Core Seminar in International Relations
Theory
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Summary and Objectives

This course, restricted to graduate students, surveys the main schools, theorists, and problems in the North American study of international relations (IR). It is designed to develop students’ ability to understand, and assess critically, analyses of international relations. It is intended as an important step in preparing for Ph.D. comprehensive examinations in IR. It is also designed to provoke thinking about thesis and dissertation topics. It is less a course about international relations than about how political scientists study international relations; hence it is part of graduate students’ initiation into the scholarly guild.

Students lacking background in IR theory may find the course difficult at first. The reading each week is extensive, the essays and discussions intensive; students must work together to cover it thoroughly.

Class sessions will consist of overviews and summaries by the instructors and concise presentations of the readings by students, but the bulk of our time will be taken up by discussion. The success of this seminar hinges on participation by all students. It is essential that everyone do the required readings by the start of class. Most of the reading material will available on the class web page and in books available for purchase at the University of Virginia Bookstore.

General Requirements

1. Participation. For each weekly meeting a set of required readings are assigned that range from 150 to 400 pages. Seminar members will be expected to have a firm grasp of required material and be ready to discuss it critically. This will necessarily involve active participation; failure to participate will be taken as a sign of inadequate preparation. If you are reluctant to speak in class, be aware that the profession requires its members to be able to engage in oral argumentation. In most courses of this type at UVa and elsewhere, students find it helpful to form study groups whose members divide up the readings and share notes among themselves. We encourage you to do this but will leave it to you to organize these groups and distribute notes. Class members
will take turns acting as weekly scribe. The scribe of the week will not be required to participate in oral discussion.

2. **Short Essays.** Each student will write six short essays, each no longer than 400 words. Each essay will formulate a researchable puzzle based upon some or all of the week’s readings. The puzzle may concern empirically testable propositions (e.g., “how would we know if democracies never fight one another?”), or theoretical claims (e.g., “does it follow from standard realist assumptions that balances of power will always form?”). Please submit these to the course’s Collab site (under “Assignments”) by 9:00AM on the day of class. The deadlines and word limits will be strictly enforced. The instructors will assign each student three essays, and students may choose the other three. Students are free to trade weeks so long as they notify the instructors in advance. Essays should not summarize the readings, except as necessary to frame the puzzle.

3. **Final Exam.** The final exam will simulate the Ph.D. comprehensive examinations, except that it will comprise only two sections (theory and application) and take only three hours. It will be given early in the final exam period.

**Assignments and Evaluation**

There are three main components to the final semester grade.

- Participation 25%
- Short Essays 40%
- Final Exam 35%

**Incompletes and Late Assignments**

No grades of Incomplete will be given in this course. Assignments must be handed in on time. Late papers will marked down significantly. No written work will be accepted after the last day of final exams.

**Books and Readings**

The following books are required and available at the University of Virginia Bookstore. All other readings can be accessed on Collab.


**Schedule**

1. The Presence of the Past
   

2. Realism v. Idealism
   
   • Kant, I. (1795). *Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*.

3. Levels of Analysis
   
4. International Institutions


5. Order and Hierarchy


6. Sociological Approaches


7. Democracies, Capitalism, Interdependence


8. **Force, Coercion, and Bargaining**


9. **Signaling and the Security Dilemma**


10. **Domestic Politics and International Interactions**


11. **Images and Reputations**


12. **Nuclear Weapons and World Politics**


13. **Perspectives on Trade and Finance**


14. **Getting Critical**


Bibliography


Ellsberg, Daniel. 1968. *The Theory and Practice of Blackmail.* Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND.


Kant, Immanuel. 1795. Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch.


