Political Science 577

Theories of Conflict

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Hours: Friday 1:30–3:00
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Thursday 14:00–16:40. Harkness 329

This course examines the literature on conflict that has developed in the last decade. We will examine recent formal literature as well as the latest substantive (non-formal) literature on conflict. The course will help graduate students identify the broad direction of international conflict studies and will also permit graduate students to pursue topics or ideas of their own interest. To that end, we set aside two classes for “model building sessions” where students can explore approaches to formalize some of the ideas in the substantive literature, or explore extensions of the current formal literature. Much of the course revolves around the student led discussions, so we expect students to be prepared and fully participate. Students should have taken or be concurrently taking PSC 584 or have an equivalent knowledge of complete and incomplete information game theory.

Course Requirements

During the semester students are required to write two 5-page papers which comment on one (set) of readings. One 5-page paper must comment on non-formal readings, the other on a formal paper or book. The paper on non-formal work requires that the student can concisely identify the main themes of the work under scrutiny. To that end, the student should be able to summarize in five pages 1) the central question, 2) the central answer, 3) the competing explanations and 4) why the competing explanations are wrong. For further guidance, please refer to the last page on this syllabus. The paper on the non-formal work requires not only that students discuss the technical aspects of the work, but also make an effort to put this in the broader IR context and evolving research agenda. At the end of the semester a research paper is due. It is our hope that students will use the “model building sessions” to lay the basics for their research papers.

To guide the class, each student is required to lead the discussion on 3 assigned readings.
**Academic Integrity**

Be familiar with the University’s policies on academic integrity and disciplinary action (http://www.rochester.edu/living/urhere/handbook/discipline2.html#XII). Violators of University regulations on academic integrity will be dealt with severely, which means that your grade will suffer, and We will forward your case to the Chair of the College Board on Academic Honesty.

**Texts**

The following books should be in the bookstore, but can also be ordered from Amazon:


Students will also get a photocopy of the following book manuscripts:


Readings not included in one of the texts can be found through one of the online databases or on the library’s course web page or from Prof. Goemans.
Course Outline

Thursday, September 7

1. **Introduction**
   It would be a good idea to start the readings for next week early!

Thursday September 14

2. **Schelling**

Thursday September 21

3. **Informal Models of Conflict: War & Peace**

Thursday September 28

4. **Informal Models of Conflict: War Termination**
Thursday October 5

5. The Role of Leaders

• Fiona McGillivray and Alastair Smith, Leader Specific Punishments: A Theory of Interstate Relations, Political Institutions and Leader Change. Book ms.. Chapters to be assigned. Sean

• Scott Wolford, National Leaders and International Politics, unpublished manuscript, Emory University. Jeremy

Thursday October 12

6. The Role of International Organizations


• Seth Weinberger, Institutional Signalling and the Origins of the Cold War, Security Studies, 12, no.4, Summer, 2003: 80-115. Angelia


Thursday October 19

7. Mediation and Audience Costs


Thursday October 26

8. Students
   - Brainstorming sessions.

Thursday November 2

9. Models of War: Incomplete Information
   - Mark Fey & Kris Ramsay, * Mutual Optimism*. Manuscript, University of Rochester, Princeton University. Yoji

Thursday November 9

10. Models of War: Commitment
   - Donald Witmann, TBA.

Thursday November 16

11. Domestic Politics and War

Thursday November 23

Thanksgiving Recess
Thursday November 30

12. **Domestic Politics: Risky Policies**


Thursday December 7

13. **Students**

- Brainstorming session
Questions to consider in formulating and evaluating social science research

1. *What is the central question?*
   - Why is it important (theoretically, substantively)?
   - What is being explained (what is the dependent variable and how does it vary)?
   - How does this phenomenon present a puzzle?

2. *What is the central answer?*
   - What is doing the explaining (what are the independent variables and how do they vary)?
   - What are the hypotheses, i.e., what is the relationship between independent and dependent variables, what kind of change in the independent variable causes what kind of change in the dependent variable?
   - What are the causal mechanisms, i.e., why are the independent and dependent variables so related?
   - How do the independent variables relate to each other?
   - What assumptions does your theory make?
   - Is the theory falsifiable in concept?
   - What does this explanation add to our understanding of the question?

3. *What are the possible alternative explanations?*
   - What assumptions are you making about the direction of causality?
   - What other explanations might there be for the phenomenon of study, and to what degree do they conflict with the central answer?
   - Could the hypothesized relationships have occurred by chance?

4. *Why are the possible alternative explanations wrong?*
   - What is the logical structure of the alternative explanations (compare 2)?
   - What is the empirical evidence?

5. *What is the relationship between the theory and the evidence?*
   - What does the research design allow to vary, i.e., in this design are the explanations variables or constants?
   - What does your research design hold constant, i.e., does it help to rule out the alternative competing explanations?
   - How are the theoretical constructs represented empirically, i.e., how do you know it when you see it (measurement)?

6. *How do the empirical conclusions relate to the theory?*
   - How confident are you about the theory in light of the evidence?
   - How widely do the conclusions generalize, i.e., what might be the limitations of the study?
   - What does the provisionally accepted or revised theory say about questions of broader importance?