

Politics Department: Subfield Guides for Undergraduates

International Relations

The field of International Relations includes the study of interaction between states, international law, non-state actors (i.e. Amnesty International, multinational firms, terrorists), and market forces. Courses explain questions that range from the causes of war to the sources of development. There are no specific International Relations courses required, and this memo is intended to provide advisory information to help guide students with their course selection.

A survey of the field is provided in POL240 (Introduction to International Relations). Students are recommended to take the course in their sophomore or junior year to gain a foundation in some of the basic theoretical and substantive issues in international relations.

In addition, students are encouraged to select one course from each of the two major subfields within international relations: security studies and international political economy/international organization. Security studies include the following courses: 380, 382, 387, 388, 389, 392, 393, 397, 399, and 462. International political economy/international organization course offerings include the following courses: 383, 385, 398, 440 and 478. POL381 represents an advanced theory course that includes topics in both security and IPE and may be taken either alone or as complement to POL240. POL313 addresses broad themes related to normative questions of cooperation in international affairs.

To prepare for writing a senior thesis, students should consider additional advanced seminars. For example, a student who expects to write a thesis about U.S. alliance strategies in East Asia might take POL240 Intro IR, POL385 IPE, and POL392 American Foreign Policy as foundation courses and pursue more advanced studies by taking POL393 Grand Strategy and POL462 IR East Asia.

Within course offerings of the politics department, there is close overlap among subfields. For example, a student who is interested in understanding the dynamics of civil wars will find that courses from both Comparative Politics and International Relations provide important insights. In addition, the study of International Relations draws upon research from many disciplines and students should look carefully for complementary cognates from other departments, especially WWS, economics, history, and sociology. Many students also successfully combine studies of International Relations with pursuit of a regional studies certificate and apply language skills and field research abroad in their thesis. Some International Relations students choose to use statistical analysis in their senior thesis, and gain the necessary skills by taking POL 345 and POL 346. Those with interest in applying formal models to topics of international relations should take POL 347. International Relations as a primary field may be combined with the Political Economy certificate program.

Course Offerings in International Relations

The listing below shows the range of course offerings based on courses that have been offered in recent years. Please note that new courses may be offered any given year and some of the courses listed below will not be offered every year. Students must check with the registrar listing for course availability, semester, and instructor information.

POL 240 International Relations

A comprehensive introduction to the major issues of contemporary international relations. The course presents competing theoretical perspectives and reviews the historical record to explore such puzzles as the causes of war, explanations of cooperation, the behavior of states, and the proper ethical standards for judging international relations.

POL 313 Global Justice

What, if any, norms of justice apply to the institutions and practice of world politics? Topics include "political realism" and skepticism about global morality; just wars and justice in warfare; ethics of humanitarian intervention; the nature and basis of human rights; world poverty and global distributive justice; and democracy and accountability in global institutions. Readings chosen from recent works in political philosophy.

POL 380 Human Rights

A study of the politics and history of human rights. What are human rights? How can dictatorships be resisted from the inside and the outside? Can we prevent genocide? Is it morally acceptable and politically wise to launch humanitarian military interventions to prevent the slaughter of foreign civilians? What are the laws of war, and how can we punish the war criminals who violate them? Cases include the Ottoman Empire, Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, Bosnia, and Rwanda.

POL 381 Theories of International Relations

This course is an introduction to conflict and cooperation in international politics. It emphasizes the impact of the anarchic international system on patterns of conflict and cooperation across nations, issues, and time. It spends roughly equal amounts of time on war and trade. It also considers the role of domestic factors in international politics, but it privileges the role of the system in explaining outcomes. The class uses some elementary game theory, statistics, and trade theory but does not assume that students have any prior knowledge of these subjects.

POL 382 War and Peace

An examination of war as a political phenomenon, with a particular emphasis on the period since 1945. Topics to be considered include the cause, character, and consequences of war, the evolution of warfare, the moral justification of war, and the possibility that war is becoming obsolete.

POL 383 International Cooperation

Examines theories about how international cooperation can be initiated and maintained. Topics include the achievement of cooperation under conditions of anarchy, regimes and norms, international and multilateral organizations, tacit bargaining, formal and informal agreements, and strategies for punishing noncompliance.

POL 385 International Political Economy

A study of the relationship between political and economic processes in international affairs. Attention will be given to problems that lie on the boundary between politics and economics.

POL 387 Peacemaking (WWS 313)

The course begins with a discussion of civil and international conflict and the history of making peace. It then focuses on contemporary civil wars and the lessons from an array of United Nations and other efforts to make peace, including the Gulf War, Cambodia, El Salvador, Somalia, and the former Yugoslavia.

POL 388 Causes of War

Why do states and peoples go to war? Conversely, how can war be avoided? This course surveys some of the most important explanations--including human nature, the anarchic international system, domestic politics, economics, technology, nationalism, and terrorism--and evaluates them in light of historical wars, and of crises resolved short of war. The course will examine cases ranging from the Peloponnesian War to the ongoing American-led war against terrorism.

POL 389 Theory and Practice of International Diplomacy (WWS 321)

This course examines the development, challenges, and multiple complexities of international diplomacy. It addresses three dimensions: the conceptual aspects of diplomacy in the international system; the historic development of international diplomacy; and the intricacies of international negotiations.

POL 392 American Foreign Policy

This course will analyze American foreign policy from the nation's founding to the present. Diplomatic, security and economic issues will be covered. Among the specific topics examined will be the U.S. rise to global power; the origins, course and end of the Cold War; Vietnam; and U.S. foreign policy in the post Cold War and post 9/11 world.

POL 393 Grand Strategy (WWS475)

Military strategy was defined by Clausewitz as the use of battle to achieve the objectives of war. Grand strategy is broader, encompassing the attempted use by political leaders of financial, economic, and diplomatic, as well as military, power to achieve their objectives in peacetime and in war. This seminar will examine the theory and practice of grand strategy both to illuminate how relations among city-states, empires, kingdoms and nation states have evolved over the centuries and also to identify some common challenges that have confronted all who seek to make and execute grand strategy, from Pericles to Barack Obama.

POL 397 National Security

An introduction to classic texts (for example, Sun Tzu, Clausewitz) and dominant theoretical approaches in the study of national security. Why states fight and how they fight are examined with an emphasis on how they generate and employ military power in combat. The determinants of battlefield effectiveness, the limits of military power, and the historical evolution of warfare are also considered. Attention is paid to alternative conceptions of security (including human security) and warfare, including civil wars, insurgencies, and genocide. Cases are drawn from diverse Western and non-Western historical eras.

POL 398 International Institutions and Law (WWS 337)

This course will focus on the continual tension between international law and international politics. It will examine the impact of this tension on issues of intervention and also on other issues of substantive importance, including environmental protection, trade, human rights, laws of war applicable to the "war on terror," and crimes of state. The course will also discuss recent developments affecting international institutions and recent changes in international law, such as the changing conception of "sovereignty."

POL 399 China's Foreign Relations (WWS 461)

This course will review and analyze the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China from 1949 to the present. It will examine Beijing's relations with the Soviet Union, the United States, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Third World during the Cold War, and will discuss the future of Chinese foreign policy in light of the end of the Cold War, changes in the Chinese economy, the post-Tiananmen legitimacy crisis in Beijing, and the continuing rise of Chinese power and influence in Asia and beyond.

POL 440 International Organization

From peacekeeping operations, development assistance, to rules for free trade, the mandate for international organizations continues to expand. Why do states delegate authority, and what accounts for the change over time and issue in the role of international organizations to promote cooperation? The course will examine theories about the design and effectiveness of formal institutions and assess the record of specific organizations including the United Nations, World Trade Organization, and World Bank. This is an advanced seminar, and students should have completed POL240 or POL381 prior to enrollment.

POL462 International Relations of East Asia (WWS462)

This course will concentrate on the Cold War and post-Cold War international relations of East Asia. We will discuss the interaction between changes in the broader international system and changes in international relations in the East Asian region. The course will finish with a discussion of the implications of events and trends since the end of the Cold War.

POL 478 International Political Economy of East Asia (WWS 477)

This course examines conditions that support open markets and economic growth with a focus on the East Asian experience. How have the countries of East Asia responded to the constraints and opportunities of the world economy? The path to export-led rapid growth in Japan, Korea, China, and Southeast Asia will be compared to assess the "East Asian Miracle" and the role of state-led industrial policy. The 1990s in which Japan's growth stalled and the region went through a major financial crisis will be discussed to determine policy lessons. What implications does China's emergence as economic powerhouse hold for the region and global economy?