

**The State of the Academic Tribe in 2003**  
As it relates to Understanding the State of the World

[A talk prepared for the Open Source Solutions Conference in Washington D.C., Sept. 17, 2003]

All errors were caused by Michael Andregg, Justice and Peace Studies program,  
University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA [mmandregg@stthomas.edu](mailto:mmandregg@stthomas.edu)

**The “Academic Tribe” tries diligently to understand the world, but it also moves very slowly and talks constantly (it is much like a herd of highly verbal turtles).**

I will try to be clinically accurate and avoid jargon here. We struggle with problems common to most information workers, but our prime advantages are very diverse contacts and active collaboration.

1. **It is very Disorganized.** In fact, the “herding cats” metaphor better describes the task our managers face than anything remotely like military command and control.
2. **It is Under Funded.** (Of course, everyone is “UNDER funded.”) But contrary to some opinions, we don’t lack for technology, what we lack is money for skilled people and support staffs. Paradoxically, we also overfund morons. This will be explained soon.
3. **It excels in “Collaboration” and “Networking”** so long as we are not hierarchical, disciplined, or accountable. These are cardinal sins in the Politically Correct world we academics live in. PC requires some deviations from objective reality in assumptions, like the politicized intelligence products that national agencies sometimes require.
4. **Byzantine Politics prevail.**
5. **Centers of Excellence** are embedded in a **Sea of Mediocrity** much like the world. This is especially true in peace studies. So, the best people are also often overwhelmed and unavailable. This is one reason why personal networks are so important to real results. Of course the Internet is transforming. But to focus on that or other technical issues risks overlooking the critical dimension, which is \*\* PERSONAL \*\* collaborations.
6. It is an intensely **Verbal** group, whose reward systems are **Highly Skewed** to favor abundant Noise over slower, higher quality, and often quieter work. A very prominent political scientist found that 87% of the papers in his flagship journal were never cited by anyone. But junior faculty MUST crank out these junk papers or lose their careers. This distinction between the talkers, the watchers, writers and marketers as opposed to the doers and the creators of new knowledge is the most important distinction in academe today. This can be important to you too if you use traditional indices for selecting your experts.
7. So, **separating signals of wisdom from the noise** of professional talkers chewing their cud is extremely difficult. Unending din punctuated by occasional shrieks from the ideologically challenged is a more accurate description of the Academic Tribe on most days when we are actually working (which is not all that often).
8. Lip service is paid to **Interdisciplinary work**, but the money is hogged by **specialized Departments**. This has parallels in stovepiped intelligence organizations. Lip service is also paid to **Long-Term Objectives**, and **Strategic Planning**, but devoting actual money to those goals usually applies only to investments in physical plant.

Now, having said so many mean but honest things about my esteemed colleagues I would like to comment on what we do well, and to provide some numbers. The next slides show the number of colleges and students in the US and worldwide, along with some elementary budget and comparative data. We see about 12,000 colleges worldwide, about a third of which are in the USA [4,182]. These colleges serve about 90 million students worldwide, about a sixth of which are in the United States [~16 million]. In America language requirements decline each year. Restoring these would help us a lot if our task is to understand the world and our many places in it. Among our domestic US students, about 15,000 get language degrees each year, and 6,381 were "Area Studies" grads in the year 2,000, although that number must be discounted for application to international relations since many of these are ethnic or cultural studies majors. Foreign exchange programs are many, large, and are a major means for "understanding the world." Our small school sends over 600 students abroad each year, and accepts about the same # of incoming international students. The aggregate budget of those American colleges was about \$277 billion in 2001, about 60% of that money going to public institutions and 40% to private colleges and universities.

Competing for the public's attention are over 31,000 International Organizations, broken down into NGO's and IGO's, and many thousands of media outlets of which only a few dozen really matter due to conglomeration of ownership. However, these groups are extremely important to intelligence professionals for two complimentary reasons. First, they can be prime sources of specialized information. Second, whether you attend to them or not, you can be 100% confident that policy makers are. So when you give your carefully calculated, value-added, high impact briefings on important stuff to key people, you can be confident that CNN or Fox will be on in the decision-maker's office, Time magazine will be on their desk, and that their email in-box will be stuffed full with advice from trusted confidants and groups that make a habit of knowing things.

My second claim in the outline was that the academic tribe is "under funded" so the next slide provides some comparative data on that. The top box compares estimates of US national security IC funding, non-US intelligence community funding, SCIP-like business intelligence (US only) and the total funding for US colleges and universities in 2001. Compared with the total of these 4 very rough figures, the official U.S. intelligence community consumes 17.4% of funds available. I took a second look at a different parameter, comparing numbers of personnel, which yielded another VERY ROUGH estimate that the whole US intelligence community was at most 16.6% of the total personnel employed in America to figure out what is going on in the world.

17.4% and 16.6% are not significantly different, and even though they are both extremely rough, first order estimates, I feel safe observing that the Academic world is about 6 times larger than the Official Intelligence world in America. Granted, we are not all wizards in the academy. In fact, some of us are just plain dumb. But, same goes for spies and analysts; such is life. A more important observation is that both of these very important communities tend to look down on each other from vain and hyper-critical perches. Rather than correcting each other's errors by working together constructively, we tend to compound our errors by carping and defensive over-reactions.

My third claim was that the Academic Tribe "excels in collaboration and networking." This could cause great amusement in some circles considering how much we fight over petty things, but that would miss the main point. Networking and collaboration are our main comparative advantage over traditional intelligence agencies, which are to be blunt hamstrung by stovepiping, interagency and country rivalries, and perhaps most important of all, by the institution of the security clearance. That limits the IC enormously. Having studied spies and other IC professionals for about 15 years I could go on and on about that, but this is not my job today.

**Baer quote goes here: Note the presence of Richard Baer at the conference**

One way to illustrate the dynamic I allude to here is to contrast being able to read “anything” in the open literature, most of which was written years ago and half of which was junk the day it was printed, and being able to call or email scholars you know personally to get their immediate, interactive and substantial opinions on issues of the present moment. I have heard many analysts who spend their days at computers claim that they can read anything written AND know the secrets. So they think **they’re** wizards. But they can’t really know everything, because just like us they have only two eyes, two ears, one brain, and the same 24 hours a day we all get. Sure, you can call up other analysts or spies if we ignore those bureaucratic limitations for a moment. And you can read lots of stolen mail, which can be quite revealing. But near-instant, substantive collaboration with intelligent others on complex and sensitive topics usually requires significant amounts of trust. This is more important the more sensitive the information sought. For that, years of effort building active networks helps a lot, and information barriers hurt.

Mr. Baer said it more economically: “My access to information is better since I got out of the CIA.” Tom Gjelten of NPR said it differently, but it’s the same idea. Intelligence is sometimes easier to get when you’re not a spook. More people trust teachers and even reporters than trust spies or other “intelligence professionals.” Even if there were not hidden agendas and sometimes lethal goals among governments, the secrecy barriers will assure that this remains so. Spooky-luky people generate fear and suspicion in polite society. Teachers and reporters don’t, usually. This is a primary reason why skilled people in the media and in the academy have begun getting better answers faster than security cleared, technically empowered, well funded analysts in official intelligence agencies. And that is a matter of grave concern to some senior IC executives.

My fourth conclusion was that Byzantine Politics prevail in academia. I doubt that anyone in government needs instruction on Byzantine politics, but will note that academics generally think that our politics is even more Byzantine and crazy than most. We have too many verbal people, with too few practical things to do. Add egos the size of small planets, and you get Byzantine politics with major bizarre elements. I recommend you avoid that like a disease infested swamp. But if that’s where the information you need is, well that’s where you must go.

My fifth conclusion was that centers of excellence are embedded in a sea of mediocrity. I will illustrate this with reference to global centers of peace research, and of peace studies, slightly different domains. Figure 4 shows the top ten Ph.D. peace education programs in the world today. Two are in Sweden, two in the U.S., and one each in Ireland, Israel, Austria, Australia, the UK and Argentina. Figure 5 shows the top ten Peace Research Institutes which are loaded with acronyms: SIPRI in Stockholm Sweden, PRIO in Oslo Norway, the UN University of Peace with branches in San Jose Costa Rica, New York and Geneva, the Pearson Peacekeeping Center in Nova Scotia and Montreal Canada, the Institute of Peace Science in Hiroshima Japan, a large cluster of rather different groups in D.C. including the USIP, FAS and CDI among others, the Kroc Institute at Notre Dame in Indiana, the Matsunaga Institute at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, IPCRI in Jerusalem Israel, and the Center for the Study of Intelligence and Wisdom in St. Paul Minnesota.

But wait, that’s silly, the Center for the Study of Intelligence and Wisdom is a two-bit, one-lunged outfit known only to a select few. The CSIW is my group. This is just a tiny example of the danger of relying on single sources. Michael Klare’s group at the Five Colleges of Massachusetts is much more vigorous; they’re called PAWSS for the Peace And World Security Studies program. They do everything we do only better (except for television). So number 10 on the graphic should go over to New England like so many numbers do. But when I was making this up I succumbed to

self-promotion and tried to deceive you. As you know very well, most media AND academic sources have biases too, sometimes very big ones. In fact, the issue of who owns the media and what their diverse agendas are is one of the hot topics for those who study propaganda carefully.

My sixth claim was that the land of academe is populated by an intensely verbal group whose reward systems are Highly Skewed to favor Noise over slower, higher quality work. Well this just shocks some of our tenured dinosaurs and amuses others, but it is undoubtedly true so I'll offer one classic essay on the topic for your consideration. It's called "Chaos in the Brickyard" and was published in Science, one of our best journals, in October of 1963. The main point is simple; our reward systems in academe today favor quantity over quality, almost always. And in such an environment, noise dominates insight over the short term, at least.

Now the academic world has theoretical and practical mechanisms designed to squeeze the noise out, leaving distilled and verified insights – we pray each day. Sometimes those work better sometimes worse, but they always take time. So if you need to know what's really going on right now, you have to know who really knows NOW, not ten years later. And running to whoever has published the most will often get you the ones who make the most noise instead of who really knows what's going on. Similar problems probably affect the official intelligence community.

One of the sadder days in my adventure studying spies was when I learned that official intelligence analysts are often asked to crank out the same kinds of well-crafted junk that we are in order to meet production quotas. The nominal reasons are the same; someone must keep the lazy talkers and readers working, and management wants some easy, quantitative measures of output. If lives are not on the line, so what? But otherwise, ... well, enough said on that for now.

My seventh point stressed the central importance of separating signals of wisdom from the noise generated by hundreds of thousands of professional talkers and writers chattering away, so it's somewhat redundant to point 6. But this is also a problem intimately familiar to intelligence analysts working for official agencies. I think we could help each other more with these universal problems of the information age if we could talk shop with each other more easily. But to be blunt, the security clearance pretty much prohibits that. This is a loss to both of us.

Finally, I claimed that lip service is paid to Interdisciplinary work in the academy but that most money goes to specialized departments, and that long term or strategic objectives usually lose out to short term urgencies. These problems appear to be nearly universal in bureaucracies, so again, it appears I am observing that the academic information world suffers many of the same problems that the official, governmental information world endures.

Please send solutions as soon as possible! I always take a solutions approach to end my discussions of problems. It is so easy to criticize, and so hard to improve! I have one, shocking, all-purpose solution but that won't go down well with some true-blue spooks. Its only virtue is that it works really well. Collaborate more. Narrow the domain of that which truly needs to be secret. Get less spooky-luky. I am happy to talk more about that, but it appears that we are out of time. So let me know if you have any solutions, and I promise I will tell you mine as fate allows.

Best wishes always, with your important work and in life.

Michael Andregg, justice and peace at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA.  
[mmandregg@stthomas.edu](mailto:mmandregg@stthomas.edu)

# OSS '03 PROCEEDINGS "BEYOND OSINT: Creating the Global Multi-Cultural Intelligence Web" - Link Page

[Previous](#)      [Countering Traumatic Attacks](#)

[Next](#)      [The State of the Academic Tribe in 2003 - SLIDES](#)

[Return to Electronic Index Page](#)