Master Syllabus
Course: PSC 161 Introduction to International Relations
Cluster Requirement: 4C – The Nature of the Global Society

This University Studies Master Syllabus serves as a guide and standard for all instructors teaching an approved course in the University Studies program. Individual instructors have full academic freedom in teaching their courses, but as a condition of course approval, agree to focus on the outcomes listed below, to cover the identified material, to use these or comparable assignments as part of the course work, and to make available the agreed-upon artifacts for assessment of learning outcomes.

Course Overview:

This course provides an introduction to the structure and processes of international politics. The course focuses on theories of the causes of war and peace, cooperation and conflict, and development and underdevelopment. Students are also introduced to key concepts such as anarchy, states, sovereignty, nations, nationalism, power, interdependence, and intergovernmental organization.

Learning Outcomes:

Course-Specific Learning Outcomes:

1. Identify and explain essential concepts such as state, sovereignty, nation, and anarchy.
2. Explain the central ideas of the leading theories about the causes of conflict and cooperation in international relations, and notice when ideas drawn from these schools are used by politicians and political commentators.
3. Assess competing analyses of major international developments and/or issues. The choice of specific areas of focus is up to the individual instructor. Possibilities include specific international conflicts, the European Union, the United Nations, nuclear proliferation, human rights, the role of religion, international trade, and global poverty. No instructor is expected to cover all possible topics.

University Studies Learning Outcomes:

1. Explain basic problems faced by societies and cultures outside the US or issues that shape societies globally.
2. Locate, analyze, summarize, paraphrase and synthesize material from a variety of sources.
3. Evaluate arguments made in support of different perspectives on global society.

Examples of Texts and/or Assigned Readings:

There are dozens of introductory international relations textbooks that cover essentially the same material. Alternatively, instructors may eschew a textbook in favor of some combination of articles, primary sources, and book extracts, or combine a textbook with supplementary readings.
Textbook Examples


Supplementary Reading Examples

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (c. 400 BC), extracts.


News articles and United Nations publications.

Example Assignments:

The assignments employed to assess the University Studies learning outcomes will necessarily vary with class size and instructor preferences. Larger sections will tend to employ multiple choice examinations and/or short answer quizzes and essays, while smaller sections may employ a variety of longer written assignments. The following examples are illustrative and do not exhaust the full range of options available.

Example #1 – Essays

In smaller classes, instructors may choose to assign essays that require students to identify, evaluate, and integrate arguments about international relations from various types of sources and perspectives. Any such assignment would almost inevitably assess all three 4C outcomes. The artifact would be the students’ essays, the grading rubric, and a summary description of the students’ performance on the assignment.

Example #2 – Short Answer Quizzes and Examinations

In both small and large classes, instructors may employ in-class writing assignments to assess students’ understanding of the material. The artifact would be the students’ responses, the grading rubric, and a summary description of the students’ performance on the assignment.

Example #3 – Multiple Choice Questions

All of the University Studies outcomes can be assessed by means of well-designed multiple choice examinations. Outcome #1, “*Explain basic problems faced by societies and cultures outside the US or issues that shape societies globally,*” can be assessed by questions that combine factual and causal arguments:

Which of the following statements best describes the current distribution of wealth on the planet Earth?

a) The world’s wealth is gradually migrating from once-powerful industrial countries in North America and Western Europe to newly industrialized countries, especially in Asia. Most economists expect that China’s per capita income will surpass that of the United States by the end of the 21st century.
b) The distribution of world economic wealth is directly correlated to differences in government intervention in the economy. The wealthiest countries are those that have opened their domestic markets to international trade and capital investment, and where governments refuse to intervene to prop up failing corporations. By contrast, those countries whose governments attempt to protect domestic producers from foreign competition remain mired in poverty.

c) The distribution of wealth and well-being is highly unequal. Three-quarters of the world’s income is enjoyed by the richest fifth of the world’s population, most of whom live in high-income countries. The poorest 40% of the world’s population lives on less than $2 per day. These differences in wealth are accompanied by vast disparities in life expectancy, child mortality, access to clean water, and many other indicators of human well-being. Correct answer.

d) The distribution of wealth and well-being in the world is far more unequal within countries than it is between them. Within the United States, for example, the annual income of the richest 10% of the population is 94 times greater than that of the poorest 10 percent. By contrast, the income of the richest 10% of the people in the world is only about ten times greater than the income of the poorest 10 percent.

Outcome #2, “Locate, analyze, summarize, paraphrase and synthesize material from a variety of sources,” may be assessed by questions that require the students to identify arguments made in different types of sources and to place those arguments within the context of others examined in the class. For example:

Which of the following statements best describes the argument made by New York Times columnist and bestselling author Thomas Friedman?

a) Globalization, in its current form, is neither positive nor inevitable. Rather, it represents an effort by large multinational firms to create a “borderless” capitalist economy. Their goal is to pit the world’s states in competition with one another for foreign investment, so that wages and environmental, health, safety, and labor standards around the world will be driven downward toward the lowest common denominator.

b) Globalization is inevitable and its effects are largely positive. Globalization forces individuals, companies, and countries to continuously innovate in order to remain economically competitive, and in the process it will allow individuals and firms in countries like India and China to catch up with, and even outperform, their counterparts in the United States and Western Europe. Correct answer.

c) Globalization represents the global spread of the most offensive aspects of American consumer culture. As a result, it will inevitably spark a worldwide “clash of civilizations” between the West and other societies determined to retain their unique cultural traditions in the face of “universal homogenization.”

d) The current phase of globalization will lead not to a more peaceful, integrated world economy, but to the rise of new great powers and the return of multipolarity. As China and India become great powers, the universal claims of the United States and other Western states will be fundamentally challenged, and the global balance of power will shift.

Outcome #3, “Evaluate arguments made in support of different perspectives on global society,” may be assessed by questions that require students to link particular arguments or statements to the larger theoretical and ideological perspectives examined in the course. For example:

Which of the following explanations for the “democratic peace” would a liberal international relations theorist be LEAST likely to support?

a) Liberal states are characterized by competitive elections and an open “marketplace of ideas.” Consequently, the governments of liberal states tend to use force only when the public can be persuaded that it is desirable to do so, and they are less able, relative to their counterparts in nonliberal states, to continue to prosecute a war if popular support declines.
b) In their rise to power, the leaders of liberal states learn the skills of persuasion, empathy, negotiation, and compromise. They can then use these skills when disputes arise with other states. These skills are most effective, however, when the leaders of other states also possess these skills, and this is most likely to be the case when the other states involved are liberal states.

c) Both the citizens and the leaders of liberal states recognize the governments of other liberal states as the representatives of the interests of their citizens. When conflicts of interest arise in relations among liberal states, citizens and leaders alike assume that these conflicts can and should be resolved through persuasion and compromise. To attempt to impose one’s will upon another liberal state by force would be a violation of liberalism’s most basic political principles.

d) In the years preceding World Wars I and II, Britain, France, and the United States were more threatened by Germany than they were by one another, so they naturally allied together against this common threat. During the Cold War, these same states (now joined by Germany, Italy, and Japan) continued to ally together because all feared the USSR more than they feared one another. When the Cold War abruptly ended, the United States was so powerful that the other liberal states had no alternative but to bandwagon with it. Correct answer.

Since examinations in PSC 161 will not contain any questions that do not address at least one of the University Studies 4C outcomes, the artifact produced from will be summary data describing students’ performance on the examinations, along with copies of the examinations themselves.

Sample Course Outline:

The range of topics that might be covered in PSC 161 vastly exceeds the time available in a one-semester introductory course. As a result, no two instructors’ syllabi are likely to be alike, and individual instructors commonly change the topics they cover from one semester to the next. With that caveat in mind, here is a sample course outline:

1. The Problem of Anarchy
2. States and Sovereignty
3. Nations and Nationalism
4. Realist International Relations Theory
5. Power and Alliance Formation
6. Power and International Justice
7. Nuclear Deterrence and Proliferation
8. Liberal International Relations Theory
9. The Democratic Peace
10. International Interdependence
11. International Organizations
12. Regional Integration
13. The Nature of the Post-Cold War International System
14. Globalization and Economic Development

The Political Science Department does not expect that every instructor will cover exactly the same topics or devote the same amount of time to them. On the contrary, pedagogical diversity allows instructors to learn from one another and discuss the pros and cons of different approaches to the material.