

Contemporary International Problems: Big Ideas on International Relations
PSCI 4820.001
Spring 2012
W, 6:30–9:20 p.m.

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Course Description

Courses on contemporary problems naturally focus on specific issues, such as economic development, the environment, and so forth. This course, however, is grounded in “big ideas” relevant to many issues in international relations (IR). This course also eschews focus on scholarship strictly associated with the sub-field of IR as it is known in the discipline of political science. Rather, the course treats IR broadly, and in doing so considers ideas that bear on IR from the fields of biology, archeology, ecology, in addition to more main stream contributions by IR scholars. While the problems that the course entertains are contemporary, the readings draw broadly with respect to historical and substantive examples. The course is designed to provoke students to consider ideas, problems, dilemmas, etc., that are germane to IR. This provocation is stimulated through weekly discussions of the assigned material, rather than lecture. Ultimately, the goal of the course is to stimulate students to think about the “big picture” and the big ideas that are advanced by thinkers to address elements of the picture. Such elements can range from moral dilemmas, to biological imperatives, to leadership, to norms, and so forth.

Suggested Pre-requisite

Although it is not a formal pre-requisite, knowledge of the material covered in PSCI 3810 (Introduction to International Relations) is helpful, as a number of theories and terms that appear in that course are relevant to the study of American foreign policy. If you have not taken PSCI 3810, you should consider doing so prior to taking this course.

Reading Materials

The following reading materials are required for the course (in the order that we will be considered for discussion, so that you can purchase them incrementally.) They are available at the UNT bookstore and other booksellers:

1. *The Selfish Gene: 30th Anniversary Edition*—with a new Introduction by the Author [Paperback] Richard Dawkins (Author) ISBN-13: 978-0199291151 384 pages
2. *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* [Paperback] Francis Fukuyama (Author) ISBN-13: 978-0374227340 608 pages
3. *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (New Studies in Archaeology) [Paperback] Joseph A. Tainter ISBN-13: 978-0521386739 264 pages

4. *Day of Empire: How Hyperpowers Rise to Global Dominance—and Why They Fall* [Paperback] Amy Chua (Author) ISBN-13: 978-1400077410 432 pages
5. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Studies in Environment and History) [Paperback] Alfred W. Crosby (Author) ISBN-13: 978-0521546188 390 pages
6. *The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions Are Changing World Politics* (The Norton Series in World Politics) [Hardcover] Kathryn Sikkink (Author) ISBN-13: 978-0393079937 342 pages
7. *Winning the War on War: The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* [Hardcover] Joshua S. Goldstein (Author) ISBN-13: 978-0525952534 400 pages
8. *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior is Almost Always Good Politics* [Hardcover] Bruce Bueno de Mesquita (Author), Alastair Smith (Author) ISBN-13: 978-1610390446 352 pages

A note about books in electronic form, such as Kindle editions and e-books. Students in a different, but similarly structured, course (PSCI4830: American Foreign Policy) reported that electronic books were not particularly conducive to the nature of book discussion, what with its rapid jumping from one location to another in a text. So, you might wish to try an e-book and see how it goes, before deciding to go either the e-book or hard copy route entirely.

Class Format

The foundation of this course is discussion of course readings. During the first half of the weekly class, students will discuss the assigned readings in small groups. Following a break, the class as a whole will discuss the readings with the instructor serving as the lead.

UNT Blackboard

Student attendance, grades, etc., will be posted on the UNT Blackboard system. Additional information regarding upcoming course activities, adjustments to plans, etc., will also be posted on Blackboard *students are responsible for this information*. Hence, students should check their Blackboard account regularly.

Student Responsibilities

Weekly Meetings

Attendance will be taken for this course during the first 5 minutes of class. Students are expected to arrive to class each Wednesday evening having read the assigned readings for the week. *Participation* means actively engaging the course material, not merely showing up in the classroom and sitting quietly. If you pursue the latter strategy, you will not receive credit for participation. Quality of contributions, rather than simply volume, is the goal. Participation in small and large group formats will account for 30% of a student's final grade. Midterm evaluation of student participation will be reported on Blackboard during the week of Feb. 29.

Exam

There will be one essay-exam on April 11. The question(s) will be drawn from the material covered in the course readings and in-class discussion. An exam preparation discussion will be held during class on April 4. The exam contributes 40% toward the student's final grade. Please bring a bluebook exam booklet and blue/black pen to the exam.

Simulation & Paper

A simulation will be conducted in class during our April 18, 25, and May 2 meetings. Attendance is *required* during all simulation days. The paper requires students to integrate ideas contained in the course readings and discussions with behavior observed during the simulation in an analysis of approximately 10 double-spaced pages. The semester paper must be uploaded by Wednesday, May 9 in the Blackboard system. Additional information regarding the paper will be forthcoming as the semester progresses. The paper will contribute 30% to each student's final grade.

Calendar

<i>Week 1</i>	Jan. 18	Course Introduction
<i>Week 2</i>	Jan. 25	Dawkins
<i>Week 3</i>	Feb. 1	Fukuyama, Parts I–II
<i>Week 5</i>	Feb. 8	Fukuyama, Parts III–V
<i>Week 6</i>	Feb. 15	Tainter
<i>Week 7</i>	Feb. 22	Chua
<i>Week 8</i>	Feb. 29	Crosby
	Participation Evaluation Posted on BB	
<i>Week 9</i>	Mar. 7	Sikkink
<i>Week 10</i>	Mar. 14	Goldstein
<i>Week 11</i>	Mar. 21	SPRING BREAK
<i>Week 12</i>	Mar. 28	Bueno de Mesquita & Smith
<i>Week 13</i>	Apr. 4	Exam Preparation
<i>Week 14</i>	Apr. 11	EXAM
<i>Week 15</i>	Apr. 18	Simulation
<i>Week 16</i>	Apr. 25	Simulation
<i>Week 17</i>	May 2	Simulation/Debriefing
<i>Week 18</i>	Wed., May 9	Paper Uploaded to Blackboard by 7 p.m.

Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism

The UNT Code of Student Conduct and Discipline defines cheating and plagiarism as the use of unauthorized books, notes, or otherwise securing help in a test; copying others' tests, assignments, reports, or term papers; representing the work of another as one's own; collaborating without authority with another student during an examination or in preparing academic work; or otherwise practicing scholastic dishonesty. Normally, the minimum penalty for cheating or plagiarism is grade of "F" in the course. In the case of graduate departmental exams, the minimum penalty shall be the failure of all fields of the exam. Determination of cheating or plagiarism shall be made by the instructor in the course, or by the field faculty in the case of departmental exams. Cases of cheating or plagiarism on graduate departmental exams, theses, or dissertations shall automatically be referred to the departmental Graduate Studies Committee. Cases of cheating or plagiarism in ordinary course work may, at the discretion of the instructor, be referred to the Undergraduate Studies Committee in the case of undergraduate students, or the Graduate Studies Committee in the case of graduate students. These committees, acting as agents of the department chair, shall impose further penalties, or recommend further penalties to the Dean of Students, if they determine that the case warrants it. In all cases, the Dean of Students shall be informed in writing of the case. Students may appeal a decision under this policy by following the procedures laid down in the UNT Code of Student Conduct and Discipline.

Statement of ADA Compliance

The Political Science Department cooperates with the Office of Disability Accommodation to make reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Please present your written accommodation request on or before the second week of classes.