

Theories of International Relations

Tuesdays: 12:30 – 3:15 in Maxwell 402 or Zoom *

Professor Audie Klotz

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Office hours: Mondays 2:30-4:30 or by appointment (in Eggers 330 or Zoom) *

* Covid contingencies: Some people need to attend virtually, and anyone can request a virtual meeting or appointment. We will discuss whether to record any sessions. Please wear masks in the classroom for community safety and to protect individual health privacy. We will adapt further if necessary.

Objectives: This course serves primarily as the foundation for the Political Science PhD field exam in International Relations and secondarily as a gateway to additional coursework or dissertation research. Anyone in another program may request to modify assignments.

We will cover basic theoretical vocabulary and sample major debates. Readings concentrate on contemporary writings, by both established and early-career scholars. Since we cannot possibly cover all topics, assignments point you to related literature. You will also have opportunities to determine some topics and readings.

Since my overarching goal is for each of you to develop an independent analytical voice, I will guide you in the use of numerous theories as thinking tools. You will:

- ✓ Employ contending conceptions about structures and agents to differentiate key features of the international system.
- ✓ Assess analytical claims about power in the international system, based on logic and evidence.
- ✓ Diversify the historical and geographical scope of your knowledge about the international system.
- ✓ Hone your reading, writing, and speaking skills.

Assignments: The weekly Schedule below provides required readings as well as guidelines for written assignments, which we will discuss further. I will circulate additional guidelines for participation. *I may ask you to share written work with other members of the class. Enrollment serves as your acceptance of this policy.*

You can access readings directly through the library or in folders (with pdf-files or web links) on Blackboard <blackboard.syr.edu> (BB). In part to facilitate compliance with accessibility standards, we use digitized materials, i.e., journal articles and e-books

rather than scanned book chapters. In part to remedy citation biases, we concentrate on relatively recent publications. We sample a range of publishing outlets, too.

While this course does not require any background in International Relations, I do sometimes take familiarity with terminology for granted. Be sure to ask for clarification or elaboration at any time. For those without much background, I recommend perusing relevant selections in *Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, ed. C. Reus-Smit and D. Snidal (Oxford, 2008), available as an e-book via the library and frequently linked in the weekly folders. Do not hesitate request – or recommend – more resources; I continually add links on BB.

I base grades on weighted components, while also considering factors such as significant improvement or extenuating circumstances:

- Participation (20%) – you should always complete the required readings before class and arrive with questions (see additional guidelines).
- Discussion leadership (10%) – groups will guide the conversation for one topic, to be selected early in the semester (see additional guidelines).
- Reviews (three short papers, 15% each, 45% total) – you will respond to specific tasks, based on additional reading (see instructions below).
- Take-home essay (25%) – you will answer a question modeled on the PhD field exam (but anyone taking the course primarily for research may propose an alternative literature review).

Technology: For a plethora of reasons, I no longer regulate the use of devices in the classroom. Avoid distractions or distracting other people. Any persistently disrespectful behavior will negatively impact participation grades.

We will decide at the first session whether to record on Zoom. If we lack a consensus, the default will be not to record. *Enrollment serves as your agreement not to share any recordings on social media.*

In line with university privacy policies, I rely on email communication using your <syr.edu> account, which is also the default for announcements via BB. If you prefer to use a different email address, be sure to set a “forward” from your university account. The best way to contact me is by email or talk with me after class. For confidential or longer conversations, sign up for office hours or make an appointment.

Integrity: Plagiarism is, unfortunately, a concern even at the graduate level, so you will submit all written assignments via TurnItIn links on BB. *Enrollment serves as an agreement to have your papers become part of the TurnItIn database, for the sole purpose of detecting plagiarism* (including by other students from you).

Keep in mind that TurnItIn provides many other useful tools, such as the Originality match, which can improve your paraphrasing. Online submission also enables me to provide quicker feedback.

Be aware that SU [policies](#) govern academic integrity, including serious sanctions for dishonesty of any sort. To minimize such potential problems, we will routinely discuss proper citation and paraphrasing, along with a range of other professional expectations. I retain the option to use grade penalties for infractions, including course failure. If in doubt, ask questions prior to submission.

Accommodations: Students who might need disability-related accommodation should contact [Disability services](#) to get an Accommodation Authorization Letter, after which we can make appropriate arrangements. If you have any other constraints (e.g., childcare) that may impact your full participation in the course, feel free to discuss those with me. While I try to use procedures and platforms that avoid barriers, I do not know all possibilities; please raise issues or make suggestions.

Absences: People miss class for a plethora of legitimate reasons. I operate on the honor system and do not ask for documentation. If you are ill, or if any other unexpected circumstances prevent your presence in class, please send me an email (once you can). If needed, we will work out alternative deadlines for any assignments. Also, SU provides the option for anyone to reschedule an assignment due to a conflict with faith-based holidays; you can register via MySlice (under Student Services) at the start of the semester. Caveat: I might require an alternative method to demonstrate engagement, especially for anyone frequently absent.

Resources: One of the many support services provided by the university may be particularly salient for this course, because we talk often about war and rights violations. If any of the topics that we cover leave you feeling anxious or stressed, please consider making an appointment at the [Counseling Center](#), 315-443-8000 (any time).

Since faculty are “mandatory reporters” about sexual assault, I cannot promise confidentiality. Anyone affected, directly or indirectly, can find confidential support through the Counseling Center or the Ombudsperson. Please be aware that anyone working as a Teaching Assistant is also a mandatory reporter – if this is news, contact your supervising faculty member!

Schedule

8/31: Overview

What is theory? Where do we see theories? (Handouts will also posted on BB.)

9/7: Purposes of Theory

How and why does the field cluster theories into schools of thought (or “paradigms” or “traditions”)? What criteria should we use to assess theories? Who decides? Read the listed articles that introduce special issues in two of the main journals. Also skim ahead in the schedule to start thinking about preferred topic or date of group leadership.

Tim Dunne, Lene Hansen, and Colin Wight, “The End of International Relations Theory?” [European Journal of International Relations](#) [EJIR] 19 (3), 2013, 405-425, **and skim one article of your choice** in this special issue.

David Lake, Lisa Martin, and Thomas Risse, “Challenges to the Liberal Order: Reflections on *International Organization*,” [International Organization](#) [IO] 75 (2), 2021, 225-257, and **skim the table of contents** for this special issue.

Part 1: The Nature of the International System

In this first half of the course, we identify ways in which theories build on assumptions about the nature (“ontology”) of the international system. Often major disagreements are due to divergent premises, not explanatory claims. Yet convergent assumptions do not guarantee similar analyses. We will explore these distinctions and debates through two common dichotomies: anarchy/hierarchy and material/ideational power. (You will encounter other categorizations, none inherently right or wrong; they each privilege certain characteristics over others.) By the end of this section, you should know basic conceptual vocabulary that underpins major theoretical traditions and be able to identify core premises of specific works (in the next section and in your research).

9/14: Anarchy

Defined foremost by “Realists” as the absence of (empire or) world government, “anarchy” remains perhaps the most widespread key assumption. This premise is also taken as a starting point by many of their critics, including some “Liberals” and “Constructivists.”

Jeffrey Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited,” [International Security](#) [IS] 25 (3), 2000: 128-161

Jack Donnelly, “The Discourse of Anarchy in IR,” [International Theory](#) [IT] 7 (3), 2015: 393-425

Pandemic application: *IO* published a special online supplement ([S1](#), December 2020). Compare and contrast use of “anarchy” by Daniel Drezner (“The Song Remains the Same”) and Tanisha Fazal (“Health Diplomacy”). Of course, you can read or skim other contributions too.

9/21: Hierarchy

Whether theorists view institutions as “thin” (e.g., international society) or “thick” (e.g., patriarchy) leads to variations in conceptions of hierarchy as differential status within an anarchical system or as the fundamental nature of that system. Debates within and about the “English School” illustrate this range.

Shogo Suzuki, “Japan’s Socialization into Janus-Faced European International Society,” [EJIR](#) 11(1), 2005: 137-164

Ann Towns, “The Status of Women as a Standard of ‘Civilization,’” [EJIR](#) 15(4), 2009: 681-706

Ayşe Zarakol, “Sovereign Equality as Misrecognition,” [Review of International Studies](#) 44 (5), 2018: 848-862

Peruse guidelines and select a book for Review #2 (due 10/19)

9/28: Review #1 due by class on BB – be prepared to “pitch” your nominee

IO annually honors an early career scholar, who published an article in the journal that year, with its [Keohane Award](#). Imagine that you serve on a committee to select one of the articles published thus far in 2021 (except for the special issue, which went through a unique review process). Online “First View” articles count, as do coauthored articles by (only) early career scholars. (*IO* defines early career as untenured.)

Write a rationale for your choice, to share among the other committee members (actually, your classmates). These memos (maximum 500 words, ~two pages) should concisely summarize the research and its strengths, despite any weaknesses. Include a paragraph at the end that explains why you rank this article as meritorious compared to (at least) one other contender for the prize (e.g., similar topics).

10/5: Material Power

When mapping out three paradigms in the 1980s, Robert Gilpin included Marxism, along with Realism and Liberalism, as pillars of the field. Since then, its prominence declined, for reasons we can discuss, even while remaining essential in cognate fields (e.g., sociology). Like other schools of thought, Marxism splits into multiple variants, so we will sideline debates over labels. Instead, we will compare materialist arguments.

Christopher Layne, “The Waning of U. S. Hegemony – Myth or Reality? A Review Essay,” [IS](#) 34 (1), 2009: 147-172

Sean Starrs, "American Economic Power Hasn't Declined – It Globalized! Summoning the Data and Taking Globalization Seriously," [*International Studies Quarterly*](#) [ISQ] 57 (4), 2013: 817–830

Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, "Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion," [*IS*](#) 44 (1), 2019: 42-79

Lina Benabdallah, "Spanning Thousands of Miles and Years: Political Nostalgia and China's Revival of the Silk Road," [*ISQ*](#) 65 (2), 2021: 294–305

10/12: Ideational Power

The so-called First Great Debate pitted "realists" against "idealists," thus delegitimizing many ideational approaches. By the 1990s, however, both Liberal and Constructivist claims had undermined this dichotomy, opening theoretical debates about many forms of "ideas" (e.g., beliefs, norms, ideologies). As a focal point, we will sample gender analyses, with an eye toward conceptualizations of power.

Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True, "An Intersectional Analysis of International Relations: Recasting the Discipline," [*Politics & Gender*](#) 4 (1), 2008: 156-173

Jamie Hagen, "Queering Women, Peace and Security," [*International Affairs*](#) 92 (2), 2016: 313–332

Helen Kinsella and Laura Shepherd, "Well, What is the Feminist Perspective on International Affairs? Theory/Practice," [*International Affairs*](#) 95 (6), 2019: 1209–1213

[*One less article this week gives you a little more time for the book review.*]

10/19: Review #2 due by class on BB – be prepared to explain your book

Select one book from the list below – all written by early career scholars, published recently by major presses in the field. (Click on publisher link for details.) No need to buy any of these books; all will be available through Bird Library, as an e-book or physical copy on one day reserve. (One option is an open-access e-book.)

Write a review that assesses the book in the context of a bigger question or debate. Typically book reviews do not exceed 1000 words yet manage to provide a coherent overview that balances praise and criticism. Keep in mind that there is no template. Submit prior to class as preparation for discussion.

Please avoid the temptation to search for reviews of your selected book on blogs or podcasts. If you want models, peruse reviews of other books in journals such as

Perspectives on Politics, International Studies Review (not to be confused with *Review of International Studies*), *Millennium*, and *International Affairs*.

Ba, *States of Justice* ([Cambridge](#) 2020, on reserve)

Hearson, *Imposing Standards* ([Cornell](#) 2021, open access e-book)

Kuo, *Following the Leader* ([Stanford](#) 2021, on reserve)

Alternatively, you may propose to review another very recent book, either from one of these presses or others. Provide me with a rationale at least two weeks in advance.

Part 2: Actors in the International System

Calls for “problem driven” research, instead of concentrating on questions derived from theoretical gaps, are increasing yet no consensus has emerged on how to organize this alternative agenda. Therefore, I have again organized sessions ontologically, now concentrating on agency, as one way to ask: “whose problems?” We will survey various conceptions of actors and their exercise of power, including topics that you choose. By the end of this second part of the course, you should see how alternative theoretical perspectives drive some of the current debates and which approaches are relevant to your own research.

Each week, we will read additional items posted on BB. As discussion leaders, you will help to select these topics and readings. (Peruse BB folders for topics in previous years.) Or we can start with a current policy concern and sample theoretically informed perspectives. Blogs or podcasts can be a useful place to get started.

10/28: Territories

Rather than revisiting debates about state sovereignty, we will delve into newer critiques that examine lasting effects of empires and imperialism.

Adom Getachew, “Universalism After the Post-Colonial Turn: Interpreting the Haitian Revolution,” *Political Theory* 44 (6), 2016: 821–845

Sheryl Lightfoot, “Decolonizing Self-Determination: Haudenosaunee Passports and Negotiated Sovereignty,” *EJIR*, OnlineFirst, July 2021

11/2: Interests

Rather than revisiting state-centric debates about national interests, we will delve into debates about the autonomy of non-state actors that critique presumptions about material and ideational interests.

Susan Sell and Aseem Prakash, "Using Ideas Strategically: The Contest between Business and NGO Networks in Intellectual Property Rights," [ISQ](#) 48 (1), March 2004: 143-175.

Amanda Kennard, "Enemy of My Enemy: When Firms Support Climate Change Regulation," [IO](#) 74(2), 187-221 [most recent Keohane Award winner]

11/9: Identities

We look beyond the conflation of identity with nationalism.

Srdjan Vucetic, "A Racialized Peace? How Britain and the US Made Their Relationship Special," [Foreign Policy Analysis](#) 7 (4), 2011: 403-421

Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit, "Is Securitization Theory Racist? Civilizationism, Methodological Whiteness, and Antiblack Thought in the Copenhagen School," [Security Dialogue](#) 51 (1), 2020: 3-22

11/16: Review #3 due by class on BB

We will select one recent article for everyone to review. Use blog style, with 500-word maximum length. Expect to share your writing (procedures to be decided).

11/23 – No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

11/30: Topic(s) to be decided

We will decide, collectively, what to cover this week. Options include the role of theory in policy-oriented writings, debates over old or new canons, or journals that did not get enough attention. We can address professional development or "hidden curriculum" questions, not limited to the dissertation process. Expect a few readings or other materials (e.g., perhaps podcasts or blogs).

12/7: Draft Essays

To mimic the exam setting, I will distribute a few questions at the start of class. You will immediately outline a response to one question, for about an hour. Then we will discuss your preliminary answers and potential revisions.

12/14: Essay due on BB by midnight

I am only slightly flexible on this deadline. Any extensions need to be negotiated at least one day in advance, with a new firm deadline. If you need more time, then we should discuss a formal incomplete.

Guidelines for Participation

Participation counts for 20% of your course grade. Baseline expectations: You should engage in discussion, both consistently and constructively. Of course, your presence in the (physical or virtual) classroom is essential. Each of us, regardless of personality differences, can take simple steps to improve classroom conversations. You will also complete asynchronous short assignments to equalize opportunities for people to offer their perspectives.

Traditionally, academic coursework emphasizes reading and writing while often omitting attention to speaking skills as techniques that everyone can improve. Consequently, we tend to cluster people by personalities, which often results in talkative people dominating conversations. Yet some people who voice their opinions freely may contribute less than those who say insightful things less frequently. Some people feel comfortable plunging into heated debate, whereas others want time to ponder before joining the conversation.

To break this cycle, each of us can make a few commitments:

If you are generally a talkative person, I encourage you to exercise restraint and make efforts to engage quieter classmates. For starters, consider whether you truly listen and respond to others. You might try acting like an ethnographer, while waiting until others have contributed at least once. (You can let me know if this goal will keep you quiet.)

If you are generally a quiet person, I encourage you to avoid relying on “being shy” as justification for spectating. For starters, consider making a commitment to contribute at least once each session. You might offer a question or comment early on; this strategy enables you to influence the direction of discussion rather than having to jump into the middle of debate. (You can let me know in advance that you want an opening.)

Also, everyone will provide a few questions on the readings in writing before class, posted on a Discussion Board. For example, you might ask for clarifications if one of the readings covers unfamiliar conceptual terrain and you would like us to unpack the argument in class. Alternatively, maybe you are familiar with one (or more) of the readings and would like to suggest discussion questions for the group to ponder.

I will not explicitly grade your posts; they help us to prepare for discussion and allow you to influence our agenda. You do not need to “prove” you looked at every reading by writing up questions on each.

During Part 2 of the course, you will lead discussion as part of a group, for an additional 10% of your grade. I will cluster people into teams, based on a preliminary survey of your thematic and scheduling preferences. In consultation with me, each

group will select a specific topic and recommend one-to-two readings, or comparable materials. I expect groups to finalize materials no later than two weeks prior to the session.

Next, the group will create a plan for discussion. The possibilities are wide ranging, from the standard approach of formulating questions to designing role plays or using visual prompts. Whatever the technique, you should have a few key objectives – what you want people to learn by the end of the session. Consult with me about your plan at least a few days in advance.

I do not have a formal rubric for grading this assignment, because I start from a baseline premise that every group, and each member of the group, will deliver. My emphasis will be on the quality of your preparation, such as the selection of appropriate materials and timely consultation, rather than outcome. Even terrific plans do not always result in lively discussion. And occasionally, groups do not work well together.