Sofía Valdes – Winner of Edwin H. Sherman Prize for Undergraduate Scholarship in Force and Diplomacy

Editor's Note: In 2024 Sofía Valdes, a student at Temple University was awarded the annual Edwin H. Sherman Prize for Undergraduate Scholarship in Force and Diplomacy. The paper must address an issue, contemporary or historical, that demonstrates the intersection of force and diplomacy in international affairs. Her paper is titled, "Violent Reverberations of The American War on Drugs in Latin America: A Comprehensive Policy Analysis". Valdes wrote the following piece about how she discovered CENFAD and shares her methodology in writing this paper.

Political science and global studies students at Temple often overlap in both classes and social circles. By my third semester at Temple, most of my classes were filled with the same people and, more than once, with the same professors. It was only by coincidence that I took two classes in the same semester— in the same room, actually!—with Dr. Alan McPherson. Moreover, it was only because of my classes with Dr. McPherson that I was added to the CENFAD Listserv. Frankly, I likely would not have attended any lectures without the extra credit promised! One of the classes I took with Dr. McPherson that semester, Superpower America, was one of the best classes I ever took in my undergraduate career. While studying history is not my specialty, this class and its emphasis on the intersection of American history and foreign policy fascinated me. Not only did I learn a lot from the class, but I also wanted to continue learning and extrapolating some of the contemporary implications of current foreign policy due to the history of American imperialism and interventionism. Through the CENFAD Listserv, I was inspired to apply for the Edwin H. Sherman competition. The announcement of the deadline and prize value amount also highlighted the open-ended nature of addressing a contemporary or historical issue that demonstrates the intersection of force and diplomacy in international affairs.

Past competition winners had been history projects, which makes sense as CENFAD is part of the history department, but my political science capstone project—a drug policy proposal—aligned slightly with the competition's prompt. So, I spoke to my capstone professor, Dr. Nyron Crawford, about what he thought about a modified timeline to finish my policy paper. He agreed to work with me so I could submit it on time for the competition and ensure it was on par with the parameters of his class. Dr. Crawford specializes in American drug policy, and his capstone class focused on researching failing or successful drug policy and what should change about it. I had decided to narrow the focus of my project on drug policy in Latin America, and with knowledge of the CENFAD competition, I set an even deeper focus on American imperialism and counter-narcotics initiatives—a rather inherent demonstration of force and diplomacy (or lack thereof). While this paper was my second capstone project—my global studies capstone was about linguistic vitality—this paper was specifically engaging for me to research because of the policy aspect of the paper. I really enjoyed researching and consolidating all the information that composed this paper, from

the historical aspects of American imperialism to the policy successes of other countries and practical policy implementations that other countries are enacting today. Much of what we learned about in Superpower America formed a basis to support my research and strengthen both my argument—especially in the case studies—and my policy suggestion.

Because of the paper's scope, I could compile my research into a more comprehensive analysis that combined three regions of Latin America, their distinctive historical contexts with American interventionism, and subsequent contemporary policy analysis. I began with archival research to examine the history of American interventionism in Latin America. A foundational understanding of U.S. actions and their long-term consequences, especially regarding foreign policy and counter-narcotics efforts, was crucial to configure the rest of my paper. Analyzing specific case studies of comparative policy implementation of drug, education, and prison reform policy in other countries *proved* the need for reform in Latin America because of their evident overall successes. Because my paper was intended to be persuasive in nature, as a policy *suggestion*, the development of this nuanced and comprehensive argument was critical, and so it aligned with the competition's focus on the intersection of force and diplomacy in international affairs.

American interventionism and its implications on diplomacy should be included in any discussion of contemporary policymaking.

The United States's forceful history of military interventions—including but not limited to Latin America—no doubt still has implications on diplomacy beyond just foreign policy. I briefly mentioned anti-Americanism in my paper, and it is still rising globally, impacting cross-cultural camaraderie and geopolitical stability beyond bonafide diplomatic relations. Policy can be successfully proposed, written, and reformed in the future by researching policy and its successes, failures, and shortcomings throughout history. In turn, policymaking can inform things like prioritization of how foreign aid is spent and sent and hopefully inspire a more benevolent and diplomatic perception of Americans and their policy abroad. According to the Brookings Institute, Americans generally support American foreign aid to other countries. However, how this American taxpayer money is being spent and its prioritization is an ongoing point of contention. When researching policy suggestions and success in other countries, such as prison reform, drug policy improvement, and economic aid prioritization, it gives me hope that success is, in fact, possible. Those successes can be proven by research and, more importantly, policy reform. Though I proposed policy reform in Latin America in this paper, research and policy improvement in other countries can also be used as models for reform here in the United States. In my professional future, I hope to use research to shape and reform future policy, just as I propose in this paper.