

An International Relations Buffet

Written by Dylan Kissane

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The *POL 210: Issues in International Politics* course kicks off on Tuesday. Ahead of that first class, I wanted to provide an overview of the course itself and give readers a chance to see what is to come in the weeks ahead.

As I mentioned in my first post on **Political Business**, this course is delivered to a classroom of business majors. The course is designed to be a survey of international politics, giving students enough basic knowledge to write competent research papers but without the expectation that they will follow up this course with a swathe of IR courses in the future. Thus, the course has been developed to be a sort of 'buffet' of international politics, with students getting a taste of many different elements across the 13 weeks and 26 lessons.

The first week of the course is introductory, but still very important. The first class introduces the course and allows me time to explain how the assessment in the course works, run through the various deadlines for group and individual work, and try to get the students excited about the topics to come. The second class of the first week is focussed on how to write an international politics research paper, a skill that I have found business majors usually need to develop, and quickly, in a course like mine.

I then launch into international relations theory. The next three weeks of the course are a chance for students to come to understand diverse approaches to understanding and explaining international politics, with the basics of realism, neorealism, liberalism and constructivism covered, as well as touching on Marxist and feminist approaches to IR. I round this off with a class on hard power and another on soft power so that, by the end of the fourth week, students should feel confident to dive into some basic analysis.

The next three weeks of the course introduce larger themes to the students. After a review of 20th and 21st century international politics, students consider issues like the Global South, NGOs and non-state actors, and the effects of economic, social and cultural globalisation. They also play the first of two small-scale political games to test their skills in political strategy, negotiation and alliance formation.

Concurrently, students are preparing for their major group assignments, being a student-taught class on a theme I have allocated. This year students can choose between Geopolitics (for the theoretically minded), Russian Power Politics or Iran & Nuclear Weapons (for the strategically minded students), China & Taiwan or Israel & Palestine (for students interested in conflict). These student-taught classes make up the third quarter of the semester and lead into the final quarter: the Conflict Simulation.

The Conflict Simulation is a four-and-a-half hour practical exercise simulating an international crisis. Students work in groups and represent one of eight major powers in contemporary world politics and must defuse a security crisis which threatens to plunge the world into catastrophe. This simulation allows students to apply what they have learnt earlier in the course, as well as put their business-based negotiating skills to work in a different domain.

It's a lot to squeeze into just thirteen weeks but, if previous years are a guide, it should get students excited about IR and allow them, by the end of the course, to understand just why a business student needs to be aware of the political world around them.

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For now, though, it's a final weekend of rest and review before the semester and *Issues in International Politics* gets underway next week.

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