POLS 681: International Security
Dr. Ches Thurber

Spring 2019

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Class Hours: Wed 12:30-3:10 p.m.
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Course Description

This course is intended as a graduate-level survey of the literature 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. To put it differently, we will read the kinds of articles that are published in journals such as International Security, Security Studies, the Journal of Conflict Resolution and the Journal of Peace Research. Of course, we will be reading from more general IR (IO, ISQ, WP) and political science journals (APSR, AJPS, JoP, PoP) as well. We will examine the various conceptualizations and definitions of conflict, theories about the causes of violence at both the sub-state and inter-state 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 field of political science, and those interested in how the academic field of security studies contributes to important policy debates.

Texts

All reading materials for this course will be available on Blackboard.

Evaluation

Class attendance, preparation and participation (30%): 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 (50%): 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. I welcome you to write this paper in conjunction with another graduate course, conditional on the approval of the instructor of the other course. The idea is that this will allow you to double the effort you put into this paper, moving it closer to conference presentation and eventual publication. I am open to modifications of this assignment on an individual basis if doing so would better meet your professional goals. Please contact me as soon as possible to discuss.

Grading Standards

Grades in graduate school are a little bit silly, in my opinion, as you are at the point in your careers where it is your written work itself that matters (and how it is received by a broader scholarly community) more than the grade arbitrarily assigned by a single cantankerous professor. Nevertheless, they can serve as a helpful signaling device for your own self-assessment, for departmental funding decisions, and to admissions committees at PhD programs (for MA students planning to continue on...). While I have outlined a mathematical weighting above, the inherently qualitative nature of class participation and final project evaluation has made me realize that a more generally qualitative statement of grading standards might be more useful. The scheme below is taken from Prof. Kyle Beardsley in the political science department at Duke University with some modifications to adapt to our departmental norms and my own personal views. I think Dr. Beardsley does a really nice job of articulating the attributes of strong graduate-level work in political science.

It may also be helpful to think about the grading distributionally. In the past, I have generally awarded between 1 and 3 straight As per graduate seminar. The modal grade has been an A-, with a few Bs and B+s.

- **A**: Exceptional Performance. Consistently outstanding work on all course-related tasks at a level that distinguishes the student from other members of the class. A comprehensive and incisive command of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A frequently demonstrated exceptional capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. The ability to master and integrate large amounts of factual material and abstract theories. An outstanding ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

- **A-**: Very Good Performance. Consistently strong work on all course-related tasks. A command of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A clearly demonstrated capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. Understands well and can integrate the relevant factual and theoretical material central to the course. A strong ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

- **B+**: Good Performance. Solid work on all course-related tasks. A good grasp of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A generally demonstrated capacity for original, creative, critical, and logical thinking. A very good command of factual
and theoretical material, and some capacity to integrate the two. A solid ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

- **B**: Decent Performance. Generally consistent work on most course-related tasks. A general understanding of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. Modest evidence of the capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. An acceptable understanding of factual and theoretical material, but limited evidence of the capacity to integrate the two. A basic ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

- **B-**: Barely Satisfactory Performance. Mostly satisfactory work on course-related tasks, but with notable deficiencies. A general understanding of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. Understands at a basic level the facts and theories related to the course, but with clear gaps, errors, or incomplete work. A limited or inconsistent ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

- **C+/C**: Inadequate Performance. Some, but generally insufficient understanding of the basic elements of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. An inability to go beyond a recitation of basic factual material related to the class. Demonstrated weaknesses in the ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

- **D**: Unacceptable Performance. A superficial and inconsistent familiarity with the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. An uneven understanding of basic factual material related to the course; no evidence of fact/theory integration. Demonstrates significant gaps in the ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

- **F**: Failure. A general lack of familiarity with the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. The absence of even a basic understanding of the factual material related to the course.

**Course Policies**

- Successful completion of this course requires consistent, punctual attendance, and active participation in both class discussion and class exercises. If you must miss class due to a conflicting responsibility or an emergency, it is your responsibility to contact me to discuss the situation. I will generally require a short written assignment to be submitted in lieu of class attendance. Any more than 1 absence without prior notification and make-up work will affect your final grade.

- All students are expected to adhere to the highest levels of academic integrity. Violations of university, departmental, and disciplinary standards will not be tolerated and will lead to an F for the course.

- 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 (Jan. 16): Concepts, Theory, and Measurement in the Study of Conflict


Recommended Readings


Week 2 (Jan. 23): Systemic Explanations


Recommended Readings


**Week 3 (Jan. 30): Information, Credibility, and Commitments**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 4 (Feb. 06): Psychology, Leadership, Gender, and Culture**


**Recommended Readings**

**Week 5 (Feb. 13): Domestic Politics and Conflict**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 6 (Feb. 20): Democracy and Conflict**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 7 (Feb. 27): Organizing Warfighting**

• 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.

**Recommended Reading**

• Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson and Sherry Zaks “Militant and Rebel Organization(S),” *Comparative Politics*, 2018, forthcoming.

**Week 8 (Mar. 06): Civil-Interstate Conflict Nexus**


**Recommended Readings**

• Clayton L. Thyne “Cheap Signals with Costly Consequences: The Effect of Interstate Relations on Civil War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 6 (December 2006): 937–61.

**Week 9 (Mar. 13): Spring Break**

**Week 10 (Mar. 20): Nuclear Weapons**

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

**Recommended Readings**


**Week 11 (Mar. 27): Ethnic Conflict**


**Recommended Reading**


**Week 12 (Apr. 03): Terrorism**


**Recommended Readings**

**Week 13 (Apr. 10): Harming Civilians: Repression, Predation, and Genocide**

• Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein “Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 03 (August 2006).

**Recommended Readings**


**Week 14 (Apr. 17): Civil Resistance**


**Recommended Readings**

**Week 15 (Apr. 24): Intervention, Resolution, and Aftermath**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 16 (May. 01): Decline of War?**

• Tanisha Fazal “Dead Wrong?: Battle Deaths, Military Medicine, and Exaggerated Reports of War’s Demise,” *International Security* 39, no. 1 (Summer 2014): 95–125.

**Final Papers Due: Monday 5/6 at 5pm.**
Book List

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.


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