POLI/PWAD 457: International Conflict Processes
Fall 2015 — University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Instructor

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Course Information

Meeting Times: Tuesdays & Thursdays 3:30–4:45pm, Gardner 210
Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:00am-12:00pm; Thursdays 1:00–3:00pm
Course Website (Sakai): https://sakai.unc.edu/portal/site/poli457f15

Course Description

This course is an advanced undergraduate seminar on the causes and patterns of conflict processes in the international system. We begin with the assumption that there may be recognizable patterns of behavior that influence the occurrence of conflict. Our task is to evaluate the scholarly attempts to uncover these patterns and the underlying causes of war and its termination. In this course, we will primarily focus our attention on so-called “rationalist” theories of conflict. These theories, many of which use a bargaining perspective, assume that conflict processes are driven by the strategic decisions of rational actors.

The course presupposes basic familiarity with international politics as taught at the level of POLI 150. The emphasis will be on developing your analytical capacity to examine and assess scholarly arguments. The ability to memorize factual material is taken for granted, but it is not the primary goal of the course. Please note that this is not a current events course. Current events will be addressed only when relevant to learning about and evaluating the theories and empirical investigations at hand.

Because this class will focus almost exclusively on scholarly research, you may notice that many of the readings have technical components. This is reflective of much contemporary research in international relations and conflict processes. I do not expect you to have any previous knowledge of quantitative methods, such as statistics or game theory. In this class, we will mainly be analyzing the scholarly arguments made in these readings, which you will be able to do without delving into the technical details. Early in the semester, I will provide basic information about statistics and game theory that will help you be a better consumer and analyst of political science research.

Grading

Two Papers 60%
Final Exam 30%
Class Participation 10%
Class Participation

The majority of the class will be devoted to discussions of scholarly readings. You are expected to have read the assigned material when we discuss it in class. I will ask many questions, and the class will be responsible for providing the answers. Students should feel free to ask questions and debate the topics at hand. There are no wrong questions, and you are strongly encouraged to participate even if you found the readings difficult or problematic.

The participation grade evaluation will be based on the quantity and quality of comments and questions and demonstration of knowledge of the course material. Attendance is not the same thing as participation, but if you are not in class you cannot participate. I will take attendance at each class period. If you miss a significant number of class sessions, this will adversely affect your participation grade. If you have personal circumstances will prevent you from regularly attending class, you should consider withdrawing from the course.

Papers

During the semester you will be responsible for writing two analytical papers (roughly 7 pages each) that address the course readings. For each paper, I will give you a list of possible questions/topics that you could address in your paper. You should not feel constrained by these prompts. If you have a different idea for a paper that addresses the relevant readings, contact me. Together, the two papers will be worth 60% of your total grade. The paper with the higher grade will be worth 35%, while the paper with the lower grade will be worth 25%. To excel in these assignments, you must go beyond a basic review of the readings. Instead, you will need to analyze the authors’ arguments and/or identify and assess the overall impact and agenda of the works. Note that you do not have to agree with the author(s) or assume that they have accomplished what they have set out to do.

Late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade (i.e., 3 points) for each day late. Note that plagiarism is a violation of the UNC Honor Code and will be prosecuted accordingly.

Exam

In addition to the papers, there will be a final in-class exam. The exam will require you to step back and process the material in the course beyond the individual contributions of each reading. Mere demonstration of knowledge of the material will be regarded as an average performance. To excel on this exam you will have to demonstrate an ability to synthesize and analyze the material relevant to the questions on the test.

Course Materials

One required book is available in the UNC Bookstore. All other readings are available on Sakai.


Important Dates

- Paper 1 due: Thursday, October 8
- Paper 2 due: Tuesday, December 1
- Final Exam: Thursday, December 10 (4:00pm)
Class Schedule

Introduction

Tuesday, August 18

- No reading

Thursday, August 20: The Scientific Study of Conflict


Tuesday, August 25: The Bargaining Approach


Part 1: Interstate War

Thursday, August 27: The Bargaining Model of War


Tuesday, September 1: Bargaining and War Outcomes


Thursday, September 3

- TBD

Tuesday, September 8: Bargaining and the Duration of Peace


Thursday, September 10: A Democratic or Capitalist Peace?


Tuesday, September 15: Leaders and War


Thursday, September 17: Reputation and War


Tuesday, September 22: Alliances and War


Thursday, September 24: Territory and War


Part 2: Civil War and Terrorism

Tuesday, September 29: Bargaining and Civil War


Thursday, October 1: Civil War Actors

Tuesday, October 6 & Thursday, October 8

- In-Class Simulation: Bargaining and War

- ***PAPER 1 DUE THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8***

Tuesday, October 13: Resolving Civil Wars


Thursday, October 15

- **NO CLASS: FALL BREAK**

Tuesday, October 20: Resolving Civil Wars


Thursday, October 22: Military Intervention


Tuesday, October 27: Terrorism


Part 3: Third Party Conflict Management

Thursday, October 29: Mediation


Tuesday, November 3: Legal Dispute Resolution


Thursday, November 5: Humanitarian Intervention


Tuesday, November 10: The Role of International Institutions


Thursday, November 12

- TBD

Tuesday, November 17: Humanitarian Aid


Thursday, November 19

- In-Class Simulation: Third Party Conflict Management

Tuesday, November 24

- Film: “Fog of War”

Thursday, November 26

- NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

Tuesday, December 1

- Film: “Fog of War”

- ***PAPER 2 DUE***

Thursday, December 10

- Final Exam: 4:00 pm in Gardner 210