

**Political Science 497 Seminar in International Affairs**  
**(Section 001)**  
**(HONORS)**  
**(Section 002)**

Classroom: GH 337 5:00-7:45pm Tuesdays

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Office: GH 311

Office Hours: 12:30-2:00 Wednesdays or by appointment

**There is no assigned textbook. All readings will be placed on Blackboard or handed out in class.**

**Course Description:**

The Senior Seminar in International Affairs is designed to synthesize the skills and knowledge gained by students in the International Affairs major. This course should strengthen students' research, written and oral communication skills relating to international affairs. This class is a seminar. That means there will be little to no lecture by the professor. Students must come to class having actively read and thought about the readings. They must be prepared to delve deeply into the assumptions, premises, reasoning, conclusions and implications of the readings. Placing the readings in the context of the broader international affairs literature is vital. Applying concepts and theories to real world events will be our main objective throughout the course.

**Learning Outcomes:**

- demonstrate knowledge of the dynamics of the international political and economic system and an understanding of the causes of changes and mechanisms to manage change
- demonstrate knowledge and methods needed for critical assessment of international processes and the complex relationship between domestic and international issues
- acquire an understanding of diverse regions, cultures and countries and demonstrate the ability to perceive events from more than one theoretical and cultural perspective
- recognize cultural differences and demonstrate an ability to interact effectively and appropriately in international and/or multicultural contexts.

**Student Responsibilities:**

Given you are seniors and or are nearing completion of the major and are hopefully preparing for graduate school or a career in the field, the expectation is that you can identify core readings that can serve as the foundation for understanding issues and topics in international affairs. Students will be responsible for putting together readings for discussions based upon their research interests. In addition, the student should be able to defend their readings selections and easily describe the thesis, key theories, concepts, and findings of each article that they assign. Furthermore, they should be able to provide discussion questions and application/examples from the real world to enhance our learning experience. Students will also tie the topics to their assigned region of specialty for the semester. Finally, students will demonstrate their mastery of a topic through an expanded portfolio paper and presentation.

### **Grading Breakdown:**

Attendance/Participation: 200 pts.

Discussion Leading: 100 pts.

Reading List: 100 pts.

Reaction Pieces (7): 210 pts.

Current Events Report: 20 pts.

Portfolio Paper: 250 pts.

Portfolio Research Question: 20 pts.

Portfolio Preliminary Analysis and Annotated Bibliography: 60 pts.

Finals Week Presentation: 40 pts.

Late assignments will not be accepted except under the discretion of the professor. If an assignment is even a minute late, the student is to assume it will not be graded or even read.

Grading Scale:

A = 900 or higher; B = 800 to 899; C = 700 to 799; D = 600 to 699; F = 599 and lower

All Honors components that differ from the standard class are highlighted in gray.

**Attendance and Participation:** Attendance and active participation is mandatory, constituting 20% (200 points) of a student's final grade. Simply being a warm body in the classroom does not equate to active participation. Similarly, one cannot actively participate if one has not read in advance. Students are expected to have read and to constructively contribute to the class and not simply talk for the sake of talking. Behavior which is disruptive, causes a distraction, or impedes in participation and interaction will lead in a deduction of your participation credit (this includes but is not limited to reading non-class related materials, browsing the internet—Facebook can wait until after class—texting and making phone calls in class). A student who has more than **one** unexcused absences will automatically forfeit all attendance and participation points.

**Discussion Leading and Reading List:** Students in pairs (or possibly trios) will lead discussion and develop a reading list for one class period, with each part constituting **10% (100 points)** of a student's final grade (**200 points total**).

First, students will first develop a reading list based on an assigned issue in international affairs. This is to be a theme-based set of a minimum of four readings and 50 pages of text. Video clips, podcasts, or other materials are also highly encouraged. Readings should primarily comprise of peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, articles from policy-oriented magazines (e.g. Foreign Policy, The Economist) and thinktank papers. One piece should ideally introduce the issue in a concise manner (e.g. the background information needed to understand the topic; definition of the topic if applicable), while the additional pieces should provide theoretical background, empirical findings, policy implications or solutions to the problem if applicable.

The readings must be posted on Blackboard at minimum by Thursday at noon the previous week. It is strongly recommended that you consult with the professor before finalizing your reading list. Do not simply choose the first few sources on the topic, but purposefully choose readings based on their content and the ability of the leader and audience to understand and critically assess. Articles from predatory publishers, from undergraduate journals/publishers, and articles in which the class could not feasibly comprehend (e.g. extensive formal models) will not be considered.

Secondly, students will act as discussion leader for the assigned day. As part of this, students must first set up the context of the topic within international affairs. Next, discussion leaders will lead discussion. To facilitate this, at minimum 48 hours before class, leaders will post on Blackboard and email to the

entire class a set of at minimum seven questions that focus on the readings and can facilitate an extended discussion. Questions should not have “yes-no” answers or merely ask for what the author said or argues. They should be probing questions and “big questions” that relate the readings to the broader issues of international affairs.

To facilitate discussion, leaders can create a PowerPoint, but keep in mind that a leader’s job is not to summarize the material but to facilitate discussion. Students in the past have often used a minimalist PowerPoint largely of visuals (e.g. maps, statistics) to move the discussion along. Leaders should also keep in mind that the discussion often goes in directions that they may not have anticipated, so be flexible.

**Reaction Pieces:** Reaction Pieces (seven total), will constitute **21% (210 points)** of a student’s final grade. Foreign affairs reports are a means for every student to expand on the assigned class discussion.

As part of a Reaction Piece, students will write a minimum of 400 words relating the assigned topic/readings to their assigned geographical region of concentration (e.g. East Asia, Middle East, Eastern Europe) and providing a relevant news article, journal article, data source, web source, or other item relevant to the topic.

A Reaction Piece must include:

1. Analysis of the assigned readings with explicit reference to a claim in a reading or the readings as a whole. Simply writing on the topic is not an analysis.
2. Include an additional reading based on your assigned reading and tie this to your analysis. A full citation is required but does not count towards the minimum word length.
3. Include at minimum one discussion question.

These reports prepare not only the students to engage in the discussion, but to assist the discussion leaders in structuring the class. These must be posted on Blackboard at minimum 24 hours before class.

**Current Events Report:** A Current Events Report comprises **2%** of the final grade (**20 points**). Prior to the first day of class (Week 1) students will prepare a short written response (minimum of 300 words) to the following question:

What was the most important event or issue in international affairs over the summer?

This requires no citation, but should make the case for the event or issue chosen. The thought piece can be uploaded to Blackboard or submitted in class as a typed hard copy. This writing will provide the basis for discussion on the first day.

**Portfolio Project:** Students will write a 16+ page (**Honors: 20+ page**) portfolio project. This project must be double spaced in 10 or 12 point font Times New Roman and one inch margins (excluding tables, figures and works cited) on an issue of international affairs. This will comprise **25% (250 points)** of a student’s final grade. A portfolio should demonstrate a student’s mastery of a significant issue in international affairs beyond those covered in the discussion topics. Rather than a traditional research paper, a portfolio should be seen as a report providing the necessary information for a future analysis. The portfolio must provide a clear research question, synopsis of the research on the topic (literature review) as well as an analysis of the research on the topic (e.g. what are the debates? What aspects have not been addressed? What assumptions are made?) and finally a minimum of two policy recommendations on the topic (approximately 1-2 pages). Original analysis of data on the issue can also be included, but not necessary.

The paper must include at minimum 15 academic or policy research articles. News articles may be cited but do not count towards these 15.

In addition, within the portfolio, students will propose a future research project based on this literature (approximately 2 pages). In other words, given adequate funding, what would be the best means to analyze this issue? This can focus on the broad topic of the portfolio or a subsection, but the proposal must include what specific steps would be taken and why. For example, would an interview-based or survey-based project be most applicable and who would be the respondents? What data or access would be necessary? Focus on approaches that are feasible even if costly, rather than purely hypothetical examples (e.g. don't claim you would interview Kim Jong Un).

To aid in producing a coherent Portfolio Project, students will submit a **Research Question** and a **Preliminary Analysis with Annotated Bibliography**. The Research Question comprises **2% (20 points)** of a student's final grade. This should include a clear research question that moves beyond basic description or yes/no answers. Students should also include a brief summary (a minimum of 200 words) about the importance of the research question. This is due Week 3 (September 5<sup>th</sup>).

For the Preliminary Analysis with Annotated Bibliography, due Week 8 (October 10<sup>th</sup>), will constitute **6%** of a student's final grade (**60 points**). Students will produce:

1. A revised research question (if applicable)
2. A preliminary analysis of what has been found so far (approximately 2-3 paragraphs)
3. An annotated bibliography of a minimum of six sources. Full citations are required. A link is not a full citation.
4. Each annotation should be approximately 3-4 sentences, and should summarize and critically analyze the source and provide information on how you plan to use the source (e.g. it highlights a debate in the literature; it ignores a key issue). This should not simply be an abstract of the paper.

If a student fails to submit a Preliminary Analysis, the professor is under no obligation to grade the final Portfolio Paper.

Students will post their Preliminary Analysis with Annotated Bibliography on Blackboard at minimum 48 hours prior to class. Students are expected to have read each analysis before class, prepared to discuss and critique the analysis. Students are also encouraged to provide written comments to fellow students as well.

Students will also present their preliminary portfolio analysis in the latter weeks of the class, with the other students expected to ask substantive questions and critique. The final version of the portfolio is due in hard copy and electronic copy (on Blackboard) at the scheduled time of the "final" during finals week.

**Finals Week Presentation:** The Finals Week Presentation constitutes **4%** of a student's final grade (**40 points**). Students, in small groups (2-4), will respond to a question presented by the professor in advance. Students will present their response for approximately 10 minutes (a PowerPoint is encouraged but not required), followed by a critique by the class.

### **Disability Services**

In compliance with university policy, students with disabilities who require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact Student Disability Services in Downing University Center, A-200. The phone number is 270-745-5004. Please **DO NOT** request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a letter of accommodation from Student Disability Services.

## **Academic Honesty and Integrity**

I expect all students to abide by the rules and regulations set forth in the Western Kentucky University Student Handbook in regards to all forms of academic misconduct (cheating, plagiarism, etc.). I take academic integrity as serious and violating these standards will result in an “F” in this course without exceptions. That means if you cheat, plagiarize, engage in any sort of academic dishonesty including failure to cite sources appropriately on any portion of the course and are caught—you will automatically receive an “F” for that assignment and I reserve the right to assign a 0 for the entire course. If you have any questions about what does and does not constitute academic misconduct, please speak with me.

Student work may be checked by plagiarism detection software. If you have any doubts as to when you should cite, click on the links below. You can also go to the Writing Center for guidance. Similarly, I do not accept materials from online dictionaries or encyclopedias such as Wikipedia as a source for citation.

## **How to Communicate with your Professor:**

Communication should be done first and foremost before or after class or during office hours. If it is a general question, it should be asked in class so that others can benefit from the information as well. Do not hesitate to ask questions. Questions can also be posted in the Discussions forums on Blackboard, thus others can respond if they know the answer as well.

If you do email me, follow these standards:

1. Include the class title (e.g. PS497) and a substantive heading (e.g. question about Taiwan). Emails without a subject title or which do not follow this format (e.g. a title of “Hey”) will not be answered.
2. Use a salutation such as “Dr. Rich”. Again, using “hey” or other informal variations will likely lead to me ignoring your email.
3. I expect emails to be written coherently, which means punctuation, capitalization, and a signature. Signing your email is especially important if you are not using your WKU email account. I will not spend time trying to guess which student is partyallnight@gmail.com nor am I likely to respond if no signature is included.

I generally respond within 24 hours, but I seldom respond after 10pm. Thus if emailing about an assignment or test on the next day, I strongly recommend that you plan ahead accordingly.

## **Class Schedule**

Below is a class schedule. I reserve the right to make changes to the schedule if necessary. I will announce any changes to the syllabus in class and post changes to the Blackboard course website.

### **Week 1:**

August 22

Introduction and Syllabus Explanation  
Assignment of Regions and Presentation Topics  
Discussion of Current Events Report

### **Week 2:**

August 29

Professor Led Discussion Issue # 1

### **Week 3:**

September 5

Professor Led Discussion Issue # 2  
Research Question Due

### **Week 4:**

September 12

Student Led Discussion Issue # 1

### **Week 5:**

September 19

Student Led Discussion Issue # 2

### **Week 6:**

September 26

Student Led Discussion Issue # 3

### **Week 7:**

October 3

Student Led Discussion Issue # 4

### **Week 8:**

October 10

Preliminary Analysis and Annotated Bibliography Due

### **Week 9:**

October 17

Student Led Discussion Issue # 5

### **Week 10:**

October 24

Student Led Discussion Issue # 6

### **Week 11:**

October 31

Student Led Discussion Issue # 7

**Week 12:**

November 7

Student Led Discussion Issue # 8

(Possibly a Portfolio Presentation as well)

**Week 13:**

November 14

Portfolio Presentation Day # 1

**Week 14:**

November 21

**NO CLASS**

**Week 15:**

November 28

Portfolio Presentation Day #2

**Finals Week:**

December 5

Finals Week Presentation