Making U.S. Foreign Policy

A graduate course proposed for the Department of American Studies at Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic.

Course Description

This course examines the principal factors influencing the formulation of U.S. foreign policy. This examination will include the international environment, information processing, personality factors, political culture, public opinion, decision makers and decision making. We also consider the institutional setting including the role of the President and Congress and the interplay between the branches of government. This course focuses on the process by which U.S. foreign policy is made rather than recent issues in U.S. foreign policy. The central purpose of this course is to suggest some patterns of behavior that will help you understand in the future why the American government behaves as it does in foreign policy.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

1. Identify the historical development of U.S. foreign policy and how that history shapes its trajectory.

2. Discuss the factors that influence the formulation of U.S. foreign policy, including the major institutions and policy processes and the domestics sources involved in making US foreign policy.

3. Write a scholarly book review on a current book on U.S foreign policy

Pre-Requirements for this Course: Language skills: This course requires English language academic communication skills (reading, writing, and speaking) that are advanced. As a former Peace Corps Volunteer who served in the Dominican Republic, your professor understands the challenge of communicating at an advanced level in a language that is not your first. As I do for my U.S. students to help them build their vocabulary, I will often use multiple words that have similar meanings. Please feel free to ask me questions if you do not understand a word. Also remember that your professor is trying to learn the Czech language and I will need your help.

Course Structure: This course is a discussion course with some formal lectures by the professor. The goal is to improve our understanding of the process of making American foreign policy through active discussion among the students and between the students and the instructor. For us to have engaging discussions you must do all your assigned readings before you come to class. You will be required to read no more than an average of 50 pages per week. Part of your
final grade will be based on your attendance and participation in class. For you to participate in the class you must do your readings and engage the literature. **Attendance and participation is mandatory for this class.**

**Evaluation**

Students’ final grade will be based on the following.

- Attendance and Participation = 25%
- Mid-Term = 15%
- Final Exam = 30%
- Book Review = 30%

The exams will be short answer/short essay questions drawn from the readings and the classroom lectures. The mid-term exam will cover the material in the first half of the class. The final exam will be comprehensive, covering all the material of the course.

You will also be required to write a review essay on your choice on **one** of the three following books. All three books are widely available and in paperback.


In addition to publishing articles on original research, scholarly journals like *Perspectives on Politics* and the *International Studies Review* publish essays on recent scholarly book publications. Book reviews offer an important service to the scholarly community as there is far more published every year than any one person can read. Your reviews should be accurate in their descriptions of the book and creative and interesting to read. They should contain 5 to 8 double-spaced pages.

When you write your review you should:

1. Place the book within the literature or literatures to which it contributes. The author may or may not expressly indicate the book’s contribution.

2. Describe the basic thesis, core concerns, theoretical framework, and/or historical focus. This should include major findings, conclusions and insights, as well as methodologies or strategies used to arrive at these conclusions.

3. Evaluate the book’s conceptual, methodological, or substantive contribution. You should assess the main ideas and methodologies. Discuss how well the author does what he/she sets out to do. Assess the strengths and weakness of the work. You should also suggest directions for further research.
4. Identify who might profit from reading the book. Is it primarily for specialists in a particular sub-field or might other scholars benefit from it? Is the book suitable for a general audience? Does it cover the general material in a readable way?

5. Evaluate the book’s style. How effectively is the material organized and written?

Readings:

We will be reading selections from the following list of books and articles. The books or the relevant parts and the articles will be placed on reserve in the library for you to make copies. In some cases they may be available in electronic form.


Schedule

The following schedule is subject to change. Active class attendance will avoid any uncertainties

Week 1 – **Foundations of Policy and the Global Setting**

Required

“Introduction: What makes a Great Power” (chapter 1) in Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role.* (10 pages)

“The Global Context” (chapter 2) in Glenn Hastedt, *American Foreign Policy.* (22 pages)

Recommended


Week 2 – **Models of the Foreign Policy Process**

**Required**


**Recommended**


Week 3 – **The Constitution and Foreign Affairs**

**Required**

*The Constitution of the United States*, Article I, Sections 7-10, Article II, Sections 2-3


**Recommended**


Week 4 – **The Presidency**

**Required**

“Presidency” (chapter 7) in Glenn Hastedt, *American Foreign Policy*. (22 pages)


**Recommended**


Week 5 – The Congress

Required

“Congress” (chapter 6) in Glenn Hastedt, American Foreign Policy. (29 pages)


Recommended


Week 6 – Foreign Affairs Bureaucracy

Midterm Exam

Required

“Bureaucracy” (chapter 8) in Glenn Hastedt, American Foreign Policy. (21 pages)


Week 7 – Public Opinion and Foreign Policy

Required

“Society” (chapter 5) in Glenn Hastedt, American Foreign Policy. (31 pages)


Recommended

Week 8 – **The Election Cycle and the Conduct of U.S. Foreign Policy**

**Required**


**Recommended**


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Week 9 – **Interest Groups**

**Required**


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Week 10 – **Case Study – NATO Expansion and Relations with Russia**


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Week 11 – **Case Study – Climate Change**

Week 12 – **U.S. Foreign Policy Making in a Changing Global Hierarchy.**


We will also discuss the three books that were assigned for review.

**Final Exam**