

FOUNDATIONS OF WORLD POLITICS

INTL 203

Wofford College
Dept. of Government & International Affairs
Fall 2025
MWF 8:30-9:20am, Daniel Building 203

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Office hours: M 1-5pm; Th 3-5pm

Overview

Why do nations go to war? What challenges pose the greatest threat to global peace and security today? Do nuclear weapons promote stability or conflict? Does trade foster peace among nations? Does it reduce or deepen global inequality? How should states respond to global environmental problems? What drives people to migrate, and how should states respond? How does democratic erosion shape the international order? This course explores these and other pressing questions using the theoretical tools of international relations and the analysis of both historical and contemporary real-world events.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Form and articulate views about important questions, debates, and topics in the study of world politics.
- Engage critically with the major theoretical frameworks for understanding the logic and complexities of world politics.
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of such frameworks to analyzing past and contemporary real-world events.
- Lay a strong foundation for future courses in international relations, comparative politics, and related disciplines.
- Develop reading, writing, communication, and teamwork skills through in-class and take-home assignments of varying stakes.

Assignments & Grading

Class Participation (20%): Participation in class is a vital component of this course and is essential for a productive learning environment. Students are expected to attend class regularly, arrive on time, and actively contribute to discussions and in-class activities. Reading the assigned materials in advance is critical for informed participation. Participation will be graded in two equal parts: **10% for attendance** and **10% for engagement**. The attendance component requires

students to attend *all or almost all* sessions, with *up to three* unexcused absences permitted throughout the semester without penalty (please refer to the section titled “Absences, Scheduling Conflicts & Late Submissions” on p. 4 for more details). Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. The engagement component assesses students’ regular involvement in class through thoughtful comments and questions that show preparation and curiosity about the material. To receive full marks on engagement, students should contribute to class conversations consistently throughout the semester, rather than only sporadically or occasionally.

Office Hours Attendance (10%): Students are expected to attend office hours *at least twice* during the semester to discuss any aspect of the course—assignments, readings, ideas, or broader questions. Each visit earns 5% of the final grade. This is not just a grade boost; it is also an opportunity to check in and build a relationship. I view office hours as a space to support your learning, professional development, and life beyond the classroom. Students are always welcome to come more than twice. Office hours are by appointment, held on **Mondays from 1-5pm** and **Thursdays from 3-5pm at Daniel Building 221**. You can sign up [here](#). If that time does not work for you, I am happy to schedule an *ad hoc* appointment—either in person or virtually. Please email me at tacconen@wofford.edu or talk to me before/after class to meet at a different day or time.

Midterm Exam (20%): Students will take an in-class midterm exam, scheduled for **Wednesday, October 15**. By this point, they will have engaged with foundational theoretical frameworks, key concepts, and early empirical examples in world politics. The exam will include a mix of multiple-choice questions, short-answer responses, and long-answer essays designed to assess students’ understanding of the material, engagement with the readings, and ability to reflect on key debates. Specific instructions and a study guide will be provided in advance.

Class Debates (25%): Students will participate in *two* in-class debates, scheduled for **Friday, September 26** and **Friday, November 14**. These debates offer students a chance to apply key theories and concepts from the course in a structured, high-engagement setting. Students will work in teams to defend a position, engage with counterarguments, and connect course concepts to real-world implications. Each debate is worth 12.5% of the final grade, with 7.5% based on participation during the debate, and 5% based on an individual post-debate reflection. The post-debate reflection will allow students to individually process the experience, articulate what they learned, and assess how their thinking may have evolved. Reflections must be submitted within one week after each debate (**by 11:59pm on Friday, October 3** and **Friday, November 21**, respectively). Specific instructions and debate topics will be provided prior to the debates.

Final Exam (25%): Students will take an in-class final exam, scheduled for **Monday, December 8 from 8-10:30am**. Like the midterm, it will consist of multiple-choice questions, short-answer responses, and long-answer essays. The final will cover material from the second half of the semester and assess students’ engagement with theories, key concepts, and real-world

cases, as well as their command of the assigned readings. Specific instructions and a study guide will be provided later in the course.

Academic Integrity

This course adheres to the Wofford Honor Code, which defines plagiarism as “the act of using another person’s words or ideas and presenting them as one’s own with or without the consent of the other.” The guidelines outlined in the Honor Code will be used to identify and address academic dishonesty. Examples include, but are not limited to: verbatim repetition, without acknowledgement, of the writings of another author; borrowing or using information developed by another without acknowledging the source; paraphrasing or translating the work or thought of another person without acknowledgment; allowing any other person or organization to prepare work that one then submits as their own; and borrowing language or ideas from another person without proper acknowledgement and citation. Violations of academic integrity are taken seriously and may result in severe consequences, including suspension or expulsion. If you have any doubts or questions, consult the [Honor Code](#), the [Writing Center](#) and/or the [Wofford Library](#) for more information.

Classroom Environment

This classroom is a space for adult learners. I encourage open, respectful dialogue—not only between students and myself, but also among peers. Communication should flow horizontally, fostering learning through peer-to-peer interaction, not just instructor-led discussion. Creating an inclusive and engaging environment is essential for this course to function well. Disrespect of any kind will not be tolerated. Be kind to each other. I will be especially attentive to maintaining a classroom that is welcoming to all students, regardless of gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, or cultural background. I will not micromanage your behavior by enforcing rules about phones or laptops. You may use your devices for note-taking or class-related research during activities. However, any non-course-related use of technology is not allowed. If at any point you have concerns, comments, or suggestions about the class environment, please reach out to me via email, or speak to me before/after class or during office hours. This is a shared space we will build together—and my door is always open.

AI

Developing strong writing and critical thinking skills is especially important in the first years of college, which is why I have designed many of this course’s assignments to be completed in class. These assignments are meant to help you strengthen these foundational skills without relying on AI tools to do the thinking or writing for you. That said, I cannot forbid the use of AI outside of class—and I do not want to. Tools like ChatGPT can be useful for brainstorming,

expanding on a topic, and helping you better understand a reading, among other things. But remember that these tools can make mistakes or produce inaccurate information, so it is your responsibility to evaluate and corroborate anything they generate. I encourage you to reflect on the skills you may allow to atrophy—or never fully develop—if you rely too heavily on AI. In my view, learning to use these tools thoughtfully is part of your education, just like learning to use Google or Word. But I urge you to approach AI with intention, especially given its novelty.

Absences, Scheduling Conflicts & Late Submissions

Most assignments in this course—midterm and final exams, class debates, class participation, and office hours attendance (which is not in class but still in person)—require your presence. Students should review the assignment schedule and grading breakdown carefully and ensure they can attend on those days. If you anticipate a conflict, notify me as early as possible—*at least one week in advance*—so that we can arrange an alternate day and time to complete the assignment, typically during office hours (you may notify me in person, but please follow up by email so there is a written record and it is easier to track). Students may miss *up to three* class sessions during the semester without penalty or documentation—no questions asked. Additional unexcused absences will reduce the attendance portion of your participation grade and will likely negatively affect your engagement portion as well. Additional absences may be excused in cases such as illness, family emergencies, religious observances, or college-sanctioned events, but *they require advance notice and appropriate documentation*. If you are sick, documentation may come from the [Wellness Center](#). If you are a student-athlete, please let me know in advance if you'll miss class due to athletic commitments. If you miss an in-class assignment for an excused absence, we will arrange a make-up session; otherwise, you will lose full credit for that assignment. Please note that missing a class debate may be particularly difficult to make up; in such cases, an alternate task will be assigned, and it will likely be more demanding than the original format. If you anticipate needing additional time for submitting the post-debate reflections, please notify me *at least one week in advance* and I can offer a 48-hour extension—no questions asked. Otherwise, late reflections will incur a penalty of one-third of a letter grade for each day late. If you are facing ongoing challenges that may affect your ability to attend class or complete your work, please reach out as soon as possible so we can work together on a plan.

Accessibility

Wofford College is committed to full inclusion of all students. If you have already established disability accommodations with Accessibility Services, please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. If you have not yet established services through Accessibility Services but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations, please contact Accessibility Services at accessibilityservices@wofford.edu or visit <https://www.wofford.edu/student-experiences/wellness-center/accessibility>.

Mental Health

College can bring challenges that interfere with learning and well-being, including strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating, or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns may affect your ability to attend class, focus, complete assignments, or participate in daily activities. If you are experiencing distress, please reach out to me and/or seek support through campus resources. Wofford's Wellness Center offers a variety of [Counseling Services](#) and other resources that you may find useful. You can contact them at 864-597-4370, email counselingservices@wofford.edu, or schedule a virtual appointment [here](#). For immediate assistance, call the [Office of Campus Safety](#) at 864-597-4911. For immediate mental health assistance, contact the Terrier Care Line at 864-597-4393 (available 24/7).

Asking for help is a sign of courage and strength.

Required Texts

Mingst, Karen A., and Heather Elko McKibben. *Essentials of International Relations*. 9th ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2021 (abbreviated as "Essentials" in the Schedule).

I *cannot* post this textbook on Moodle due to copyright restrictions. Students must obtain their own copy. It is available for purchase or rental through the [Wofford College Bookstore](#) (print and digital formats) or may be purchased separately in digital form through [Ebooks Basic](#). Please ensure you obtain access to the text by the first week of class, and let me know if you encounter any difficulties. All other required readings are available on Moodle.

Schedule

Date	Topic/Assignment	Readings
Part I: Historical Foundations		
W 8/27	Introduction	Kendall-Taylor & Fontaine 2024
F 8/29	Approaches to IR	Essentials, Ch. 1
M 9/1	<i>Labor Day, No Class</i>	
W 9/3	Westphalia & World War I	Essentials, Ch. 2 (pp. 19-35)
F 9/5	World War II	Essentials, Ch. 2 (pp. 35-40)
M 9/8	The Cold War	Essentials, Ch. 2 (pp. 40-52)

W 9/10	The Post-Cold War Era	Essentials, Ch. 2 (pp. 52-63)
F 9/12	Discussion & Review of Part I	No new readings assigned

Part II: Theoretical Frameworks

M 9/15	Realism	Essentials, Ch. 3 (pp. 65-77) & Glaser 2024
W 9/17	Liberalism	Essentials, Ch. 3 (pp. 77-82) & Doyle 2024
F 9/19	Realism & Liberalism (cont.)	No new readings assigned
M 9/22	Constructivism	Essentials, Ch. 3 (pp. 83-88) & Jamison 2021
W 9/24	Frameworks in Dialogue	Essentials, Ch. 3 (pp. 94-101) & Walt 1998
F 9/26	Class Debate I	
M 9/29	<i>No Class</i>	
W 10/1	Critical Theories: Feminism, Postcolonialism & Race	Essentials, Ch. 3 (pp. 89-94) & Tickner 1988
F 10/3	Critical Theories (cont.)	Krishna 2018; Zvobgo & Loken 2020
	Post-Debate Reflection I Due	
M 10/6	Levels of Analysis: The International System	Essentials, Ch. 4 (pp. 103-119) & Singer 1961
W 10/8	Levels of Analysis: The State & The Individual	Essentials, Ch. 4 (pp. 119-139)
F 10/10	Wrap-Up: Levels of Analysis	No new readings assigned
M 10/13	Midterm Review Session	
W 10/15	Midterm Exam	
F 10/17	<i>Fall Break, No Class</i>	

Part III: International Security

M 10/20	Types & Causes of War	Essentials, Ch. 6 (pp. 177-201)
W 10/22	War Prevention & the Laws of War	Essentials, Ch. 6 (pp. 201-219); “The Laws of War” podcast
F 10/24	<i>No Class</i>	
M 10/27	Nuclear Weapons	Tannenwald 1999; Daalder & Lodal 2008; Waltz 2012
W 10/29	Nuclear Weapons (cont.)	Same as above
F 10/31	Discussion & Review of Part III	No new readings assigned

Part IV: International Political Economy & Governance

M 11/3	IPE	Essentials, Ch. 8
W 11/5	IPE (cont.)	Same as above
F 11/7	IGO & NGOs	Essentials, Ch. 9
M 11/10	Human Rights	Essentials, Ch. 10
W 11/12	Discussion & Review of Part IV	No new readings assigned
F 11/14	Class Debate II	

Part V: Global Challenges

M 11/17	The Environment	Essentials, Ch. 11; Hardin 1968 & McKibben 2020
W 11/19	The Environment (cont.)	Same as above
F 11/21	Migration	Essentials, Ch. 12 (pp. 425-442)

Post-Debate Reflection II Due

M 11/24	<i>Thanksgiving, No Class</i>	
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W 11/26	<i>Thanksgiving, No Class</i>	
F 11/28	<i>Thanksgiving, No Class</i>	
M 12/1	Democratic Erosion	Bermeo 2016; V-Dem Report 2024
W 12/3	Democratic Erosion (cont.)	Same as above
F 12/5	Parting Thoughts	Walt 2020; “The Case for Liberal Internationalism” podcast
M 12/8	Final Exam, 8-10:30am	

List of Readings

Assigned readings for the course are listed below with full citations:

- Bermeo, Nancy. 2016. “On Democratic Backsliding.” *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), 5-19.
- Daalder, Ivo, & Lodal, Jan. 2008. “Logic of Zero-Toward a World without Nuclear Weapons.” *Foreign Affairs*, 87: 80-95.
- Doyle, Michael. 2024. “Why They Don’t Fight: The Surprising Endurance of the Democratic Peace.” *Foreign Affairs*, 103: 135-141.
- Glaser, Charles. L. 2024. “Fear Factor: How to Know When You’re in a Security Dilemma.” *Foreign Affairs*, 103: 122-128.
- Hardin, Garrett. 1968. “The Tragedy of the Commons.” *Science*, 162(3859), 1243-1248.
- Jamison, Maj Benjamin C. 2021. “A Constructivist Approach to a Rising China.” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, Air University Press (May 2021).
- Kendall-Taylor, Andrea, & Fontaine, Richard. 2024. “The Axis of Upheaval: How America’s Adversaries Are Uniting to Overturn the Global Order.” *Foreign Affairs*, 103: 50-63.
- Krishna, Sankaran. 2018. “Postcolonialism and its Relevance for International Relations in a Globalized World.” In *Race, Gender, and Culture in International Relations* (pp. 19-34), Routledge.
- McKibben, Bill. 2020. “A Very Hot Year.” *The New York Review of Books*.

- Mingst, Karen A., & Heather Elko McKibben. 2021. *Essentials of International Relations*. 9th ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Nord, Marina, et al. 2024. "Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot." University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute.
- Singer, J. David. 1961. "The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations." *World Politics*, 14(1), 77-92.
- Tannenwald, Nina. 1999. "The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use." *International Organization*, 53(3), 433-468.
- Tickner, J. Ann. 1988 [2016]. "A Critique of Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism." *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues*, 15-27.
- Walt, Stephen M. 1998. "International Relations: One World, Many Theories." *Foreign Policy*, 29-46.
- Walt, Stephen M. 2020. "The Global Order After Covid-19." *Institute for Security Policy (ISP)*, Working Paper, Vienna.
- Waltz, Kenneth N. 2012. "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb: Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability." *Foreign Affairs*, 2-5.
- Zvobgo, Kelebogile, & Loken, Meredith. 2020. "Why Race Matters in International Relations." *Foreign Policy* (June 19, 2020).