POSC 206 – Core Seminar in International Relations

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or by appointment

Course description

This course introduces students to the major approaches used by international relations scholars to examine international political phenomena, including realism, liberalism, Marxism, constructivism, rational choice, domestic politics, bureaucratic politics and psychological theories of decision-making. In the second half of the course, we will use these theories in order to discuss central issues in international relations including war and peace, cooperation and political economy (to name just a handful).

Course requirements:

This course is demanding. There is not only a great deal of reading, but most of it is pretty dense. You will be overwhelmed and frustrated at times. That said, though we won’t be able to cover every topic to your satisfaction, we will strive to introduce participants to the major approaches and major themes. By the end of the semester, you will not only be able to speak thoughtfully about IR as a sub-discipline, but you should have developed a litany of broader and deeper questions. There is only one book required for purchase: Robert Keohane, Editor, 1986, *Neorealism and its critics* from Columbia University Press. It is inexpensive and widely available through online booksellers. Mostly, however, we will be using articles posted on the class D2L site, or in the case of “comps reading” (explained below), you will be required to track down the articles or book excerpts in the library or from MU’s extensive electronic journal collection. Here are the main parameters of the course:

1) 35% - Participation, thought papers and “comps gangs.” This class, like most graduate seminars relies on the preparation and participation of all of the individuals. I expect perfect attendance (within reason) and regular, meaningful and active participation. I reserve the right to call on students without notice!

With preparation in mind, a thought paper is generally due each week at 8am on the day of class (that gives me time to see how you’re doing with the material before class begins at 4pm). I know you all get “too” busy from time to time so I will expect a total of 10 thought papers over the course of the semester. Since the first and last week have no substantial reading, there will be no thought paper, which means that you will be given a break for three other classes. In the thought paper, for each of the required readings, I expect that you will identify concisely and meaningfully the author’s main argument(s), and then elucidate a thoughtful analysis that includes both the principal strengths and weaknesses of the work, and the contribution to the discipline. You will be graded simply by “Very Good,” “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory.”

Next, in the “Comps reading” section of each week, you are expected to split into groups of four students (there may end up being one or possibly two groups of 5 because of the class number), divide up the readings and create “comp study” summaries for yourself and your colleagues. Because part of the task is to enlighten your peers who have not necessarily read the seminal work, I expect that these
summaries will be more sophisticated than the thought papers. I will not grade these directly, but I do expect that you will include them each week with your thought papers (consider it a check on free-riding!). In weeks with a particular generosity of readings, I will expect no more than two additional readings per person. In previous years, I have seen extra levels of coordination between groups so that all of the readings are covered…I’ll leave that up to you (it’s your comp exam!).

Lastly, each week, I will assign a student or students to “present” each required reading to their colleagues (and me!). I will lead off by facilitating Week #2 (Realism) to give you an idea of my expectations, and will, of course, gently provide additional guidance in each subsequent class. Please understand that I have very high expectations of the students. If you can’t fulfill these requirements, you should consider taking a different class.

2) 65% - Literature reviews. Each student will be expected to read in depth and prepare written literature surveys on two weekly course topics (one from each half of the semester). The surveys, worth 30% and 35% (usually the second round is better!) of the course grade, will provide an overview and critical analysis of the topic in question, summarize major theoretical issues and debates, and assess the major strengths and weaknesses of a representative selection of works. Papers should be analytical rather than descriptive in nature and approximately 10-12 pages in length (12-point font, double-spaced with 1-1.5” margins). The first review will be selected by you from Weeks #2 to #8. You can submit your review any time, but the first one must not be handed in any later than March 3rd (the second is due during final exam week). There is a clear expectation that you incorporate both the required and comps reading. Moreover, I do NOT want a rehash of our discussions in class. I am seeking greater depth and contemplation. I will simply return reviews for re-writing if this becomes an issue.

Schedule

Week #1 – January 13th – Introduction – Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology

Comps reading:

Week #2 – January 20 – Realism
Required:

Comps reading:

**Week #3 – January 27th – Neorealism**


Comps Reading:

**Week #4 – February 3rd – Liberalism I (the “liberal peace”)**

Required:


**Comps Reading:**


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**Week #5 – February 10th – Liberalism II (principally “neoliberalism”)**


**Comps reading:**


Week #6 – February 17th – Rational Choice

Required:


Comps Reading:


Downs, George and David Rocke. 1995. Chapter 3 from Optimal Imperfection? Domestic Uncertainty and Institutions in International Relations.


**Week #7 – February 24th – Constructivism**

**Required:**

**Comps Reading:**

**Week #8 – March 3rd – Marxism and Feminism**
Required:

Comps Reading:

Week – March 10 – SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS

Week #9 – March 17th – Domestic Level Explanations

Required:
Press. Chapters 1&2.


**Comps Reading:**


**Week #10 – March 24th – International War (including nuclear weapons)**

**Required:**


**Comps reading:**


Week #11 – March 31st – Civil War

Required:


Comps reading:


**Week #12 – April 7th – International Organizations and Institutions**

**Required:**


**Comps reading:**


Ballman, Alexander, David Epstein, and Sharyn O’Halloran. 2002. Delegation, Comitology, and


**Week #13 – April 14th – Trade and Money**

**Required:**


**Comps reading:**


American Political Science Review 100 (3): 369-384.

**Week #14 – April 21st – Equitable Development in a “Globalizing” World**

**Required:**

**Comps reading:**
Way, Christopher, and Hector Schamis. 2003. Political Cycles and Exchange-Based

Week #15 – April 28th – Wrap-up

FINAL LITERATURE REVIEW DUE IN MY OFFICE BY 5:30PM ON TUESDAY, MAY 5th.