PSC 333 International Relations Theory

Course Syllabus

Instructor: Dylan S. McLean               Spring 2015
Office: 516 Park Hall                Tue. & Thurs. 5 - 6:20pm
Office Hours: 2 – 4pm Thursdays or by appt. Capen 10
Email: dmclean2@buffalo.edu

Course Description

This is a course on theory, specifically theories of international politics. World leaders are continually confronted with a variety of circumstances and problems that must be addressed through the practice of statecraft and the implementation of foreign policy. This course seeks to develop an understanding of where those problems come from, what forces lead to them, and what forces influence and constrain the solutions decision-makers employ to address them.

The course begins by providing a basic framework for understanding what a social scientific theory is and how they should be evaluated. With these tools it proceeds to review some of the main theoretical currents in the field of international relations. In deference to predominant student interest, the focus of the course is primarily on theoretical approaches seeking to explain international conflict; however, some time is allotted for a brief consideration of international cooperation. A fair amount of time is spent on the various strains of realism and liberalism. The course then proceeds to explore strategic bargaining and deterrence theory as well as a selection of progressive theoretical research programs such as the democratic peace, power transition theory, and the geopolitical approach. The concluding weeks are devoted to the study of terrorism from a theoretical perspective. We explore the strategies of both terrorists and counter-terrorists, deal with the subjectivity of terrorism, and address the question of terrorism’s effectiveness as a political strategy.

This is an upper division undergraduate course and, as such, is not designed to be easy. It is designed to be intellectually rewarding. In order for a student to be successful in this course they must actively engage with all of the assigned reading and attend class regularly. Lecture provides background and context for each week’s topic while clarifying essential concepts from the reading.

By the end of the course, you should have achieved the following learning outcomes:

- Understand what makes social science scientific.
- Know how to critically evaluate scholarly theory.
- Identify and discuss the most significant theoretical debates in the field of international relations.
- Compare and contrast Realism and Liberalism, as well as their most common variants.
- Understand how strategic bargaining theory has influenced our thinking about war.
- Identify what makes international cooperation more or less likely.
- Be able to identify several different explanations for the cause of international conflict.
- Demonstrate an understanding of what distinguishes terrorism from other types of violence.
**Required Readings**

There is no text book for this course. All of the readings listed below will be available electronically either through the university library, primarily JSTOR, or the course’s UBLearns site.

**Course Requirements**

The final course grades will be based off of the following criteria:

1) **3 Tests (60%)**

There will be 3 tests given in this course. They will cover material from both the lectures and readings. Each is non-cumulative and only evaluates the material covered since the last test. The format will be discussed in more detail as the semester progresses; however, it will most likely consist of some combination of multiple-choice and true/false.

The scheduled day for each test is listed below.

2) **Weekly Talking Points (30%)**

Every student is expected to submit two talking points, drawn from the readings, for each topic. These are to be emailed to the instructor (send to dmclean2@buffalo.edu) by 8 AM the day we start each topic (dates listed below). These talking points should focus on the most interesting general question, point, or argument identified by the student in the week’s readings; the student should analyze, evaluate, or extend this question, point, or argument (not simply summarize it). Alternatively, they can also be a critique of some aspect of the reading. They should be written in the form of a short paragraph. No more or less than two distinct talking points should be submitted for each set of readings. Talking points in excess of 160 words will not be accepted. Talking points that arrive late will also not be accepted; late submissions will receive no credit. Unless there was only one required reading for that week, the talking points must come from different readings. These must be analytical! Simple summarization is not acceptable.

These talking points will be used to guide the portion of the class in which we engage in focused discussion of the week’s readings. Students should come to class with a copy of their talking points and, if asked by the instructor, be prepared to present their talking point to the class in order to foster discussion. Students will be asked to do this at some point, quite possibly several times. Students can avoid being put on the spot by volunteering to present one of their talking points when volunteers are solicited by the instructor.

There will be 11 rounds of talking points. The 10 best submissions will count toward the 30%.

3) **Participation & Attendance (10%)**

It is expected that each student will attend class and participate in class discussions regularly. We will cover a variety of topics in this course which will likely, and hopefully, prompt lively and thought provoking discussion. All students should feel encouraged, and are expected, to participate in such discussions on a regular basis. Attendance will occasionally be taken.

**Grading**

The breakdown for final grades, and the letter grade corresponding to percentage based scores on individual assignments, is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A) 93-100%</td>
<td>(B) 83-86.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A-) 90-92.9%</td>
<td>(B-) 80-82.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B+) 87-89.9%</td>
<td>(C+) 77-79.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B) 73-76.9%</td>
<td>(C) 70-72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B-) 67-69.9%</td>
<td>(D-) 60-62.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) 63-66.9%</td>
<td>(D+) 67-69.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D-) 60-62.9%</td>
<td>(F) &lt; 60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a means of feedback as well as evaluation, the required coursework is designed to measure each student’s progress in achieving the course’s learning outcomes. Grades in the “A” to “C-“ range indicate achievement of the learning outcome targeted by the coursework while “D” and “F” grades indicate failure to meet the expectations of that outcome. The table below presents the learning outcomes and what coursework assesses their achievement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Assessment Measure(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand what makes social science scientific.</td>
<td>Test 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know how to critically evaluate scholarly theory.</td>
<td>Test 1; Talking Points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify and discuss the most significant theoretical debates in the field of international relations.</td>
<td>Tests (all); Talking Points; Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare and contrast Realism and Liberalism, as well as their most common variants.</td>
<td>Test 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand how strategic bargaining theory has influenced our thinking about war.</td>
<td>Test 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify what makes international cooperation more or less likely.</td>
<td>Test 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be able to identify several different explanations for the cause of international conflict.</td>
<td>Tests (all)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate an understanding of what distinguishes terrorism from other types of violence.</td>
<td>Test 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Make-up Exams and Incompletes

Make-up exams are available only to students with a medical or personal emergency (e.g. death in the family). Students must notify the instructor well in advance of the exam if they are going to be absent and provide documentation justifying the absence in a timely manner. If some type of emergency prevents attendance at an exam the student has 24 hours in order to contact the instructor and provide documentation of the emergency. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in the denial of a make-up exam and an automatic zero.

Note the university’s policy on incomplete (I) grades: “A grade of incomplete may be given to a student who has not completed all of the assigned work in a course, if he/she has a passing average, and there exists a well defined means by which the course requirements can be completed…”. An incomplete is given only in exceptional circumstances—for very grave and ongoing situations. For more information see: [http://undergrad-catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/grading/explanation.shtml](http://undergrad-catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/grading/explanation.shtml)
Plagiarism Statement

Cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any student found in violation of university policy will automatically receive a grade of “F” for the course. Details regarding what constitutes academic dishonesty are available at:
http://undergrad-catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/course/integrity.shtml

Classroom Etiquette

Please arrive to class on time and with your cell phone off or on vibrate. Repeated tardiness or interruptions (e.g. a ringing cell phone) may adversely affect your participation grade. Feel free to bring beverages to class but please refrain from eating as a courtesy to your classmates.

While participation is encouraged, it is probable that some of the topics discussed in this class are likely to stir strong emotions among some students. Class discussions must be kept civil and respectful at all times. Any behavior to the contrary of this will absolutely not be tolerated.

Students with Disabilities Policy

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal antidiscrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. This legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. Please notify the instructor immediately if you have a disability that requires accommodation.

Extra Credit Policy

Extra credit will not be offered to individual students under any circumstance. Any extra credit opportunities will be made equally available to all students.

Email Policy

Email is a valuable communication tool. Students are expected to regularly check their University at Buffalo email address on a regular basis. Important course announcements will be distributed via email. I will make every effort to respond to substantive questions via email as quickly and completely as reasonable. Some matters are better addressed during office hours. I will not tolerate emails concerning matters that are clearly addressed in this syllabus.

Course Schedule and Readings

* The course schedule may need to be adjusted as we progress. I will announce any changes to this schedule in class and via email.
* All readings listed below are required. They should be completed prior to the first meeting of the week they are listed under.
* Pay attention to page numbers! You are only required to read the page ranges listed.

January 27: Introduction & Course Overview

No readings required
January 29 & February 3:  *What are IR Theories, Paradigms, and Research Programs?*
*talking points due January 29th by 8am*


February 5 & 10:  *Realism I*
*talking points due Feb. 5 by 8am*


February 12 & 17:  *Realism II*
*talking points due Feb. 12 by 8am*


February 19 & 24:  *Liberalism – Neoliberalism*
*talking points due Feb. 19 by 8am*


February 26:  *Test 1*
March 3 & 5:  *Power Shift Theories*  
*talking points due March 3 by 8am*


March 10 & 12:  *Strategic Bargaining & Deterrence*  
*talking points due March 10 by 8am*

*JSTOR*

March 24 & 26:  *Democratic Peace*  
*talking points due March 24 by 8am*

*JSTOR*

March 31:  *Test 2*
April 2 & 7:  Geopolitics  
*talking points due April 2 by 8am*


April 9 & 14:  International Cooperation  
*talking points due April 9 by 8am*


April 16 & 21:  Film TBA  
*no talking points*

April 23 & 28:  Terrorism I  
*talking points due April 23 by 8am*


April 30 & May 5:  Terrorism II  
*talking points due April 30 by 8am*


May 7: Test 3