

International Relations

POLS 5341.060

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I will be in my office on Tuesdays and Thursdays
from 11a to 12:30p.

More about Dr. Sterken:

<https://works.bepress.com/robert-sterken/about/>

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The University of Texas at Tyler ~ Spring 2024

Course Description: This is an introductory course on international politics and the relations between actors in the global political system. This course aims to systematically study international interactions between actors with different interests and ideas. In this course, we will explore topics, encounter puzzles, examine theories, and evaluate evidence to try to gain a greater understanding of world politics. The overarching goal of the course is to understand how the contemporary global political system originated and what historical processes and actors drove its development and change.

Course Expectations and Goals: Theory is not separate from the world; it constructs what we see.

The goals of this course:

1. Give you a solid grounding in historically informed International Relations.
2. Introduce the concepts, vocabulary, and theories of International Relations.
3. Use these concepts, vocabulary, and theories to analyze issues facing political leaders and societies. This is a heavily analytical course; critical thinking is required equipment.

My intent is not to teach you ‘facts’ or measure your ability to commit facts to memory by rote. While some dates and actors will be of significance, of far more importance will be your ability to take the concepts and theories we discuss in class and use them to analyze issues confronting societies and the policy responses mounted by political leaders. The only exception to this general claim pertains to geography. Where states are located and who their neighbors are (i.e., their geography) are important aspects of international relations. To this end, I expect you to have a good general idea of where states are located, and you will be graded on this knowledge.

Five Objectives for Students:

1. Analyze and understand the major themes of international relations and global politics.
2. Develop an appreciation of the theory and its utility in studying and practicing International

Relations.

3. Improve critical thinking and writing skills.
4. Demonstrate the ability to describe the social, political, and economic forces that influence social behavior and the global system.
5. Use knowledge of international affairs in a practical problem-solving way to address issues of immediate international concern.

Course Texts: The course is a primary opportunity to develop a firm foundation in IR theory and concepts. We will be making use of this excellent textbook:

Baylis, John, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, eds. *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*. 9th edition. Oxford University Press, 2023. ISBN: 978-0192898142.

Optional Materials: We will also regularly incorporate discussion of contemporary events (and exams may reference them), so you should keep up on what is happening in the world by regularly reading a current events news source like *the New York Times*.

Assignments and Assessment of Learning:

Case Study Policy Memos 30%

Midterm Examination 25%

Final Policy Memo 20%

Final Examination 25%

The course requires an online map quiz (taken in Canvas) and ten (ten) short (about 500 words) and one long (3,000 words) policy memo paper. More details are provided in the assignments on Canvas.

Short Case Study Policy Memos: (30%) You will apply concepts and theories from class to address a contemporary policy problem. The format should generally be the following: a short introduction to the problem (what, where, why, when, and who). A brief discussion of current policy. Your proposed solution is written in such a way as to flag how you are incorporating class concepts, ideas, and theories. This should be oriented toward a policymaker who does not have explicit knowledge of IR theory and concepts (e.g., do not write “realism/liberalism/constructivism says X” but instead use ideas and concepts from the theories to make your case).

Final Policy Memo: (20%) You will develop a longer policy paper, providing greater detail than the short papers on the problem (precisely, greater effort at explaining why it is a problem), the current measures addressing it, and your proposed solution.

Examinations: There will be a midterm (25%) and a final (25%): The final exam is cumulative, although at least half of the exam will be on the material covered since the midterm.

Course Schedule: This is an asynchronous online course. There are due dates for each assignment; late assignments will be docked one letter grade. However, you can elect to work ahead of the scheduled due dates if that works best for your schedule. The course requires a great deal of reading and writing, so please plan accordingly.

I am looking forward to reading your work! Please email with questions or concerns or meet me in my office or zoom (see Zoom link in Canvas announcements).

[Student Resources](#)

[University Policies and Information](#)

It is important to take the necessary precautions to ensure a healthy and successful year. UT Tyler continues to urge you to protect yourselves against the flu, COVID and any new threats that may be developing. Be diligent about preventive measures such as washing hands, covering sneezes/coughs, social distancing and vaccinations, which have proven to be successful in slowing the spread of viruses. Encourage those who don't feel well to stay home, and if they show symptoms, ask them to get tested for the flu or COVID. Self-isolation is important to reduce exposure ([CDC quarantine/isolation guidelines](#)). Please work with your faculty members to maintain coursework and please consult [existing campus resources](#) for support.