POLS 681: International Security
Dr. Ches Thurber

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Office Hours: M/T 9:30-11:00 a.m.
Class Hours: Wed 12:30-3:10 p.m.
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Course Description

This course is a graduate-level survey of social scientific research on war, conflict, security, and peace. It is intentionally broad, attempting to encompass several different “subfields within the subfield.” These sometimes go by different names such as international security, security studies, conflict processes, and peace science. More specifically, this seminar will include the examination of both interstate and civil conflicts as well as bridge quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches. We will examine the various conceptualizations and definitions of conflict, theories about the causes of violence at both the sub-state and interstate levels, and variation in the forms that conflict can take. This is one of the four core courses for preparation for the Ph.D. candidacy exam in international relations and this syllabus (including the recommended readings) constitutes the reading list for the international security portion of the exam. It will also be valuable for those preparing to teach undergraduate courses in international relations and security, those looking to broaden their proficiency in the discipline of political science, and those interested in how the academic field of security studies contributes to important policy debates.

Mode of Delivery

This course is listed as a hybrid course, combining online and in-person components. Due to the continued high rates of coronavirus in our region, we will begin the semester by meeting online synchronously using Blackboard’s Collaborate feature during our officially scheduled class time. If changes in conditions allow, we may begin meeting in person later in the semester. However, accommodation will always be made to students who prefer to continue to learn remotely and no student will ever be asked to engage in class activity that they feel to be unsafe.

Texts

There are no required textbooks. All readings are available through a class Zotero shared collection. Alternatively, students may locate materials on their own through the NIU libraries.
Evaluation

Class attendance, preparation and participation (20%): The time we spend in class is for me the most important of this course. As such, punctual attendance is mandatory. But more important than just being present is that you are actively engaged. I expect that you have done the readings and that you try to participate in discussion each and every class section.

Reading Analyses (20%): For each week, you will be required to draft written summaries on each of the readings. These summaries will be invaluable as you prepare for comps as well as help ensure a high level of discussion in seminar. You may pick five weeks over the course of the semester in which you opt not to complete summaries.

Final Project (40%): You will produce a research paper similar in scope to what you might present at a professional academic conference (6k-8k words). It should identify a puzzle in the realm of international security, broadly defined, propose a theoretical explanation, and evaluate that explanation with quantitative and/or qualitative evidence.

You will produce two drafts of the paper, the first of which will be reviewed by me and another student. You will then have the opportunity to produce a revised version of the paper. Each version is worth 20 percent of your grade.

Variation in the final project is welcomed based upon your specific needs. This includes, but is not limited to:

- improving a paper from a previous course
- writing a paper in combination with another course
- preparing comps-style essays in lieu of a research paper.

Please talk with me as early as possible in the semester to discuss these alternatives.

Peer Review Essay (20%):

You will read another student’s initial research paper draft and write a 1,000 word review memo as if you had been asked to read the paper as a submission to a professional political science journal (except that you will not be making a recommendation for publication). Your memo will be sent to the author, but the identities of both author and reviewer will be kept anonymous. Of course, in a small class, it is entirely possible that you may be able to figure out the identities of either the author or reviewer. This is often true in professional practice as well. But I expect that you not engage in deliberate efforts to ascertain or disclose identities, as is the professional norm.

A Note on Learning Amidst Pandemic

These are crazy times. We will be proceeding with this class the best we can and to some degree I hope the process of reading, writing, and talking about topics we are all passionate about helps you with some sense of normalcy. But sometimes that can feel like absurdity. Please know that you are not alone in feeling it and that we are all in this together. I will be as accommodating as I can this semester in light of these circumstances and I hope that we can all agree to engage each other in a spirit of mutual patience, empathy, and understanding. If you or somebody you know is struggling with anxiety or other issues, do not hesitate to reach out. Resources available include the DRC, Student Counseling Services or call 815-306-2777.
Course Policies

• All students are expected to adhere to the highest levels of academic integrity. Violations of university, departmental, and disciplinary standards will not be tolerated. Instances of plagiarism will lead to an F for the assignment and will be reported through institutional procedures.

• If you need an accommodation for this class, please contact the Disability Resource Center as soon as possible. The DRC coordinates accommodations for students with disabilities. It is located on the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 or drc@niu.edu. Also, please contact me privately as soon as possible so we can discuss your accommodations. Please note that you will not be required to disclose your disability, only your accommodations.

• It is my personal policy to allow graduate students to call me by my first name, “Ches.” This reflects the idea that I view you all as colleagues-in-training. Please let me know how you prefer to be addressed, both in name and pronoun, if it differs from what is in the college directory. I will make every effort to address you in the way you wish to be addressed. Please try and do the same for your fellow classmates, as well as for other faculty in the department.

• I am committed to your success in this class – if you feel that you are not performing to your expectations, please come and see me. I am available to answer any questions you may have about course assignments, requirements or content. I generally answer e-mails within 24 hrs on weekdays, and would be happy to schedule an appointment to meet with you if you are unavailable during my posted office hours.
Class Schedule

Students are expected to read the following before Wednesday’s class session. This syllabus, including the recommended readings and book list, constitutes the reading list for the subtopic of International Security for the PhD Candidacy exam in IR. An asterisk next to a journal article indicates that the author has expanded the idea into a book, included in the book list at the end of the syllabus. PhD students preparing for the candidacy exam should be familiar with the book as well (and others may wish to take a look at the book as well of course!).

Week 1 (Aug. 26): Theory, Method, and Purpose in the Study of Security


Recommended Readings


Week 2 (Sep. 02): Systemic Explanations


Recommended Readings

**Week 3 (Sep. 09): Information, Credibility, and Commitments**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 4 (Sep. 16): Psychology, Leadership, Gender, and Culture**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 5 (Sep. 23): Domestic Politics and Conflict**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 6 (Sep. 30): Democracy and Conflict**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 7 (Oct. 07): Organizing Warfighting**

- Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson and Sherry Zaks “Militant and Rebel Organization(s),” *Comparative Politics* 50, no. 2 (January 2018): 271–93.

**Recommended Reading**

- Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson “Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War,” *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (July 2013): 418–32.

**Week 8 (Oct. 14): Civil-Interstate Conflict Nexus**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 9 (Oct. 21): Nuclear Weapons**


**Recommended Readings**

• Mark S. Bell and Nicholas L. Miller “Questioning the Effect of Nuclear Weapons on Conflict:” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, August 19, 2013.

**Week 10 (Oct. 28): Ethnic Conflict**


**Recommended Reading**

Week 11 (Nov. 04): Terrorism


**Recommended Readings**


Week 12 (Nov. 11): Harming Civilians: Repression, Predation, and Genocide


**Recommended Readings**

Week 13 (Nov. 18): Intervention, Resolution, and Aftermath

PAPER FIRST DRAFT DUE


Recommended Readings


Week 14 (Nov. 25): Thanksgiving Week

PEER REVIEW MEMO DUE TUESDAY 11/24 BY 5PM – NO CLASS WEDNESDAY

Week 15 (Dec. 02): The Future of Peace


Recommended Readings


**FINAL PAPERS DUE WEDNESDAY 12/7 at 5PM**

**Supplemental Book List for IR Candidacy Exams**

The following is a list of books that doctoral students preparing for candidacy exams should be familiar with. They are linked in some way to a journal article already on the syllabus, which should provide a solid overview of the author’s theoretical argument. However, students should be familiar with the book, including expansions of the theory and empirics, and be prepared to make references to the books where appropriate in an exam answer. Students should also be familiar with the complete books listed elsewhere on the syllabus, even when only specific chapters are assigned.


