

January 11, 2021

Greetings International Relations Students (IR, IRGB, IRGE, INCO):

It has come to our attention that there is some misinformation circulating about the USC Dornsife School of International Relations (SIR). To be clear, **SIR remains open** and there are no plans to close it. Indeed, it has been strengthened recently with the addition of new faculty and an exciting major, and it enjoys a very bright future.

Below we provide a bit of background, then turn your attention to the present and future of SIR. We also invite you to join us for a Town Hall meeting on Tuesday, January 12, 2021 at 11:30 am PT, if you would like to ask us further questions. Register for the webinar [here](#).

Background:

In August 2019, SIR and the Department of Political Science merged to form the Department of Political Science and International Relations (POIR). The decision to combine the two units was not taken lightly; it was completed over three years. Our joint Ph.D. program, which has been successful for more than a decade, demonstrated the value of combining the two academic disciplines. We also recognize that most universities have a combined unit featuring political science and international relations. SIR reports dating to 2011 concur.

The merger achieved two important goals: a better student experience (e.g. wider access to mentors, courses, and career opportunities); and an improved ability of faculty to conduct the cutting-edge research that best prepares undergraduate students for the realities of the world after USC. A strong majority of the faculty voted to combine the two units in October 2018. This included a majority of the SIR faculty.

The combined faculty spent almost a year drafting and approving its by-laws for governance and asked the dean via a memorandum of understanding to appoint an inaugural Chair (from SIR) and Vice Chair (from Political Science) to represent each part of the combined department, a tradition we proudly continue today. Today, POIR has a Chair from Political Science and a Vice Chair from SIR.

POIR Today:

Today POIR is flourishing. We are a diverse and growing community of students, faculty and staff across all parts of the department. This includes the four international relations undergraduate majors, which continue to thrive in their current form.

We taught the same number of students in 2020 that we taught in 2019 in both semesters. In other words, students weren't forced out of classes due to the merger despite a worldwide pandemic (the toughest test of all). This sustained level of instruction occurred despite the pandemic keeping two faculty from teaching their classes from their homes abroad. I applaud the POIR faculty and staff who pulled together to make this happen mid-semester 2020 and to this day.



Those who doubted the merger could work feared that the quality of teaching and mentoring would decline because faculty would be newer, less qualified lecturers. That has not happened. No faculty have lost their positions. Quite the contrary: we have added five faculty, with a sixth on the way (search pending). We deeply value our RTPC faculty and know the quality of education they deliver to our undergraduates. They include the former chair of the National Intelligence Council -- hardly a "rookie" lecturer. We added one with significant practical experience in human rights, and four tenure-track, research-active faculty. Three of our five new faculty are international relations experts who expand our ability to cover regions like the Middle East and Central Asia, providing additional variety.

Indeed, SIR has added majors and is expanding. We have added a fourth, rapidly growing major in cyberintelligence in partnership with Vitterbi. This new major, Intelligence and Cyber Operations, is now part of SIR's outstanding undergraduate programs, which remain as relevant to the real world as they ever were. To wit: our international relations faculty's research is relevant to exactly what is going on in the world today. SIR faculty member Pablo Barberá published a post in [The Washington Post](#) last week explaining the impact of social media upon democracy years before Twitter and Facebook suspended the President's accounts. Hint: it's both good *and* bad.

We recognize, as always, that individual experiences with our faculty, staff, and students may vary. We are working hard to ensure that everyone is welcomed in this new environment, and that the things SIR excels in, like undergraduate education, remain strong and vibrant. But as we have seen in our country, "alternative facts" can take on a life of their own, and we think it important to set the record straight.

Student Engagement

In the wake of several incidents at USC and in the world last spring a number of students came to us over the summer with a host of concerns about SIR's commitment to diversity and equity. Since early August 2020 Professor Hancock Alfaro has met personally with members of the [Delta Phi Epsilon](#) honors fraternity, co-hosted a town hall and engaged electronically with international relations students (via Instagram, email, and Zoom). We answered questions then and are happy to answer more questions about the merger. We also instituted a Syllabi Task Force, chaired by Professor Kang, to review undergraduate syllabi to ensure we are continuing to provide the most diverse curriculum to our students. To learn more, please do not hesitate to join our Town Hall meeting on Tuesday, January 12th at 11:30 am.

We are convinced that the merged POIR is best for students, faculty and staff and the results clearly support that conviction.

Thanks for reading, and Fight On,

Ange-Marie Hancock Alfaro, Chair
Dave Kang, Vice Chair

cc: Carol Folt, Chip Zukoski, Amber Miller, POIR faculty