

Preliminary Syllabus
Political Science 150
Introduction to International Relations

Course Dates: July 1, 2021 - August 6, 2021

Synchronous Seminars: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9am-10:45am

Lectures: At your convenience before each seminar

Instructor: Rachel Xian

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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Canvas Site: TBD

Syllabus Link:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WybuQcTbkbjkc-OiVwT38Xk7voAnlj0WYjBPuPP34Kc/edit>

Course Description

International relations (IR) seeks to understand human interactions on a planetary scale. The international system thus comprises more than the United Nations and formal summits. It is a complex web of nation-states, militaries, trade relations, migratory flows, civil societies, logistics networks, and structures, both written and unwritten, of laws, treaties, agreements, and norms. The actors and institutions that make up this system find themselves in varying degrees of conflict and cooperation, prosperity and poverty, interconnectedness and insularity. They interact as representatives of millions-strong nation-states, as politicians beholden to cabinets and constituents, and as individuals with idiosyncratic interests. Given the complexity and breadth of such a system, it is a wonder at all that international politics has been able to address global issues to the extent it has. It is, unfortunately, less surprising that the transnational state of affairs we want — a sustainable climate, peaceful cooperation, food security, basic human rights, even distributions of wealth — has been difficult to obtain and sustain.

This course seeks to introduce students to the complexity of IR as both a political practice and an academic discipline. It will expose students to key scholarly debates and developments, providing students with foundational tools to analyze international issues with the subtlety they deserve. To provide a broad overview of IR in only five weeks, this course condenses a massive amount of information into four general domains: concepts and theories; security and conflict; international political economy; and emerging issues. Students will participate in bi-weekly synchronous discussion seminars, watch asynchronous lectures, and complete a semester-long final project on a contemporary IR topic of their choice. Students should expect to come away with a better picture of what IR is, and a more nuanced sense of how we understand it.

Topics

Week 1 - Concepts and Theories of IR

Core Concepts: What is international relations?

- Practice vs. Discipline
- Nation-state
- Eurocentric history
- Sovereignty and the Treaty of Westphalia

Actors and Actions: Who and what is involved in IR?

- Levels of analysis/three images
- International organizations
- Instruments, treaties, agreements, architectures
- Borders/boundaries
- NGOs and grassroots
- Diplomacy, trade, war, people

Theories: How do we understand the international system?

- Realism/neorealism
- Neoliberalism
- Constructivism
- Psychology and decision making

Week 2: Security and Conflict

Armed Conflict: What is war and why does it happen?

- Interstate war
- Intrastate (civil) war
- Types of conflict
- Current conflicts

Defense and Security: How do states protect themselves? - *Guest lecturer*

- Nuclear weapons and MAD
- Substate actors and terrorism
- Military and strategy

Conflict Management: How do we deal with conflict?

- Conflict management and resolution
- Theories: Lund's conflict cycle, bargaining and negotiation, mutually hurting stalemates
- Difficulties in conflict prevention
- International law: Geneva Convention, Law of Armed Conflict, Responsibility to Protect
- Human rights: Peace vs. Justice

Week 3: International Political Economy

International Trade and Finance: How does money flow across the system?

- Theories: Free market, free trade, self-help

- Organizations: Regulating international money
- Foreign direct investment and cooperation
- Trade wars, sanctions, and conflict

International Development: Who benefits and where?

- Wealth inequality, uneven distribution
- Foreign aid, development projects, and conflict
- Labor, migration, refugees
- Domestic vs. international protections

Paper Proposal Due

Week 4: Emerging Issues

Interconnectedness: Is the world getting smaller or bigger?

- Networks: policy, labor, finance, social
- Globalization and the global commons

Transnational Issues: What affects all of us?

- Climate change and environmental regulation
- Health: Pandemics, scientific cooperation
- The Internet: Cybersecurity, privacy, governance

An Evolving System: What next?

- Great power competition
- The future of democracy
- Conflicts to watch

Week 5: Presentations and Papers

Assignments

- Seminar participation - 30%
- Bi-weekly discussion posts - 25%
- Final Project
 - Final paper/policy memo proposal - 5%
 - In-class presentation - 10%
 - Final paper or policy memo - 30%

Seminar Participation

Synchronous seminars will be held over Zoom every Tuesday and Thursday, 9am to 10:45am. These seminars will be primarily discussion-based, focusing on both lecture topics and readings assigned prior to that seminar. You are expected to have watched lectures and read accompanying materials before each

seminar. You will get out of the seminars what you put into them! You are encouraged to come prepared with questions from lectures/readings, and most certainly hot takes on any of the week's topics.

Bi-Weekly Reflection Post

Write two 250-word reflections each week, one after each synchronous session. Reflections can refer to topics brought up in the in-class discussion, any of the readings prior to that session, and/or the lecture(s) prior to that session. In addition to any interesting thoughts you would like to expand upon or respond to, you should also ask 2-3 open-ended questions per reflection. A handful of these questions will be selected to provoke discussion in the next session. Be prepared to elaborate on any aspect of your reflection in the next seminar, questions or insights. **Reflection posts should be submitted by 8pm after each synchronous session.**

Final Project

Select one regional or topical issue in current international relations. Possible topics may include an ongoing conflict and its peace process; resource scarcity and consequent tensions in a particular region; the responsibility to protect and its implications for state sovereignty; or, as outlined below, a theory or approach to understanding IR you think has seriously gotten things wrong. Write a **policy memo or academic paper** on this issue. These two options reflect the practical vs. academic domains of international relations.

Paper Proposal

To prepare for your final paper or policy memo, you are required to submit a **paper proposal** by the end of week 3 (Friday, 11:59PM EST). Your proposal does not need to be formally structured, or written out like an essay. Bullet points with elaborations as needed are sufficient. Your proposal should also include a preliminary bibliography (3-4 sources), and should indicate whether you plan to write a policy or academic paper. **Proposals should be 1-2 pages, double-spaced.**

In-Class Presentation

In the last week of class, you will also **present preliminary findings** on your international issue. Think of this as your chance to do a first-pass outline of your final paper and receive peer feedback. These presentations need not include all empirical details or academic sources, but they should give us a basic understanding of the topic, as well as your perspectives on it — whether policy or academic.

Presentations should be approximately 10 minutes long with accompanying slides, followed by a 5 minute Q&A.

Academic Paper or Policy Memo

A policy memo should be, as its name implies, policy and practice oriented. This means it should be directed toward a specific audience (e.g. policymaker - Secretary of State, President/Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Policy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; think tank audience; congress or political body). It should include a background to the issue, overview of recent developments, outline of sub-issues and actors, analysis of ongoing policies, and policy recommendations.

An academic paper should ask a substantive research question. Such questions usually begin with “how” or “why.” A research paper should be framed around a puzzle - something that seems counterintuitive, or

runs contrary to historical precedent. Your research paper should not merely describe; it should advance an argument, supported by primary, secondary, or tertiary sources, and should be organized in a clear manner. Look to articles from journals like *International Security*, *International Organizations*, or *APSR* for layout ideas. A brief literature review prior to your argument is recommended, although emphasis on *brief*. A research paper need not include policy recommendations, though if relevant, policy implications may be included in a conclusion. Please reach out to me if you have a quantitative or data-driven paper proposal. We will assess feasibility and structure if so.

Alternatively, your final paper can critique a major theory of IR. Critiques should outline the theory's primary perspectives, and use at least two alternative theories to mount an opposition. In addition to these alternative theories, you must include, with each theoretically grounded critique, a brief case study that is inadequately explained by the theory under critique, and better accounted for by the alternative theory at hand.

All memos and papers should be 15-30 pages, double-spaced (not including bibliography). Citations in whatever format you prefer, preferably Chicago or APA.

Final papers are due by midnight (11:59PM EST) the last day of class (August 6, 2021).