

POLS 2400  
**INTRODUCTION TO GEOPOLITICS**  
Spring 2017  
Lectures: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 8:30-9:20  
Old Main 304

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Office Hours: 9:30 – 10:30 Monday, Wednesday and Friday, or by appt.

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We are living at a time of exceptional political fluidity and uncertainty. Being an active citizen requires an understanding of the political complexity of our world, and the manner in which seemingly distant events are connected to your own actions and future. This class will demonstrate how a geopolitical and geographic perspective aids in understanding the dynamics of conflict and geopolitics.

The geographic perspective “situates” or “contextualizes” political conflicts through the use of two concepts: scale and place. We will investigate these concepts and use them to understand why certain people, groups, or countries act in certain ways in certain situations. For example, the actions of North Korea and Iran, the goals of the so-called Islamic State, or the actions of US hate groups can all be “situated” within the perspective of political geography. We will also introduce topics that are essential building blocks in understanding geopolitics and current events such as: different approaches to geopolitics, territory, nations, states, world power, environmental geopolitics, terrorism, transnational social movements, borders, and boundaries.

The purpose of this class is to provide such a perspective through the adoption of a particular theoretical idea, structure and agency. As with the geographic concepts we will explain and introduce the concepts of structure and agency in class and continually revisit them. In conjunction with the concepts scale and place we will use structure and agency to situate conflicts and those involved in them. The goal is to try and understand the limits and possibilities faced by countries and other political actors as they negotiate, initiate, or try to avoid conflict.

Geopolitics is a perspective to be used – and use it we will. A significant part of the class will be the interpretation and discussion of newspaper articles using the concepts we discuss in class. By the end of the class you will be able to engage quality news media – and the nightly international news – using the concepts you have learnt to gain a broader understanding of what is going on in the world.

The goal of this class is to offer a geopolitical perspective to help you navigate through the “noise” of media reports, make sense of them, and put them into a coherent framework.

## **Readings**

The basis of class will be lectures supported by a textbook that parallels and complements the material presented in class. **The required textbook is:**

*Introduction to Geopolitics* (third edition) by C. Flint, published by Routledge in 2017.

It is important that you get the third edition of the textbook as the class has been altered to reflect the new content. This textbook is written specifically as a guide to this class – it will complement all the lecture notes as well as providing additional explanation and exemplification. We will use all of the chapters in depth.

Copies of the book are on reserve in the library and available in the bookstores.

**The other piece of required reading is the *New York Times* and/or *The Washington Post* to allow us to keep abreast of current affairs that we can relate to the theoretical material discussed in class.** The *New York Times* is available on the web at [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com). I strongly suggest you take advantage of the *New York Times* student digital subscription offer available at nytimes.com/studentrate. The NYT is also available in the library, including the Lexus/Nexus database. The *Washington Post* is available on the web at <https://www.washingtonpost.com>. **You can subscribe to the WP for FREE!** Follow the instructions on the WP website through the "subscribe" link and create an account. You must use an email account that ends in the ".edu" suffix. You will then have to verify your e-mail address. The process requires some specific steps; I suggest following the instructions in the FAQs. The NYT and WP are also available in the library, including the Lexus/Nexus database.

Why just two newspapers and why the *NYT* and *Washington Post*? Fair questions and I hope I can give fair answers. I feel that it is an important part of your college education to engage a “quality” newspaper on a daily basis. A college education means knowing what is going on in the world beyond the classroom walls, the campus and Logan. In this class we will **not simply read** the newspaper and summarize articles. Instead, we will become informed readers of the newspaper by **applying** our political geography perspective to an interpretation of the current events being reported.

We will look at just these two newspapers, the *NYT* and *WP* mainly because of logistical reasons. In a large class it helps me manage the class assignments. (The biggest problem is that if I open up the choice of newspapers then the definition of a “quality” newspaper becomes stretched too thin). But why the *NYT* and *WP*? The cost of focusing on these newspapers is that we are exposed to just two editorial perspectives. But like it or not, the *NYT* is a “paper of record”, and what is (and is not) reported and discussed in the *NYT* plays a key role in defining the content of the “news.” So, love it or hate it the *NYT* is a key media source and one you should be familiar with. The *Washington Post* also has a distinctive editorial position and plays an influential role in forming opinion and setting the agenda for debate.

For the essay assignments you will need to provide a hard copy of a *New York Times* or *Washington Post* article. If you subscribe to the digital edition it is quite easy to print an article.

## Lectures

The lectures will be used to present concepts and theories, and to exemplify them. It is also a time for us to discuss the concepts as a class, and also address how on-going current affairs relate to the class material. In other words, you will be asked to suggest important or interesting news stories in recent editions of the *NYT* and *Washington Post* and as a class we will see how they relate to the concepts.

I will use powerpoint presentations to frame my lectures. The powerpoints will be made available before the lectures. The powerpoints (and other documents such as study guides) will be made available using the Canvas system. Time will be taken to introduce you to the expectations and ingredients of the short essays. Also, activities from the textbook will be undertaken to help you gain a fuller understanding of the class material.

## Your Responsibilities

You are responsible for obtaining the lecture notes, and so you should come to class. I expect attendance, it is part of your grade, and your active participation in the class. You may also download the lecture slides from Canvas (see below) to supplement your notes or print them out in advance to help you take notes.

Coming to class means arriving on time, staying for the duration and being attentive: no talking (*it drives me nuts!*), newspaper reading, text messaging (*I might just go ballistic!!*), or snoring. And, of course, please turn your cell-phones off.

**Group Exercises:** We will illustrate the themes and concepts of the class through a series of role-playing group exercises. These only work if you are in attendance. Hence, **I expect you to be there and be an active participant.**

**Essays:** **No late assignments will be accepted**, unless there is a medical or family emergency documented by the Dean's office— meaning something sudden, drastic, and unforeseen. If you have scheduled events, such as weddings, family reunions, job interviews, etc., coming up plan ahead and hand in the assignment early!

**No cheating in the essays!** Your written work must be independently produced, and must not display cross-over or direct similarity with the work of a classmate; this is a form of cheating that will definitely result in an “F” for the assignment in the first instance and in the course for second offences. **All cases of cheating will be reported to the Dean’s office.** My advice is that if you work with someone or in a group use different concepts and newspaper articles to prevent such “cross-over.” We will use the Utah State Student Code of Conduct to evaluate behavior.

## Civility Policy

The expectation of in-class discussion of the course material reflects a belief in informed debate

that respects individual opinions and differences. Each member of the Utah State University community is responsible for fostering an atmosphere imbued with dignity, respect, tolerance, appreciation of diversity and positive regard for all members of our collegiate community.

## Accessing Canvas.

To access the course page:

1. Type the following url “ <https://canvas.usu.edu>” in to your browser to get to the main Canvas page.
2. Log-in to Canvas using you’re a Number and Password.
3. Select the "Introduction to Geopolitics" link under the Courses window. You will be redirected to the POLS 2400 course page, where you will be able to access the course syllabus, lecture notes/slides, and assignments. If additional readings, discussion groups, and your performance records are added and activated during the semester they will be made available in Canvas too.

You may wish to familiarize yourself with Canvas by reviewing any of the online tutorials, which may be accessed from your Canvas homepage.

Please note that you are responsible for properly accessing material posted to the Canvas system!

## Grades

Your final grade will be calculated using the following breakdown:

Group Exercises and Class Attendance	35%
Five short essays	50% (first essay accounts for 8% of your final grade, the fifth and final essay accounts for 12% and the rest 10%)
Final Exam	15%

**Short Essays:** The short-essays will be explained in greater detail in another handout. They are one-page exercises that require you to discuss a recent (published since the previous exercise) *New York Times* or *Washington Post* article using one of the concepts we have discussed in class. It is not simply a summary of the article – it is an exercise in using the concepts from the class to “situate” and give greater meaning to the issue covered in the article. **If you forget and miss the class to hand in an essay there will be no opportunity to hand it in later.** You will lose the points – so pay attention to the schedule and announcements. Make-up opportunities will only be possible for medical or family emergence reasons, and may require documentation from the emergency Dean.

**Group Exercises:** The group exercises play a key role in this class. They will require you to think about the concepts in depth and apply them to different scenarios. You will be assigned

membership in a particular group for the entire length of the semester. Failure to attend on the days of group exercises is inconsiderate to your fellow group members and will result in a strong deduction of points towards the class attendance component of your grade. The group exercises will also require a short writing assignment jointly produced by all group members that illustrates your knowledge of the relevant concepts.

**Final Exam:** The final exam is a longer version of the short papers. You may write up to, but no more than, three pages using at least two newspaper articles that you have not previously used (yes, I will be keeping track). You must use three different concepts from the class (from three different sections) to explore a particular real world event that is discussed by the articles (same event/issue, different concepts, different articles). You will gain points by showing the connection between the concepts and how using them in conjunction enriches your understanding of the event. An excellent paper will offer some constructive critique of the concepts.

The final grades will be assigned according to the following system:

A+	97-100%	C+	77-79%	F	anything below 60%
A	93-96%	C	73-76%		
A-	90-92%	C-	70-72%		
B+	87-89%	D+	67-69%		
B	83-86%	D	63-66%		
B-	80-82%	D-	60-62%		

### **Lectures, Short Essay and Group Exercise Timetable**

#### *Unit 1. Introduction to Geography and Geopolitics*

From January 9 through January 27

Reading: Chapter 1 of the textbook.

**Short Essay 1 due in class January 30**

**Group Exercise January 25**

#### *Unit 2. Geopolitical Codes: Agency or the Way Geopolitics is Done*

From January 30 through February 17

Reading: Chapters 2 and 3 of the textbook.

**Short Essay 2 due in class February 20**

**Group Exercises February 13 and 15**

#### *Unit 3. Nations and Nationalism: The Building Blocks of Geopolitics*

From February 20 through March 17

Reading: Chapter 4 of the textbook.

**Short Essay 3 due in class March 21**

**Group Exercise February 25 and March 15 and 17**

*Unit 4. Territorial and Network Geopolitics: Reasons and Means of Conflict*

From March 20 through March 31

*No classes in the week beginning April 3rd*

Reading: Chapters 5 and 6 of the textbook.

**Short Essay 4 due in class April 10**

**Group Exercise March 29**

*Unit 5. Geopolitics, Structure, and the Global Scale: World Leadership and the Environment*

From April 10 through April 28

Reading: Chapters 7 and 8 of the textbook.

**Short Essay 5 due in class April 21**

**Group Exercise April 24 and 26**

**Final Exam: Hard copy delivered to Main 320 (Political Science Department Office) by 3pm Thursday May 4<sup>th</sup>. No e-mail attachments or late papers accepted.**