Seminar in International Relations Theory  
*PLSC 40600*  

Fall 2017

**Time:** Wednesday, 9:30 am – 12:20 pm  

**Room:** Pick Hall 506  

**Professor:** Austin Carson, Department of Political Science, acarson@uchicago.edu  

**Office hours:** Tues 11am-12pm & Weds 1pm-2pm. Pick Hall 428. Sign up for a slot here: http://acarson.uchicago.edu/page/office-hours.

**Course description**  
This course is a Ph.D.-level survey of the major scholarly traditions and debates in the field of International Relations. It provides an introduction to the central theoretical approaches including realism, liberalism, and constructivism and their variants. The course also exposes students to more recent non-paradigmatic research programs, reflections on the field’s development over time, and the recurring “meta-debates” which underlie many of the differences in applied areas. Seminar discussion will identify and criticize the central arguments advanced by different scholars in order to assess the relative merits of different theoretical perspectives. The course is designed to help students prepare for the Department’s IR general exam. Assigned and suggested readings are a starting point for building a reading list; the course offers practice with answering exam questions; students will exercise modes of critical analysis during seminar important for passing the exam.

**Required texts**  
The following books are assigned in their entirety (or close to it). I recommend purchasing them. Editions generally do no matter unless noted.  

The following books are also very influential and have a chunk assigned. You may also want to purchase some/all. Editions generally do no matter unless noted.  

All articles should be available through UChicago library resources. It is your responsibility to work with other students in class to divide labor of finding and scanning book chapters for books that are not assigned in their entirety. Please coordinate using this Google Drive spreadsheet.

Requirements
Students are expected to attend every session and complete the assigned readings. The class grade will be based on the following. More details will be provided in class.
- Seminar participation (35%)
- Review essay (25%)
- Comp exam essay (40%)

Seminar participation (35%). In general, students should come to seminar with all assigned readings completed and thoughtfully contribute to discussion each week. Be mindful of over-participating; quality beats quantity. A good rule of thumb is to make three to four quality comments per week. Each student will also lead discussion of specific reading(s) several times during the term. Discussion leaders are expected to kick off discussion of specific readings with an oral summary; specifics vary by week. Sign up for roles throughout the quarter will take place during Week 1. Grading of summaries will be based on substantive accuracy and clarity of presentation. I will provide a template for slides that students may use. I take student discomfort with verbal contributions in a seminar setting seriously. Please meet with me during office hours to discuss strategies and alternatives if you foresee or are struggling with this part of the course.

Review essay (25%). Each student will write a review essay of scholarly work anywhere on this syllabus (assigned or suggested) on a topic of their choice. Students may choose to review either a pair of books or four articles. The review should summarize each entry individually and also compare/contrast among them. The best papers will also identify a promising direction for future research based on points made in their reviewing. Examples of review essays can be found in Perspectives on Politics, International Organization, and World Politics; there are also several on this syllabus. Due by email (acarson@uchicago.edu) end of Week 6 (Friday Nov 3rd) at midnight. Max 12 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 point font, 1-inch margins.
Comp exam essay (40%). Students will respond to an essay prompt modeled on the International Relations Ph.D. comprehensive exam. The question will address an enduring question in IR. Students will be sent the essay prompt by email and have eight hours to write. The format is open book/note. Essays are only expected to draw on assigned readings on this syllabus. Students are strongly encouraged to develop a system for managing their notes at the beginning of the quarter. More details, including citation details and strategies for preparing, will be given in class. “Exam” day is **Tuesday, December 5th**. I will email the prompt to the class before 8 am; essays are due by 5 pm that day and should be sent as Word or PDF docs to acarson@uchicago.edu. Max 12 pages double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 point font, 1-inch margins.

**A note on content**
This syllabus is designed to avoid duplication of content in other graduate seminars. Those planning to take the Ph.D. comprehensive exam should consult the other syllabi by IR faculty for complete coverage of the field.

**Important suggestions**
Two tips about staying organized and note-taking. Think long-term about your notes. Experiment with systems that store and organize notes in a way that they can be used for years after. (I still consult my own notes I took in my Autumn 2007 IR field seminar during grad school!) In addition, try to specifically find ways to blend notes on “forest thinking” and “trees thinking.” It is important to have detailed notes on each reading; however, close reading can often obscure the big picture. You might include a step in your notes process that forces you to step back and articulate the big ideas, such as a mandatory five sentence summary for each reading placed above more detailed notes. You should also experiment with reference management systems. These can be an incredible efficiency boon, reducing the time you spend on works cited and helping organize your materials. I use Zotero and Bibtex. I recommend both.

**Professionalism**
Our seminar will be its own term-long community with an intellectual culture we co-create. My goal is for all of us to feel comfortable participating in developing and rigorously testing our ideas. To ensure this, all of us must follow basic norms of respectful intellectual exchange. Be professional in all communications (including emails). Comments in class should be respectful of other students. Avoid a confrontational tone; respectfully disagree by suggesting a different view rather than forcefully contradicting. Essential to this environment is abstaining from acts of sexual misconduct, which encompass a range of conduct from sexual assault to sexual harassment. These will be treated as violations of the standards of our community and are unacceptable. Other forms of misconduct based on race, religion, or sexual orientation are equally unacceptable. One useful university resource on gender-based misconduct is [here](#).

**Email policy**
Note that in general I may not read or respond to student emails until the evening; on weekends, I often do not read/respond at all. Do not expect immediate replies.

**Late policy**
All deadlines are strict. Papers/assignments received late will be dropped a full letter grade for each 24 hours past the deadline.
**Incompletes policy**
While rare, I will consider granting incompletes to students in two situations: 1) under extreme personal/family duress; or, 2) after being convinced that only with extra time can the student execute a particularly ambitious, creative, and promising critical literature review. All incompletes (and, relatedly, “pass/fail” arrangements) must be worked out in advance.

**Academic integrity**
I will strictly follow the University’s policy on academic integrity: “It is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another’s statements or ideas as one's own work.” More details on the policy are [here](#).

**Disability accommodations**
If you need any special accommodations, please provide me with a copy of an Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Services office) as soon as possible so that you may discuss with him/her how your accommodations may be implemented in this course.
Overview

Week 0. Background and Big Picture

Week 1. International System I: Structure as Material Polarity

Week 2. International System II: Other Kinds of Structure

Week 3. The Domestic Turn I: Regime Type and War

Week 4. The Domestic Turn II: Other IVs and DVs

Week 5. Why Cooperate? Rational Cooperation among States
Institutions facilitate interstate cooperation ............................................................ 24
Compliance ............................................................................................................. 25
Critique: relative gains and distributional uncertainty ........................................ 25

Week 6. How to Cooperate? Variation in Design of Institutions ................................ 26
Institutional design and rational cooperation ....................................................... 26
Power and design ............................................................................................... 26
International law and legalization ...................................................................... 27
International courts ............................................................................................ 27
WTO (lots on this IO in particular) ....................................................................... 27
Constructivist alternatives .................................................................................. 28

Week 7. Varieties of Realism ................................................................................. 29
General histories of realism ............................................................................... 29
Classical realisms and reinterpretations ............................................................... 29
Offensive vs. defensive realism (incl security dilemma) ....................................... 29
Balance of threat vs. power ................................................................................ 30
Neoclassical realism ......................................................................................... 30
Bargaining model of war .................................................................................... 30

Week 8. International Political Economy ............................................................. 32
Trade (see also Domestic Turn II) ........................................................................ 32
Legalization ......................................................................................................... 33
Monetary policy .................................................................................................. 33
Foreign investment .............................................................................................. 33
Other frameworks/approaches ............................................................................ 34

Week 9. Communication: Signals, Perceptions, and Inferences ............................. 35
Costly signalling and other signals ...................................................................... 35
Reputation ........................................................................................................... 36
Perceptions and misperceptions .......................................................................... 36
Secrecy, deception, misrepresentation ................................................................. 37
Learning, analogies, metaphors, use of history .................................................. 37

Week 10. Actors Other Than States: Firms, NGOs, Rebels, IOs, Diplomats .............. 38
End of the Cold War (i.e. why the non-state turn came when it did) ...................... 38
Rebels/insurgents ............................................................................................... 38
Terrorism ............................................................................................................ 38
Private sector for-profit actors .......................................................................... 39
NGO/Advocacy .................................................................................................. 39
IOs as independent actors .................................................................................. 39
Diplomats & practices ....................................................................................... 40
**Week 0. Background and Big Picture**

This is not a real week! Nothing here is assigned and none will be covered in class. These are for reference only. It includes writings about the historical evolution of IR as a field, debates about the biggest changes that have come to make the modern international order what it is (“core features”), and work that addresses underlying differences which tend to crop up again and again in more specific debates (“meta-debates”). Especially useful for exam studying purposes and/or if you want to teach IR theory in the future.

**Required readings**

NONE. This is for reference only. Go to Week 1 for the first assigned readings.

**Other important work**

**History of the field & the “Great Debates”**

**Historiography and Great Debates**


**Paradigms**


Core features of the modern international order

Overviews of the international order


Sovereign state


Multilateralism


Nationalism and decolonization


**Nuclear revolution**


**Liberalism: economic & political**


**Meta-debates**

*Ideational vs. material variables*


*Agent vs. structure*


Rational choice and other logics of action


Real world relevance


Week 1. International System I: Structure as Material Polarity
The central theme in this opening week is that international structure – defined narrowly as military capabilities, the number of great powers in the system, and the balance among them – is key to understanding war, (in)stability, free trade, and other outcomes. Waltz looms large this week.

Required readings

Other important work
Levels of analysis
Polarity and war proneness
Polarity and alliance/balancing


Hegemonic stability theory / economic outcomes


Unipolarity


Empire and IR


Anarchy/hierarchy


Power transition theories
**Week 2. International System II: Other Kinds of Structure**

This week maintains the focus on international structure but widens what we consider as “system” and “structure,” including ideas, culture, complexity, networks, and transnational linkages.

*Note: formal international organizations as feature of structure addressed in Weeks 5 and 6.*

**Required readings**


**Other important work**

*Systemic ideas: constructivism overview*


*Systemic ideas: constructivism and norms*

(See also NGOs/advocacy networks, Week 10)


**Systemic ideas: English School**


**System & legitimacy**


**System complexity**


See also 2011 special issue of Cambridge Review of International Affairs on “Complexity and the international arena.”

**System as network**


**Week 3. The Domestic Turn I: Regime Type and War**

This week covers the most influential disciplinary shift in the last twenty years: the turn to domestic politics. This week focuses on work addressing formal domestic political institutions and outcomes related to interstate conflict, especially Democratic Peace Theory, the democratic advantage thesis, and audience cost theory.

*Note: see also neoclassical realism in the week on realisms (Week 7).*

### Required readings


### Other important work

*End of the Cold War (i.e. why the domestic turn came when it did)*


*Overviews of domestic turn*


*Regime type and war: Democratic Peace Theory and critics*


Kant, Immanuel. Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch. 1795.


Debs, Alexandre, and H.E. Goemans. “Regime Type, the Fate of Leaders, and War.” American Political Science Review 104, no. 03 (August 2010): 430–445.


(See also: Symposium on Rosato’s “Flawed Logic of DPT,” American Political Science Review 99, no. 3 (2005).)


Bell, Duncan. “Before the Democratic Peace: Racial Utopianism, Empire and the Abolition of War.” European Journal of International Relations 20, no. 3 (September 1, 2014): 647–70.


Regime type and war: other


Regime type and coercion: audience cost theory

Is it economic liberalism / capitalism, not regime type?
Week 4. The Domestic Turn II: Other IVs and DVs

This week covers a range of other work focusing on domestic dynamics besides regime type and outcomes besides war. This former includes domestic societal interactions, domestic public opinion, and specific leaders. Outcomes beyond war include trade, international legal compliance, and foreign policy decisions.

Required readings

Other important work
Domestic society/sectors and war

Domestic politics and nuclear weapons

Domestic politics and economic outcomes
(See IPE Week 8)
Leaders

Domestic constructivisms


Domestic public opinion (a sampling)


Interdependence


Bureaucracy


Krasner, Stephen D. “Are Bureaucracies Important? (Or Allison Wonderland).” Foreign Policy, no. 7 (1972): 159–79.


Week 5. Why Cooperate? Rational Cooperation among States

The unifying theme of all “Liberalisms” is that, under certain conditions, states have a rational interest in cooperating rather than fighting. This week focuses on early applications of game theory that helped shed light on unitary states’ rational interest in cooperation under anarchy, as well as the factors that shape that interest (i.e. iteration; discount rate). It also features early work on formal international institutions (often called “regimes” at that point) facilitating that cooperation.

Required readings


Other important work

Early game theory & rationality of cooperation


Institutions facilitate interstate cooperation

Haas, Ernst B. The Uniting of Europe. Stanford UP, 1958.


Compliance


Critique: relative gains and distributional uncertainty


Week 6. How to Cooperate? Variation in Design of Institutions
This week shifts the focus to the various ways states can, including different features of formal international organizations, treaties, and international law that influence gains/losses. The central themes are: 1) explaining why international organizations and other institutions vary so much in form, and 2) identifying how specific features of international organizations, interstate treaties, and international law influence states’ rational incentives to cooperate. Some works abandon the unitary state model by incorporating domestic political dynamics (a la Weeks 3 and 4).

NOTE: review essays due by Friday midnight of this week (Nov 3)

Required readings

Other important work
Institutional design and rational cooperation

Power and design


International law and legalization


International courts


WTO (lots on this IO in particular)


Constructivist alternatives
Week 7. Varieties of Realism
This week returns to themes from Week 2. “Realism” is the reference point for all IR theory for good reason: it is the oldest, most coherent theoretical paradigm in the discipline. Yet “Realism” is, in reality, a motley crew. We review some of the diversity in realist theory, focusing on classic texts that preceded Waltz’s Theory of International Politics and debates within realism that followed it. One method of formalizing realism, the bargaining model of war, is also introduced.

Required readings

Other important work
General histories of realism

Classical realisms and reinterpretations

Offensive vs. defensive realism (incl security dilemma)


Balance of threat vs. power

Kaufman, Robert G. “‘To Balance or To Bandwagon?’ Alignment Decisions in 1930s Europe.” Security Studies 1, no. 3 (March 1, 1992): 417–47.


Neoclassical realism


Bargaining model of war

Week 8. International Political Economy

This week addresses the politics of economic transactions across borders. The dominant focus is on trade in goods. This includes a large literature on the determinants of trade openness as well as studies of the role of treaties/IOs. It also features work on monetary policy, sovereign debt, and foreign direct investment.

Note: See Prof. Bobby Gulotty’s seminar on IPE for more. You may also consider Prof. Paul Poast’s seminar on IPE and security.

Required readings


Other important work (see Gulotty syllabus for more)

Trade (see also Domestic Turn II)


Gruber, Lloyd. “Power Politics and the Free Trade Bandwagon.” Comparative Political Studies 34, no. 7 (September 1, 2001): 703–41.


Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., Zachary C. Steinert-Threlkeld, and David G. Victor. “Predictability versus Flexibility: Secrecy in International Investment Arbitration.” World Politics 68, no. 3 (June 23, 2016): 413–53.

Other frameworks/approaches
Week 9. Intentions: Signals, Perceptions, and Inferences

This week’s work addresses a fundamental problem in relations among states: understanding others’ intentions. This includes how states express their preferences/intentions/goals, how other states perceive one another, and how states manipulate both. Topics include images, signals, audiences, inferences, and (mis)perceptions. On the reception side, it includes work on the role of perceived reputation and status in assessments as well as the psychological, emotional, bureaucratic, and learning dynamics that can influence inferences.

Note: see also signaling in DPT and domestic politics in Weeks 3-4; defensive vs. offensive realism debates are also relevant (Week 7). Also see my PLSC 40605 “Recent Debates” syllabus for weeks on impact of race and emotions on perceptions.

Required readings


Other important work


Costly signalling and other signals


Reputation


Perceptions and misperceptions


Yarhi-Milo, Keren. Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations. Princeton UP, 2014.

Secrecy, deception, misrepresentation

Learning, analogies, metaphors, use of history
Week 10. Beyond States: Firms, NGOs, Rebels, IOs
Another big innovation in the last two decades is a range of research that gives agency to non-state actors. This includes everything from scientists and the environment to lawyers and human rights to IOs addressing traditional security. A theme throughout these disparate research programs is the causal importance of actors besides the state such as firms, non-governmental advocacy groups and networks, and international organizations and their bureaucrats.

Note: See Prof. Paul Staniland’s seminar on civil wars for more on rebel/insurgent groups.

Required readings

Other important work
End of the Cold War (i.e. why the non-state turn came when it did)

Rebels/insurgents
See Staniland syllabus.

Terrorism


Private sector for-profit actors
(See also Gulotty IPE syllabus)


NGO/Advocacy


IOs as independent actors


Diplomats & practices

Comp “exam” is Tuesday, December 5th
Prompt emailed out by 8 am, essay due by 5 pm
Send to acarson@uchicago.edu