Greetings, IR majors, alumni, colleagues, and friends!

As I write this, the first snow of the semester is quietly falling outside my office window. Everything is quiet and peaceful. We have reached the end of another semester. It was a taxing semester in the shadow of rapidly developing world events. The world is a complex place. In order to understand that complexity, we need to dig deep into history, economics, politics, geography, culture and identity, among others, fields that form the backbone of what we do here at IR.

We started the semester with a welcome back picnic for majors and quickly pivoted to IR week. Each year for the past several years, we have planned a week during which we offer programming that invites our campus to engage with international affairs. This semester, we spread out IR week over the entire semester. We began the series on September 27, 2023 with a thought-provoking talk by Professor Oumar Ba (Cornell University) entitled “Rethinking Liberal Internationalism: Imperialism, Pacification, Humanity.” The talk situated the pacification of Madagascar amidst the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We followed this talk by a faculty panel on October 17 on “Policy in Times of Chaos: A View from Latin America,” Which was organized by Professor Larrabure. Participants in this panel discussed the coexistence of increasing authoritarianism as well as grassroots democratic movements. During the week of October 30, we had several events, beginning with an IR student panel. Michaiah Augustine ’24, Gracyn Shaw ’25, and Zoie Smith ’24 discussed their experiences in studying abroad, internships, applying for fellowships, and funded summer research. Their poise and hard work were on full display on this panel.

During the week, we held a campuswide Globle competition. If you have never played this online game, you might like to try it out. It’s like Wordle, but with geography. Congratulations to Aisulu Lawton, Connor Rogan, and Hunter Gehman who claimed the top three spots and won an assortment of international snacks. We also gathered for an evening of international affairs Kahoot that week. The competition was fierce but friendly, and there were also a few laughs. Matthew Zhu, Professor Zhu’s 11-year-old son, won one round. We congratulate him and look forward to enrolling him as an IR major when he’s old enough to go to college.

We closed out IR week with an alumni panel that featured Emma Halper ’17 (Centers for Disease Control), Stefan Ivanovski ’12 (PhD candidate at Cornell University), and Katelyn Rothney ’15 (Microsoft Azure AI). They each shared their paths beyond Bucknell and provided advice for invited our students to imagine where their Bucknell education can take them. In the following pages, you will read more about each of these events. It was also great fun to welcome Emma’s mother, Lynn Pokorny ’86, who was also an IR and Spanish double major. It’s not often we get two generations of IR majors in one room.

This semester, we welcomed Lexi Coon, who began serving as our Academic Assistant in October. She has come up to speed in no time and has already become an invaluable asset to our team. If you have not met her yet, drop by the IR office. We also have our first IR Department intern. Anna Lajos ’25 took on this role and helped us plan and execute our events this semester. Welcome Lexi and Anna!

As this semester and year winds down, we are looking forward to a new year and hope that it will bring resolution to many ongoing conflicts in the world. My colleagues join me in wishing everyone a healthy and peaceful 2024! As always, please stay in touch and send us your news and if you are ever in the area, we’d certainly love a visit. You can also follow us on Instagram @bucknellinternationalrelations.

Professor and Chair, International Relations
Policy in Times of Chaos: A View from Latin America

On October 17 of this year, the International Relations department, along with the Bucknell Institute for Public Policy (BIPP), held a lunchtime public event titled, “Policy in Times of Chaos: A View from Latin America.” The event, part of IR Week, brought together three panelists: Professor Emma Banks (International Relations), Professor Matías Vernengo (Economics) and yours truly. The event also included the participation of international guest, Fredy Lozano, a Colombian trade union activist who played a key role in the recent political campaign of current president of Colombia, Gustavo Petro. The event featured one of the highest attendances in the history of the BIPP’s “pizza and policy” speaker series. Indeed, as they say, it was “standing room only.”

The thematic focus of the event was the confluence of, on the one hand, the emergence of new authoritarian politics in the Latin American region and, on the other, a resurgence of grassroots democratic movements, a reality that disturbs traditional distinctions between democratic governance and authoritarianism, as well as left and right-wing politics. In this respect, I began the discussion by focusing on the rise of now former President of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, arguing that the roots of his rapid ascendance to power lie in what I call a crisis of power devolution under the governments of the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT).

Although broadly a progressive political party, the PT, while in power, I argued failed to include a transformative dynamic in most of its “pro poor” social programs, with the notable exception of Participatory Budgeting. This exception notwithstanding, pro poor programs such as Minha Casa Minha Vida and Bolsa Familia, which targeted low-income and middle-income populations, had the effect of further inserting vulnerable populations into dominant economic and political logics that reinforced individualism and consumption and are ultimately tied to highly volatile global markets, particularly in natural resources. Although successful at ameliorating poverty, these programs left a vacuum when it came to popular democratic participation, a traditional political plank of the PT had been unable to provide. The events of 2013 delegitimated the PT, opening the door to new right-wing forces who, using an anti-elitist discourse, built their base in part from the same lower income populations that originally had supported the PT. The lesson here is that progressive politics tread on thin ice when its public policies focus on amelioration rather than transformation.

Our second speaker, Professor Emma Banks, discussed the new progressive government of Gustavo Petro in Colombia and its connection to anti-mining struggles in the country. President Petro is often discussed as one of the key political figures leading a left “come back” in the region, the so-called second “Pink Tide”. The first Pink Tide, typically associated with the rise of political figures such as former president of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, former president of Bolivia, Evo Morales and former president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, came to a screeching halt in 2010, as a series of right-wing governments began to take power. The rise of President Petro in Colombia has many asking whether we can expect a long-term return to progressive politics in the region. Our final speaker, Professor Matías Vernengo discussed the case of Argentina, currently under the government of the traditionally progressive Peronist party, but suffering a tremendous economic crisis. Professor Vernengo highlighted how Argentina’s economic problems are rooted in the country’s limited capacity to access financial markets, a result of a now two-decade long battle with International financial institutions. He also discussed the recent meteoric rise of right-wing libertarian presidential candidate, Javier Milei. Could Milei be Argentina’s new Bolsonaro? Now that he has been elected, we are about to find out.
On September 27, the IR department had the honor of hosting Oumar Ba, an assistant professor in the Department of Government at Cornell University. Prof. Ba is a scholar of the lasting impacts of European imperialism throughout Africa in the second half of the 20th century.

Starting with his discussion of the “long 1948,” a period of over a year in which the global standards of human rights were established while major European powers waged vicious wars of colonialism across Africa and Southeast Asia, Prof. Ba examined this apparent contradiction. How, at a time when the French Republic was touting the norms of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, could they also engage in violent wars of oppression throughout their territories marked by massacres, wanton violence against native populations, torture, and mass disappearances? Indeed, it seems a fundamental challenge to square the ideals of the French Revolution, and its enactment into the canon of International Humanitarian Law, with the realities of the wars of decolonization fought across the Global South.

At the heart of Prof. Ba’s analysis is that this is no contradiction at all, merely the effect of a global system which considers non-white peoples to be less than human. Ba noted that the very individuals who were responsible for the Universal Declaration of Human rights were also proponents of colonial violence, such as Rene Cassin, a French legal scholar, opposed to the Vichy Fascist regime in France, but deeply opposed to liberation of the colonies. Cassin, a human rights lawyer, campaigned to place himself in the running for the Nobel Peace Prize and developed the legal framework for the UN Court of Human Rights. In his development of this court, he made great pains to disqualify colonized peoples from seeking Human Rights representation in the courts, and explicitly fought against the right of individuals to seek remedy in the courts for fear that these courts would be “abused” by colonized people seeking justice for the grave violations of their rights in the colonial system.

Professor Ba explored the specifics of the colonial project in Madagascar, underlining the Malagasy rebellion as a response to famine and colonial violence enacted by the French. Ba expounded upon the importance of recognizing the particulars of each project of colonialism while also highlighting the commonalities, both within the overall Misión Civilizatrice of the French, and in comparison with other colonialisms, but urged caution against falling into the rhetorical trap of colonizers that “this time is different compared to those other, evil colonialisms.”

Furthering his argument, Ba explained that he considered imperialism to be the “albatross” of liberalism, wherein a system of universal justice placated the moral concerns of people in the West, but simultaneously denied humanity to the rest of the world. Again, Ba, highlighted the notion that this was no hypocrisy, it was based in a fundamental understanding of who is human and who is not.

In an earlier discussion during the day, Prof. Ba noted the relationship of colonialism with fascism and genocide, as elucidated by authors like Fanon and Cesaire. His analysis was unexpectedly timely, with a discussion of the compared coverage of resistance fighters in Ukraine versus those in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and other sites in the global south, the former referred to as Freedom Fighters while the pejorative term “terrorist” is reserved for non-white resistance fighters.

Professor Ba also presented in the IREL 418 course, Social Movements and Society, wherein he discussed the particulars of the colonial project in Guinea-Bissau, a project of Portuguese colonialism as opposed to his present work in the former French colony of Madagascar.
Stefan Ivanovski, 2012
Ph.D. Student in Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University
Major: International Relations (with honors) & Spanish

Stefan Ivanovski is a Ph.D. student at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University. He studies firms that are worker-owned and worker-managed. In his research, he focuses on firms in the tech sector because he wants to understand how cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence will shape the future of work. He is also a lead contributor for the Lifestyle Democracy blog, where he writes on the topics of technology, democracy, and society. Prior to joining Cornell University, Stefan worked for over 7 years as a consultant for CIVITTA, the largest management consulting firm originating in Central and Eastern Europe, Salience, an international consulting firm specializing in telecommunications with headquarters in Dubai, and for the Government of Macedonia. He worked on projects in the private, public, and civil society sectors in areas such as Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), telecommunications, innovation, and education in North America, South America, Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

Outside of work, Stefan serves on the board of Leadership for Education, Activism, and Development (LEAD), a Macedonian civil society organization that builds leadership skills among youth.

He is an alumnus of the Global Shapers Community, an initiative of the World Economic Forum, a network of young people implementing projects for positive change in their communities. In 2017, he became a fellow of UNLEASH, which is a global innovation lab for building solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With his team, Recovering Giants, Stefan won third place for their proposal in the category of Urban Sustainability at UNLEASH.

To spice up his life, Stefan enjoys dancing salsa and bachata. If he is not on the dance floor, you may catch him at one of the classical music concerts at Cornell’s Bailey Hall, at the open-mic standup show in Ithaca, or riding his bicycle to campus or the grocery store. Stefan was raised in Skopje, Macedonia, and has a BA in International Relations (with honors) and Spanish from Bucknell University, a Master of City Planning from the University of Pennsylvania. While at Bucknell, he studied abroad in Argentina and Spain, and completed a Davis Projects for Peace in Puerto Rico.

Career Advice:

Learn to ask the right questions. Be very specific with your questions about what the day-to-day job is like. Talk to friends and alumni about careers you are considering. Inquire about what they like and dislike about their jobs or careers.

Learn from the best and think long-term. Begin your career by working for reputable, well-established companies that have the resources to invest in cutting-edge technologies. This will provide you with valuable insights and skills that can springboard your career. It is easier to “downgrade,” move from a company that is deemed reputable to one that is not deemed as known or as reputable, than to “upgrade”, move up from a company that is not as prestigious or known to one that is well known. It is best to speak to people in your sector of interest to see how relevant this is. At top companies you can learn some very good work ethics and practices that will serve you working in any other sector. Wherever you end up working, make the most of it. Be an active and intentional learner.

Prioritize physical and mental well-being: A sound body leads to a sound mind. Incorporate regular exercise into your routine, and don’t underestimate the importance of maintaining good physical health.
Hone your communication skills: Invest in your ability to write and communicate effectively. Take on challenging classes and engage in presentations and public speaking. These skills are lifelong assets.

Embrace disappointment: Sometimes a company, a manager, a colleague will severely fail to meet your expectations. Sometimes, you will fail and disappoint others. Take this as part of your learning experience.

Work abroad and learn new languages. Work abroad and immerse yourself in a different culture.

Master new languages. Remember, your aptitude for learning languages is influenced by culture and personal choice, it is not related to where you were born or which languages you grew up speaking.

Prior to starting her current position at CDC, Emma completed a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree at Emory University’s Rollins School of Public Health. While at Emory, Emma focused on Global Health and worked in sexual and reproductive health research for populations living in conditions of vulnerability in Central America and in the United States. She also had the opportunity to work with various teams at CDC while in graduate school, including the Global Health Policy team and the Fertility Epidemiology team. Before returning to school for her MPH, Emma worked for several years at Population Services International (PSI) in Washington DC, where she served as a Program Manager for the Latin America and Southeast Asia regions. In this role, she focused on building the programmatic and financial capacity of local teams, supported new business development initiatives, and guided efforts in global health program design and implementation across a variety of health areas. Emma started working at PSI after graduating from Bucknell, where she received a BA in International Relations and Spanish in 2017.

Emma is passionate about refugee, immigrant and migrant healthcare access, sexual and reproductive rights, and humanitarian health. She currently lives in Atlanta, Georgia, where she loves trying new cuisines and spending time outside with her boyfriend Alex (also a Bucknell graduate!) and their new dog, Blanche.

Career Advice:

Embrace the unknown and try to be open to opportunities that you didn’t plan for or imagine yourself doing. It is totally okay and expected if your first few jobs are not exactly what you had in mind. Each job is an opportunity to develop new skills and figure out what you like and what you don’t like. Sometimes, the most rewarding experiences arise from opportunities that you didn’t expect. Also, don’t underestimate the power of networking. Engage with as many people as possible, either through LinkedIn or through alumni networks like the Bucknell Alumni app. Remember that most people are enthusiastic about sharing their insights and experiences. Consider it this way: the worst-case scenario is a lack of response, but in the best-case scenario, a completely novel opportunity could unveil itself to you. I also think speaking to people about their day-to-day is one of the best ways of determining if something sounds appealing to you or not, which may lead you to consider new kinds of work!
“My summer internship would provide me with a super cool chance to do stimulating work with the US government in D.C. The office I worked in tasks itself with processing and transmitting extradition and evidence requests regarding criminal cases to and from other countries.

My work focused largely on summarizing and organizing the intensive case load that the office intakes.

Aidan Lankler, class of 2024

From the Middle East to Washington, D.C.

Sitting atop a rock in the deserts of Jordan while the sunset changed the hue of the sand to an orangish red, I felt grateful for my journey to this point, and excited about the journey ahead. My adventure here featured a wild time studying abroad in the Middle East, while the journey ahead foretold an internship with the International Affairs Office at the US Department of Justice. That particular weekend, a friend and I camped in a cave in the desert after deciding to take a break from the bustling city of Amman and spend some time exploring. We had been studying and interning in Jordan for the past two and a half months and now had our summer plans set, so we felt we were due some time off.

My time in Jordan was filled with so much curiosity and learning. The program consisted of 17 students enthusiastic about Arabic and geopolitics. Amman proved to be an incredible place to learn about international relations. In the city, you can feel the pressure and tumult of the Middle East resting on the back of Jordan. The country is a beacon of stability in a chaotic region. To the North, East, and West, Jordan is surrounded by conflict. The country’s people all bear the marks of these conflicts as the nation is filled with refugees from countries like Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen, and Somalia. And indeed, many people share their stories. The country’s rather chatty taxi drivers often filled our ears with talks of politics and the Jordanian economy. The whole country served as a worthy classroom for students of international conflict.

I interned with the Jesuit Refugee Service, which served to educate and empower refugees living in the city. The NGO had two branches that students partook in. One branch focused on teaching English, while the other sought to assist with refugee livelihood and teach technical skills like computer programming and job attainment. My specific task was to prepare students for proficiency using English in a business setting. I worked with teachers to develop and instruct a course focusing on professional uses of English. The internship also consisted of facilitating cross-cultural activities between the students abroad and the refugees at the organization. The internship provided me professional experience that I would once again activate come summer.

My summer internship would provide me with a super cool chance to do stimulating work with the US government in D.C. The office I worked in tasks itself with processing and transmitting extradition and evidence requests regarding criminal cases to and from other countries. My work focused largely on summarizing and organizing the intensive case load that the office intakes. The team I worked for focused on Asia, Africa, the Pacific and Middle East, so I got to review cases from a very wide variety of countries. I recall collectivizing dozens of interesting international cases from faraway places like Nigeria and Vietnam. I also got to partake in the transmission of documents to US prosecutors and foreign authorities. The work granted me exposure to the world of international relations in government and provided me with a passion for public work. I learned so much about the justice system and the delicacies of maintaining positive relationships with other countries in a firsthand setting.

Aidan Lankler ‘24

Photo courtesy of Aidan Lankler ‘24

Red desert. Photo courtesy of Aidan Lankler ‘24
On Oct. 30, 2023, our students had the opportunity to attend an Alumni Panel. We were joined by 3 of our alumni: Emma Halper ’17, Katelyn Rothney ’15 and Stefan Ivanovski ’12. All three of our guests majored in International Relations, with Emma and Stefan also double majoring in Spanish. Our students had the chance to hear about their experiences at Bucknell and their incredible paths upon graduating.

Emma Halper ’17 is a Global Border Health Fellow in the Division of Global Migration Health at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). She is tasked with providing technical assistance to countries to improve public health preparedness and response capacities, facilitate collaboration and routine public health information sharing across neighboring countries and regions, and analyze population movement patterns. During her time at Bucknell, Emma took advantage of the many opportunities available to our students, including summer internships. Upon completing her senior year, Emma earned a population services internship in D.C. where she worked for four and a half years. Later on, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, Emma obtained a masters degree in public health at Emory University while simultaneously starting her work for the CDC. The biggest piece of advice Emma had for our students was to keep an open-minded approach to the opportunities offered to you and embrace the unknown. “Sometimes, the most rewarding experiences arise from opportunities that you didn’t expect”.

Stefan Ivanovski ’12, Bucknell’s former International Student from Macedonia, is currently completing his Ph.D. at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University. Prior to joining Cornell, Stefan worked as a consultant at CIVITTA for over 7 years, the largest management consulting firm originating in Central and Eastern Europe. Stefan also worked for Salience, an international consulting firm specializing in telecommunications and for the Government of Macedonia. As a freshman at Bucknell, Stefan landed an internship with the Red Cross and was inspired to improve economic conditions in his home country. The biggest piece of advice Stefan had for our students was to develop communication skills and learn how to interact professionally. Also, he emphasized the importance of caring for yourself and prioritizing mental health. He urged everyone to learn Spanish as it is the most widely-spoken second language in the United States.

Katelyn Rothney ’15 is currently working for the Microsoft Azure AI department. On top of majoring in International Relations here at Bucknell, she was also a double minor in Sustainable Business Management as well as Theater. During her first year, she was part of the Global Residential College and recalls it as a great opportunity. Initially her interest in International Relations were in human rights and social justice. During her time at Bucknell, Katelyn took up numerous internships, such as working for the Canadian Embassy in D.C., the Canada Institute, as well as IBM. Upon graduation, Katelyn continued to work at IBM Watson for 7 years as a product manager before moving onto Microsoft last December, working in the field of Open AI. Katelyn’s biggest piece of advice for our students is to take advantage of all the networking opportunities Bucknell has to offer. Katelyn’s successful career post-graduation and her job at IBM may have not become a reality if not for her participation in Bucknell’s networking events.

It is always a great pleasure to have our alumni come back on Bucknell’s campus and share their knowledge and advice to our current students. We thank Emma, Katelyn and Stefan once again for taking the time to share their stories with us!
My Odyssey: A Look into My Path as an International Relations Major

My journey at Bucknell University has been anything but ordinary. Hailing from Brooklyn, New York, I embarked on my academic adventure amidst the uncertainties of a global pandemic, setting the stage for a narrative filled with resilience, the unknown, and the pursuit of unique opportunities.

My first year in 2020, amidst the throes of the pandemic, Bucknell was a vastly different landscape than the one she experiences today. Despite the challenges, I remained unwavering in my plan to major in International Relations. Despite the isolated nature of my first year, I refused to let that hinder my pursuit of my endgame of working in the diplomatic sector. I embraced the struggle of the unknown, and in the attempt to find some control, overloaded on my coursework to take the majority of my major requirements within my first three semesters. My resolve to study abroad was unwavering, fueled by a vision I clung to like a security blanket. I applied to numerous scholarships and secured prestigious awards such as the Benjamin Gilman Scholarship and three Bucknell French major scholarships. Still, the doubts didn’t cease as new COVID variants emerged and professors spoke of the program being canceled until the very second my foot boarded that plane. Once there in France, my journey took a transformative turn as I honed my passion for building foreign relations with French and African diaspora communities.

Navigating the uncertainties of the pandemic, from travel advisories to delayed government processing, phase one in my journey to diplomacy was successful. My arrival in France marked a significant chapter in my life, as I enjoyed an almost limitless amount of freedom and independence. The flexibility of the International Relations major allowed me to immerse myself in various courses at the University of Tours, delve into European Union Government studies, and even grace the runways of Paris Fashion Week — a testament to the breadth of opportunities one can take advantage of abroad.

Upon my return a year later, I still had an insatiable urge to experience diverse cultures which led me to the Bucknell in Costa Rica program. Eager to enter into phase two of my vision, I applied to many foreign service internships, most of them advertised by the Chair of the IR department Emek Ucarer. I ultimately became an alternate for the prestigious national United States Foreign Service Internship Program.

The uncertainty surrounding summer plans persisted and I wouldn’t receive any update or clarity until late May, weeks before I would be flown out to DC. This past summer, I began the first half of a two-year internship working at the Department of State. In the Summer of 2020, I will be working abroad at the US Embassy to the Bahamas. While this blessing was astounding to me, I still dreamed of becoming a Foreign Service Officer upon my graduation. This would involve long arduous anxiety riddled months of applying to the Pickering, Rangel, and Payne Foreign Service Fellowships. I eventually became a finalist for both the Pickering and Payne and accepted the Pickering Fellowship under the guidance of several IR professors who crafted meaningful letters of recommendation and provided me with much needed advice.

I hope my journey of trial and error serves as a beacon of inspiration for those daring to navigate the uncharted waters of academia and global exploration. Know that no journey will be the exact same and work to forge your own unique path here at Bucknell.

Michaiah Augustine ’24
IR Faculty News

Professor Banks attended the United Nations Climate Talks (COP28) in Dubai. She earned a badge to attend the American Anthropological Association and plans to take full advantage to expand my new research project on the global energy transition.

Alumni News

In this section, we highlight news from our alumni. Let us know what you are doing by sending us an email to international-relations@bucknell.edu. We would also welcome short submissions on projects or perspectives.

Giuliana Ferrara '22 completed her Fulbright in Belgium and started an MSc degree in International and Social Public Policy at the London School of Economics in Fall 2023. She will not be far from Julia Tokish '22, who has also earned a Fulbright and is earning a Master’s degree in Human Rights and Global Ethics at the University of Leicester in the UK.

Of Note: Campus News and Events

Bucknellians Earn Scholarships to Advance as Global Citizens

Bucknell's Fulbright recipients, which includes International Relations major Julia Tokish '22 (pictured above), were chosen from approximately 10,000 applicants nationwide.

Dominguez Center for Data Science to Open at Bucknell University

The Dominguez Center for Data Science will prepare Bucknell students to solve global problems in a digital age earning experiences that prepare them for 21st century careers.

Bucknell Earns High Marks from ‘U.S. News & World Report' Rankings

Bucknell University climbed seven spots from last year to be ranked among the top 30 schools in the category of National Liberal Arts Colleges.

We're on the Web!

Visit the IR Department.

Interested in supporting the mission of the International Relations Department? We’d love to hear from you. Send your updates and/or your short submissions on projects or perspectives.

The IR Matters! newsletter highlights events and people in the Bucknell IR community. The publication appears once a semester and welcomes feedback and submissions from students, alumni, and faculty.