Introduction to International Relations - Syllabus

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INTRODUCTION

Political Science is an attempt to understand how and why events unfold in the way that they do. Accordingly, we attempt to use this understanding to predict how similar events will unfold in the future, and take action to impact these events. As a result, any course dealing with politics necessarily must account for historical forces driving current action. World politics directly impacts the quality of your environment, the size of your pocketbook, the extent of your personal freedoms, and the length and quality of your life.

Accordingly, in this course we will explore the broad forces at play in the world: international economics, national interests, military power, nationalism, ethnicity, the environment, and human rights. We will discuss world events as they unfold before our eyes and debate grand global issues underlying those events. We will reveal a breadth of analytical tools that help make sense of our political world, and we will apply those tools in open discussion to contemporary cases. You will leave this class with both a vision of the world’s political landscape and an ability to better understand the multitude of events that comprise that landscape.

PROGRAM LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

The Program Learning Objectives (PLOs) for the Political Science Program are for students to develop: 1. An understanding of the processes, theories, and empirical regularities of political institutions and political behavior in the student’s chosen emphasis area: American politics, comparative politics, or international relations. 2. An ability to employ critical thinking and demonstrate social scientific literacy, including basic quantitative literacy. 3. A capacity to utilize contemporary social science research methods to conduct rigorous research on political phenomena. 4. Effective written communication skills, especially the ability to convey complex concepts and information in a clear and concise manner. 5. An ability to apply abstract theory and research methods to understand contemporary political events and public policies.
POLI 005: Course Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)

Students successfully achieving the objectives of this course should be able to:

1. Discuss the history of and trends in the emergence of the international nation-state system and modern challenges to that system; (Per PLO #1)

2. Comprehend the various theories and concepts used to study International Politics, as a distinct branch of the social sciences; (Per PLO# 1, 2)

3. Respectfully discuss political topics, and engage in debate with fellow students (inside and outside of class) in an intellectually informed manner; as a corollary to this objective it is expected that students will leave the course able to distinguish between reasoned argument and *ad hominem* invective; (Per PLO# 2, 4)

4. Understand the structure and activities of the various actors influencing policy decisions on the world stage, including the ability to elicit a more specialized knowledge about important countries and regions of the world, current leaders and issues; (Per PLO #1, 5)

5. Write thoughtful, college-level essays, with minimal grammar, syntax, or spelling errors; (Per #4)

6. Develop critical thinking skills, including the ability to engage salient points on both sides of an argument and appreciate others’ perspectives; (Per #2, 5)

Teaching Philosophy

**Heterodox:** Do not fear to dissent from the taken-for-granted or assumed “best” path. Question yourself; defend your point of view, without being dismissive of alternative positions or disrespectful of others. Use alternative ways of seeing to map the limitations of your own gaze, and to sharpen its focus. Recognize that learning is a process of *cooperative conflict:* ultimately, we argue with texts, distant authors, and each other in order to advance a dialogue, not to defend a dogma. If the instructor asks for clarification or pushes you to expand on a comment or position, he does so with this in mind, not to “make you feel dumb”.

**Intellectualism:** If you are in college or university, odds are good that you believe in the value of education. Indeed, knowledge is power. However, having an opinion (especially in Political Science courses) or a belief is not the same as having accurate knowledge. In fact, many of human kind’s most enduring conflicts are based on beliefs (religious or otherwise) that do not coincide with others’ beliefs. In this class I will ask you to develop the following skills:

1. **Embrace your ignorance**, and then strive to overcome it. We learn by first recognizing there is a skill or body of knowledge that we do not have, then taking steps to rectify this. Many students have their academic progress stunted because they are afraid of “looking stupid” in front of their peers; we are all here to learn, act accordingly and overcome this fear! Even Socrates famously noted, “I know only that I know not.”

2. **Question assumptions:** Part of being in college is to challenge belief systems and to think new, often scary thoughts. Question yourself and ask WHY you believe things that you believe. It is acceptable to have opinions, but the instructor will often ask you why you hold them; have a reason *why* you think what you think! Part of being human is our ability to recognize when we have been wrong, and change our viewpoint in light of new information. This can be incredibly powerful, even though ‘existential crises’ are often a disturbing aspect of being in university.

3. **Opposing views:** Part of being truly educated is the ability to hold two opposite viewpoints in your mind at the same time, understand both fully, and then be able to decide which is most favorable. This does *not* require you to agree with one, both, or either, but rather to understand it in an objective (not reactionary) manner. For example, in American politics we have a system dominated by two parties, which often leads to emotionally heated debates. One way to cut through the emotion of such situations is to mentally “switch” the labels associated with each position, and ask yourself if you would feel the same way if a Democrat (or Republican) was taking the position being contested. This can be
especially fruitful in situations dominated by personality (such as a Presidential election!). Be able to take personal views and emotions out of a debate and evaluate all sides fairly.

Metaphor #1: Most of us, if not all, know how to ride a bicycle. Think about how you learned to ride a bike. I’m sure you did not attend lectures on bike riding. Rather, with the assistance of a parent, sibling or friend you got on the bike and started riding. You may have had learning wheels, you may have fallen off the bike many times, but in the end you learned how to ride the bike and you can still do that today! This is a good example of all learning. First, it was active, not passive. You did things rather than taking lecture notes. Second, you were motivated to learn bike riding because your friends did it, or it gave you greater mobility, or for any number of other good reasons.

Metaphor #2: Another way to think about learning at a College or University is that it is like taking out a membership in a Health and Fitness Club. Your tuition at UC Merced gives you the right to attend a certain number of classes each semester. It also gives you the right to use the Library system, the computer commons and other College facilities. Similarly, your Club membership fee allows you to use the exercise machines, swimming pool* and other Club facilities. However, if you never visit the Club and work out, your membership money is wasted. In the same fashion, if you just come to class most of the time without preparing and without participating, without being active in class, your tuition money is wasted, too. So, as your teacher I am like a personal fitness trainer. It’s my job to exercise your mind. And please remember – no pain, no gain! Life IS a participatory activity.

REQUIRED READING
There are two required texts for this class. One core textbook, International Politics on the World Stage, will provide the necessary analytical tools to help make sense of the world. We will apply those tools to current events in the news, and other readings throughout the semester. Finally, we will debate issues from Taking Sides, in an effort to better understand some of the issues that make world politics such a fascinating and controversial field. In sum, you will need the following readings:

3. Additional Readings as required (e.g., Atlantic Monthly, Economist). Effort will be made to select readings available free on the inter-webs.
4. A major newspaper or internet access to a major newspaper with coverage of global events. My personal preference is for the New York Times (which I strongly recommend – online college rate at 50% off regular rate) (www.nytimes.com).

CLASS PERFORMANCE
There will be several measures of your performance that contribute toward your final course grade in this class. Doing so allows some flexibility in the determination of your final grade. For example, if a student does not “test well”, there are several other factors that can help offset a poor test grade. Specifically, your grade will be determined on the following:

Attendance (10%)
You cannot benefit from class if you are not here; the process of learning is as important as the information you gain from it. If you miss class you will have to work harder to learn and remember the material, your understanding will be incomplete, and you will likely perform more poorly on the paper and final exam. Attendance will be taken 10 times throughout the semester; to be considered present you need to be in your seat at the beginning of class. After the first week of class, if you arrive after the lecture or class discussion has begun (i.e., you are late) you will be considered absent. (SLO 1-4)

1 Learning metaphors courtesy Dr. Patrick McGowan
**Discussion Section (30%)**

Your activity in your registered discussion section provides you a valuable opportunity to interact in a more personal setting, and is designed to take advantage of debate and discussion built around the *Taking Sides* reader. Organization and evaluation of graded components is up to the discretion of your discussion section instructor, but often includes quizzes, presentation of debates, participation, attendance, short writing, or other criteria. Your instructor will be clarifying the exact elements of your discussion section grading structure. (SLO 3, 5, 6)

**News Journal (10%)**

This class has meaning and application to real world events. This relevance will become more apparent if you keep up with current events in world politics. Therefore, you will be required to read a respectable daily newspaper: *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Christian Science Monitor*, or others you approve with me the first two class periods.

You will benefit from reading the entire paper, but I only require that you read the front page and international section. Increasingly, the main page of the business section is also of international interest. We will discuss current items each week as they appear throughout the semester. This newspaper journal will be graded on how thoroughly it covers the current news (number and breadth of articles) and how carefully you read the material (underline main points or make notes in margin). **DUE Monday 05/06.** (SLO 3, 4)

**Short Papers (20%)**

To summarize what you collected in your news journal and apply the theoretical concepts from the lectures, class readings, and library and internet sources, you will write 2 short papers (5-6 pages). The paper will be grounded in a topic of your news journal or *Taking Sides* and as discussed in class, but will also require additional library and internet research. I will grade your paper on clarity of prose and structure, accuracy of information, appropriate citations, theoretical application, and critical thought. You will need to submit *both* an electronic and hard copy of your paper. (SLO 4,5,6)

**Midterm & Final Examination (15 % each = 30%)**

You can demonstrate your new knowledge on a midterm & final examination. The exams will likely consist of 4 parts. **First**, you will identify on a world map a number of countries identified by their names or by their place in this semester’s major news stories. **Second**, you will answer a series of multiple choice questions based on the lectures and readings, some of which you may already have seen in the reading quizzes. **Third**, you will have a section of short answer/identification of importance in which you discuss the relevance or application of a given concept. **Fourth**, you will answer two essay questions. I will distribute a list of essay questions which you may take home and prepare. I will choose some of these questions (probably four or five) to place on your final exam, of which you will choose to answer two. The exams will, of course, be closed book/closed note. (SLO 1, 2, 4). **Midterm Friday 03/15. Final Monday, 05/13, 3-6pm.**

**OTHER DETAILS:**

**Dishonesty**

It is expected that all students will adhere to the University of California’s policies on academic honesty. Cheating on any quiz, exam, or written assignment will result in an automatic failing grade for that assignment and possibly an ‘F’ for the entire course. Extreme cases may also result in expulsion from the University, as discussed in College guidelines for academic dishonesty. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, copying any part of a classmate’s work, plagiarism, inadequate citation of published material, using material without permission, or otherwise misrepresenting others’ work as your own.
Furthermore, plagiarism will be taken extremely seriously; any and all cases will be referred to the Dean for administrative action in addition to action deemed appropriate by the instructor.


Grade Breakdown

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<td>933 – 1000</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>900 – 932</td>
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<td>867 – 899</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<td>833 – 866</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>800 – 832</td>
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<td>767 – 799</td>
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<td>600 – 632</td>
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<td>Below 600</td>
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Under NO circumstances will so-called ‘extra credit’ work be granted. NO make up exams will be permitted; the only exception is for a documented medical emergency.

The instructor reserves the right to make updates and changes to the syllabus, with notice, throughout the semester. Additionally, assignments are due by the start of class on the day they are designated as due. Late assignments receive a deduction of 1/3 of a letter grade per day (note: NOT per class session) that they are late, to a total 50% reduction. At that point, all work will be graded out of 50% possible points.

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**CALENDAR**

**Week 1** – Introduction (W)

- Introduce course, syllabus, texts (availability), expectations, etc.
- Comments on the Scientific Method and the Social Sciences
- Object lesson on perspective & selective attention

**Lecture/Discussion of Readings:** (for Friday)

-- International Politics Ch. 1 – Thinking and Caring about World Politics

**Week 2**

**Lecture/Discussion of Readings:**

-- International Politics Ch. 2 – Evolution of World Politics


**Discussion**: Taking Sides Intro and Issue #1 (‘Globalization’)

**Week 3**

**Readings**: International Politics Ch. 3 – Levels of Analysis*


**Discussion** – Taking Sides Issue #3 (Globalization & Cultural Diversity)
Week 4

Readings: International Politics Ch. 4 – Nationalism
Discussion – Taking Sides Issue #7 (Palestinian State?)

Week 5 (No Class Monday – President’s Day)

Readings: International Politics Ch. 5 – Globalism*
Discussion – Taking Sides Issue #20 (Arab Spring)

Week 6

Readings: International Politics Ch. 6 – National States
Opinion Readings:
“How We Would Fight China, Robert Kaplan
Discussion – Taking Sides Issue #6 (China)

Week 7

Readings: International Politics Ch. 7 – Intergovernmental Organization
Discussion – Taking Sides Issue #17 (ICC)

Week 8

Readings: International Politics Ch. 8 – National Power and Statecraft
Discussion – Midterm Review Midterm Friday 3/15

Week 9

Readings: International Politics Ch. 9 – International Law and Justice
Discussion – Taking Sides Issue # 15 – Drones & Int’l Law

Week 10 – Spring Break

Week 11*

Readings: International Politics Ch. 10 – National Security
Discussion – Taking Sides Issue # 8 - Iran

Week 12

Readings: International Politics Ch. 11 – International Security

**Discussion** – *Taking Sides* Issue # 16 – UN Peacekeeping

Week 13

**Readings:** *International Politics* Ch. 12 – National Economic Competition

**Debate** – *Taking Sides* Issue # 11 Immigration

Week 14

**Readings:** *International Politics* Ch. 13 – International Economic Cooperation

**Debate** – *Taking Sides* Issue # 12 – Hi-Tech Exports

Week 15

**Readings:** *International Politics* Ch. 14 – Human Rights and Social Justice


**Debate** – *Taking Sides* Issue #18 – Discrimination against Women

Week 16  MONDAY 05/06 – Journal Due.

**Readings:** *International Politics* Ch. 15 – Global Commons/Environment


**Debate** – *Taking Sides* Issue # 19 – Global Warming

Week 17:  **Final Exam:** Monday 05/13, 3-6pm