

Introduction to International Relations

sample course syllabus at introductory undergraduate level

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I. Course Description

What explains conflict and cooperation in international security and political economy? How do states and non-state actors interact in the international system? Why do they sometimes resort to violence? What international institutions structure their interactions? To equip students to answer these questions, this course introduces students to the major questions, theories, and issues in international relations. Students will leave the class with theoretical frameworks that can be used to understand current geopolitical issues as well as a historical appreciation for the study of international relations and the major events that have shaped our world. Throughout the course, we will relate our theories and historical knowledge to current issues of policy relevance, including: the North Korean nuclear threat, terrorism, cyber, rise of China, climate change, the war in Iraq, Trump, NAFTA, currency manipulation, Brexit, and debates over immigration.

There are no prerequisites for this course. The course will emphasize critical reading and timed writing skills that are essential to success in college and real life.

II. Requirements and Expectations

1. Attendance and participation (20%).

Attendance at lecture and sections is required. Unexcused absences will affect participation grades.

Participation in your section discussions is one of the most important parts of this class. Your TAs will be asked to assess your participation in terms of the quality, not quantity, of your contributions. I will ask your TAs to consider the following questions in assigning your participation grade: What observations, questions, or arguments did this student bring to the table? Did the student listen carefully to the views of others and respond fairly and thoughtfully? Did the student's comments reflect active engagement with the week's readings?

To this end, carefully consider whether using electronic devices in class will improve or detract from your participation. If you choose to use an electronic device, please note that I have a no-tolerance policy for any work on computers that is not related to our present discussion. Multitasking not only harms your educational experience but also that of your neighbors. Evidence of being off-task, both in lecture and in section, will affect your participation grade. TAs will sit at the back of the class to ensure that electronic devices

are contributing rather than detracting from the overall educational experience of the classroom.

2. ID quizzes (15%).

The ability to successfully identify key concepts and their significance is a critical skill in college, and exams frequently use “IDs” to test your ability to do this in a concise answer. This skill is tested in college exams because it requires you to take a large amount of information and distill it into its main points, a talent which is rewarded in many real-world careers.

To hone this skill, we will have several ID quizzes over the course of the semester. In an ID quiz, you will be asked to pick one of three terms from the week’s readings and briefly identify the concept and significance of the terms on an index card in three minutes. Quizzes may take place in lecture or in section. These are not “gotcha” exercises – their goal is to help you gradually develop this skill.

3. Three midterm exams (10%, 15%, and 15% respectively) and a final exam (25%).

The other skill this course emphasizes is timed writing. While you will spend much of your college career revising and polishing papers seemingly ad infinitum, in many academic and real-world situations, you will be expected to provide a cogently expressed written opinion with little preparation time. Timed writing exercises prepare you for this.

Midterm exam 1 is a take-home exam. You will receive two essay questions and will write 3-4 double-spaced (typed) pages on each. The goal of this exam is to practice writing short essays without the constraint of time or recall. All subsequent exams will be in-class, timed, and closed-book.

In midterm exam 2, you will be given a list of four essay questions one week before the exam. On the day of the exam, you will receive three of those essay questions and will be asked to select two.

In midterm exam 3, you will be given a list of eight essay questions one week before the exam. On the day of the exam, you will receive a list of five of those essay questions and will be asked to select two.

In the final exam, you will not be provided with a list of essay questions prior to the exam. On the day of the exam, you will receive a list of eight essay questions and will be asked to select two. There will also be an ID section.

Exams will be cumulative but will emphasize previously untested material.

III. Course Materials

All readings are required unless otherwise indicated.

Required books:

Frieden, Lake, and Schultz (3rd ed., 2015), *World Politics: Interests, Interactions, Institutions* [FLS]

Mingst and Snyder (6th ed., 2016), *Essential Readings in World Politics* [MS]

IV. How to Read for this Course

This class will give you practice in taking a lot of material and discerning what of it is most important. I suggest you keep a running list of IDs as you read. In general, a new tool or concept that can help us think about a class of problems or issues in international politics is a great candidate for an ID. When reading articles about historical or contemporary cases, think about *why* that case is being assigned. What broader phenomenon is it an example of? Or what core theoretical tension does a policy debate tap into? These examples can also be IDs, and in the “significance” section, you will want to discuss how they fit into the context of our course.

I also encourage you to reflect at the end of each class on the big questions raised by the class and by the readings. Write them down and think of them as practice essay questions when you return to preparing the material for the exam. Form a study group and exchange your IDs and practice questions with others.

PART I: TOOLS FOR UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Week 1.1: Power and Principle in International Relations

- What motivates the behavior of states?
- Asking “why” questions versus “should” questions in the study of politics
- What to expect from this course

Thucydides, “The Peloponnesian War and the Melian Dialogue,” *MS*

Week 1.2: Anarchy and the Security Dilemma

- What does it mean for the international system to be anarchic? (How would Mearsheimer and Wendt disagree with each other in answering this question?)
- Does anarchy necessarily lead to conflict?
- Explain the security dilemma and the offense/defense balance. Does the security dilemma necessarily lead to conflict?

Mearsheimer (2001), “Anarchy and the Struggle for Power,” *MS*

Wendt (1992), “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” *MS*

Jervis (1978), “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” *MS*

Week 2.1: The History of International Relations

- Which come first: political events or theories of politics?
- What major historical events demanded explanation?
- How might changes in the last century change the nature or focus of political science theories?
- Why is it important but challenging to imagine counterfactuals?

FLS, chapter 1

Dick (1962), *The Man in the High Castle* (excerpt)

Week 2.2: The Science of International Relations

- What is a theory in political science?
- What is a dependent and an independent variable?
- What is the relationship between a theory and a hypothesis?
- What are the various levels on which theories can operate?

Van Evera (1997), “Chapter 1: Hypotheses, Laws, and Theories: A Users Guide,” *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*

Singer (1961), “The Levels of Analysis Problem in International Relations,” *World Politics*

Levy (1998), “The Causes of War,” *Annual Review of Political Science*

Week 3.1: Interests, Interactions, and Institutions

- Where do interests come from?
- How can game theory help us understand interactions?
- How do institutions affect interactions?

FLS, chapter 2

PART II: THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Week 3.2: The Balance of Power

TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM 1 DUE

- What is the balance of power, and what is its relationship to multipolarity?
- Does the balance of power contribute more to war or to peace?
- Why do states join alliances?
- Case: How would you make the case that balancing and bandwagoning contributed to the outbreak of World War I?

Morgenthau (1948), "The Balance of Power," *MS*

FLS, chapter 5, pp. 184-202

Martel (2003, 3rd ed.), *Origins of the First World War*, chapters 1 and 2

Week 4.1: Power Transitions

- What is a hegemon? What is revisionism?
- Case: How would you make the case that World War I is hegemonic war?
- Case: Do you think a power transition war with China is likely? Why or why not?

Gilpin (1981), "Hegemonic War and International Change," handout from *Conflict After the Cold War*, pp. 93-103

Martel (2003, 3rd ed.), *Origins of the First World War*, chapter 3

Christensen (2015), "The China Challenge," *MS*

Week 4.2: Deterrence

- Why are nuclear weapons thought to have contributed to peace?
- What assumptions are required for deterrence to hold?
- Case: In your view, is the "long peace" of the Cold War due to nuclear weapons or to bipolarity?

Sagan and Waltz (2012 3rd ed.), *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, chapters 1 and 2

Gaddis (1986), "The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System," *International Security*

Week 5.1: Unipolarity

- Is unipolarity stabilizing or destabilizing to the international system?
- Case: Is unipolarity over?

Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth (2009), “Unipolarity, State Behavior, and Systemic Consequences,” *MS*

Monteiro (2011), “Unrest Assured: Why Unipolarity is Not Peaceful,” *MS*

Brooks and Wohlforth (2016), “The Rise and Fall of Great Powers in the Twenty-first Century: China’s Rise and the Fate of America’s Global Position,” *International Security*

Week 5.2: IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAM 2

PART III: EXPLAINING CONFLICT AND COOPERATION

Week 6.1: Bargaining Model of War

- What does Clausewitz mean when he says that “war is an instrument of policy”?
- Explain the bargaining model of war.
- What three explanations does Fearon offer for wars that make both sides worse off?

Clausewitz, “War as an Instrument of Policy,” *MS*

FLS, chapter 3

Fearon (1995), “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *MS*

Week 6.2: Misperception

- Where do Jervis’s arguments fit in the bargaining model of war?
- Where do cognitive biases documented by psychology fit in the bargaining model of war?
- Case: What misperceptions could have contributed to the outbreak of World War II?

Jervis (1968), “Hypotheses on Misperception,” *MS*

Yarhi-Milo (2013), “In the Eye of the Beholder: How Leaders and Intelligence Communities Assess the Intentions of Adversaries,” *MS*

Sagan (1988), “The Origins of the Pacific War,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*

Week 7.1: Individual Personalities and Biases

- Do individuals matter in the international system?
- Case: Do you think President Trump has personally affected international politics? Or can current outcomes be explained through systemic or societal factors. Please try to remain academic in your analysis and ground your argument in the theories we have discussed.

Byman and Pollack (2001), "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security*

Bell (2017), "Donald Trump is Making the Great Man Theory of History Great Again," *Foreign Policy*

Abrams (2017), "Trump the Traditionalist," *Foreign Affairs*

Week 7.2: Democracies and War

- Is "democratic peace theory" a theory in the sense we discussed in week 2?
- Can democratizing more countries contribute to international peace?

FLS, chapter 4, pp. 166-183

Gartzke (2007), "Capitalist Peace or Democratic Peace?" *MS*

Rosato (2003), "The Flawed Logic of the Democratic Peace Theory," *American Political Science Review*

Week 8.1: Domestic Politics and War

- Can bureaucratic politics and organizational routines ever matter in explaining war and peace?
- Case: In what ways did organizational routines influence the trajectory of the Cuban Missile Crisis?
- Case: In what ways did bureaucratic politics influence the 2003 US invasion of Iraq?

FLS, chapter 4, pp. 136-167

Allison (1969), "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," excerpt

Mann (2004), *Rise of the Vulcans*, excerpt

Week 8.2: International Organizations and Laws

- How do international organizations address bargaining failures between states?
- Can international organizations and laws constrain the behavior of powerful states?

FLS, chapter 5, pp. 203-233

FLS, chapter 11

Keohane (1984), "After Hegemony," *MS*

Mearsheimer (1995), "The False Promise of International Institutions," *MS*

Week 9.1: Trade

- How do factors of production help us to understand why countries trade with each other?

- Who benefits from trade? (Use your knowledge of the Stoper-Samuelson Theorem and the Ricardo-Viner model.)
- What is protectionism, and why does it happen despite the inefficiencies it produces? How do international institutions reduce protectionism?
- What is a trade deficit, and is it a problem?
- Case: What explains the emergence and decline of support for NAFTA? What is likely to happen if NAFTA (and other free trade agreements) disappear?

FLS, chapter 7

Peterson Institute (2017), “Free Trade: The Payoff to America” (video) - [link](#)

Peterson Institute (2017), “Is the US Trade Deficit a Problem?” (video) - [link](#)

Peterson Institute (2017), “Why Reducing Trade Deficits with NAFTA is the Wrong Strategy” (video) - [link](#)

Ryssdal and Wood (2017), “Avocado Toast is Really a Story about NAFTA,” Make Me Smart, episode 10 (podcast) - [link](#)

Week 9.2: Monetary Policy

- What is the difference between a fixed and floating exchange rate?
- Why are countries incentivized to manipulate their currencies, and how do they do so?
- Why does currency manipulation by one country negatively affect other countries?
- How can the US address currency manipulation by other countries?

FLS, chapter 9

Peterson Institute (2017), “Currency Manipulation and its Toll on the US Economy” (video) - [link](#)

Peterson Institute (2017), “China is No Longer Manipulating its Currency,” (video) - [link](#)

Week 10.1: IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAM 3

Week 10.2: Finance

- What are capital flows? How do open capital flows promote growth and development?
- What are the bargaining problems associated with debtor-creditor interactions?
- Case: How did commitment problems contribute to recent debt crises in Europe? How did European integration further complicate these crises? Why do you think economists were surprised when the EU was created?
- What are the benefits and problems associated with foreign direct investment?

FLS, chapter 8 (skip section on migration)

Bloomberg (2015), “The European Debt Crisis Visualized” (video) - [link](#)

Week 11.1: Migration

- What is the economic case for the free movement of labor across borders?
- Who “loses” from open migration policies?
- Case: Is aversion to immigration in Europe entirely grounded in economic concerns? What do you think Bansak et al. would find if they studied attitudes toward Mexican immigrants in the US?

FLS, chapter 8, pp. 372-379

Borjas (2016), “Yes, Immigration Hurts American Workers,” *Politico*

Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner (2016), “How Economic, Humanitarian, and Religious Concerns Shape European Attitudes Toward Asylum Seekers,” *Science*

Week 11.2: Globalization and Integration

- The last few weeks have outlined several reasons why economic integration promotes growth.
- In what ways could globalization negatively affect developing countries?
- Why is there discontent surrounding globalization even in developed countries?

Rodrik (2009), “Trading in Illusions,” *Foreign Policy*

Colgan and Keohane (2017), “The Liberal Order is Rigged,” *Foreign Affairs*

Bloomberg (2016), “The Brexit Debate Explained in 2 Minutes” (video) - [link](#)

Week 12.1: Development

- Why do (or don't) powerful states care about poverty?
- What tools do powerful states and international organizations use to address poverty?
- Are those tools effective? Why or why not?

FLS, chapter 9

Sachs (2005), *The End of Poverty* (excerpt)

Easterly (2006), *The White Man's Burden* (excerpt)

PART IV: CONTEMPORARY THREATS

Week 12.2: Environment

- What is a collective action problem? How does this concept help us understand man-made climate change?
- Who wins and loses from environmental regulation?
- Case: According to Keohane and Oppenheimer, what are the main differences between the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement? Draw on your knowledge of institutions and commitment problems in your responses.

FLS, chapter 13

Keohane and Oppenheimer (2016), "Paris: Beyond the Climate Dead End through Pledge and Review?" *Politics and Governance*

Week 13.1: Civil War and Humanitarian Intervention

- What factors can contribute to civil war?
- In what ways can civil war create external international challenges?
- Under what conditions does humanitarian intervention in a civil conflict or human rights atrocity succeed?

FLS, chapter 6, pp. 234-263

Fearon and Laitin (2003), "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*

Patrick (2013), "Does Syria Mean the End of the Responsibility to Protect?" *The Atlantic*

Week 13.2: Terrorism

- How do terrorist organizations use violence to achieve strategic objectives?
- Case: Why does Cronin argue that ISIS is not a terrorist group? What kinds of policies can the US and other countries adopt to weaken ISIS?

FLS, chapter 6, pp. 264-289

Cronin (2015), "Why ISIS is Not a Terrorist Group," *Foreign Affairs*

Posen (2015), "Contain ISIS," *The Atlantic*

Week 14.1: Nuclear Proliferation

- It will be useful to review readings from our class on deterrence.
- Case: What policy options are available to the US after states like North Korea have acquired nuclear weapons?

Stanton, Lee, and Klingner (2017), "Getting Tough on North Korea," *Foreign Affairs*

Bowden (2017), "How to Deal with North Korea," *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/07/the-worst-problem-on-earth/528717/>

Week 14.2: Cyber

- Do conventional theories of deterrence apply in the domain of cyberspace?
- Case: How should US policy makers handle Russia, given its cyber capabilities? Do you agree with Treisman's explanation for Russia's intervention in the Crimea? Why or why not, and what does your opinion suggest about the success of a deterrence strategy?

Nye (2017), "Deterrence and Dissuasion in Cyberspace," *International Security*

Treisman (2017), "Why Putin Took Crimea: The Gambler in the Kremlin," *Foreign Affairs*