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Research Statement

My research to date has focused on international cooperation theory and the nature of power in international environmental politics. I have already published a number of peer-reviewed journal articles in these areas, and several more are under review. I have also started to develop a research program on the role of development finance in international environmental politics. Over the last two years, I have worked with a team of research assistants at the College of William and Mary to code information on the environmental content of each of the more than one million development project in the AidData database. This has enabled me to begin several projects that will lead to a number of additional publications. Additionally, I have discussed the need for an updated volume on environmental aid with the acquisitions editor at MIT Press, and I am currently in the process of designing a formal prospectus.

In the short to medium term, I will continue to research and publish on cooperation theory. As I discuss below, several projects are well in progress, and several more are ready to start. Second, I plan to continue to develop my expertise on questions of environment and development, and to complete a monograph on environmental aid.

My work on cooperation theory and global environmental governance builds directly from my dissertation research at the University of Massachusetts, conducted under the guidance of Peter M. Haas. In my dissertation, “The Negotiation and Design of Multilateral Environmental Agreements,” I found that the design of existing agreements has been driven less by environmental norms or efficiency concerns and relatively more by power relations within and among the contracting parties. While I found some evidence of ‘rational design’, the balance of evidence cautioned against excessive optimism in the capacity of institutional design features to mitigate cooperation problems. I found that flexibility provisions, for example, are rarely successful in securing the participation of reluctant, powerful states; such states typically refuse to participate unless on favorable terms.

This research was the basis of my 2009 article in *Conflict Management and Peace Science*. It also motivated further research on what drives powerful countries to support international regulatory regimes. In a paper – “Profitable Participation” – that is currently under review at *International Studies Quarterly*, Johannes Urpelainen and I theorized that powerful states are most likely to support regulatory regimes that benefit domestic economic interests. A first-best outcome would be to design regulation that directly benefits (e.g., by expanding certain markets) domestic firms. Often, however, demand for international regulation precedes product development. In these situations, which are extremely common in global environmental politics, we theorized that capacity for innovation will be the most important determinant of a country’s support for proposed regulation. We find strong support for this theory in our analysis of the international regulatory regime governing the production and international trade in pesticides and industrial chemicals.

My dissertation research also led me to be skeptical of overly-functionalist explanations of institutional design. This skepticism informs a current project that contributes to the emerging literature on informal governance. In “Frivolous but Rational?,” Urpelainen and I seek to identify scope conditions for the influence of formal rules in international cooperation. This project is nearly complete, and will be submitted this month to the Political Economy of International Organizations (PEIO) workshop and the *Review of International Organization*.

This work on environmental agreements led me to develop related research on corporate influence in international environmental governance. In “Profitable Participation,” Urpelainen and I observed that while successful international cooperation on organic pollutants reflects growing concern for transboundary environmental threats; it also reflects successful mobilization among corporate actors. This is one reason why there continues to be such conflict over the meaning of “sustainable development.” Further work on corporate interests in global environmental politics has yielded an article on the diffusion of voluntary environmental standards (forthcoming at *Environmental Policy and Planning*) and a forthcoming article in *Review of Policy Research* that compares interest group influence and bureaucratic capture in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

My research on international environmental agreements has also led me to question conventional explanations – including my own – concerning the significance of treaty ratification. Institutionalist and constructivist theories of international cooperation both emphasize the importance of ‘cascade’ effects in norm diffusion. Patterns of treaty ratification are often used to indicate the existence of such a cascade. However, there are situations when this may not be warranted. In a new paper – “Is the Good News about Ratification Good News about Cooperation?” – Johannes Urpelainen and I explain when and why it may be a mistake to read ratification as evidence of norm diffusion. This paper will be submitted to *International Organization* following presentation at the next International Studies Association conference.

I am particularly excited to continue developing my work on the use of development finance in international environmental governance. With the addition of environment codes to the AidData database, I am now able to conduct a wide variety of research projects. For example, I have started a project on the international financing of global public goods, examining which global environmental goods are funded, how, and by whom.

Second, I can use these data to contribute to the literature on aid allocation. I argue that environmental aid allocation is best understood using a bargaining framework. Donor-centric theories – extremely common in the existing literature – fail to reflect that global environmental threats can provide leverage to countries that lack conventional sources of power. What may appear on face to be inefficient allocation of environmental aid may simply reflect shifts in the distribution of power among donors and recipients.

A third use of these data will be to examine the effectiveness of aid in promoting institutional capacity. Lack of capacity is widely understood as a cause of noncompliance with international treaties. Accordingly, the desire to improve institutional capacity has served as a primary motivation for foreign aid, and environmental aid in particular. Further research on the role of development finance in building capacity will benefit both theory and practice.

My research agenda as a whole – the design of environmental treaties, the effects and limits of formal rules, the role of corporate influence in environmental politics, the provision of global public goods, and the use of development finance to promote global environmental governance – follows from the original question that drove me to write my dissertation: why is international environmental cooperation so difficult? Today, that question remains as timely as ever. My commitment to pursuing answers has helped me to continue to develop ideas based on dissertation research. It has also motivated me to branch out as a scholar – to develop new methodological skills and substantive expertise. My work is only beginning, and I look forward to the opportunity to continue it in an academic setting that rewards intellectual development and the pursuit of knowledge.