**PSCI 5810: Proseminar in International Relations**

**Fall 2010**

**Thursdays 2:00-4:50**

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**Course Objective**

The fundamental aim of this course is to provide students with a broad background in the field of international relations as a means of developing the foundation necessary for taking preliminary exams and advanced coursework in international relations. This course will focus upon broad themes of international relations and only touch briefly upon topics like international political economy and international conflict that will receive more advanced treatment in advanced courses. As we will see in our studies, there is no single, unified theoretical or methodological approach to the study of international relations. As a result, we will parallel the diversity of approaches with one another, evaluating their strengths and weakness, deriving their assumptions, and deconstructing the causal mechanisms that they develop.

**Readings**

Course readings will come from a combination of books and journal articles. The books listed below are available at the university bookstore. Journal articles, in order to save students costs, are available electronically through the library. A few readings (noted by ***) are available from the instructor and will be made available at least one week in advance of their discussion.


In order to aid you in estimating the reading load for a week, weeks in which a full book is assigned are highlighted.

**Class Meetings**

This course will be conducted in a seminar format. As such, much of the success or failure of the course will rest with the students. Students are expected to attend all classes, read all assigned material, and participate thoughtfully in our discussions. Students who fail to attend class, who are unprepared, or who do not participate in class will be penalized heavily. Participation involves more than simply restating the material that is assigned, but instead involves making insightful points about those readings and raising thoughtful questions about the material that stimulate discussion.

Graduate school represents a transition point in scholarship in which students are asked to move from consumers of knowledge to producers of knowledge. As a result it is important for students to begin to deconstruct and analyze the material presented in class as a means of moving toward this transition. In order to aid in this transition, students will be expected to act as discussion leader for one week’s group of readings. In this role, students will be expected to raise issues for discussion relevant for that week’s set of readings. Students must email me the list of discussion topics/questions they intend to cover no later than 5 pm on the Wednesday before each class meeting. Students will sign up for their week as discussion leader during the first class meeting.
Papers

Students will be expected to write six short (5 double-spaced pages) papers during the semester. These papers will discuss a given week’s readings and should be sent to me via email no later than 5 pm on the Tuesday preceding that week’s class. No late papers will be accepted. Students will select the readings on which they will write during the first week of class. Students may not write a paper for a week in which they serve as discussion leader.

These papers should not be summaries of the readings but focused critiques and analyses of the readings. I am looking for you to evaluate the key arguments raised by the literature, discuss the ways in which the different readings compare and contrast with each other, and gauge the degree to which these readings move the literature forward by enhancing our understanding of international relations. Papers that simply summarize the readings with no original discussion will be penalized heavily. These papers must be typed.

Exam

There will be one closed-book exam in the course. This exam will be a take-home exam in which students will have a choice of exam questions to answer. Questions will resemble the types of questions those on preliminary exams. Students, upon opening the exam, will have three hours to complete it. The exam will be distributed at the end of the last day of class and will be due no later than 3:30 PM, December 14th. Exam responses are expected to be typed.

Grading

Participation – 30%
Analysis papers – 40%
Final exam – 30%

Introduction – August 26

I. Theoretical Approaches to the Study of International Relations

1. Approaches to the Study of IR – September 2

   This first week’s readings provide us with some thoughts about how we may approach the study of international relations. What is it we are looking for in our studies? What is the best means of finding it? These readings will provide the jumping off point to these questions that recur throughout the semester.


2. Classical Realism – September 9

   Classical realism has, in many respects, represented the dominant theoretical approach to the study and practice of international relations. This week we will examine its core tenets, its assumptions, and the causal forces that it postulates for international relations.


3. Neorealism – September 16
Neorealism was motivated by a desire to make the study of international relations more “scientific”. Waltz’s work represents one of the key works of this approach. Focus on how the theoretical arguments differ from those of the realists.

• Kenneth Waltz, Theory of International Politics, chapters 1-6, 8


4. Challenges to Realism: Liberalism and Neoliberal Institutionalism – September 23
The theoretical approaches we will examine this week challenge the assumptions, predictions, and causal mechanisms described by both the realists and the neorealists. As a result, these theoretical schools reach very different conclusions about the nature of international relations and the manner in which actors in the system behave.


II. Approaches to the Study of International Relations

5. Methodological Approaches to International Relations – September 30

• Andrew Bennett, “Case Study Methods: Design, Use, and Comparative Advantages” in Models, Numbers, and Cases: Methods for Studying International Relations, Detlef Sprinz and Yael Wolinsky-Nahmias, eds.
6. Rational Choice Approaches – October 7
Much of contemporary international relations scholarship assume, both implicitly and explicitly, rationality in the behavior of actors in the international system. We will discuss the basis for this assumption and how this assumption is integrated into theoretical explanations of events in the international system.


7. Challenges to Rational Choice Theory – October 14
Although there is an emphasis placed upon rational decision-making in the international system, research from both political science and social psychology suggests that the manner in which individuals make decisions differs significantly from that assumed by rational choice theory. We will discuss the merits of the rationality assumption and the consequences of its violation.


8. Domestic Politics and International Relations – October 21
Many explanations of international relations envision states behaving as unitary actors as the fundamental actors in the international system. This set of readings discusses ways in which the internal characteristics of states impacts
their behavior in the international system. We will discuss the trade-offs between the simplicity of the unitary actor assumption and the complexity of domestic politics in developing theoretical models of international relations.


### III. Arrows & Olive Branches: Sources of Cooperation and Conflict in the International System


Scholars of international relations have very different expectations about the frequency of cooperation in the international system and the forces that promote its occurrence. We will discuss what is meant by cooperation as well as examine the prevalence of cooperation in the international system, highlight its causes.


#### 10. Promoting Cooperation: International Institutions & Regimes – November 4

Fundamental to the disagreement about the possibility of cooperation in the international system is a lack of agreement about whether states pursue absolute or relative gains. We will examine the arguments behind each expectation and examine how they impact theorizing about international relations.


11. International Political Economy – November 11
This week’s readings dovetail nicely with our previous discussions of cooperation. We will examine the core forces within the international economic system and discuss the diversity of theoretical explanations for the structure of the global economy.


12. International Conflict – November 18
Conflict has represented a core feature of human interaction across human history. We will spend this week examining some of the key ideas surrounding the causes of warfare in the international system.

• Scott Bennett and Alan Stam, The Behavioral Origins of War. All


*** Thursday, November 25 – No Class, Thanksgiving Break ***

IV. The Placement of Contemporary International Relations Scholarship

13. Alternative Approaches - Constructivism – December 2
Thus far, our studies of international relations have taken a decidedly positivist approach to international relations. This approach, however, is by no means the only approach to the study of international relations. This week we take a very different approach to the study of international relations, constructivism


*After our long discussion of IR theory, we will attempt to place what we have studied into a broader context. To what degree does IR theory contribute to our understanding of international relations? Do we know anything more about IR than Thucydides did in his day? Does IR scholarship offer any useful lessons for policymakers?*


**Final Exam Due No later than 3:30 PM, Tuesday, December 14th**

**Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism**

The *UNT Code of Student Conduct and Discipline* defines cheating and plagiarism as the use of unauthorized books, notes, or otherwise securing help in a test; copying others’ tests, assignments, reports, or term papers; representing the work of another as one’s own; collaborating without authority with another student during an examination or in preparing academic work; or otherwise practicing scholastic dishonesty.

Normally, the minimum penalty for cheating or plagiarism is a grade of ‘‘F’’ in the course. In the case of graduate departmental exams, the minimum penalty shall be the failure of all fields of the exam. Determination of cheating or plagiarism shall be made by the instructor in the course, or by the field faculty in the case of departmental exams. Cases of cheating or plagiarism on graduate departmental exams, theses, or dissertations shall automatically be referred to the departmental Graduate Studies Committee. Cases of cheating or plagiarism in ordinary course work may, at the discretion of the instructor, be referred to the Undergraduate Studies Committee in the case of undergraduate students, or the Graduate Studies Committee in the case of graduate students. These committees, acting as agents of the department chair, shall impose further penalties, or recommend further penalties to the Dean of Students, if they determine that the case warrants it. In all cases, the Dean of Students shall be informed in writing of the case. Students may appeal a decision under this policy by following the procedures laid down in the the UNT Code of Student Conduct and Discipline.

**Statement of ADA Compliance**

The Political Science Department cooperates with the Office of Disability Accommodation to make reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Please present your written accommodation request on or before the sixth class day (beginning by the second week of classes.)

**Course Evaluations**

The Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SETE) is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available to you at the end of the semester, providing you a chance to comment on how this class is taught. I am very interested in the feedback I get from students, as I work to continually improve my teaching. I consider the SETE to be an important part of your participation in this class.