

POLS 285: Introduction to International Relations

Department of Political Science Northern Illinois University Spring 2025

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 930-1045pm
DuSable Hall 176

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Overview

The study of international relations presents a number of both consequential and intriguing puzzles important for understanding the world today. Why do countries fight wars? Can laws and treaties stem the proliferation of nuclear weapons? Does the rise of China present a security threat to the world? Why can't global leaders come to an agreement to effectively tackle climate change? Why is global cooperation so difficult, even when most of the world shares similar goals of peace and prosperity? This class will help students answer these questions and more.

This course begins with a historical and contemporary overview of international politics before delving into a number theoretical approaches that help us systematically analyze and understand the world. The second half of the course then employs these theories to help us examine a number of current debates, including nuclear deterrence, terrorism, trade wars, human rights, and climate change.

Students will come away from the course with a set of analytic frameworks and a depth of historical knowledge that will enable them to better understand current issues in global politics and will empower them to participate in the process of crafting solutions, whether that be as a future policymaker, an issue-advocate, or an engaged global citizen.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will:

- Be familiar with core theories and current debates within the scientific study of international relations (IR)

- Be able to think critically about global politics and apply diverse analytical lenses to contemporary issues
- Be able to articulate their views confidently and competently in both discussions and written work

Requirements and Grading

Course Requirements

- Midterm (March 4th): 15%
- Paper #1(March 19th): 20%
- Paper#2(April 30th): 20%
- Final Exam(May 8th): 20%
- Reading Quizzes (Weekly): 10%
- Course Participation and In-Class Activities(Ongoing): 10%
- Map Quizzes (Weeks 2-6): 5%

Midterm Exam (15%): The midterm exam will be held in class (see schedule below). It will consist of multiple choice and short answer essay questions. Students will have 75 minutes to complete the midterm.

Written Assignments (20% each): Students will write two short essays of 3-4 double-spaced pages. Essays will ask students to critically analyze a current issue in global politics of a student's choosing using content from the course. Further details will be provided the coming weeks.

Final Exam (20%): The final exam will be held during the designated exam period. It will consist of a similar mix of multiple choice, short-answer, and long-answer essay questions to the midterm.

Reading Quizzes(10%): Each week students will complete an online reading quiz using the inquizitive app(or otherwise through blackboard). Unless otherwise specified quizzes will be due Monday at midnight.

Class Participation(10%): Students are expected to have read and reflected upon required readings prior to each class. Participation in class means active engagement in discussions, group activities, and other forms of interaction with your colleagues and instructor. If you are not in class, you cannot earn participation points. However, missing one or two classes (attendance will be taken at random) is less consequential than attending all classes but remaining quiet, distracted, or disengaged. If you have concerns about your performance or your ability to confidently engage within the class, please (at any time) speak to me in office hours.

Map Quizzes(5%): Five map quizzes are scheduled in advance and will take place at the start of class on Tuesday of weeks two through six. Map quizzes require students to locate up to 10 countries on a blank map of a given continent or geographic area. Blank maps are available on Blackboard and you can use the map in your textbook or a current online map to fill in names and to study.

January 21st – The Americas

January 28th – Europe

February 4th – Africa

February 11th – Middle East

February 18th – Asia

Note that there is no opportunity to make-up either type of quiz without prior approval from the instructor. Make-up quizzes, if offered, will vary from those held in class and may, necessarily, be more challenging. No additional time will be provided (e.g. if you arrive to class a few minutes late to find a Reading Check-In or Map Quiz in progress, you will not be granted extra time to complete it).

Letter Grade Distribution

Students will receive a percentage score for each assignment that can be totaled and translated into a letter grade according to the scale below.

≥ 92.5	A	77.50 - 79.99	C+
90.00 - 92.49	A-	70.00 - 77.49	C
87.50 - 89.99	B+	60.00 - 69.99	D
82.50 - 87.49	B	≤ 59.99	F
80.00 - 82.49	B-		

Course Materials

You have one required textbook for the course and will need to have access to Inquizitive for the semester. The e-book + inquisitive is \$49 or you can just purchase Inquizitive for \$25. It may be possible to utilize alternative editions of the book for some readings. Students interested in doing so should consult the alternative editions to note and manage discrepancies (i.e. some readings may not be within older editions). Additional readings beyond the textbook will be provided via Blackboard (as noted by BB in the below schedule).

Karen A. Mingst and Heather Elko-McKimmben. Essentials of International Relations, Ninth Edition. (Norton, 2021). (EIR in schedule)

In addition, students will be required to purchase access to InQuizitive. It will be accessible through blackboard. If you have difficulties finding, accessing, or affording course materials please let me know.

Current Events:

Important and consequential events in international political will be happening all the time this semester. Accordingly, this course will rely on discussions that transcend reading material and beckon engagement with contemporary issues of global politics. It is therefore required that students stay up to date with current global affairs by following a major newspaper (e.g. New York Times, BBC, or the Economist). I highly recommend getting in the habit of reading the news every day and, if you can, purchasing a subscription (quality journalism does not come cheaply) to an outlet of your choice for the duration of the semester.

If a natural curiosity about the world or performing your civic duty is not enough to motivate a reading habit, current events will be discussed every day in class (i.e. participation points), be a component of reading quizzes, and exams.

Course Policies:

Attendance: Attendance is expected at every lecture. If you have a conflict on the same day as a quiz or a paper please email me BEFORE lecture and we will find an alternative solution. Emails received after lecture will be dealt with on a case by case. You are required to be present in class for participation and quiz points unless your absence has been communicated prior to class

Disability accommodations: 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 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.

Office Hours: These are drop-in times and all students are always welcome to attend to discuss anything related to the course, or anything else you feel that I could potentially help with. No RSVP is required. Please visit as often as they like, and attend in small groups if you wish. Face to face interaction allows me to get to know you and allows me to much efficiently and effectively answer any questions you may have. If you cannot meet during the time scheduled, please email me well in advance to arrange an alternative time.

Email: I prefer face to face communication. If you have questions about course content please come see me in person, before or after lecture, during office hours, or at another scheduled time. If you have smaller logistical questions etc. please feel free to email. If the response requires more than a couple sentences I will ask that we meet in person. I will check my email from the hours of 9 am - 5 pm, but am not available on weekends. I will try to respond within 24 hours. Please include the

course number (POLS 285) in the subject line and, of course, use proper email etiquette.

Laptops and Technology: I highly recommend taking notes in lecture by hand. Research suggests it is more effective in helping you learn. If you insist on using a laptop please sit in the back of the classroom. Please stay off your cell phone for the duration of the class period (you can wait a whole hour to answer a text message). If I catch you on you on your phone I reserve the right to ruthlessly cold call on you.

Academic Integrity - I take academic misconduct very seriously. All work submitted must be a students' own in full. Any student in this course found to have plagiarized (accidentally or otherwise) the work of another individual (including, but not limited to, other students or from existing scholarship) will receive, at a minimum, a failing grade on the assignment and likely in the course. The student may also be subject to additional sanctions by the University. Students are expected to have read and to abide by NIU's Student Code of Conduct. This is your responsibility and a requirement of this course. Please take NIU's Online Tutorial on Academic Integrity to re-familiarize yourself if you have doubts or concerns and/or speak to your Instructor in office hours. If you have any questions throughout the course relating to academic practices, academic integrity, and issues of plagiarism and/or citation please speak to the Instructor and/or consult the links noted above. Failure to understand these requirements does not constitute an excuse to deviate from them.

A Note on AI: The use of generative AI, such as ChatGPT, is not explicitly prohibited in this course. I understand that the use of these technologies will likely be a valuable tool in the future (I'm trying to figure them out too). AI tools can be beneficial for various tasks like some research, overcoming writer's block, and grammar editing, however it cannot take the place of critical thinking or in-depth research. To this end, I will provide explicit instructions for each assignment as to whether and how AI may be used. Violation of these rules will be considered academic dishonesty.

Assignment Submission: Your paper assignments will be submitted on blackboard. For every 24 hours the assignment is late you will receive a 5% reduction in your grade, starting at the beginning of the class period the day the assignment is due. After 72 hours late the grade earned grade will be cut in half (ie an 85% becomes a 42.5%). If you think you might need to submit late, ask for an extension.

Extensions I understand that life happens and accommodations are likely when agreed upon with the Instructor. If you think you may need to delay taking an exam or submitting a written assignment, you should talk to me as soon as possible. Extensions are never guaranteed, but are much more likely if you talk to me before the issue arises, not after. They will be based on University policy, exigency of the circumstances, and timeliness of the request (i.e. the earlier the better).

Grade Appeals: If you wish to appeal a grade you must wait 48 hours after you receive the grade and send the instructor a 1 page email specifying why you believe

your grade is incorrect.

Extra Credit: A limited number of extra opportunities will be available to students throughout the semester. Typically, these involve students writing up a response to a mix of on-campus lectures, documentary screenings, and podcasts. Extra credit opportunities will be announced in class and questions posted on BB.

Our Academic Environment: Together, we will foster a comfortable, engaging, and accessible scholarly environment. All students should feel welcome to attend and speak freely in class and in Office Hours. Issues of politics can be controversial and debates can become heated. However, we will approach this course as colleagues, and we will treat each other with respect and dignity at all times.

Undocumented Students Undocumented students are welcome in this class. If you are undocumented and need assistance please contact Undocumented Student Support or come talk to me.

Mental Health: These are challenging and anxiety inducing times outside of this course. I understand this and have my own battles. We all will handle this uncertainty and stress in different ways. Please take the time for self-care and if you need extensions for mental health reasons do not hesitate to ask. 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.

Gender Identity: As a faculty member, I am committed to using your proper name and pronouns. We will take time during our first class together to do introductions, at which point you can share with all members of our learning community what name and pronouns you use, as you are comfortable. Additionally, if these change at any point during the semester, please let me know and we can develop a plan to share this information with others in a way that is safe for you.

Land Acknowledgement Statement: Northern Illinois University operates and is built on the traditional lands of the Oceti Sakowin (Sioux), Miami, Bodewadmiakiwen (Potawatomi), Sauk and Meskwaki, and Peoria. These lands are subject to Cession 50 and 148, though their terms have been consistently violated. We seek to acknowledge this land and these peoples in order to honor the legacies, struggles and current existence of Indigenous peoples; situate ourselves within settler-colonial projects; disrupt the erasure of Indigenous peoples; and begin/continue the work of collectively learning and fulfilling our obligations, for those of us who are uninvited guests on Indigenous peoples' lands.

Recordings- Please do not record lectures without first getting permission from the instructor. Lecture slides will be posted to blackboard after class.

Class Schedule

Week #	Week of	Topic
1	January 14	Introduction
2	January 21	Historical Context & Using IR theory to understand our world today
3	January 28	Realism
4	February 4	Liberalism
5	February 11	Social and Marxist Theories
6	February 18	A More Global IR and State Power
7	February 25	Psychology and Zombies
8	March 4	Midterm and Transition Midterm Exam March 4th
9	<i>Spring Break</i>	<i>No Classes</i>
10	March 18	Conflict Written Assignment 1 Due March 19
11	March 25	War and Nuclear Weapons
12	April 1	International Law & Institutions
13	April 10	International Political Economy
14	April 17	The Global Environment
15	April 24	Human Rights & Human Security Written Assignment 2 Due April 23
16	May 1 Finals Week	The Future of the World Order & Review Final Exam May 8 th – 10-1150

Detailed Class Schedule and Assigned Reading

This syllabus is a living document and is designed to guide our learning. In the spirit of reflexivity, I reserve the right to adjust the schedule, readings and assignments as appropriate or necessary. All changes will be announced through NIU email. Dates below indicate the Monday of each week. If you have trouble accessing any materials please email Prof Kuehl.

1. Introduction & Historical Context

- A. Introduction to International Relations
 - EIR Chapter 1
 - (Be sure to catch up on the news)
- B. What in the World? Current Happenings in Global Politics

- Council on Foreign Relations. 2025. "Transition 2025: A Report the Incoming Trump Administration Should Read"

Recommended:

- Nicholas Kristof "This Was a Terrible Year, and Also Maybe the Best One Yet for Humanity" *New York Times* (BB)

2. Historical Context & Using IR theory to understand our world today

A. Whirlwind History!

- EIR Chapter 2

B. What is Theory?

- Jack Snyder, "One World, Rival Theories," from *Foreign Policy*
- Recommended: David Singer "The Levels-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations" *World Politics* (BB)

- Recommended

- Kristof 2023. ["This was a Terrible Year, and Also Maybe the Best One Yet for Humanity"](#)
- HistoryExtra, "[Appeasement and the road to World War Two](#)" (podcast)
- In Our Time, "[The Thirty Years War](#)" (BBC podcast).
- In Our Time, "[The Opium Wars](#)," (BBC podcast).
- In Our Time, "[Sovereignty](#)," (BBC podcast).

3. Realism

A. Classical Realism

- EIR Ch. 3 – All – focus on 65-76
- Thucydides, "Melian Dialogue," from The Peloponnesian War

B. Neo-realism

- Byers, Andrew and Randall Schweller "Trump the Realist" *Foreign Affairs*
- Recommended:
 - Kenneth Waltz (1988) "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory"

- John Mearsheimer, “Anarchy and the Struggle for Power,” from *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*
- John Mearsheimer (2006), “China’s Unpeaceful Rise” *Current History*

4. Liberalism

A. Classical Liberalism

- EIR Ch. 3 77-82
- Woodrow Wilson, “The Fourteen Points”
- Recommended:
 - Michael W. Doyle, “Liberalism and World Politics”
 - Immanuel Kant, “Perpetual Peace”

B. Neoliberalism

- G. John Ikenberry (2008), “The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?”
- Colgan, Jeff D. and Robert O. Keohane “The Liberal Order is Rigged”
- Recommended:
 - Robert Axelrod and Robert O. Keohane (1988), “Achieving Cooperation Under Anarchy” *World Politics* **(BB)**

5. Social and Marxist Theories :

A. Constructivism

- EIR 92-95
- Sarina Theys (2018), “Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” E-IR: <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/23/introducing-constructivism-in-international-relations-theory/>
- *Skim*: Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics”
- Recommended:
 - Ba and Hoffman, “Making and Remaking the World for IR 101”

B. Feminist IR

- EIR Chapter 3, pages 95-97
- Carol Cohn (2018), “The Perils of Mixing Masculinity and Missiles” *The New York Times*
- Vogelstein et al (2020), “The Best Foreign Policy puts Women Front and Center”

- *Recommended:*
 - Checkel "Revenge of the Patriarchs: Why Autocrats fear Women"
 - J. Ann Tickner, "Man, the State, and War: Gendered Perspectives on National Security"
 - Carol Cohn (2019), "Gender and National Security" *Ploughshares* <https://www.ploughshares.org/issues-analysis/article/gender-and-national-security>

6. A More Global IR and State Power

A. More Global IR

- Zvobgo and Lokean "Why Race Matters in International Relations"

B. Models of Foreign Policy Decision-Making

- EIR Ch 5. 162-169
- Putnam "The Logic of Two Level Games"

- *Recommended*

- Bhambra et al. "Why is Mainstream International Relations Blind to Racism"
- Patrick Porter (2017), "Even Donald Trump can't defeat the blob" *The National Interest* <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/even-donald-trump-cant-defeat-the-blob-21515>

7. Individual Psychology and Review

A. The Individual

- EIR ch 4
- Robert Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception"
- Daniel Drezner (2025) "Will the madman theory actually work"

C. Review and Zombies

- EIR 97-104
- Drezner, "Theories of International Politics...and Zombies" *Foreign Policy*
- *Recommended*
 - Jack Snyder, "One World, Rival Theories," from *Foreign Policy*

- Turnbull, “How the World Can Deal with Trump”

8. Review and Midterm

- A. Midterm
- B. Writing Workshop

Spring Break

9. War and Security I

- A. Conflict Today
 - EIR Ch. 6 – War and Security
 - Council on Foreign Relations, “[Global Conflict Tracker](#)” (interactive)
 -
- B. Total War
 - Mara Karlin 2024 "The Return of Total War"
 - Recommended:
 - Kenneth N. Waltz, “Why Iran Should Get the Bomb: Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability”

10. Explanations for War and Nuclear Weapons

- A. Rational Explanations for War
 - Frieden, Lake, and Schultz, "Ch. 3 Why are there Wars" from *World Politics*
 - Edward Luttwak, “[Give War a Chance](#),” *Foreign Affairs* (Jul/Aug 1999).
- B. Nuclear Weapons Debate
 - Selections Sagan and Waltz *Nuclear Weapons*

11. International Law & Institutions

- A. International Organizations and the UN
 - EIR Ch. 7
 - Council on Foreign Relations “The UN Security Council”

- B. International Law
 - a. Hathaway “War Unbound” *Foreign Affairs*
 - b. Cooley and Nexon “Trump’s Anti-Liberal Order” *Foreign Affairs*

12. International Political Economy

- A. The Global Economy and International Politics
 - EIR Ch 8
 - Peterson Institute for International Economics, “[What is Globalization? And How Has the Global Economy Shaped the United States?](#)” (interactive).
 - *Recommended Watch:*
 - [Vox “What Donald Trump Doesn’t Understand About Trade”](#)
 - [Khan Academy “Comparative Advantage”](#)
- B. Trade Wars and the Liberal Order
 - Colgan and Keohane “The Liberal Order is Rigged” *Foreign Affairs*
 - Harrell “How to Stop a Trade War” *Foreign Affairs*
 - Recommended
 - Ikenberry “The Next Liberal Order” *Foreign Affairs*

13. Climate Change and Global Environment

- A. Climate Change
 - EIR Ch. 11
 - Nicola Davison (2019) “The Anthropocene” *The Guardian*
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/may/30/anthropocene-epoch-have-we-entered-a-new-phase-of-planetary-history>
 - Pacheco-Vega “The Environment”
 - Taberner et al “[Trump’s success and COP’s failures have placed us firmly on the ‘highway to climate hell’](#)”
 - *Recommended:*
 - Thomas Homer-Dixon (1994), “Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict”
 - Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons”

For useful background, review:

- Climate Science Basics (per the 2016 EPA):
<https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/climatechange.html>

- Global Limits TED Talk:
http://www.ted.com/talks/johan_rockstrom_let_the_environment_guide_our_development

B. Climate Change Governance

- a. Taberner et al “Trump’s success and COP’s failures have placed us firmly on the ‘highway to climate hell” *The Conversation*
- b. Michael Mann “Lifestyle Changes Aren’t Enough to Save the Planet. Here’s What Could” *Time* <https://time.com/5669071/lifestyle-changes-climate-change/>

14. Human Rights & Human Security

A. Human Rights

- EIR Ch 10
- EIR Ch 9.2 – Non-governmental Organizations
- Franck “Are Human Rights Universal” *Foreign Affairs*

B. Human Rights and Non-State Actors

- Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, “Transnational Advocacy Networks in International Politics”

15. The Future of the World Order

A. The Future of World Politics

- Richard Haass, “[How a World Order Ends](#),” *Foreign Affairs* (Jan/Feb 2019)
- Beckley, “The Age of American Unilateralism” *Foreign Affairs* (Apr 2025)

Recommended

- The President’s Inbox, “[The Liberal World Order](#),” (podcast).

Final Exam: Tuesday, May 8, 10-11:50 a.m.

Bring a large bluebook

Note: Topics and readings may be subject to change at the discretion of your Instructor. Any change in the above schedule (e.g. the cancellation or rescheduling of a class or the hosting of the class by a guest other than your Instructor) will be noted as soon as possible through Blackboard.