**PLS 160- Online Introduction to International Relations**

**Michigan State University**

**Fall Semester 2020**

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All office hours are conducted through Zoom links than can be accessed in the D2L website

**Overview**

This is an introductory course in international relations. It provides a background to help you understand contemporary world politics, and a basis for continuing on to higher-level international relations courses at Michigan State University. The class will introduce students to the main theoretical traditions and topics in the field and use those theoretical frameworks to explore issues related to the causes of international conflict and violence, the role of international institutions, and various aspects of international economic relations. Narrower topics that we will cover include: international institutions, military alliances, wars, trade agreements, the role of multinational corporations, and international finance.

This iteration of PLS 160 is online and largely asynchronous.

**Textbook and other course resources**

Textbook: Frieden, Jeffrey A., David A. Lake, and Kenneth A. Schultz. 2009. *World Politics: Interests, Interactions, Institutions.* New York: W.W. Norton. 4th edition

The textbook readings will be supplemented, at times, with academic and newspaper articles. Those articles will be uploaded in advance to the course D2L website.

**Video Lectures and Slides**

In lieu of in-person lectures, the course materials will primarily be conveyed through a series of shorter, more narrowly focused videos and accompanying power point presentations.

The videos are not meant to substitute for the reading, and they are meant to be viewed after the reading has been completed. While the videos should be intelligible even if you have not read first, they are delivered at a pace and using a vocabulary that presumes some prior familiarity with the material. The videos themselves are largely focused on the concepts, while the discussion sections (see below) are meant to illustrate those concepts with examples. I may during the course of the semester post additional videos as the opportunity and need arises.

There are a lot of benefits to relying on shorter videos over longer lectures, even without the public health benefits that are currently motivating them. But a downside that is worth noting is that traditional lectures can do a better job of showing connections between topics than do shorter, discrete videos. That sort of synthesis is often going to be clearer in the reading. Part of your task as students is to make sure that you are paying attention to those connections, and synthesizing material into a holistic picture as much as possible.

The videos will be released on a schedule as noted below. The sequential release of videos is meant to help facilitate our keeping to a common pace, which will help discussion sections and much else.

**Feedback**

Student feedback (positive or negative) is always important, but especially so in a course in which large parts of it are administered impersonally. We will reach out to the class periodically to gather feedback, and welcome constructive feedback even if it is not being actively solicited. The best way to give such feedback is through the GSI or the ULA.

Notwithstanding my desire for feedback, there are limits to how much or how quickly it can be applied to the course. For the first few weeks, at least, we are all locked into the speed and level of detail that I chose for the first few videos. Moreover, with over 200 students and only one video per topic it is inevitably going to be the case that the videos will fit some students’ learning styles better than others. Nonetheless, adjustments are possible over the course of the semester and I will make them as needed and to the extent that they are feasible.

**Office Hours**

Office hours are the best antidote to the impersonal nature of a large online course. Office hours can be used as a way to have concepts re-explained, to discuss their application to real world events, to ask administrative questions about the course, or just to get to know the instructors. There will be (virtual) office hours held by Kerner, Du and Briones via recurring Zoom meetings. These office hours are meant for individual meetings, and there will be a virtual waiting room where students will stay until it is their turn to meet.

Zoom links for instructor office hours can be accessed through the D2L website. Links are provided under the “upcoming events” in the course calendar.

**Discussion Sections, Discussion Cohorts & Topic Papers**

The syllabus is divided in to 7 “topics,” most of which last two weeks. For each topic students are required to either attend and participate in an online discussion or submit a short paper. It is up to the student to decide which they prefer. Students can choose to only write papers, or only attend discussion sections, or any combination of the two. Those two options are described in more details below.

*Discussion Sections & Cohorts*

Discussion sections will be held in fixed time slots, six times a week via recurring Zoom meetings. Links to those meetings are available in the D2L website in the “upcoming events” section of the course calendar.

Students will assign themselves into one of 6 discussion section cohorts: A, B, C, D, E or F, each of which will correspond with specific discussion section time slot. Each cohort will have roughly 35 students in it.

With small number of exceptions, each week’s discussion section will be linked to a newspaper article that illustrates or expands on some point made in the reading and/or lecture. Part of the section will be spent discussing that article in relation to the week’s themes, and part will be reserved to answer questions and review material from readings and/or lectures.

(The reading list below assigns articles to each discussion section, but those assignments should be understood as provisional and subject to change. If and when current events provide better or more useful presentations of the material, we will use those instead.)

Cohort selections will be made in the first week of class. Enrollment in those cohorts is capped at 50, so if you have substantial time constraints please enroll sooner than later. After the fact switching is discouraged, but possible in coordination with Kerner.

If there is a structural reason why you will always opt for the paper option—scheduling conflicts, for example—you will register for Cohort G. Cohort G is reserved for people who will never (and for whatever reason, can never) attend a discussion section. Professor Kerner will follow up with the members of Cohort G to make sure that they are given some form of Zoom-based access to the instructors. As long as it is theoretically possible that you will be attending a discussion section please sign up for one of cohorts A, B, C, D, E or F.

*Discussion Section Preparation*

In addition to reading the assigned article, students should complete the textbook readings and watch the videos associated with that topic prior to discussion section.

*Submitted Questions*

Students are expected to submit one question/comment prior to attending discussion section. Questions can be submitted via the D2L assignments tab. This question/comment can relate to the article assigned to the discussion section, or to something the course reading. These do not have to be particularly insightful questions. Something like “I didn’t understand X, can you please discuss it?” works fine. The purpose of the questions is to help us utilize the time optimally.

**Submitted questions are due 12 hours before discussion section.**

*Discussion Section Requirements and Grading*

Discussion sections (or their paper alternatives) account for 30% of a student’s final grade. Students will be graded on three dimensions

1. Attendance: students are expected to attend (at least) one discussion section per topic. Most topics span two weeks and thus have two sections to pick from; Some topics only span 1 week and for them there is only one discussion section.
2. Submitted Questions
3. Participation: students should participate in the Zoom discussion as much as is practical

Discussion sections will be graded on a 0-100 basis. The following is meant to roughly benchmark your grade expectations.

**100:** attends at least one section per topic, always submit a question before hand, makes at least one comment per discussion and ideally several.

**90:** attends at least one section per topic, always submit a question before hand, participates in most discussions

**83**: attends at least one section per topic the vast majority of the time, usually submits a question before hand, meaningful participation in about half of discussion sections

**70:** spotty attendance record, occasionally submits questions, infrequent contributor

….

**0:** never does anything

*Topic Papers*

You do not have to do the discussion sections. You may find yourself unable to attend the required discussion section during a topic. You may find yourself unable to attend *any* discussion sections. You may just prefer a paper-based option. Any of that is ok. In lieu of attendance in a discussion section you may write a 1-page paper (and not more than one page, double spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font) that relates the assigned reading to the textbook material. There is no set rule about how to structure these papers, but I anticipate that most will be structured as “this article reminded me of this concept, and here is how” or “this article suggests that this theory might not always make accurate predictions” sort of papers.

The papers will be graded on a comparable scale to the sections. Individual papers will be graded on a check-plus/check/check-minus/0 basis. To get check plus a paper must be reasonably thoughtful and evince evidence of preparation. A paper that is to varying degrees unthoughtful or shows a lack of preparation will get less credit. Papers are due by the end of the week of that discussion section, and late papers will not be accepted.

**GRADING**

This is for the most part an exam-based course. There will be two exams over the course of the semester, one covering the first half of the course (theoretical approaches to IR, causes of war) and the other covering the second half (international economic relations). The final exam is non-cumulative.

In keeping with the asynchronous nature of the course, there will not be exam “times” but rather exam weeks. The exams can be taken at any point during that week, but the exam itself will be timed. The exams will be open notes and open book. The questions on the exam will be randomly assigned to you from a larger bank of questions and presented in a random order. The order of the multiple-choice options will also be randomized. As a result, every student will get a different exam.

The numerical grade will be computed as follows:

35%: midterm

35%: final

30%: discussion section/topic papers

At the end of the semester we will down weight your lowest exam grade by 5% and up-weight your highest exam grade by 5%. The (adjusted) points earned for each of the four components noted above will be converted to a final grade based on the following scale:

4: 92%-100%

3.5: 84%-92%

3: 76%-84%

2.5: 68%-76%

2: 60%-68%

1.5: 52%-60%

1: 44%-52%

0: <44%

Grades are inclusive of the lower bound and exclusive of the upper bound, such that a 92 will yield a 4, and a 91.99999 will yield a 3.5, an 84 will yield a 3.5 and 3.499999 will yield a 3, and so on.

**COURSE POLICIES**

1. No extra credit assignments.
2. Academic Honesty: All students are expected to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct, especially the provisions pertaining to academic honesty. No student in this course may claim ignorance of these regulations. Accordingly, violations of academic honesty - even allegedly "borderline," "minor," or "ambiguous" transgressions - will NOT be tolerated.
3. Discussion Section Norms of Behavior:
   1. Be respectful of other students’ opinions and questions.
   2. Be patient with the technology and the limitations it may impose.
   3. If you have a question, ask it; you are probably not the only one.
   4. Be on time.

Module I: Introduction

**Topic 0: Course Logistics**

**Release Date: 9/2**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Topic | Textbook Reading | Other Reading | Video # |
| Introduction & Logistics | none |  | 1 |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Discussion Topic | Reading | Date & Time | Leader |
| Logistics | none | 9/2 @ 4:00 pm  9/3 @ 11:30 am  9/3 @ 7:00 pm  9/4 @ 10:00 am  9/4 @ 2:00 pm | Kerner  &  Briones  &  Du |

**Topic 1: Isms**

**Release Date: 9/4**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Topic | Textbook Reading | Other Reading | Video # |
| Introduction to IR/Isms | xx-xxxi |  | 2 |
| Realism | xxxi-xxxiv |  | 3 |
| Liberalism | xxxiv-xxxv |  | 4 |
| Constructivism | xxxv-xxxvi |  | 5 |

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| Discussion Topic | Reading | Date & Time | Leader | Date | Leader | Date | Leader |
| Realist/Liberal/Constructivist approaches to US-China diplomacy | U.S. Relations With China 1949 – 2019  <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-china>  Avoiding a new Cold War between the US and China. Brooking institute. [Jeffrey A. Bader](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/08/17/avoiding-a-new-cold-war-between-the-us-and-china/) Monday, August 17, 2020 | A: 9/9 @ 11 am  B: 9/10 @ 11:10 am | Kerner | C: 9/10 @ 3 pm  D: 9/11 @1 pm | Briones | E: 9/11 @ 10 am  F: 9/11 @ 3 pm | Du |

**Topic 2: Actors, Interests, Institutions**

**Release Date: 9/11**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Topic | Textbook Reading | Other Reading | Video # |
| Actors & Interests | 42-50 |  | 6 |
| Interactions: Cooperation and Bargaining | 51-57; 63-67 |  | 7 |
| 2x2 Games: Prisoner’s Dilemma, Stage Hunt, Chicken | 82-87 |  | 8 |
| Public Goods & Coordination | 57-63 |  | 9 |
| Institutions | 68-78 |  | 10 |

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| Discussion Topic | Reading | Date | Leader | Date | Leader | Date | Leader |
| Cooperation and Bargaining | The Chill of U.S.-Russia Relations Creeps Into Space. The Atlantic. Marina Koren January 11, 2019 | A: 9/16 @ 11 am  B: 9/17 @ 11:10 am | Kerner | C 9/17 @3 pm  D 9/18 @ 1 pm | Briones | E: 9/18 @ 10 am  F: 9/18 @ 3 pm | Du |
| Public Goods, Coordination & Institutions | 10 things you need to know about NATO <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/126169.htm>  Trump’s NATO criticism is ‘valid,’ Europe isn’t spending enough on defense, UK ex-minister says. CNBC. [Holly Ellyatt](https://www.cnbc.com/holly-ellyatt/) Wed, Jul 11 20181:23 AM  https://www.cnbc.com/2018/07/11/trumps-nato-criticism-is-valid-europe-isnt-spending-enough-on-def.html Trump keeps criticizing NATO allies over spending. Here's how NATO's budget actually works. [John Haltiwanger](https://www.businessinsider.com/author/john-haltiwanger)  Dec 2, 2019, https://www.businessinsider.com/how-nato-budget-is-funded-2018-7 | A: 9/23 @ 11 am  B: 9/24 @ 11:10 am | Kerner | C 9/24 @ 3 pm  D 9/25 @ 1 pm | Briones | E: 9/25 @ 10 am  F: 9/25 @ 3 pm | Du |

**Module 2: Conflict**

**Topic 3: Bargaining Model**

**Release Date: 9/25**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Topic | Textbook Reading | Other Reading | Video # |
| What is War | 88-96 |  | 11 |
| The bargaining model / Compellance and deterrence | 96-102 |  | 12 |
| War from incomplete information/ Credibility | 103-117 |  | 13 |
| War from commitment problems | 118-127 |  | 14 |
| War from Indivisibility | 127-130 |  | 15 |
| Is war less likely now? | 130-135 |  | 16 |

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| Discussion Topic | Reading | Date | Leader | Date | Leader | Date | Leader |
| Intro to the bargaining model | None-strictly review | A: 9/30 @11 am  B: 10/1 @ 11:10 am | Kerner | C 10/1 @ 3 pm  D 10/2 @ 1 pm | Briones | E: 10/2 @ 10 am  F: 10/2 @ 3 pm | Du |
| Credibility/war from commitment problems | Special Report:‘Time to take out our swords' - Inside Iran’s plot to attack Saudi Arabia. Reuters NOVEMBER 25, 2019  <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-attacks-iran-special-rep/special-reporttime-to-take-out-our-swords-inside-irans-plot-to-attack-saudi-arabia-idUSKBN1XZ16H> | A 10/7 @11 am  B: 10/8 @ 11:10 am | Kerner | C: 10/8 @ 3 pm  D: 10/9 @ 1 pm | Briones | E: 10/9 @ 10 am  F: 10/9 @ 3 pm | Du |

**Topic 4.A: War and Domestic Politics**

**Release Date: 10/9**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Topic | Textbook Reading | Other Reading | Video # |
| National vs Particularsitc Interests | 138-146 |  | 17 |
| Leaders, Rally Around the Flag Effects | 146-155 |  | 18 |
| Interest Groups | 156-168 |  | 19 |
| Democratic Peace | 168-183 |  | 20 |

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| Discussion Topic | Reading | Date | Leader | Date | Leader | Date | Leader |
| Democratic Peace | Capitalizing on the Capitalist Peace, American Enterprise Institute <https://www.aei.org/articles/capitalizing-on-the-capitalist-peace/> | A 10/14 @11 am  B: 10/15 @ 11:10 am | Kerner | C 10/15 @ 3 pm  D: 10/16 @ 1 pm | Briones | E: 10/16 @ 10 am  F: 10/16 @ 3 pm | Du |

**Topic 4.B: War and International Institutions**

**Release Date: 10/16**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Topic | Textbook Reading | Other Reading | Video # |
| Alliances | 189-199 |  | 21 |
| Alliances in Europe: 1879-Present | 199-205 |  | 22 |
| Collective Security Organizations | 205-212 |  | 23 |
| UN & the Security Council | 212-216 |  | 24 |
| UN Peacekeeping and Peacemaking missions | 214-233 |  | 25 |

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| Discussion Topic | Reading | Date | Leader | Date | Leader | Date | Leader |
| Alliances & Collective Security Organizations | Five challenges that NATO must overcome to stay relevant<https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/04/five-challenges-for-nato> | A 10/21 @11 am  B: 10/22 @ 11:10 am | Kerner | C: 10/22 @ 3 pm  D: 10/23 @ 1 pm | Briones | E: 10/23 @ 10 am  F: 10/23 @ 3 pm | Du |

**Midterm Week: 10/26-10/30**

**Module 3: Global Economic Relations**

**Topic 5: International Trade**

**Release Date: 10/30**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Topic | Textbook Reading | Other Reading | Video # |
| Trade Introduction | 294-299 |  | 26 |
| Comparative Advantage, Heckscher-Ohlin, Trade Barriers | 299-306; 340-345 |  | 27 |
| Stolper-Samuelson | 306-310 |  | 28 |
| Ricardo Viner | 310-311 |  | 29 |
| Melitz Model | 311-312 |  | 30 |
| Domestic Institutions and Trade | 313-318 |  | 31 |
| International Institutions and Trade | 318-330 |  | 32 |

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| Discussion Topic | Reading | Date | Leader | Date | Leader | Date | Leader |
| Ricardo-Viner.vs. Stolper-Samuleson | Blaming Trade and Voting Trump in the Rust Belthttps://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/10/magazine/blaming-trade-and-voting-trump-in-the-rust-belt.html | A: 11/4 @11 am  B: 11/5 @11:10 am | Kerner | C: 11/5 @ 3 pm  D:11/6 @ 1 pm | Briones | E: 11/6 @ 10 am  F: 11/6 @ 3 pm | Du |
| International Institutions and Trade | Why did Trump end the WTO's Appellate Body? Tariffs.  [Chad P. Bown](https://www.piie.com/experts/senior-research-staff/chad-p-bown)  and Soumaya Keynes March 4, 2020  <https://www.piie.com/blogs/trade-and-investment-policy-watch/why-did-trump-end-wtos-appellate-body-tariffs> | A 11/11 @11 am  B: 11/12 @11:10 am | Kerner | C: 11/12 @ 3 pm  D: 11/13 @ 1 pm | Briones | E: 11/13 @ 10 am  F: 11/13 @ 3 pm | Du |

**Topic 6: International Monetary Relations**

**Release Date: 11/13**

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| Topic | Textbook Reading | | | Other Reading | Video # | |
| Introduction to Money, Exchange Rates and Interest Rates | | 386-392 |  | | | 33 |
| Exchange Rate Regimes and Domestic Politics | | 393-402 |  | | | 34 |
| Mundell-Fleming, Simplified | |  |  | | | 35 |
| The Gold Standard | | 402-406 |  | | | 36 |
| Bretton Woods | | 406-409 |  | | | 37 |
| Post-Bretton Woods | | 409-410 |  | | | 38 |
| Euro | | 410-411 |  | | | 39 |
| Currency Crises | | 412-422 | Chapter 5 The LDC Debt Crisis - FDIC - [www.fdic.gov/bank/historical/history/191\_210.pdf](http://www.fdic.gov/bank/historical/history/191_210.pdf) | | | 40 |

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| Discussion Topic | Reading | Date | Leader | Date | Leader | Date | Leader |
| Exchange Rate Regimes and Domestic Politics | Emerging market currencies have been hit by the coronavirus, but analysts say it’s not all bad news. CNBC. April 14, 2020 [Elliot Smith](https://www.cnbc.com/elliot-smith/) <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/14/emerging-market-currencies-have-been-hammered-by-covid-19.html> | A 11/18 @11 am  B: 11/19 @11:10 am | Kerner | C: 11/19 @ 3 pm  D: 11/20 @ 1 pm | Briones | E: 11/20 @ 10 am  F: 11/20 @ 3 pm | Du |

**Topic 7: International Finance**

**Release Date: 11/27**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Introduction to Foreign Investment | 348-360 |  | 41 |
| IMF & Debt Crises | 360-370 |  | 42 |
| FDI | 371-376 |  | 43 |
| Political Risk and Domestic Politics | 1040-1043 | Jensen, N. (2008). Political risk, democratic institutions, and foreign direct investment. *The Journal of Politics*, *70*(4), 1040-1052.  Pages 1040-1043 | 44 |
| Political Risk, Bilateral Investment Treaties & ISDS | 376-377 | Kerner, A. (2009). Why should I believe you? The costs and consequences of bilateral investment treaties. *International Studies Quarterly*, *53*(1), 73-102.  Pages 73-82 | 45 |

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| Discussion Topic | Reading | Date | Leader | Date | Leader | Date | Leader |
| IMF & Debt Crises | Lebanon Fences Off More of Its Economy Against Currency Crisis [Dana Khraiche](https://www.bloomberg.com/authors/ASLSS20Zhl8/dana-khraiche)July 10, 2020 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-10/lebanon-fences-off-more-of-its-economy-against-currency-crisis> IMF Bailout May Be Half What Lebanon Sought When Talks Began [Dana Khraiche](https://www.bloomberg.com/authors/ASLSS20Zhl8/dana-khraiche)  and [Yousef Gamal El-Din](https://www.bloomberg.com/authors/AS3jRyGIV2Y/yousef-gamal-eldin) July 28, 2020<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-28/imf-bailout-may-be-half-what-lebanon-sought-when-aid-talks-began> | A: 12.2 @11 am  B: 12/3 @11:10 am | Kerner | C:12/3 @ 3 pm  D:12/4 : @ 1 pm | Briones | E: 12/4 @ 10 am  F: 12/4 @ 3 pm | Du |
| Political Risk, International Institutions & Bilateral Investment Treaties | Revisiting BITs in the wake of Covid-19  Financial Express Bangladesh | 6 July 2020  by Shahrima Tanjin Arni  <https://www.bilaterals.org/?revisiting-bits-in-the-wake-of> | A: 12/9 @11 am  B: 12/10 @11:10 am | Kerner | C: 12/10 @ 3 pm  D: 12/11 @ 1 pm | Briones | E: 12/11 @ 10 am  F: 12/11 @ 3 pm |  |

**12/14-12/18 Final Exams Week**