PLIR 1010
International Relations

Prof. Todd S. Sechser
Office Hours: Thursdays, 2:00–3:30PM
Office: Gibson #282
Email: todd.sechser@virginia.edu
Website: faculty.virginia.edu/tsechser

Description

The study of international relations is the study of social suboptimality. Human civilization has had many centuries to tackle its most important problems, yet war, terrorism, and pollution (among many other problems) persist. Why haven’t the nations of the world been able to resolve these international problems even when there is widespread agreement that they are harmful to society? Can they be resolved, or are we destined to live with them forever? This course aims to provide students with the knowledge and tools to begin thinking rigorously about these questions.

The course is roughly divided into three major parts. The first part discusses the basic components of the international system, covering key concepts such as sovereignty, anarchy, levels of analysis, and the use of scientific principles in the study of international relations. The second part considers enduring questions about the nature and sources of conflict – particularly military conflict – in the international system. The third part discusses possible pathways to cooperation among nations, with special attention given to economic and environmental questions.

Undoubtedly, the course does not consider the full panoply of issues and viewpoints in contemporary international relations scholarship – there is simply not enough time. For instance, the syllabus regrettably does not cover topics such as human rights and international poverty. But by evaluating broad classes of problems, hopefully the course will prepare students to apply the analytical tools they acquire to other important questions in world politics.

Objectives

By the end of the course, students should:

1. Understand the major theoretical approaches to three central problems of world politics: war and peace, protectionism and free trade, and environmental degradation and
protection.

2. Be able to critically evaluate theoretical propositions in international relations using rigorous standards of logic and evidence.

3. Learn to think more clearly and write more persuasively.

General Requirements

1. Attend Lecture. Lectures will take place from 9:00–9:50AM on Mondays and Wednesdays. The lectures will reinforce and supplement the readings, but much of the material in the lectures will not be contained in the readings.

2. Complete the Readings. Material covered in the assigned readings will be considered fair game for the exams. Common myths about the readings include: (1) believing that it is possible to catch up on the readings by cramming prior to an exam; (2) focusing on trivial details rather than the big ideas of each reading; and (3) thinking that it is not worth reading any of the assignments if they cannot all be completed. Be careful not to succumb to these myths.

3. Attend Discussion Sections. All students must attend and actively participate in their discussion section each week. A discussion section can succeed only if its members arrive prepared and ready to share insightful thoughts and questions about the subject matter.

Assignments and Evaluation

There are five main components to the final semester grade.

1. Midterm Exam (20%). The midterm exam is optional (though the grade is binding if you take it) and will be given in class on October 7. Exams are closed-book and consist of a combination of multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions. Exams are not graded on a competitive curve, so there is no disincentive for collaborative studying.

2. Final Exam (30%). The final exam is comprehensive, and it is required to pass the course. The exam will be given in Nau #101 from 2:00–5:00PM on Tuesday, December 15.

3. Policy Memo (20%). Each student must complete a brief policy memo and four associated assignments, which will be due throughout the semester. A detailed description of the memo and assignments (including due dates) can be found on the course’s Collab page. Students must upload all assignments and the final memo to Collab no later than the indicated due date and time. The final memo is due no later than December 7 at 9:00AM.
4. **Lecture Participation** (10%). To help keep you engaged, most lectures will contain quiz questions about the reading that you will answer using your iClicker (or iClicker2). Be sure to **bring your iClicker to every lecture**. Each question is worth 2 points for an incorrect answer and 5 points for a correct answer. When calculating your total quiz score, your four lowest scores will be dropped to accommodate unavoidable conflicts such as emergencies, family events, illnesses, and athletic travel. In other words, you have four “free” absences. However, no additional scores will be dropped for any reason.

5. **Section Participation** (20%). Participation in section discussions is a critical element of this course. Teaching assistants will take attendance at each section and will evaluate each student’s participation in section meetings.

6. **Extra Credit.** Periodically throughout the semester there may be opportunities to receive small amounts of extra credit by participating in research projects conducted by members of the Department of Politics. These opportunities will be announced in class or via email, and are completely voluntary. You may participate at your discretion but are under absolutely no obligation to do so.

**Exam Policy**

1. **Make-Up Exams.** Make-up or rescheduled exams are not given for any reason, including illness, family emergencies, and other unexpected events. There are no exceptions. The exam dates and times are stated clearly in this syllabus, so please schedule accordingly. If your final exam schedule is “overloaded” (see the exam schedule here), you will need to reschedule one of your other final exams or modify your course schedule.

2. **Final Exam Requirement.** The midterm exam is optional. However, **you must take the final exam to pass the course.** If you elect not to take the midterm exam (or are otherwise unable to take it), then your grade from the final exam will simply be applied to the midterm. For example: if you miss the midterm exam and subsequently receive a B+ on the final, then your midterm grade will also be recorded as a B+.

3. **Note to SDAC Students.** If you have received permission for special exam accommodations at the Student Disability Access Center, you will need to make individual arrangements to take the exam at the SDAC. It is recommended that you schedule both your midterm and final exam early in the semester, since the SDAC is small and space fills up quickly. Exams at the SDAC will be given at the same time as the rest of the class.

**Professionalism, Ethics, and Other Policies**

1. **In-Class Distractions.** Computers are not permitted in class. This bears repeating: **computers are not permitted in class.** This includes all laptops, cellphones, tablets, and anything else with a screen, other than your iClicker. This is not to be curmudgeonly:
academic research has shown that students learn more effectively taking notes by hand. Please also turn off your ringers before class. Only the SDAC notetaker and students with document disabilities may use a laptop.

2. Academic Integrity. Cheating and plagiarism are taken very seriously in this course. All assignments must be solely the original work of the student. Violations include cheating on examinations and quoting or paraphrasing another author without attribution on written assignments. Avoid plagiarism by using footnotes (with page numbers) whenever you quote, paraphrase, or otherwise borrow someone else’s ideas. If you are unsure whether you are committing plagiarism, do not hesitate to ask your teaching assistant for guidance (before you submit your work). Note that forming a group to study for exams or offering feedback on a draft of another student’s paper are not considered violations of academic integrity. On the other hand, writing portions of a classmate’s paper or copying a paragraph from a book or website without attribution are very serious violations. Violators risk failing the course and being reported to the Honor Committee.

3. Grade Appeals. Hopefully there will be no reason to contest a grade. However, a student who believes strongly that a paper or exam has been graded incorrectly may appeal by writing a one-page, typed memo explaining why the grade was inappropriate. No sooner than 72 hours and no later than 10 days after the original grade was issued, the memo must be submitted along with the original graded assignment to the student’s teaching assistant, who will then re-grade the assignment. If the dispute persists, Prof. Sechser will grade the assignment and issue a final grade, which may be higher, lower, or identical to the original grade.

4. Late Assignments. Late assignments will not be accepted for any reason. To ensure that illness, computer failures, or other unanticipated events do not cause you to miss an assignment deadline, it is recommended that you begin the assignments well in advance of the deadline. Further, you should back up your work off-site using the University’s Home Directory or Box services, Google Drive, Dropbox, or another free cloud backup service.

Teaching Staff and Office Hours

For questions about grades, exams, course policies, or other administrative issues, your first point of contact is always your teaching assistant. The teaching assistants for the course are:

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email Address</th>
<th>Office Hours and Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>Harrison Frye</td>
<td><a href="mailto:hpf7kn@virginia.edu">hpf7kn@virginia.edu</a></td>
<td>Wednesday, 1:00-3:00PM, Gibson #195</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colin Kielty</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ck7dn@virginia.edu">ck7dn@virginia.edu</a></td>
<td>Monday, 10:00-11:00AM, Gibson #195</td>
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<td>Wednesday, 10:30-11:30AM, Gibson #063</td>
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<td>Abigail Post</td>
<td><a href="mailto:asn9dp@virginia.edu">asn9dp@virginia.edu</a></td>
<td>Wednesday, 1:00-3:00PM, Gibson #284</td>
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Prof. Sechser welcomes visitors to his office hours, which are held on Thursdays, 2:00–3:30 PM in Gibson #282.

Books and Readings

There are two required books, both available at the University of Virginia Bookstore. Most readings are contained in these two books; all others can be accessed on Collab.

   
   * Important note: The 1st edition of FLS contains all the readings assigned from the 2nd edition. However, the page numbers are slightly different; if you prefer to use the 1st edition of the book, look for reading assignments denoted by [FLS1].

   
   * Important note: The 11th edition of AJ contains all the readings assigned from the 12th edition. However, the page numbers are slightly different; if you prefer to use the 11th edition of the book, look for reading assignments denoted by [AJ11].

You must also rent or purchase an iClicker or iClicker2, available from the Bookstore. Please register your iClicker on the course’s Collab page. Bring your iClicker to every lecture in order to earn participation points.

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

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<td>26-Aug-2015</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>2-Sep-2015</td>
<td>States and Power</td>
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<td>7-Sep-2015</td>
<td>Anarchy and its Implications</td>
<td>FLS2: 74–79</td>
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<td>AJ12: 33–52 (Waltz)</td>
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<td>AJ11: 35–56 (Waltz)</td>
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<td>AJ11: 90–111 (Jervis)</td>
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<td>14-Sep-2015</td>
<td>The Security Dilemma II</td>
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<td>AJ12: 152–164 (Schelling)</td>
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<td>28-Sep-2015</td>
<td>Commitment and Credibility I</td>
<td>Collab: Schelling 1966, 35–91</td>
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<td>AJ11: 57–65 (Fearon)</td>
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COOPERATION AND CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

⋆  AJ12: 67–79 (Oye)
    [AJ11: 76–90 (Oye)]
⋆  FLS2: 47–58
    [FLS1: 48–59]

⋆  [FLS1: 62–74]
⋆  FLS2: 188–213
    [FLS1: 189–213]
⋆  AJ12: 419–426 (Roberts)
    [AJ11: 515–523 (Roberts)]

28-Oct-2015  International Cooperation III
Guest lecturer: Harrison Frye
⋆  FLS2: 420–434
⋆  AJ12: 130–133 (Hoffmann)
    [AJ11: 146–151 (Hoffmann)]

⋆  [FLS1: 154–168]

4-Nov-2015  Nuclear Proliferation I: Causes  ⋆  Collab: Sagan 2000
⋆  FLS2: 143–154
    [FLS1: 143–153]

9-Nov-2015  Nuclear Proliferation II: Consequences
⋆  Collab: Sagan and Weddle 2009
⋆  Collab: Sechser 2009
⋆  AJ12: 200-203 (Waltz)
    [AJ11: 242–258 (Posen)]

11-Nov-2015  International Diplomacy
Guest lecturer: Abigail Post

16-Nov-2015  International Trade I
⋆  FLS2: chap. 7, entire
    [FLS1: chap. 6, entire]
⋆  Third policy memo assignment due by 9:00 AM. Upload to Collab.

18-Nov-2015  International Trade II
Guest lecturer: Colin Kielty
⋆  Collab: Blinder 1987, 109–135
⋆  AJ12: 235–241 (Rodrik)

23-Nov-2015  International Trade III
⋆  AJ12: 227–235 (Hiscox)
    [AJ11: 282–292 (Hiscox)]
⋆  Fourth policy memo assignment due by 9:00 AM. Upload to Collab.

25-Nov-2015  No class: Thanksgiving break.

30-Nov-2015  Environmental Problems I
⋆  AJ12: 408–413 (Hardin)
    [AJ11: 502–507 (Hardin)]
⋆  FLS2: chap. 13, entire
    [FLS1: chap. 12, entire]

2-Dec-2015  Environmental Problems II
⋆  AJ12: 459–467 (Dupont)
    [AJ11: 560–570 (Dupont)]
7-Dec-2015  Wrap-Up and Review

★ FLS2: chap. 14, entire
[FLS1: chap. 13, entire]

★ Final policy memo due by 9:00AM. Upload to Collab.

15-Dec-2015 Final Exam, 2:00–5:00PM

★ Closed-book, comprehensive.

[Updated: December 3, 2015]