Theory Section of the International Studies Association

ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13

Submitted by Felix Berenskoetter, Section Chair
22 February 2013

1. ISA 2012 Annual Meeting Roundup

The ISA Conference in San Diego was a great success for the newly established Theory Section (TS). Panels sponsored by the section were well attended, the business meeting held on 1 April in the Hilton Bayfront Hotel was lively (minutes are posted on the TS website), and the reception held jointly with the International Ethics Section and co-sponsored by Cambridge University Press was packed. Overall, there seemed to be a lot of goodwill towards our section.

2. Section Development

During its second year the section continued to show a healthy development in terms of membership and financial base. It consolidated its online presence and offerings for members.

(a) Membership

The section enjoyed a steady influx of members. By January 2013 it ranked ninth of 27 ISA sections and caucuses in terms of membership (just behind the Human Rights and Global Development sections).

- May 2012: 329 members
- October 2012: 395 members
- January 2013: 433 members

(b) Finances

Corresponding to its growing membership, the section has shown a steady growth of its financial base (thus far, all income is generated from membership dues).

- May 2011: $1,167
- August 2011: $1,982
- January 2012: $2,180

In addition, the section again raised $1,000 from Cambridge University Press towards its reception (jointly held with the International Ethics section) at the 2013 ISA Annual Meeting in San Francisco.

(c) Website

Content was added to the section website, hosted by ISA, throughout the year. Section members were invited to propose and send items to section officers, allowing for the content to be updated periodically.

(d) Mailing list

By February 2013, the section’s mailing list had 234 members and saw regular postings, increasing in frequency over the year. Important messages from the Section Chair were sent out via the mailing list administered by ISA HQ.
(e) Newsletter
The section published its second annual newsletter in February 2013, reviewing the section’s activities and development, including a list of books published by section members in 2012 and a look forward to the 2013 ISA Annual Conference. Shorter up-to-date announcements were sent via the TS mailing list throughout the year.

The section also supported four panels at the joint BISA/ISA conference that took place in Edinburgh, 20-22 June 2012, which were very well attended.

3. Theory Editors for ISA Compendium Project
In September 2012, Inanna Hamati-Ataya and Jonathan Joseph, both based at the University of Sheffield, were appointed as the new Theory editors for the ISA Compendium Project. They will be working together with the General Editor Renee Marlin-Bennett (taking over from Robert Denemark) for the next three years. During this time, Inanna and Jonathan will play an important role in further strengthening the theory component of the project.

4. Program for 2013 ISA Annual Conference
The Theory Section was allocated thirteen (ten, initially) panels for ISA 2013 San Francisco. A total of 263 papers were submitted to the section (first round: 119, second round: 144), as well as 46 panels (21/25) and 22 roundtables (6/16). This was an increase in submissions from previous year (231 papers, 39 panels, 12 roundtables).

The section program chairs (Felix Berenskoetter and Janice Bially Mattern) worked hard to sponsor 32 panels, including four roundtables, which was mainly achieved through co-sponsorship of 24 panels with other ISA sections. In addition, the section was awarded a Working Group with two roundtables and one Innovative Panel. Overall the goal of sponsoring a variety of panels furthering the mission of the section was reached (see Appendix 1 for list of titles). At the time of writing, only one panel had to be cancelled.

Unfortunately, the overall rejection rate was still fairly high, as the section could sponsor only 21% of the submitted papers and 28% of the submitted panels. The high number of rejections was not due to the bad quality of submissions but largely due to the section’s limited capacity to accept submissions. This experience triggered a request to ISA HQ to explain panel allocation mechanisms (see next point).

5. Request for Agenda Item at 2013 Governing Council Meeting
In December 2012 the Theory Section put in a request to the ISA Executive for the following two items to be discussed at the upcoming Governing Council meeting in San Francisco on 2 April 2013.

- Criteria for panel allocations: ISA executives to explain the criteria underpinning decisions about allocating panels to sections/caucuses for Annual ISA meetings
- Record of panel allocations: ISA executives to provide a record of panel allocations at ISA Annual Meetings over the past five years and to provide a rationale for these numbers

See Appendix 2 for the supporting statement justifying this request.

6. Elections of new TS Executive Committee
The four officers of the executive committee who founded and lead the section in its first two years will step down in April 2013. In line with its charter the section is holding elections for chair, vice-chair, treasurer and secretary to lead the Theory Section over the
next two years (2013-2015). Following a call for nominations in November the candidates for the open posts are:

- Chair: Daniel Nexon (Georgetown)
- Vice-Chair: Annette Freyberg Inan (Amsterdam)
- Treasurer: Shannon Brincat (Queensland), David Jason Karp (Glasgow)
- Secretary: Lauren Wilcox (Johns Hopkins), Daniel Levine (Alabama)

Online-voting took place in February and the outcome of the election will be announced at the TS Business Meeting in San Francisco (held on Friday, 5 April 2013), after which the new team will take over responsibilities.

7. Outlook
The outgoing section officers are happy and proud to be able to hand over a healthy section to a new executive committee and are confident the section will be in good hands. In addition to ideas put forward at the forthcoming business meeting in San Francisco, the officers suggest for the new team to consider the following initiatives:

- Establishing a ‘best paper’ and ‘best book’ award
- Considering an on-line discussion forum/blog for issues related to IR Theory
- Creating links with ISA regional sections and other related associations

London, 23 February 2013

Appendix 1: Titles of (co-)sponsored panels at ISA San Francisco conference:

- Genealogies and Temporalities in IR
- Philosophy of Science and IR
- Advancing Post-colonial Approaches to World Politics
- Forms of Subjectivity in International Relations
- International Politics and the ‘Death of God’ I: Political Violence
- Developments in Constructivism
- Considering Reflexivity: Theoretical and Methodological Issues
- Africa in the World: Pan-African Dimensions of Anti-Colonial Thought
- Theory and Practice 1: in Theory
- Investigating the Relationship between Realism and Rationalism
- David Harvey in IR: Time to Mend an Unwarranted Neglect?
- Strategy through Social Theory?
- Indigenous Contributions to IR and Security Studies
- Revisiting Realism
- Moments of Globality: The Construction of Global Space and the Politics of Diffusion
- Critical Engagements with the Work of Nicholas Onuf
- Perspectives on Balancing
- Feminists Re-theorize War
- Reflexivity in International Relations: Beyond ‘Positionality’
- Revisiting Liberalism
- Imagining the Futures of ‘Critical IR Theory’
- The Performativity of the International: Using Performativity as a Theoretical Tool in IR
- International Politics and the ‘Death of God’ II: Ethics and Responsibility
- Non-liberal Internationalism
- Historicizing the ‘Social’ in International Thought
Appendix 2: Section chair’s supporting statement for GC agenda item request:

“This request is prompted by the experience of serving as section chair (and program co-chair) for the newly established Theory Section (TS). Despite an increase in membership in the first year of the sections’ existence, the TS panel allocation for 2013 stayed far below that of other sections with a roughly equal membership. ISA staff explained this by noting that panel slots for new sections/caucuses would be raised only slowly until they have proven themselves. It is not clear to me what this means, or how this is evaluated, and it raises the broader issue of transparency in the allocation mechanism.

I learned from conversations with ISA staff that section membership is only one factor for allocating panels. This is also expressed in the email sent around by the conference program chairs in April, which states: “The allocation process is conducted at ISA Headquarters, and the allocation formula includes a variety of factors, such as the availability of room space at the conference venue. Another one of these factors is a bonus for past section program chair performance: panel allocations will reflect whether 2012 section program chairs completed all of their responsibilities throughout the period leading up to (and including) the conference.”

If the decision is based on these three factors only, and space being a variable outside the control of ISA, I would like to know the weighting between ’membership’ and ’performance’ and the method for calculating the latter. And if the decision is influenced by factors in addition to space, membership and performance, what are these and what is the justification for them?

On a more general level, the request is motivated by the fact that section program chairs are de facto responsible for creating the large majority of the program and, thus, exercise important gate-keeping and agenda-setting functions. How many panels a section has to its disposal considerably affects a sections’ ability to pursue its mission and advance particular debates and perspectives. And given the importance of ISA Annual Meetings in the development of the profession (as a platform for intellectual exchange, networking, CV building, etc) this plays a not-so-small role in shaping the content and boundaries of the field of IR. As such, transparency about the mechanism by which panels are allocated is important not only for all sections and caucuses, it is in the interest of all ISA members.

Please note this request is not meant to be a critique of the existing ISA executive team. In my experience the team has done great work in managing and developing the Association and provides exceptional support to sections. Yet clarification of this issue seems timely given both the proliferation of sections and the upcoming change in executive leadership. And while a clarification request in the first instance, this is also an invitation to discuss what might be the most appropriate allocation criteria and mechanisms.”