



Diablo Valley College – ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS – Summer 2026

POLSC 250 – 9064 / International Relations / 3 Units

[www.kropfpolisci.com](http://www.kropfpolisci.com)

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**Instructor:** John Kropf – Office hours: Mondays / Wednesdays, ZOOM 6:00 – 7:00 pm.

**Schedule:** Mondays / Wednesdays, Synchronous ZOOM 7:00 – 8 pm, June 15 – July 22, 2026

**Course Description:** Welcome, one and all, to the fascinating subject of international relations! I have always felt that “IR” is the most interesting and exciting field in the social sciences. It is truly multidisciplinary, meaning that we utilize many disciplines to help us understand why the world works the way it does. This means you should feel free to use history, political science, economics, law, philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, religion, and even the natural sciences in the course of your investigations. While this course is meant as an introduction to IR, it will nevertheless contain some very challenging theories and concepts. Do not shrink from that challenge! If you devote some serious effort to this course, you will find it to be very rewarding, lots of fun, as well as having many connections to your everyday life.

**Recommended:** Eligibility for ENGL-122 or equivalent

**Student Learning Outcomes:** Upon the completion of this course, students will be able to...

1. Explain international relations theory and apply relevant theoretical concepts to events.
2. Discuss the principle historical factors, including the development of foreign policy, leading to the present international situation.
3. Discuss contemporary issues in international relations and their relationships to principal historical factors with and understanding of:
  - a. the identification of actors.
  - b. the differing past-future linkages of the actors.
  - c. the counterbalancing interests of the actors.
4. Describe the most prominent structures of the international community and explain their interaction with states.
5. Recognize and discuss various elements of power in international relations.
6. Think and argue *critically* about issues in international relations.

**Course Texts:** For this course, there is 1 recommended text: Genest, *Conflict and Cooperation: Evolving Theories of International Relations, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Other readings will be found on the class website.

**Course Methodology:** Classes will consist primarily of class lectures and discussions, which will amplify and clarify text materials. Students will be expected to read assigned materials prior to the lecture and discussion. Failure to keep up with the readings will probably lead to significant confusion on your end, so do your best to stay current on the readings, and please do not save all your reading for the night prior to the writing of a research paper.

**Course Evaluation:** Student progress will be evaluated primarily through written work. You should expect to write one research paper; a series of journals and discussion boards related to documentary videos. Late work will not be accepted. Attendance on Zoom is mandatory and will be taken formally at each session. Discussions and questions form an important component of this course, so Zoom participation is strongly encouraged. Student participation in class is an indicator of student interest and shows that the student is keeping up with the assigned readings. Also, since a significant portion of your grade is based on participation, *this means that missing more than two Zoom sessions will almost certainly lower your final summer grade.* Your final grade will break out as follows:

Journal Article Responses – 20%

Discussion Board Participation – 20%

Zoom Participation – 10%

Research Paper (First Draft) – 25%

Research Paper (Final Draft) – 25%

**This course is under restricted AI Use!**

Students are not allowed to use advanced automated tools (artificial intelligence or machine learning tools such as ChatGPT, DALL-E, Grammarly, GitHub CoPilot, etc.) on assignments in this course. Each student is expected to complete each assignment without substantive assistance from others, including automated tools.

**Important Dates:**

June 16, 2026 – Last day to drop class *without* a “W” appearing on your transcript.

July 13, 2026 – Last day to drop class *with* a “W” appearing on your transcript.

July 22, 2026 – Last day to request a PASS / NO PASS

**One final note: Dropping this class is YOUR responsibility. DVC policy mandates that I cannot electronically drop you from this class after July 13<sup>th</sup> through the final grading period.**

**Political Science 250 / International Relations Outline**

**This schedule is tentative and can be adjusted to accommodate student/instructor interest**

**TX = Text Readings / WEB = Readings from Class Website**

**Part One – Introduction and Historical Overview**

**June 15: LECTURE / DISCUSSION ONE: *Introduction to and Description of the Course.*** An outline of how the course will be conducted and a short discussion of the topics to be covered. Descriptive/explanatory theory vs. prescriptive theory; the “level of analysis” problem in IR; concepts, generalizations, theories, and laws; the use of case studies.

Video: *Remaking the Middle East: The U.S., Israel & Iran.*

Readings for 6/15: TX – Chapter 1.

**June 15: LECTURE / DISCUSSION TWO: *The Historical Context of Contemporary International Relations.*** A brief look at the “Pre-Westphalian World;” the emergence of the Westphalian system and development of sovereignty; Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; absolutism and nationalism; balance of power theory; the origins of the Cold War; the post-Cold War era; unipolarity, bipolarity, multipolarity, finishing with the terrorist attacks of 9-11, the war on terrorism, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Video: *Iran Is Not the Problem.*

Readings for 6/15: The Role of History in International Relations.

**Part Two – Theoretical Perspectives in International Relations**

**June 17: LECTURE / DISCUSSION THREE: *System Level Theories – Realism.*** A look at the terms and concepts that surround the oldest theory for understanding and explaining international politics. Classical realism, neorealism, and a critique of realist theory will be included.

Video: *Why America is Losing the War with Iran (w/ John Mearsheimer).*

Readings for 6/17: TX – Chapter 2.

**June 22: LECTURE / DISCUSSION FOUR: *System Level Theories – Liberalism.*** The next system level theory we will examine seeks to “promote global order through expanded political and economic ties.” The discussion will include institutional and economic transnationalism, and a critique of transnationalist theory.

Video: *The Power of the Poor.*

Readings for 6/22: TX – Chapter 3.

**June 22: LECTURE / DISCUSSION FIVE: *System Level Theories – Class System Theory*.** In our third system level theory we will examine and discuss class system theory or globalism. Derived from earlier Marxist theories, it suggests that classes, and the divisions between them, define and determine the course of international politics. Early Marxism, imperialism, dependency theory and a critique of class system theory will be included.

Video: *Iraq for Sale*.

Readings for 6/22: TX – Chapter 4.

**June 22: LECTURE / DISCUSSION SIX: *System Level Theories – Postmodernism and Feminist Theory*.**

Today we will wrap up our system level of analysis with a look at one of the newer approaches to IR theory, postmodernism. In particular, we will focus on the emergence of feminist theory as the newest perspective. Does gender play a role in conflict between nations? What do feminists and other post-moderns have to say about the war on terrorism?

Video: *Cynthia Enloe: Masculinities in International Relations*.

Readings for 6/22: TX – Chapter 5.

**June 29: LECTURE / DISCUSSION SEVEN: *State Level Theories – Political Culture and Decision-Making Process Theories*.** Moving on to state level theories of international relations, we will examine how the type of government can be a major determinant in the behavior and foreign policy of a state. We will also look at how foreign policy decisions are made and the impact that foreign policy bureaucracies have on the government's decision-making process.

Video: *The Power of Nightmares*.

Readings for 6/29: TX – Chapters 6 and 7.

**July 1: LECTURE / DISCUSSION EIGHT: *Individual Level Theories – Human Nature and Cognitive Theory*.** Our final level of analysis will involve studying the effect that individuals have on the conduct of international relations. We will be looking at two tonight, so this should be a busy night. Tonight's lecture and discussion will focus on how the classic "nature vs. nurture" debate affects IR theory.

Video: *Soldiers of Conscience*.

Readings for 7/1: TX – Chapters 8 and 9.

**July 1: LECTURE / DISCUSSION NINE: *Individual Level Theories – Peace Studies Theory and the Research Paper Writing Seminar*.** The last discussion involving theory will focus on the newest theory of IR—the peace studies perspective. For the peace studies approach, we'll examine the principles of positive and negative peace and discuss whether an IR theory based on social justice and human rights can be legitimately incorporated into the field of IR. A discussion of the readings and a critique of these three individual level theories will follow. We will also focus on all of the elements associated with writing a perfect American Psychological Association (APA) research paper. We'll begin with a discussion of normal grading rubrics for research papers (i.e. what instructors are looking for in a great paper). From there we will examine the proper research paper format, along with the perils and pitfalls of data analysis. We will cover general APA guidelines, the 4 major paper sections (title page, abstract page, main body, and references page), and proper citation methods (in-text and references page sources).

Video: *Voices in Wartime*.

Readings for 7/1: TX – Chapter 10 and Owl Purdue APA website.

## **Part Three – Issues and Problems in International Relations**

**July 6: LECTURE / DISCUSSION TEN: *United States Foreign Policy*.** This lecture will be devoted to discussing how the United States, as the sole military and economic superpower, conducts itself through its foreign policies in the international arena. We will focus on the 5 components of American foreign policy along with an extensive discussion of the differences between preemptive vs. preventive warfare and security.

Video: *In Whose Interest?*

Readings for 7/6: WEB – Parenti and readings from the "US Foreign Policy" links.

**July 8: LECTURE / DISCUSSION ELEVEN: *International Political Economy and Globalization – The North*.** Over the next few days, we'll examine how economics plays an increasingly important role in the conduct of international relations. We will first look at the institutions and processes in the developed world such as the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank, and MNC's, and how these northern NGO's impact IR.

Video: *Globalization at the Crossroads*.

Readings for 7/8: WEB – Wolf and readings from the “Conventional Perspectives” links.

**July 8: LECTURE / DISCUSSION TWELVE: *International Political Economy and Globalization – The South*.** In the second half of this lecture, we'll discuss how the process of globalization is affecting nations in the poorer south. We'll look at three approaches (liberal, structuralist, and mercantilist) to development and examine the problem of debt. A discussion of Third World responses to economic disadvantages will also be debated.

Video: *The End of Poverty?*

Readings for 7/8: WEB – Screpanti and readings from the “Critical Perspective” links.

**July 13: LECTURE / DISCUSSION THIRTEEN: *Security Theory and Peak Oil Theory*.** We will look first at how national security theory evolved from the ashes of World War II. Terms and concepts that guided American foreign policy planners will be examined and then debated. Two central questions: How was the Cold War with the Soviet Union related to our security? Is a new Cold War emerging? In the second part of our examination of the subfield of “security studies” we will look at the latest theories of security such as regional, transstate, international, and global security. Have economic/environmental/social issues taken the place of more traditional military concerns? Is access to resources (oil) a security interest and how does it relate to 9/11/01? We will also examine U.S. foreign and energy policy in the Middle East and discuss what other systems might be utilized to change our dependency on fossil fuel sources.

Video: *Oil, Smoke and Mirrors*.

Readings for 7/13: WEB – Heinberg and readings from the “Security Theory and Peak Oil” links.

**\*\*\*\*\*RESEARCH PAPER DUE TONIGHT JULY 13, 2026 AT 11:59 PM\*\*\*\*\***

**July 15: LECTURE / DISCUSSION FOURTEEN: *Religion and Nationalism*.** This lecture and discussion will look at the ways in which nationalism and religion drive world politics. Concepts such as the state and nation-state and how these two devolve into nationalism will be examined, along with a focus on how religion shapes international relations. We will devote considerable attention to Islam's effect on contemporary U.S.-Arab world relations.

Video: *The Doctrine of Discovery: Stolen Lands, Strong Hearts*.

Readings for 7/15: WEB – Luck and readings from the “Religion and Nationalism” links.

**July 20: LECTURE / DISCUSSION FIFTEEN: *International Relations and the Global Environment*.** Our last lecture will be a wrap up of the entire course. A chance to talk about where the discipline of IR has been and where it's going (hopefully somewhere!). Tonight's reading and discussion are focused on the ecological challenges that face the international community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Topics to be addressed include sustainable development, population issues, resource issues and cooperation, and the problem of pollution. Central to our discussion will be the question of whether international environmental organizations can meet the challenges ahead.

Video: *Planet of the Humans*.

Readings for 7/20: WEB – Magdoff and Foster and readings from the “IR and the Global Environment” links.

**July 22 / Final discussion and wrap up of the course. FINAL DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE TONIGHT.** Best of luck to all and have a great (rest of summer) break!

## Final Considerations for the Course

### 1. Sensitive Subjects Warning

Due to the sensitive and controversial nature of the topics discussed in this course, the possibility of being triggered or emotionally challenged is a likelihood for some. This is because these issues may be very real in our everyday lives. For others, the information in this course may be new to them and may also prove to be upsetting. Still others may be upset due to feelings of guilt or shame for not having known or understood how things have been working in our government and society. Of course, all these feelings are okay. It's how we handle them that matters. Hopefully, we can challenge ourselves to pay attention to our emotions, considering what is upsetting us, listen to and respect one another, and share this honestly with the class (or with me in private if you prefer). This is how authentic learning takes place.

### 2. Inclusivity

Every student in this classroom, regardless of personal history or identity categories, is a member of this group. Your experiences are important, and you should share them as they become relevant to our class. No student in this class is ever expected or believed to speak for all members of their group(s).

In this class, you have the right to determine your own identity. You have the right to be called by whatever name you wish. You have the right to be referred to by whatever pronouns you wish. You have the right to adjust those things at any point in your education.

If you find that there are aspects of course instruction, subject matter, or class environment that result in barriers to your inclusion, please contact me privately without fear of reprisal.

### 3. Respectful Dialogue

*“Everyone thinks; it is our nature to do so. But much of our thinking, left to itself, is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed, or downright prejudiced. Yet the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends on the quality of our thought. Shoddy thinking is costly, both in money and in quality of life. Excellence in thought, however, must be systematically cultivated.”*

- Linda Elder and Richard Paul, *Critical Thinking: Teaching Students to Study and Learn*

In this class, I would like us to cultivate “excellence in thought” by creating a learning environment that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences, and that honors all our identities (including race, gender, class, veteran status, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.). With this in mind, let's discuss what we all need in order to slow down, recognize our own positions (including unexamined biases), and take another look at someone's ideas, experiences, or values. How can we listen to and hear different opinions, even if we don't accept them or understand them, with an open heart and mind? In this class, let's practice these skills together.

### 4. On Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is the foundation of higher education and critical inquiry. In this course, academic freedom protects the right of the instructors to design the curriculum, select course materials, and facilitate discussion of issues relevant to the field, including topics related to social inequality, power, and justice. It also protects the right of students to engage thoughtfully with course content, ask questions, and express ideas grounded in academic evidence and respectful dialogue.