George Mason University  
Schar School of Policy and Government

Meeting Time: M 7:20-10:00 pm  
Room: Lecture Hall 2  
Instructor: Erica Seng-White  
Email: esengwhi@masonlive.gmu.edu  
Office Hours: Mondays from 4:00 pm-7:00 pm and by appointment  
Office Location: Research Hall 359

**GOVT 322-002 – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY**  
Fall 2019

Course Description:

International Relations (IR) Theory is an advanced political science course designed to foster in-depth understanding with the major theories and perspectives in IR that aid in understanding conflict and cooperation in international affairs. This course will explore key concepts of international relations. We will begin by looking at core theories of IR. These theories include Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, Marxism/Neo-Marxism, Functionalism, Feminist IR Theory and Human Security. This is fundamental for exploring the field of international relations.

We will then examine interstate conflicts. This will primarily focus on wars and other forms of violent confrontation. We will analyze different international conflicts from different theoretical perspectives. This will allow us to explore various high-profile events in international affairs, both modern and historical.

The next area of focus will analyze international institutions. This includes rules, norms and expectations of behavior in the international system. We will look at how various organizations have emerged over time. We will also explore their implications for collaboration and cooperation between states.
The next section will analyze development and politics. We will analyze the role of economics in international relations and the different actors who have exerted influence over the international system over time. This will include an analysis of both developed and developing countries. We will analyze existing theories regarding the origins of development and underdevelopment. Another key theme will be the variations in the role of the state in fostering development. This unit will allow students to explore how domestic and international context can influence the trajectory of economic development.

Our final section will examine the implications of the international system for individuals. We will explore transnational crises and threats. We will also explore various actors’ efforts to address these concerns. This will include recent phenomena and historical concerns.

**Course Objectives:**

This course is designed to give students an overview of the field of international relations. This class explores interstate relations, the structure of the international system, the role of non-state actors and the implications of domestic structures. It stresses the themes of IR theories, states international institutions, political economy and non-state actors. Students will explore different approaches and actors to phenomena of international importance. This course will fulfill the Global Understanding requirement by (1) raising awareness of the implications of the structure of the international system (2) encouraging students to examine the importance of assumptions in studying international politics (3) providing students with opportunities for analysis of international phenomena.

This course is designed to foster the following skills:

- Analyze interstate relations from different theoretical perspectives
- Demonstrate an advanced understanding of the implications of different institutions
- Become familiar with positivist research and using different research methods
- Articulate findings and interpretations of various dilemmas in group work, writing and speaking
Class Discussions, Discussion Groups and Simulations (30%): Students will be expected to regularly participate in class discussions. This class wide conversation will incorporate both theory and current events. Students will also break off into assigned discussion groups. Groups will meet in class and will present a summary of their discussion to their classmates. Group members will be responsible for evaluating the contributions of the fellow members of their group. It is essential that everyone comes prepared by completing the required readings and reviewing current events. Students are also encouraged to pose questions both in advance and during the lecture that they would like to discuss as a class.

Weekly Quizzes (20%): There will be a quiz once a week. These quizzes will consist of a short writing prompt (no longer than 4-5 sentences). Students will be given fifteen minutes to prepare and fifteen minutes to write the paragraph. These quizzes will help you parse through the course material to better understand core insights. They will also help you become a faster writer.

Midterm Paper (20%): You will write a literature review for your midterm paper on a major theory of international relations. You must clearly define the theory and its core assumptions. You should also evaluate this theory. You must reference the key works by the main authors writing from the theoretical perspective you have chosen. You should identify the main points of consensus and the major debates among scholars writing on this theory. You should also identify the most salient critiques of this theory by authors writing from a different theoretical perspective. You should identify important gaps in the literature on your chosen theory. Your midterm paper is due on October 14 at the beginning of class.

Final Exam (30%): The final exam will include short answer and essay questions. You MUST bring a bluebook and a writing utensil to the exam. This exam will NOT be open book. I will post a review guide at least 2 weeks prior the exam date. You may not have your cellphone or any electronic device on your desk at any time during this exam period. The final exam will be held on December 16 from 7:30-10:15 pm.

Participation: Attendance and participation are mandatory for this class. You are expected to attend every session unless you have a documented excuse for being absent (ex: a doctor’s note).
Perfect attendance is worth three extra credit points. Topics covered during lecture and mandatory readings are fair game for daily quizzes. Your worst quiz grade will be dropped from your final grade.

**Required Reading:**

- Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- Additional readings will be assigned and made available through the Blackboard course site.
- Students are strongly encouraged to visit one of the following sources on a regular basis:
  - *The Washington Post*
  - *The New York Times*
  - The BBC or CNN
  - *NPR* (available online and at 88.5 FM)

**Schedule of Readings:**

*August 26: Introduction and Overview of Theory*

- Review the GOVT 332 Syllabus

*September 2: CLASS CANCELED DUE TO LABOR DAY*

*September 9: States, Sovereignty and Unit of Analysis*

- David Lake, “The State and International Relations,” in The Oxford Handbook of International Relations, Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal eds., (Oxford University
Press, 2008), 41 – 56.

September 16: Classical Realism, Neo-Realism and Neo-Classical Realism
  ▪ Kenneth Waltz, Theory of International Politics (Waveland Press Inc, 1979)

September 23: Liberalism and Neo-Liberalism

September 30: Constructivism
  ▪ Alexander Wendt, Social Theory of International Politics (Cambridge University Press, 1999)

October 7: Marxism and Neo-Marxism
  ▪ V.I. Lenin, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (Foreign Language Press, 1970), chapter 7.
  ▪ Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith eds. and translators (ElecBook, 1999), 481-498.

October 14: Functionalism/Neo-Functionalism

Midterm Papers are due at the BEGINNING of class.

October 21: Human Security
    (accessed July 15, 2019).
October 28: Feminist IR Theory

November 4: Analyzing IR

November 11: International Conflicts and States

November 18: International Regimes and Globalization

November 25: The North-South Divide

December 2: Refugees Crises

Grades:

93%-100% = A
90%-92.9% = A-
86%-89.9% = B+
83%-85.9% = B
80%-82.9% = B-
76%-79.9% = C+
73%-75.9% = C
70%-72.9% = C-
66%-69.9% = D+
63%-65.9% = D
60%-62.9% = D-
0%-59.9% = F

A Outstanding work; the student has demonstrated a clear mastery of course skills and concepts.

B Good; the student has demonstrated a solid understanding of course skills and concepts

C Acceptable; the student has demonstrated a general understanding of course skills and concepts
D  Pass; the student has demonstrated a general understanding of course skills and concepts

F  Failure; the student has not demonstrated a sufficient understanding of course material

Students are encouraged to come and speak with the instructor if they have any question about your grades. Please bring your graded assignment to your meeting with the instructor for reference. The instructor will re-grade any assignment but reserves the right to either raise or lower the student’s score based upon the new assessment. Please make sure you have a clear rationale for why your grade should be raised. Students may not submit an assignment for a re-grade more than once.

**Course Reading Policy:** All mandatory readings must be completed BEFORE CLASS. Please contact the instructor if you have any questions after reading the course materials.

**Attendance Policy:** Attendance is mandatory. Please make sure that you sign in at the beginning of each class. You must sign-in in order to be eligible to take a pop quiz.

**Late Work Policy:** If there is a documented reason that you cannot submit an assignment on the scheduled date, you must contact the instructor as soon as possible. Every day late will result in a half-grade reduction in the final grade for the assignment. Late work will not be accepted if it is more than a week late.

**Class Discussion Policy:** Students at George Mason University represent a diverse range of experiences. Although we may not always agree with one another, it is important that we respect one another and express said disagreement in a professional manner. Personal attacks and hate speech have no place in an academic setting. Failure to adhere to this requirement will result in a student being asked to leave lecture and will adversely affect participation grades.

**Electronic Device Policy:** Students are welcomed to use laptops for purposes of note taking ONLY. Students should keep cellphones out of sight for the duration of the class. All electronic devices
must be stowed during quizzes and exams. Students with cellphones on their desks or seats during a quiz or exam will receive an automatic zero.

**Academic Integrity:** Students are strongly encouraged to review the [Mason Honor Code](#) prior to the start of this semester. Never turn in work that is not your own. If you borrow ideas from others, you must give them credit. Failure to do so is plagiarism and is grounds for failing this course. Make sure that all citations and data are accurate. Be honest with the instructor if you are missing assignments and/or exams.

**Disability Accommodations:** Students will get the most out of this course if they have access to the tools they need to be successful. Students with a documented disability must reach out to the [Disability Services](#) (SUB I 2500) and meet with the instructor to ensure that their needs are met.

**Privacy:** The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) was designed to ensure that student privacy rights are protected. This has important implications for our course. In order to enforce this regulation, George Mason University requires that we communicate through your Mason email account. It also requires that the instructor return your assignments to the student and only the student who completed the assignment.