

GOVT 540: Seminar in International Relations†

Course Number: 77076

Course Section: GOVT 540 DL1

Fall Semester 2025

August 28 to December 4, Thursdays, 4:30-7:10pm

Online synchronous (Zoom): Link TBA

Professor: Ger FitzGerald

Office hours: By appointment (Zoom)

Email: gfitzge1@gmu.edu

†This syllabus may change as the semester progresses.

University Course Catalog Description

Analyzes selected major works of ancient, modern, or contemporary political theory that illuminate basic problems and questions for people engaged in political or civic life. Examines justice, liberty, equality, autonomy, rights, obligation, participation, and nature of politics. Offered by Schar School of Policy and Government. May not be repeated for credit.

Course Description

This course provides a comprehensive introduction to the methodology and literature of international relations (IR). This seminar surveys the most influential theories and debates in the field. The seminar focuses on theory. This is not a history course, although we will address how historical events, such as World War I and the Cold War have influenced the sociology of knowledge of IR theory and how the theories shed light on the past. This is also not a course on current events, although we will address the extent to which IR theories may or may not help us understand the present and predict the future.

Course Learning Outcomes

By the close of this course students will be able to:

- Summarize and evaluate the research questions and causalities of seminal articles and books in the international relations field.
- Apply and critique the various theories of international relations.
- Use the theories to describe, explain, and make tentative predictions.
- Develop and apply their own views and justify them in terms of theory, history, and social science research.

Grading Scale

A+: 490-500

A: 460-489

A-: 450-459

B+: 440-449

B: 410-439

B-: 400-409

C+: 390-399

C: 360-389

C-: 350-359

D+: 340-349

D: 310-339

D-: 300-309

F: 299 and below

Grade Weights

Attendance 50

Participation 50

Theory paper 120

Oral Presentation of Class Readings 100

Final Paper 180

Total 500 points

Grading-related Policies

Attendance is measured by screenshots taken at three key points during each class session:

1. **Start of class** (first 5 minutes)
 2. **Midpoint** (approximately halfway through)
 3. **End of class** (final 5 minutes)
- Students must be present and visible in all three screenshots to be counted as fully present for that session.
 - Failure to appear in **one or more of the screenshots** will result in that session being marked as a **partial or full absence**, depending on how many screenshots are missed.
 - Each student is permitted **one excused absence** during the term without penalty. No documentation is required for this absence, but students are encouraged to notify the instructor in advance when possible.
 - **Additional absences require documentation**, such as a **doctor's note** or official excuse, in order to be considered excused.
 - If documentation is not provided, additional absences beyond the one permitted will be considered unexcused and may affect your participation grade.

This policy is designed to ensure accountability while recognizing the realities of health and personal circumstances. If you anticipate any barriers to meeting these expectations, please contact the instructor early in the semester to discuss potential accommodations.

Participation

Participation is a core component of this graduate seminar, reflecting your engagement with the material and your contribution to our collective intellectual community. To evaluate participation fairly and transparently, we will use a **quantitative system based on relative performance**. Each student's participation will be evaluated and then **standardized using a T-score**. This approach helps account for variation in group dynamics and provides a way to compare individual engagement relative to the class. To convert T-scores into final participation grades, I use an **80-centered linear transformation**. This aligns the **average performance with a score of 80**, and scales other scores accordingly. This method ensures that strong participation is rewarded, while still allowing for variation based on relative contribution—not just quantity of comments. The final participation grade may be capped or adjusted in special cases (e.g., consistent disruptive behavior, or consistently high-quality contributions not captured in frequency metrics). This

system is designed to **encourage above-average participation**, while fairly recognizing different participation styles and class sizes. Quality of contribution (insightfulness, responsiveness, and constructiveness) is prioritized over quantity alone.

Important dates

Tuesday, September 2: Last Day to Add

Monday, September 8: Last Day to Drop: With 100% Tuition Refund

Tuesday, September 16: Last Day to Drop: With 50% Tuition Refund

Thursday, October 2: Topic due for 5 to 7-page analysis paper

Thursday, October 30: 5 to 7-page analysis paper due

Thursday, November 20: Topic due for 10 to 15-page research paper

Thursday, December 11: 10 to 15-page research paper due

Required texts

- Textbook—Kauppi, Mark V., and Paul R. Viotti. *International Relations Theory*. Seventh edition. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023.
- Course Packet—Readings will be available on the course site on Canvas.

Technical expectations:

This course will be hosted on Canvas for the Fall 2025 semester. Please ensure you are familiar with accessing and navigating this platform. Resources and support are available at: <https://lms.gmu.edu/getting-started-students/> to help you get started. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to reach out to me or contact the [ITS Support Center](#) for assistance. To participate in this course, students will need to satisfy the following technical requirements:

- High-speed Internet access with standard up-to-date browsers.
- Students must maintain consistent and reliable access to their GMU email and Canvas, as these are the official methods of communication for this course.
- The following software plug-ins for PCs and Macs, respectively, are available for free download:
 - Adobe Acrobat Reader: <https://get.adobe.com/reader/>

How will this class work in Zoom:

- Registered students will receive a recurring Zoom invitation for this class, which will include the meeting link.
- If your internet connection allows and you feel comfortable, please keep your camera on. I will do the same whenever possible.
- Please mute your microphone when you're not speaking. I will mute participants if there is significant background noise.
- Active participation, questions, and discussions are highly encouraged. Online settings can make it challenging to ensure everyone has a chance to speak. To facilitate interaction, please use one of the following methods if you'd like to contribute:
 - Raise your hand using the Zoom hand raise feature.
 - Use the Zoom chat window.

I will monitor these channels and do my best to acknowledge participants in the order they express their interest in speaking.

- This class will be recorded in Zoom. Videos will be posted on the course Canvas site. Videos may also be used in other GMU courses or video snippets that do not identify students may be used in public forums (e.g. website, twitter, etc.) as an example or advertisement of online course instruction. If you have privacy concerns, please speak to me ASAP.
- Please be patient with technical issues as we all learn how best to do online learning via Zoom and do the best we can with our personal home internet. Your feedback however is also welcome and encouraged.

Course Requirements:

1. Students are expected to have completed the assigned readings prior to class and to be appropriately well prepared for seminar discussion.
2. Students are required to write a ***5 to 7-page analysis paper***. This paper will apply the three main theories of international relations to a current or historical international political event.
 - a. Students to analyze an event, topic, or other suitable phenomenon using one of the sub-theories of realism (classical realism, neo-realism, and neoclassical realism) and one of the sub-theories of liberalism (liberal internationalism, complex interdependence, and neoliberal institutionalism) and also using a constructivist approach.
 - b. Topic submitted via e-mail by October 3, 2024.
 - c. Papers submitted in MS Word format via e-mail (to gfitzge1@gmu.edu) by 9pm, Friday, November 1, 2024.

Please note that make-up exams and paper extensions will be given only if students have proper documentation.

3. Students are required to write a ***10 to 15-page research paper***. The form and content of this paper will be discussed in greater detail in class. Students should note the following deadlines for research and writing:
 - a. Topic submitted via e-mail by 9pm, Thursday, November 21, 2024.
 - b. Papers submitted in MS Word format via e-mail (to gfitzge1@gmu.edu) by 9pm, December 12, 2024.

Please note that make-up exams and paper extensions will be given only if students have proper documentation.

4. All students are required to present two readings in class. These 5–7-minute presentations will serve as the starting point for seminar discussion. Students will be penalized for presentations exceeding 9 minutes. Readings marked as “INTRO” texts are not available for presentation. Presentations should critically analyze the reading and will be graded on students’ clarity of presentation and understanding of central issues and themes. Students should pay particular attention to the following (if applicable):
 - a. The author’s core assumptions and theoretical commitments.
 - b. What empirical evidence does the author marshal to support his or her argument?
 - c. How does the article relate to the literature more broadly (i.e., from which theoretical tradition is the author drawing? To what is the author

- responding? Etc.)
- d. What are the strengths of the argument? What are the weaknesses, or gaps? Are there counterarguments that challenge the author's perspective? What is the historical significance of the piece?
 - e. What is the historical significance of the piece?
 - f. How might the reading help us understand current events or real-world phenomena?
 - g. What key takeaways do you think are most important for your classmates?

Please e-mail me to discuss missed/late work. If you anticipate you will have a conflict for any reason, please inform me within the first three weeks of class.

Academic Standards

Academic Standards exist to promote authentic scholarship, support the institution's goal of maintaining high standards of academic excellence, and encourage continued ethical behavior of faculty and students to cultivate an educational community which values integrity and produces graduates who carry this commitment forward into professional practice.

As members of the George Mason University community, we are committed to fostering an environment of trust, respect, and scholarly excellence. Our academic standards are the foundation of this commitment, guiding our behavior and interactions within this academic community. The practices for implementing these standards adapt to modern practices, disciplinary contexts, and technological advancements. Our standards are embodied in our courses, policies, and scholarship, and are upheld in the following principles:

- **Honesty:** Providing accurate information in all academic endeavors, including communications, assignments, and examinations.
- **Acknowledgement:** Giving proper credit for all contributions to one's work. This involves the use of accurate citations and references for any ideas, words, or materials created by others in the style appropriate to the discipline. It also includes acknowledging shared authorship in group projects, coauthored pieces, and project reports.
- **Uniqueness of Work:** Ensuring that all submitted work is the result of one's own effort and is original, including free from self-plagiarism. This principle extends to written assignments, code, presentations, exams, and all other forms of academic work.

Violations of these standards—including but not limited to plagiarism, fabrication, and cheating—are taken seriously and will be addressed in accordance with university policies. [The process for reporting, investigating, and adjudicating violations is outlined in the university's procedures here.](#) Consequences of violations may include academic sanctions, disciplinary actions, and other measures necessary to uphold the integrity of our academic community.

The principles outlined in these academic standards reflect our collective commitment to upholding the highest standards of honesty, acknowledgement, and uniqueness of work. By adhering to these principles, we ensure the continued excellence and integrity of George Mason University's academic community.

Student responsibility: Students are responsible for understanding how these general expectations regarding academic standards apply to each course, assignment, or exam they participate in; students should ask their instructor for clarification on any aspect that is not clear to them.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to upholding the letter and spirit of the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. Under the administration of University Life, Disability Services implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities. Students can begin the registration process with Disability Services at any time during their enrollment at George Mason University. If you are seeking accommodations, please visit the [Disability Services website](#) for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu. Phone: (703) 993-2474.

Student responsibility: Students are responsible for registering with Disability Services and communicating about their approved accommodations with their instructor in advance of any relevant class meeting, assignment, or exam.

FERPA and Use of GMU Email Addresses for Course Communication

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) governs the disclosure of education records for eligible students and is an essential aspect of any course. **Students must use their GMU email account** to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. Instructors will not respond to messages sent from or send messages regarding course content to a non-GMU email address.

Student responsibility: Students are responsible for checking their GMU email regularly for course-related information, and/or ensuring that GMU email messages are forwarded to an account they do check.

Title IX Resources and Required Reporting

As a part of George Mason University's commitment to providing a safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and working environment for all members of the University community, the University does not discriminate on the basis of sex or gender in any of its education or employment programs and activities. Accordingly, **all non-confidential employees, including your faculty member, have a legal requirement to report to the Title IX Coordinator, all relevant details obtained directly or indirectly about any incident of Prohibited Conduct** (such as sexual harassment, sexual

assault, gender-based stalking, dating/domestic violence). Upon notifying the Title IX Coordinator of possible Prohibited Conduct, the Title IX Coordinator will assess the report and determine if outreach is required. If outreach is required, the individual the report is about (the “Complainant”) will receive a communication, likely in the form of an email, offering that person the option to meet with a representative of the Title IX office.

For more information about non-confidential employees, resources, and Prohibited Conduct, please see University Policy 1202: [Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence](#). Questions regarding Title IX can be directed to the Title IX Coordinator via email to TitleIX@gmu.edu, by phone at 703-993-8730, or in person on the Fairfax campus in Aquia 373.

Student opportunity: If you prefer to speak to someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential employees in [Student Support & Advocacy \(SSAC\)](#), Counseling and [Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#), [Student Health Services \(SHS\)](#), and/or the [Office of the University Ombudsperson](#).

CLASS PLAN

Introduction, August 28 — Class overview, Introductions, Fundamentals

- Introductions
 - Syllabus overview
 - Overview of the discipline of International Relations
 - Comparative Politics and International Relations
 - Fundamentals of IR theories: Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, Marxism, Psychological approaches and theories (The role of cognitive biases in decision making, including prospect theory, groupthink, reasoning by analogy.)
 - The IR theory conceptual map / Visualizing IR Theory
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ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS AND INTRODUCTION TO THE “PARADIGMS”

Class 1, September 4 — _Levels of Analysis & Introduction to the three “Paradigms”

- Singer, D. (1961). The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations. *World Politics*, 14(1), 77–92.
 - Allison, G. T. (1969). Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis. *American Political Science Review*, 63(03), 689–718.
 - Walt, S. M. (1998). International Relations: One World, Many Theories. *Foreign Policy*, 110, 29.
 - Drezner, D. (2010, June 15). Night of the Living Wonks. *Foreign Policy*.
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MODULE 1 – IR THEORIES AND APPROACHES

Class 2, September 11 — Introduction to IR Realism

- INTRO: Kauppi, Mark V., and Paul R. Viotti. "Chapter 5 - Realism: The State and Balance of Power in *International Relations Theory*, Seventh edition, 199-240.
- Thucydides. (416 C.E.). The Melian Dialogue. In *History of the Peloponnesian War*.
- Rose, G. (1998). Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy. *World Politics*, 51(1).
- Smith, N. R., & Dawson, G. (2022). Mearsheimer, Realism, and the Ukraine War. *Analyse & Kritik*, 44(2), 175-200.

Class 3, September 18 — Introduction to IR Liberalism

- INTRO: Kauppi, Mark V., and Paul R. Viotti. "Chapter 6 - Liberalism: Interdependence and Global Governance." In *International Relations Theory*, Seventh edition.
- Doyle, M. (1986). Liberalism and World Politics. *American Political Science Review*, 80(4), 1151-1169.
- Walker, T. C. (2013). A circumspect revival of liberalism: Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye's Power and Interdependence. In H. Bliddal, C. Sylvest, & P. Wilson (Eds.), *Classics of international relations: Essays in criticism and appreciation*. Routledge.
- Ikenberry, G. J. (2024). Three Worlds: The West, East and South and the competition to shape global order. *International Affairs*, 100(1), 121-138.

Class 4, September 25 — Introduction to IR Constructivism

- INTRO: Hurd, I. (2010). Constructivism. In C. Reus-Smit & D. Snidal (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*. Oxford University Press.
- Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics. *International Organization*, 46(02), 391.
- Finnemore, M. (1996). Constructing Norms of Humanitarian Intervention. In *The Culture of National Security*. Columbia University Press.
- Checkel, J. (1998). The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory. *World Politics*, 50(2), 324-348.

Class 5, October 2 — Economic Structuralism and Post-Colonialism

- INTRO: Kauppi, Mark V., and Paul R. Viotti. "Chapter 7 – Economic Structuralism: Global Capitalism and Postcolonialism." In *International Relations Theory*, Seventh edition.
- Wallerstein, I. (2011). Structural Crisis in the World-System: Where Do We Go from Here? *Monthly Review*, 62(10), 31.
- Salter, M. B. (2010). Edward Said and post-colonial international relations. In S. Chan, K. M. Fierke, C. Moore, C. Farrands, M. Chou, A. Bieler, & M. B. Salter

(Eds.), *International relations theory and philosophy: Interpretive dialogues*. Routledge.

Class 6, October 9 — IR, Climate Change, and Environmental Understandings

- INTRO: Kauppi, Mark V., and Paul R. Viotti. "Chapter 12 – Green Theory and Environmental Understandings." In *International Relations Theory*, Seventh edition.
- Keohane, R. O., & Victor, D. G. (2011). The Regime Complex for Climate Change. *Perspectives on Politics*, 9(1), 7–23.
- [Will be replaced with an alternate reading] Underdal, A. (2017). Climate Change and International Relations (After Kyoto). *Annual Review of Political Science*, 20(1), 169–188.
- Department of Defense (2021). *Department of Defense Climate Risk Analysis* [Report Submitted to National Security Council.]. <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Oct/21/2002877353/-1/-1/0/DOD-CLIMATERISK-ANALYSIS-FINAL.PDF>

Class 7, October 16 — Rational Choice, Conflict, and Cooperation

- Axelrod, R. M. (1984). *The evolution of cooperation* (Rev. ed). Basic Books, Introduction and Chapter 4.
- Fearon, J. (1995). Rationalist Explanations for War. *International Organization*, 49(3), 379–414.
- Putnam, R. (1988). Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games. *International Organization*, 42(3).
- Pape, R. A. (2003). The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism. *American Political Science Review*, 97(03).

Class 8, October 23 — Psychological and other Individual-level approaches

- Jervis, R. (2017). *Perception and misperception in international politics* (New edition). Princeton University Press, Chapters 9 and 10.
- Khong, Y. (1992). *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*. Princeton University Press, Chapter 8 and skim the Conclusion.
- McDermott, R. (1992). Prospect Theory in International Relations: The Iranian Hostage Rescue Mission. *Political Psychology*, 13(2), 237-263.

MODULE 2 – THE HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF IR THEORIZING

Class 9, October 30 — World War I and International Relations Theory

- *President Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points* (1918). (2021, September 21). National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-woodrow-wilsons-14-points>
- Levy, J. S. (1990). Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in July 1914. *International Security*, 15(3), 151.
- Lebow, R. N. (2014). What can International Relations Theory learn from the

origins of World War I? *International Relations*, 28(4), 387–410.

- Lieber, K. A. (2007). The New History of World War I and What It Means for International Relations Theory. *International Security*, 32(2), 155–191.

Class 10, November 6 – The End of the Cold War and International Relations Theory

- Fukuyama, F. (1989). The End of History. *National Interest*, 16, 3–18.
- Huntington, S. (1993). The Clash of Civilizations. *Foreign Affairs*, 72(3).
- Mearsheimer, J. (1990). Why We Shall Soon Miss the Cold War. *Atlantic Monthly*, 226(2).
- Wohlforth, W. (1999). Realism and the End of the Cold War. *International Security*, 19(3), 91–129.
- Lebow, Richard Ned, John Mueller, and William C. Wohlforth. (1995). “Realism and the End of the Cold War.” *International Security* 20(2): 185.

Class 11, November 13 – The Rise of China

- Ikenberry, G. J. (2008). The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive? *Foreign Affairs*, 87(1), 23–37.
- Mearsheimer, J. (2006). China’s Unpeaceful Rise. *Current History*, 105(690), 160–162.
- Schweller, R. L., & Pu, X. (2011). After Unipolarity: China’s Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline. *International Security*, 36(1), 41–72.
- Pan, C., & Kavalski, E. (2018). Theorizing China’s rise in and beyond international relations. *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 18(3), 289–311.
- Larson, D. W. (2024). Is the liberal order on the way out? China’s rise, networks, and the liberal hegemon. *International Relations*, 38(1), 113–133.

MODULE 3 – THE STATE OF THE DISCIPLINE

Class 12, November 20 – Critical voices: gender, race, religion, and IR theory

- Kauppi, Mark V., and Paul R. Viotti. “Chapter 11 – Feminist Understandings in IR Theory.” In *International Relations Theory*, Seventh edition.
- Unoki, K. (2022). Racism and the discipline of International Relations (IR). In *Racism, Diplomacy, and International Relations* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- [Will be replaced with an alternate reading] Thomas, S. (2003). Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously: The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society. In F. Petito & P. Hatzopoulos (Eds.), *Religion in international relations: The return from exile* (1st ed). Palgrave Macmillan.

No class on November 27 – Thanksgiving break

Class 13, December 4 – Emerging Challenges and the Future of IR

- Nye, Joseph S. (2016). Deterrence and Dissuasion in Cyberspace. *International Security*, 41(3).
- Shaw, I. G. (2017). Robot Wars: US Empire and geopolitics in the robotic age. *Security Dialogue*, 48(5), 451–470.
- [Will be replaced with an alternate reading] Drezner, D. W. (2020). The Song Remains the Same: International Relations After COVID-19. *International Organization*, 74(S1), E18–E35.
- Corry, O. (2022). What's the point of being a discipline? Four disciplinary strategies and the future of International Relations. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 57(3), 290–310.