

PO 150: World Politics
Illinois College
Fall 2026, Kirby Learning Center 211
Time: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, & Friday 9:00 AM to 9:50 AM

Professor: Robert Tanner Bivens

Email: Tanner.Bivens@ic.edu

Pronouns: He/Him

Office: Kirby Learning Center 206

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, & Friday 12:00 PM to 2:00 PM/Tuesday & Thursday: 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM

I. Overview

Does the economic rise of China present a threat to the power of the United States? Does China's rise threaten to fundamentally alter the world as we know it? What is the difference between genocide and terrorism and does that distinction matter? What are the reasons as to why climate change has been such a difficult set of discourse amongst world leaders? Can laws, treaties, and international organizations lead to world peace or are they just the machinations of more powerful states and their interest? Why is it that the United States has engaged in similar actions on the world stage regardless of the President being Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, or Biden? Why did Russia go to war with Ukraine? Why is Palestine and Israel in conflict with each other? Most important of all; why do states do what they do? These are all questions that this class plans to explore.

This course is an introduction to world politics, otherwise known as international relations (IR). IR is a subfield of Political Science that aims to explain phenomenon and pertinent questions in global politics. To answer these questions, any burgeoning scholar needs to understand both theory and the questions that need to be addressed. The first half of this class will focus on the theoretical approaches to IR and the second half of the class will focus on how these theoretical approaches help us better understand issues in global politics today like terrorism, nuclear weapons, war, peace, international economics, human rights protections, global health governance, climate change governance, international institutions, and so forth.

II. Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will:

- Be able to recognize and discuss core theories of IR
- Be able to engage confidently in current debates within the study of global politics
- Be able to think critically about global politics and potential solutions to global conundrums

- Analyze current events with more rigor and ability than those who do not have as extensive of a background in this course
- Be able to critically assess and critique scholarly writing
- Be able to articulate their views confidently and competently in written work

III. Student Assistance

I want my students to be able to engage in this class to the fullest of their abilities with as few distractions or conflicts as possible. It is currently a stressful time in this world with the aftermath of the pandemic on top of the rigor and challenges of academic life. In addition, those who are neurodivergent may have a difficult time in the academic setting and I want to be able to mitigate those problems as much as possible so that you can feel confident leaving the class with the best grade possible.

As such, if you or somebody you know is struggling with anxiety or completing coursework due to neurodivergent issues, do not hesitate to reach out. IC has a number of resources available that can help:

- Disability Services Office: <https://www.ic.edu/disabilityresources>. Tel. 217-245-3639
- Student Counseling Services: <https://www.ic.edu/counseling> Tel. 217-245-3038
- As always, in the event of a crisis and for immediate help call 911

IV: Course Structure & Course Components

Course Outline

This is an in-person course. We meet **Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, & Friday from 9:00 AM to 9:50 AM**. There will be five requirements for assessment in this course. This includes **a participation grade, three written assignments** that are meant to test your familiarity with the lecture's reading materials, **a country trivia quiz** to help familiarize you with the countries of the world, **a midterm exam**, and **a final exam**.

It should be noted as an intro level course, this class will predominantly take the lecture format for three of the weeks of class. The final Friday will be a seminar-style course where we will collectively discuss the week's readings and topics in a roundtable-style conversation or engage in simulations based on the week's topics.

Course Components

Participation: Students are expected to maintain consistent participation in the course. This includes attending class, engaging in class discussion when necessary, submitting assignments on time, and demonstrating participation through other means. 5 points of the class will be

dedicated to this participation and will be calculated and added to your final grade at the end of the semester.

Participation will be graded by the following criteria:

- Frequently attends lectures
- Frequently engages in course discussions
- Frequently attends class on Fridays for weekly discussion sessions
- Actively engages in course activities outside of lectures
- Submits assignments on time
- Maintains communication with the professor when there is an issue with attendance or submitting an assignment late that has been granted an extension
- Demonstrate consistent engagement with the coursework and materials

Note on Attendance: Attendance will be factored into your participation grade. However, attendance alone is not mandatory. It is understood that life is difficult and that we all have multiple obligations. If a student is showing a strong level of engagement with the class through work or communication, attendance inconsistencies will be mitigated. However, if a student is frequently missing class and does not demonstrate a strong level of engagement, their grade will suffer as a result.

Note on Documentation of Absences: A **formal excuse** with **documentation** will **only** be needed for **midterm and final exams**.

Written Assignments (3): There will be three (3) short argumentative response papers throughout the course. These are akin to “mini essays” that ask you to examine a debate or issue from the courses in detail and develop an informed argument (a thesis). The purpose of these assignments is to ensure that you have a good working knowledge of the reading material as well as the lectures for the class. There is no research beyond the course readings that is needed or expected. Citations of the course material are required, and this does NOT include the PowerPoint slides. Papers will be graded on knowledge of the material, how well you structure your argument, and adherence to a more academic-minded writing style. These assignments will be posted onto Moodle. Response papers should be 3-6 paragraphs and between 600 to 1000 words.

Do **NOT** exceed 1000 words per written response unless otherwise stated. Written responses must be **formally cited**. Papers that fail to cite properly will receive point reductions. Papers that do not cite at all will receive **automatic failing grades**.

Country Trivia Quiz: The Country Trivia Quiz is available on Moodle and is due **Week 2**. The purpose of this quiz is somewhat evident in its name. The focus of IR is understanding how global politics work and the 200+ countries are typically considered to be the most important aspect of IR. As such, having a general familiarity with these countries from global powers like the USA, China, and Russia to smaller countries like Slovenia, Turkmenistan, and Mozambique

will help considerably in understanding global dynamics. This quiz will help familiarize you with some of these countries. It will consist of **50 questions worth 0.2 points** each for a total of questions with a total of 10 points assigned to your final grade. Each question will have general information on the country, a factoid related to the country's politics, and a more light-hearted factoid. You will have to provide the country that corresponds to the facts.

It is **actively encouraged that you use websites like Wikipedia and Google to check these answers** and provide the correct country. The intention of this assignment is for all students to receive a **perfect score** and to familiarize you with these countries. The quiz is timed. However, the timer is set for **3 hours** and there to discourage opening the quiz and leaving it open for an extended period. Most students should be able to complete the quiz in **under an hour**.

Exams: There are two major exams in this course. The **midterm exam** consists of multiple choice, short answers, and long answer questions based on the required readings and lecture materials from **Week 1-7**. Students will have full class time to take the exam. The **final exam** is cumulative of all required reading and lecture material in the course (**Week 1-15**). It will consist of multiple-choice, short-answer, and long-answer questions. Students will have 90 minutes to write the final exam. **Both exams are open note and online!**

V: Grading Distribution

Assessment	Course Points
Written Assignments x3	35
Mid Term Exam	20
Final Exam	30
Country Quiz	10
Participation	5
TOTAL	100

Final Course Grading Scale

A = 93 to 100

A- = 90 to 92

B+ = 87 to 89

B = 83 to 86

B- = 80 to 82

C+ = 77 to 79

D = 60 to 69

F = 0 to 50

The average anticipated course grade is expected to be around 75-80 for the course. A student who consistently attends lectures, pays minor attention to the material, takes the midterm and

final exam, and answers the reading assignments per the instructions on the materials should be able to finish at minimum with around a C to B- grade.

Similarly, it should be expected that students will need to work hard to obtain B's and A's. However, the same can be said for D's and F's.

VI: Course Policies

Email Policy: I am available via email when you have questions or concerns about the course. These are professional communications: Please be respectful, formal, and proofread your correspondence. A 24-hour turnaround time during the week should be anticipated. Please consult this syllabus before emailing, as your questions may be answered here.

All email communication must be done from your **IC email address** and must include the course code **PO 150 in the subject line**. Those two requirements help me ensure they are received and read in a timely manner. If you ignore this, it is likely your email will not be returned.

Academic Dishonesty & Plagiarism: This course takes academic misconduct and plagiarism seriously. Do not risk a failing grade. Do not consult with others while writing exams or preparing your written responses. It is strictly forbidden to consult with anyone (e.g. another student, friend, or family member) while completing course assessments. Evidence of such behavior will lead to a zero on the component and/or a zero in the course (and further sanctions as appropriate). I will be looking for evidence of such behavior and will treat any as serious academic dishonesty. All assignments and exams will be inspected using plagiarism detection tools. Students are expected to have read and abide by IC's Intellectual and Academic Integrity (<https://catalog.ic.edu/intellectual-and-academic-integrity>). If you have any questions relating to academic practices, academic integrity, and issues of plagiarism and/or citation please join the Q&A sessions to chat about them.

Generative AI Writing Tools: The use of generative AI writing tools for any assignment is forbidden. Any evidence of their usage will result in a failing grade for the assignment and may be subjected to further academic dishonesty investigations.

Note: Tools that help with spelling and grammar mistakes like Grammarly do not count as an AI writing tool. But Grammarly's generative AI services would count as an AI writing tool and be subject to disciplinary action

Food and Drink in Class: Students are free to eat or bring drinks to class if they are not disruptive to the learning experience.

Electronics in Class Policy: Laptops and tablets may be used to take notes and keep track of slides as they will be posted to Moodle. Cell phones should be set to vibrate or silent while in class to ensure that the class is not disturbed. Any disruptive behavior including but not limited to cell phones ringing during class, students watching videos on their electronic devices, sounds coming from their electronic devices, or any electronic device impeding the learning experience of other students may be grounds for **dismissal** from the class for that day.

Moodle Submissions: The three writing assignments must be submitted using Moodle. Assignments are **not accepted via email** (unless requested with cause).

Lates & Make-Ups: Note **midterm and final exams** can only be made up with a formal excuse and evidence provided. The written assignments are more flexible. Plan ahead and request accommodation or extensions **before** missing a deadline. A late penalty of 5% per day (including weekends) will be levied up to four (4) days at which point the assignment will not be accepted and you will receive a zero for the assignment. Assignments are accepted at the time noted on Moodle (MOODLE). If you anticipate missing a deadline, please reach out to me before you miss it instead of afterward.

Speak to Me: In addition, you should feel welcome to speak to your instructor and request an extension or accommodation for any medical, emotional, professional, or familial reason – or any other issue that impacts your ability to succeed in our course. I'll understand! But I ask that you be in contact with me **before you miss a deadline** rather than after it has passed

Preferred Name & Pronouns: If your name is different than that which is found on the university roster, please let me know either by marking it on the sheet or letting me know in person. As an IC student, you have the right to change how your name shows up on the class roster. This is helpful for a variety of students that include but are not limited to: transgender students, gender nonconforming individuals, students who abbreviate their first name, students who use their middle name, international students, and so forth. If your name is also difficult to pronounce or often mispronounced, I encourage you to write it phonetically on the sheet as well, so I do not say it incorrectly. Please include your pronouns on the roster sheet as well.

Class Participation & Respecting Classmates: This is a lecture first and foremost which means that a significant portion of the class will be dedicated to me talking through lecture slides and notes while the class listens. However, there will be opportunities for the class to engage with the material in class for those willing to raise their hands and do so. Even some debate amongst classmates may be allowed if time permits. However, in these situations, it is expected that you behave in a professional, academic, and respectful manner. Topics including hate speech or verbiage used to belittle or harass will not be tolerated and will result in a student being dismissed from the course if it occurs.

Technical Requirements: This course uses Moodle. Students should familiarize themselves with Moodle and all technical requirements as soon as possible. If you have technical concerns, IC's IT services may be able to assist. In addition, there are many instructional videos online via Google, YouTube, etc. To Start please see:

Make sure you have access to a reliable computer for this class to submit your writing assignments, take the trivia quizzes, and access the reading material/lecture material for the course. If you do not have a reliable computer, please let me know as soon as possible and we can find a means on campus for you to access Moodle.

Incomplete: Requests for an "Incomplete" designation in this course are only accepted under extenuating circumstances and at the discretion of the instructor. Requests **must** be made to your

instructor before the final appeal date. When the course is closed the grade is finalized and there is nothing I can do.

VII: Course Materials

REQUIRED BOOKS

PLEASE NOTE

This course has two (2) textbooks. **BOTH OF WHICH ARE FREE AND OPEN ACCESS!** You do not have to purchase any books for this class. All readings are provided on MOODLE. The textbooks will be provided in a separate section, be sure to keep them up to date.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS (4)

- Stephen McGlinchey (ed.), International Relations. Bristol: E-International Relations, 2017. Available online: <https://www.e-ir.info/publication/beginners-textbook-international-relations/> (**IR in the schedule below**)
- Stephen McGlinchey, Rosie Walters, and Christian Scheinpflug (eds.), International Relations Theory. Bristol: E-International Relations, 2017. Available online: <https://www.e-ir.info/publication/international-relations-theory/> (**IRT in the schedule below**)

VIII. Class Schedule

<u>Week</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	9/1 to 9/4	Introduction & Analytical Thinking About Global Politics	
2	9/7 to 9/11	Rational Theory: Classical Realism & Neorealism	Country Trivia Quiz Due
3	9/14 to 9/18	Rational Theory: Classical Liberalism & Neoliberal Institutionalism	
4	9/21 to 9/25	Social Theories: Constructivism & Feminism	
5	9/28 to 10/2	Critical Theories in IR	

6	10/5 to 10/9	Foreign Policy Analysis	Writing Assignment 1 Due
7	10/12 to 10/16	Midterm Review & Exam	NO CLASS 10/13, 10/15, to 10/16
8	10/19 to 10/23	International Law & Organizations	
9	10/26 to 10/30	The Types of Conflict	
10	11/2 to 11/6	Nuclear weapons	
11	11/9 to 11/13	Terrorism	Writing Assignment 2 Due
12	11/16 to 11/20	Global Political Economy	
X	11/23 to 11/27	NONE!!!	Thanksgiving Break! No Class
13	11/30 to 12/4	Climate Change & Environmental Governance	Writing Assignment 3 Due
14	12/7 to 12/11	Global Civil Society, Human Rights, & Protest	
15	12/14 to 12/18	FINAL EXAM	FINAL EXAM

IX: Detailed Course Schedule & Required Readings

Week 1: Introduction of the course & Analytically Thinking about Global Politics

- The Syllabus
- Amelia Hoover Green. 2013 “How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps.” <https://www.ameliahoovergreen.com/uploads/9/3/0/9/93091546/howtoread.pdf>
- Carmen Gebhard. 2017. “One World, Many Actors” (IR)
- Dana Gold & Stephen McGlinchey. 2017. “International Relations Theory” (IR)

Week 2: Rational Theories: Classical Realism & Neorealism

- Sandrina Antunes & Isabel Camisã. 2017. "Realism" **(IRT)**
- John J. Mearsheimer. 2006. "China's Unpeaceful Rise." *Current History*. (PDF)
- G. John Ikenberry. 2008. "The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?" *Foreign Affairs*. 87(1): 23-37.

Week 3: Rational Theories: Classical Liberalism & Neoliberal Institutionalism

- Jeffrey W. Meiser. 2017. "Liberalism" **(IRT)**
- Kenneth A. Oye. 1985. "Explaining Cooperation Under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies." *World Politics*. 38(1): 1-24.
- Arthur A. Stein. 2008. "Neoliberal Institutionalism." In the Oxford Handbook of International Relations.

Week 4 Social Theory: Constructivism & Feminist Approaches

- Sarina Theys. 2017. "Constructivism" **(IRT)**
- Sarah Smith. 2017. "Feminism" **(IRT)**
- Carol Cohn. 1987. "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 12(4): 687-718.
- Alexander Wendt. 1992. "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization*. 46(2): 391-425.

Week 5 Critical Theory: Some Critical Approaches to IR

- Maïa Patel. 2017. "Marxism" **(IRT)**
- Sheila Nair. 2017. "Postcolonialism" **(IRT)**
- Alex Prichard. 2017. "The 'Isms' are Evil. All Hail the 'Isms'!" **(IRT)**

Week 6 Foreign Policy Analysis

- Stephen McGlinchley. 2017. "Diplomacy" (IR)
- Alex Ward. 2020. "The Revenge of the Blob." <https://www.vox.com/22153765/joe-biden-foreign-policy-team-revenge-blob>
- Robert D. Blackwill. 2026. "America Revived: A Grand Strategy of Resolute Global Leadership." *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/reports/america-revived>
- Interview with Tom Yazdgerdi, president of the American Foreign Services Association. <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2025/04/29/the-future-of-u-s-diplomacy/>.

Week 7 Midterm Review & Exam

- **NO REQUIRED READING**

Week 8 International Law & Organizations

- Knut Traisbach. 2017. "International Law" **(IR)**
- Shazelina Z. Abidin. 2017. "International Organizations" **(IR)**
- Michael N. Barnett & Martha Finnemore. 1999. "The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations." *International Organization*. 53(4): 699-732.

Week 9: The Types of Conflict

- Sapolsky, Harvey M. 2017. "Managing Global Security Beyond 'Pax Americana'." **(IR)**
- Ches Thurber. 2019. "Social Ties and the Strategy of Civil Resistance." *International Studies Quarterly*. 63(4): 974-986.
- Edward Fishman et al. 2026. "How Iran War Ignited a Geoeconomic Firestorm." *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/articles/how-the-iran-war-ignited-a-geoeconomic-firestorm>.

Week 10 Nuclear Weapons

- Kenneth N. Waltz. 2012. "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb: Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability." *Foreign Affairs*.
- Tannenwald, Nina. 1999. "The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use." *International Organization*. 55(3). 553-588.
- Scott D. Sagan. 1996. "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb." *International Security*. 21(3): 54-86.

Week 11 Terrorism

- Katherine E. Brown (2017) "Transnational Terrorism" **(IR)**
- Kydd, Andrew H. and Barbara F. Walter. 2006. "The Strategies of Terrorism." *International Security*. 31(1). 49-80. **(BB)**
- Abrahms, Max. 2006. "Why Terrorism Does Not Work." *International Security*. 32(2). 42-78. **(BB)**
- Crenshaw, Martha. 1981. "The Causes of Terrorism." *Comparative Politics*. 13(4): 379-399.

Week 12 Global Political Economy

- Günter Walzenbach. 2017. “Global Political Economy” **(IR)**
- James Arvanitakis & David J. Hornsby. 2017. “Global Poverty and Wealth” **(IR)**
- McBride, James, Noah Berman, & Andrew Chatzky. 2023. “China’s Massive Belt and Road Initiative.” *Council on Foreign Relations*.
<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>

Week 13 Climate Change & Environmental Governance

- Raul Pacheco-Vega. 2017. “The Environment.” **(IR)**
- Garrett Hardin. 1968. “The Tragedy of the Commons.” *Science*. 162(3859): 1243-1248.
- Andonova, Liliana B, Michele M. Betsill, & Harriet Bulkeley. 2009. “Transnational Climate Governance.” *Global Environmental Politics*. 9(2): 52-73.

Week X THANKSGIVING BREAK

- **NO REQUIRED READING**

Week 14 Global Civil Society, Human Rights, & Protest

- Raffaele Marchetti. 2017. “Global Civil Society.” **(IR)**
- Jeffrey Haynes. 2017. “Voice of the People.” **(IR)**
- Ben Richardson. 2017. “Feeding the World.” **(IR)**

Week 15 FINAL EXAM

- None! Prepare for the final exam!