

POSC/PCST 120: International Relations Paper Assignment [optional]

As the end-of-semester final, students will have three options: 1) take a timed written exam; 2) submit a final research paper; 3) or submit a set of presentation slides with accompanying recorded video. Students electing to write a final paper will work from the following prompt:

Topic:

Describe and analyze a current international issue using one theoretical perspective.

“describe and analyze”

Your task is to describe/introduce your conflict, but more importantly, analyze it. I’m looking for an interpretation that addresses the issue’s root causes – whether in power distribution, constructed meaning, reciprocal interaction, etc.

“current international issue”

Your topic must be no older than the last 15-20 years. Contemporary issues usually have origins that are older; that’s OK, provided the topic has persisted to within 15-20 years from the present. Issues must be international, involving or implicating more than one state. Likely units of analysis will be states or international non-state actors.

Topics don’t have to be military; they can be drawn from the domain of security (conventional warfare, proliferation, e.g.) or political economy (trade, e.g.). Nor do they have to be conflictual. Your topic can involve a considerable amount of cooperation. These situations are especially interesting when the states otherwise display divergent preferences. For instance, a rich state and a poor state may differ about the implementation of patent law, but finally achieve cooperation. In this case, your paper might explain why cooperation is possible, despite differences.

“one theoretical perspective”

Students must apply one theoretical perspective to their topic. The best papers will use authors other than Nye to help explain the theoretical position; for instance, you could use Waltz or Jervis as a support or framework for a realist analysis. And in this case, the second perspective you use might be a constructivist or liberal argument.

Format:

Papers should be 6-8 pages typewritten, double-spaced, with a works cited page attached (not included in the page count).

Papers should have an *introduction* that gives current and historical detail on the conflict, and then proceed to the theoretical perspective. The theoretical perspectives students adopt must be introduced adequately and applied to the conflict.

A conclusion should address the limits of the chosen perspective: What parts of the story do they convincingly explain? What parts do they leave out? Might an alternative theory or perspective 'fill in' these gaps? If so, which theory and why?

Grading:

Conflict description:	25%
Theory description/application:	50%
Conclusion	25%