

Dividing up Intelligence Education

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Dividing up Intelligence Education

Author Biography

Dr. Robert Clark is a professor at Henley-Putnam University where he teaches an advanced course in Intelligence Practicum. He began his career in the US Air Force as a B-52 Electronics Warfare Officer and subsequently as an intelligence officer. He worked as an all-source analyst and group chief at CIA for a number of years, leaving to start a software development and technical analysis company that performed specialized work for the CIA, NSA, and NRO. Dr. Clark currently is a faculty member of the Intelligence Community Officers' Course, where he conducts an exercise on collection systems and analysis for IC mid-level managers, and facilitates case studies on intelligence estimates, covert action, and counterintelligence. He continues to perform space systems threat analyses for the National Reconnaissance Office and the CIA. He published *Intelligence Analysis: Estimation and Prediction* in 1996. His second book, *Intelligence Analysis: A Target-centric Approach*, was first published in 2003; the second edition was published in 2006. Dr. Clark holds a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Illinois, and a JD in International Law from George Washington University.

Abstract

At this year's annual conference of the International Association for Intelligence Education (IAFIE) in Monterey, CA, the keynote speaker posed the question, "How much do you need intelligence education outside the beltway?" Which led to a second question discussed during the conference: "What should such education look like?" In short, what should we be teaching in universities? What should we leave to the intelligence community as training? And what could be done in either or both settings? The first question of any educational effort is: What are we preparing students for?

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Core Competencies

In September 2008, the Director of National Intelligence released Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 610, entitled "Competency Directories for the Intelligence Community Workforce".¹ This document provides guidance on the expertise needed for someone to function effectively in the US (or any) intelligence community.

Any intelligence community (IC) comprises analysts, collectors, support/infrastructure staff (finance, logistics, personnel, IT support, etc.), and science and technology (the engineers who build things). ICD 610 lists 15 of these occupational categories, which it calls mission categories. All 15 share a common set of what are called *core competencies*. The Intelligence Community depends on academia to provide its graduates with a firm grounding in these core competencies; some of them are specific course subjects in different academic disciplines. The following is a brief summary of these core competencies, with some observations of their importance in academia.

Two of the five core competencies—*critical thinking* and *communication*—are effectively dealt with in academia. Critical thinking is often highlighted as important in analysis. But an understanding of how to think about problems, to apply logic and reasoning skills, is important across the IC. For example, some of the methodologies such as Bayesian and statistical techniques are applicable in all mission categories. Analysis

¹ See http://www.dni.gov/electronic_reading_room/ICD%20610.pdf

Journal of Strategic Security

of competing hypotheses is useful in many IC professions, as is link and network analysis.

Students need to understand what various critical thinking methodologies are and how they are used. As an example, most intelligence analysts do not formally apply critical thinking methodologies except when management forces them to do so. By practicing them in academic studies, graduates can develop more logical approaches to dealing with problems in their IC jobs.

The IC expects graduates to have a high level of competence in both verbal and written communication. Beyond the basic skills, some nuances of communicating are unique to IC organizations and are best learned in the organizations. A good example is the preparation of a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE). The ritual surrounding the creation and coordination of a classified NIE in the IC is labyrinthine. The nuances of NIE preparation can best be learned in the IC—assuming that the drafter already knows how to express ideas. But the basics of writing an NIE can be taught in academia. In fact, a Mercyhurst College class recently demonstrated that it can be done using unclassified material in a collaborative online effort.

Most communication within the IC is now done electronically, so a high level of skill in using the tools of information technology is required. Colleges do very well in teaching information technology skills—so well that we all need to find a way to prepare graduates for the shock of finding that IT in the government is typically a step back from what they have at home.

The remaining three core competencies are accountability for results; personal leadership and integrity; and engagement and collaboration. These are about taking responsibility, dealing with and working with others, and making sound ethical choices—qualities that all educational systems, from kindergarten on, attempt to inculcate. The military services are especially good at inculcating these competencies, but a sizeable number of IC officers have never worked in the military. One of these competencies demands that we work across disciplines to produce collaborative results; this should be a part of any intelligence curriculum. The Mercyhurst NIE, noted earlier, provides an excellent model of how it can work.

Technical Expertise

In addition to the core competencies, ICD610 defines, for each occupational category, a unique set of technical expertise competencies. It further divides technical expertise into two categories, called *subject matter expertise* and *professional tradecraft*. These competency definitions provide a detailed picture of the expertise needed to handle each type of job and, by inference, the educational background and on-the-job training that are needed.

Twelve of the 15 occupational categories in ICD 610 are not unique to the intelligence business. Categories such as information technology, R&D, administration, logistics, finance, human capital, and legal are best developed in existing fields of study outside an intelligence curriculum. Many employers require these occupational categories. All of the 12, of course, require some understanding of their unique application in the intelligence business; but this understanding can be learned—probably is best learned—on the job.

The remaining three categories listed in ICD 610 are unique to, and closely tied to the fundamental business of, an intelligence organization. The three are: collection and operations; processing and exploitation; and analysis and production. For those who still subscribe to the concept of an intelligence cycle,² these people are "in the cycle." These three occupational categories together represent the majority of the US intelligence community. Academic courses in intelligence studies would appear to be valuable preparation for future IC officers in these categories.

Under the subject matter expertise (SME) category a number of subdisciplines are listed. At the top, appropriately, are academic or professional disciplines such as political, economic, or science studies. The Intelligence Community cannot afford to provide this expertise; it depends on academia to provide graduates who are well grounded in these studies. For analysts, a background in one of these disciplines or in language and cultural studies (better still, in both) is critical.

² As noted in my book, *Intelligence Analysis: A Target-Centric Approach*, the "intelligence cycle" never really worked in the linear fashion discussed in many texts; and information technology has basically made a shambles of what was left of the concept—despite the continuing efforts of some IC components to use it as a foundation for community organization.

Journal of Strategic Security

Languages, cultural studies, and a topic called "targets" (which translates to knowledge of regions, countries and technologies) are also on the SME list. Regional and cultural studies are important backgrounds for collectors and analysts to have, even in specialized fields such as geospatial, S&T, and economic collection and analysis. Analysts occasionally ask me, "Which language should I study?" My recommendation is to study at least one non-European language and culture; it helps one learn to see things from a different perspective and to avoid ethnocentric analysis.

Three of the four "contras"—Counterintelligence, Counterproliferation, and Counterterrorism—are listed as SME areas. Counternarcotics is not listed, reflecting the national intelligence priorities of ICD 610; but counternarcotics is an important issue in law enforcement intelligence, and should be included in academic studies for that reason. All four of the "contras" are taught in a number of academic institutions. Expertise in these four areas has traditionally been developed within the IC, but the fundamental principles can be introduced in academia. Unfortunately, the case studies that illustrate these principles are largely classified.

Another SME area is Cyber—defined basically as assessing and mitigating threats to information systems—a specialized SME area that is increasingly important in both national and law enforcement intelligence. Like the four "contras," a considerable amount of the detail on cyber operations is classified, but the basics are offered in many academic courses.

The second division of the technical expertise competency is called professional tradecraft. It includes subjects that are better learned on the job, though academia can prepare students for the learning process.

Professional tradecraft includes topics such as collection, processing, and exploitation systems capabilities, operations, and resource management. All three involve sensitive and mostly classified information, and it would be difficult to delve into these topics effectively in an academic setting. Furthermore, the subject matter to be covered changes frequently—especially in processing and exploitation. Topics such as dealing with denial and deception fit in this category. But it is a good thing for future intelligence collectors and analysts to learn, early on, that any literal material (whether from COMINT, HUMINT, or open source) can be intended to deceive—as can a fair amount of non-literal intelligence.

Organization, structure and functions that are unique to the US intelligence community should be taught within that community. These also change constantly, so that anything on these subjects taught in schools would likely be outdated by the time a graduate arrived on the job. Sub-

jects like the National Intelligence Priorities Framework (NIPF), for example, change frequently. ICD 610 for some reason lists this topic in the SME category under the heading "intelligence disciplines"—it might better fit as part of professional tradecraft. How to function effectively across the Intelligence Community is another topic best learned on the job, if students already understand the value of collaborating.

... And Inspiration

ICD 610 does not list one of the most important contributions that academia can make, and especially that an intelligence studies program should address. The IC needs for academia to inspire students about intelligence as a career. A course in the history of intelligence, for example, can be very inspiring. It is unfortunate, though, that the focus of most openly available historical material is on political and military intelligence. Very little is available on S&T and economic intelligence by comparison.

The post-9/11 "surge" in the IC, when almost anyone with an interesting degree and a clean record could enter the community, appears to be ending. The IC continues to need graduates who are prepared for and motivated to pursue an intelligence career. But IC organizations are becoming more selective in hiring, and need all their new hires, like the children of Lake Woebegone, to be above average. Graduates will need both substantive expertise as discussed in ICD 610 and a solid understanding of the fundamentals of intelligence.

About the Author

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Journal of Strategic Security

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