RPOS 370: International Relations Theory

Professor: Bryan R. Early  
Class Times: MWF 11:30-12:25  
Room: Humanities Building, Room 137  
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Office Hours: Uptown, Humanities Building B16 – M 2:35-4:35 PM  
Downtown, Milne 300A – T 10:00-11:00 AM

Course Description

This course will explore the foundational assumptions employed within international relations, the major theoretical perspectives within the discipline, and several prominent issue areas within international relations. Students will read a number of the leading theoretical contributions within the discipline and discuss them in interactive lectures. Students will also explore the strengths, weaknesses, similarities, and differences of these works in their writing assignments. The latter portion of the class will involve an intensive simulation of global politics in which students will be called upon to apply their theoretical knowledge to practical foreign policy situations.

Expectations

This is a reading intensive course and students will be expected to attend every class having read and prepared to discuss the assigned texts. Attendance is mandatory and will be especially important during the simulations. Students will be expected to turn in assigned work on time. Late work will face significant deductions.

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Explain the major theories of international relations
- Describe the major similarities and differences between the major IR theories
- Identify leading authors in the IR field and the theories they are associated with
- Understand the historical evolution of IR theory over time
- Apply theoretical frameworks to understanding practical international relations issues
- Assess the behavior of actors in international politics in light of IR theories

Grading

Attendance – 10%
Attendance will be taken five times during the semester by the instructor. If a student is absent without excuse on one of those days, he or she will lose 2% of his or her final grade. Students should notify the instructor of absences due to illness, family emergencies, or religious observances, which will be excused on a case-by-case basis.

**Theoretical Critiques – 15% and 20%**

Students will write two critical analyses of individual theories covered within the class (e.g., classical realism, liberalism, hegemonic leadership, neo-realism, neo-liberalism, constructivism, post-classical realism). For each paper, students will be expected to provide a detailed description of a theory’s core elements, identify and explain the contributions of various works of scholarship that have employed it, and discuss the theory’s explanatory gaps and weaknesses. The papers’ length should be between 6-10 pages long. The first paper will be worth 15% and the second paper will be worth 20%. The instructor will provide more details and a grading rubric. The first critique is due on 3/3 and the second is due 4/7.

**Simulation Participation – 12.5%**

Students will participate in a team-based learning simulation using the *International Relations in Action (IRA)* book. Attendance and full participation in the simulations is mandatory. Each unexcused absence during the simulation will result in 4% deduction from a student’s simulation participation grade.

**Simulation Write-Up – 7.5%**

Students will write a brief 2-3 page paper describing how IR theory informed the choices their country made during the simulation or analyzing how an IR theory could explain countries’ or leaders’ behaviors in a particular case during the simulation. This paper is due on 5/3.

**Final Exam – 35%**

This will be a cumulative exam that will cover the entire semester’s course material. It will be extraordinarily difficult to pass for students that do not keep up with the readings and attend lectures. Students should take detailed notes throughout the semester on their readings and during their lectures. Building a running study guide throughout the semester is also suggested.

**Grading Policy**

Tests and papers will be graded blind by the instructor and/or teaching assistant. If a student wishes to challenge how his or her exam or paper was graded, the student must submit a written statement describing what part of their assignment was improperly evaluated and why they think that was the case. This must be done within five days of having the assignment returned. Both the instructor and assistant will re-grade the entire project, compare their assessments, and mutually decide on a final grade. This grade may be higher or lower than the original grade given and will be final. Any clear mistakes or errors made by the instructor will be promptly corrected.
Policy on Academic Honesty

Please familiarize yourself with the undergraduate bulletin’s descriptions of cheating and plagiarism. If you are involved in plagiarism or cheating on an exam or research paper, the penalty will be failure in the course and you will be reported to judicial affairs. If you are not sure if something violates standards – feel free to ask ahead of time. In general, it’s always better to err on the side of citing too much than too little in your research papers. The university’s official policy can be found at: <http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/2003-2004/regulations.html>. Lastly, never cite Wikipedia as source. Course papers will be checked for plagiarism violations using Blackboard’s Safe Assign program.

Accommodations

“Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of Disabled Student Services (Campus Center 137, 442-5490). The office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations.” For the University’s policy, see: <http://www.albany.edu/studentlife/dss/Accommodation.html>. If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this class please inform the instructor as soon as possible.

Resources

This course will be very reading intensive. The readings come from a mixture of required texts, course reserve chapter and articles, and articles that students will be required to look up themselves. The instructor will indicate where the readings can be found in advance of their due dates.

Required Books


**Required Articles and Chapters**

All course readings that are not in the books or linked to a website will be posted on the class Blackboard Page in the “Course Readings” Folder.

**Class Schedule:**

**First Day**
Day 1: (1/20)
- Discuss Syllabus, Course Organization, Grading, and Class Policies

**Introduction to International Relations Theory**
Day 2: (1/22)

Day 3: (1/25)

**Levels of Analysis**
Day 4: (1/27)

**Decision-Making Theories**
Day 5: (1/29)

Day 6: (2/1)

**Classical Realism**

Day 7: (2/3)

Day 8: (2/5)

Day 9: (2/8)

Day 10: (2/10)

**Liberalism**

Day 11: (2/12)
Day 12: (2/17)

Day 13: Discussion Day (2/19)

**Neo-Realism**
Day 14: (2/22)
- Robert Keohane. 1986. “Realism, Neorealism and the Study of World Politics.” in *NIC*
- Kenneth Waltz. 1986. “Laws and Theories.” in *NIC*

Day 15: (2/24)
- Kenneth Waltz. 1986. “Reductionist and Systemic Theories.” in *NIC*
- Kenneth Waltz. 1986. “Political Structures.” in *NIC*

Day 16: (2/26)
- Kenneth Waltz. 1986. “Anarchic Orders and Balances of Power.” in *NIC*

**International Leadership and Hegemony**
Day 17: (3/1)

Day 18: (3/3)
**Theoretical Critique #1 Due**

**Neo-Liberalism**
Day 19: (3/5)

Day 20: (3/8)
Day 21: (3/10)

Day 22: (3/12)

Constructivism
Day 23: (3/15)

Day 24: (3/17)

Day 25: (3/19)

Day 26: Discussion Day (3/22)

Post-Classical Realism
Day 27: (3/24)
- John Mearsheimer. 2001. “Chapters 1 and 2.” in *TGPP*

Day 28: (3/26)
- John Mearsheimer. 2001. “Chapters 3 and 4.” in *TGPP*

Day 29: (4/7)
**Theoretical Critique #2 Due**
Day 30: (4/9)

IRA Simulation Setup
Day 31: (4/12)
- Brock Tessman. 2007. “Part 1.” in IRA
- Brock Tessman. 2007. “Part 2.” in IRA

Domestic Politics
Day 32: (4/14)

Day 33: (4/16)

IRA Simulation
Day 34: Alliances (4/19)
- Brock Tessman. 2007. “Alliance Politics.” in IRA

Day 35: International Conflicts (4/21)

Day 36: Free Trade (4/23)
- Brock Tessman. 2007. “Free Trade vs. Protectionism.” in IRA

Day 37: Nonproliferation (4/26)
- Brock Tessman. 2007. “Nuclear Proliferation.” in IRA

Day 38: Security Organizations (4/28)
- Brock Tessman. 2007. “Global Security Organizations.” in *IRA*
- **Background:** Beth Simmons and Lisa Martin. 2006. “International Organizations and Institutions.” in *HIR*, 192-211.


Day 40: Wrap Up (5/3)
** Simulation Write-Up Due**