POLS 6250 International Relations Seminar
Course Syllabus
Last update: Monday 26th August, 2019

Professor: Anna Pechenkina
Class meeting: Thursdays at 3:00-5:50PM in 318 MAIN
Office: 328D MAIN
Email: anna.pechenkina@usu.edu
Office Hours: Wednesdays at 10:AM to noon & by appointment

Description:

This course introduces students to the social science of international relations (IR). First, we will survey important theoretical assumptions made by theoretical paradigms of Realism, Liberalism, Institutionalism, Constructivism, and Feminism. Second, we will discuss how newer theoretical approaches to the study of international relations, e.g., the Bargaining approach, build upon or depart from the older ones. Third, we will evaluate the logic of proposed arguments and the evidence presented in support of those arguments. Class meetings will follow a seminar format with occasional, brief lectures to introduce new topics or situate debates.

Course objectives:

• To gain factual knowledge about terminology, classifications, methods, and trends in the discipline of IR;

• To learn fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories of IR;

• To learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas and arguments expressed by scholars of IR.

Course website:

Course information, syllabus, assignments, and grades are available at USU Canvas.

Readings:

All readings are available through USU Canvas.

Suggested Questions for Critical Evaluation of Readings:

Doing readings prior to coming to class is essential in this course. Use the following questions as your reading guide:

1. Summary of the theoretical points:

   • What is the research question that this paper is trying to answer?
• What is the dependent variable?
• What is the independent variable?
• What is the causal mechanism that allegedly links dependent and independent variables?
• What are the assumptions that this paper is making (explicit or implicit)? Why are they necessary? Are any of them unrealistic?
• Who are the relevant actors?
• What are their preferences and interests and where do they come from?
• At what level of analysis is the argument?
• Where does the argument fit into the theoretical landscape of IR and who would disagree?
• What is the relative importance of agency versus structure?

2. Summary of the evidence presented (if any):
• What empirical evidence does the paper provide? Is the evidence systematic or anecdotal?
• What are the empirical findings of this paper?
• At what level of analysis is the evidence?
• What is the sample of cases that is being analyzed? Do you think this is the appropriate sample to test the question, or maybe there is a selection bias?
• Do you think the empirical evidence supports the argument? Are there any alternative explanations for which the empirical evidence does not account?
• What empirical evidence would falsify the argument of the paper?

3. Critical evaluation:
• Do you think that the direction of the causal relationship is correct? Can the causality work in the opposite direction as well?
• How narrow are the assumptions stated? Do the assumptions limit the findings? (e.g., if one assumes that leaders are not motivated by reelection, what happens to the findings?)
• How generalizable is the evidence presented to other:
  – regions/countries? (E.g., if the data come from one country’s historical record, does this country’s political regime or other characteristics make it difficult to apply it to other states?)
  – time periods in human history? why?
• Can you think of any new hypotheses that come out of the theoretical explanations or your criticism, and that you can test empirically?
• Can you think of an alternative way to test the argument empirically?
• Can you think of any policy-relevant implications? Should governments change some of their current policies in light of the theory or the evidence presented in the paper?
• What did you like about the piece? in what directions could this line of research be continued?
Grades:

In-class participation (30%): To function as a class, your participation is valuable and it is needed. You can participate by asking questions and making quality contributions to class discussion. Your participation is assessed by how much you engage the assigned readings. I will call on students to identify and discuss various aspects of the readings.

For each reading, we will summarize the argument, discuss its contribution to IR, and probe the argument and evidence for strengths and weaknesses. Use the questions in the previous section to guide your reading of each piece. These questions will shape our discussion.

If you withhold participation, it impedes the ability of our class as a mini research community to further our knowledge. Students who show up to every class but do not say a word can expect a C for this portion of their grade.

Peer Reviews (30%): You will write three reviews of already published papers throughout the semester. The purpose of this is to learn how to critically and constructively analyze work in political science. You will need to pick 2 limitations (i.e., problems or areas for improvement) and explain how they undermine/extend the work in question. A good place to start is to answer the questions in section 3 “Critical evaluation” of the reading guide on pp.2–3.

Format: 1.5–2 pages-long; single-spaced; 12-point font; Times New Roman; 1 inch margins; header should contain only your name. The structure should be 1–2 paragraph(s) of summary and then 1.5 pages of discussion of at least 2 limitations.

Normally, any paper may be criticized focusing on the following types of limitations:

1. Logic of the argument.
2. Applicability to other cases.
3. (Potential) measurement of variables.
4. Further (not mentioned in the paper) implications of the argument.

Each person will review a different paper, and you will sign up for the papers to review at the beginning of the semester. The list of items for peer review is marked with an asterisk. Sign up via USU Canvas by Sep 6, 2019 at 11:59PM. Since we will not have class meetings during weeks 12 and 13, at least one of your peer reviews needs to be uploaded during those weeks.

Peer reviews are due at 11:59PM on Sundays before the class meetings, for which the papers are assigned.

Final Research Paper (40%): The final paper will need to raise an original research question on a topic related to international relations, provide a literature review for that question, develop expectations/hypotheses, and propose a research design to address said question. The paper will be 12–15 pages-long and will be due during the finals week. I encourage you to discuss your (evolving) research questions with me ahead of time. The final project consists of six assignments:
research question (due week 4); outline (due week 6); lit review (due week 8); argument (week 10); first draft (week 13) and final draft (week 16).

**Evaluation**

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<th>Max Points</th>
<th>Your Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<td>3 peer reviews @ 10% each</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research question (week 4)</td>
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<td>Literature review (week 8)</td>
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<td>Argument review (week 10)</td>
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<td>First draft (week 13)</td>
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<td>Final draft (week 16)</td>
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**Grades**

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<td>70 - 73.99%</td>
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USU Policy on Academic Integrity:
Please consult Article VI-1 of the USU Student Code.

Disability:
If you wish to request an accommodation due to a documented disability, please inform me and contact the Disability Resource Center as soon as possible.

Course Schedule:
The schedule below should give you a general framework for what topics we will cover during the semester. A continually updated version of this schedule will be available on USU Canvas. When in doubt, resort to the website version of the schedule.

Please refer to the website for the specific pages that you are expected read of each assigned reading.

Part I: IR as a Social Science

Week 1: Introduction to the course

• Watch “VICE Special Report: A World in Disarray.”

Recommended:

Week 2: No class. Labor Day

Week 3: Philosophy of science and overview of the field

Recommended:


Week 4: Units of analysis and methods of inquiry. (Research question is due)


Recommended:

- Kenneth Waltz. 1954. Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis.

Part II: Major Approaches to IR

Week 5: Realism. International system as a source of state preferences

- Kenneth Waltz. 1979. Theory of International Politics. Chapters 6, 8

Recommended:

Week 6: Institutionalism. International system as a source of state preferences. *(Outline is due)*


**Recommended:**


Week 7: Early Rationalist approach and Bargaining I


**Recommended:**

- Thomas C. Schelling. 1966. *Arms and Influence.* Chapters 1, 2, 3.

Week 8: Bargaining II and Liberalism I. *(Lit review is due)*

  *International Organization.*
• *Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, James Morrow, Randolph Siverson, and Alastair Smith. 1999. 

Recommended:

  Politics.” *International Organization.*
• *James D. Fearon. 1998. “Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Theories of International 
  Relations.” *Annual Review of Political Science.*

Week 9: Liberalism II. Domestic politics as a source of state preferences

• *Jessica L. P. Weeks. 2012. “Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the 
  Initiation of International Conflict.” *American Political Science Review.*
  Approach.” *American Journal of Political Science.*
• *Alyssa Prorok. 2016. “Leader Incentives and Civil War Outcomes.” *American Journal of 
  Political Science.*

Recommended:

• Graham Allison. 1969. “Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis.” *American Political 
  Science Review.*
  Political Science Review.*
  Connection.” *International Studies Quarterly.*
  Politics.*

Part III: Non-Mainstream Approaches to IR

Week 10: Feminism. Gender in IR. Identity approach to IR. *(Argument is due)*

• *Mary Caprioli and Mark A. Boyer. 2001. “Gender, Violence, and International Crisis.” 
  *Journal of Conflict Resolution.*
• *Charli Carpenter. 2003. “‘Women and Children First’: Gender, Norms, and Humanitarian 
  the Gender Gap in Support for War.” *Public Opinion Quarterly.*

Recommended:
Week 11: Constructivism. Ideational approach to IR


Recommended:

- Rawi Abdelal et al. 2006. “Identity as a Variable.” *Perspectives on Politics*

Week 12: Intrastate conflict


Recommended:


Week 13: Terrorism. *(First draft is due)*


Week 14: New methodological approaches

TBA

Week 15: Presentations of research projects

Week 16: *Final draft is due*