



POLI:3512:001 | SPRING 2026

INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

[The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences](#)

Course Instructor

Instructor: Sara Mitchell, Professor, [Department of Political Science](#)

Email: sara-mitchell@uiowa.edu; **Phone:** 335-2356

Drop-in Hours

Drop-in Hours (309 SH): Wednesday, 12:00-3:00pm

Students are invited to drop by during the professor's drop-in hours to discuss questions about the course material or address any other concerns. I am also available by appointment if you are unable to attend drop-in hours. To meet on Zoom, please email me to request a Zoom link.

Academic Course Home

[Department of Political Science](#)
[The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences](#)

Class Meeting Times

Tuesday & Thursday, 3:30-4:45pm, 15 Schaeffer Hall (SH)

Course Site

To access the course site, log into [Iowa Courses Online \(ICON\)](#) using your Hawk ID and password.

Course Policies

Please see University policies here:

<https://provost.uiowa.edu/student-course-policies>

Other policies are listed at the end of the syllabus.

Department Executive Officer (DEO):

Professor Julianna Pacheco: polisci@uiowa.edu or julianna-pacheco@uiowa.edu

Course Description and Goal

Course Description:

This course examines the conditions that make for war and peace in international relations. The course begins with a discussion of the scientific study of interstate warfare. Later sections of the course examine the causes of war, the outcomes and consequences of war, and peaceful solutions that have been offered to help prevent or limit war.

Course Learning Goals: After taking this class, students should be able to:

- Have a basic understanding of the factors that mitigate or exacerbate military conflict between states
- Read quantitative studies of international relations research
- Apply these factors in examining real-world scenarios, such as studying historical cases of war or assessing the prospects for future conflict in troubled areas of the world

Required Textbooks

Mitchell, Sara McLaughlin and John A. Vasquez. 2024. [What Do We Know about War? Revised Third Edition](#). Bloomsbury. ISBN: 978153193167 (paperback, \$53.10); ISBN: 9781538193174 (e-text, \$53.10). You can purchase copies online or through local bookstores.

All articles marked with an asterisk (*) can be found on the ICON course website. You can also find a copy of the syllabus and copies of the group project assignment. The typical reading load is about 40 pages per week (2-3 hours). You can earn two points if you email me a picture of Darth Vader before Exam 1.

Grading Criteria

Final course grades will be assessed based on the student's performance in the following items:

Graded Item	Points	% of final grade
Class Attendance	40	10%
Pop Quizzes	60	15%
Group Project	100	25%
Exams (2)	200	50%
Total Points:	400	100%

Course grades will be distributed as follows:

99-100: A+	77-79: C+	Below 60: F
93-98: A	73-76: C	
90-92: A-	70-72: C-	
87-89: B+	67-69: D+	
83-86: B	63-66: D	
80-82: B-	60-62: D-	

Course Policies

- **Collaboration:** While the group project is collaborative in nature, you will also be evaluated for your individual contributions to the project.
- **Late Assignment Policy:** Any group project component submitted after the due date will be assigned a 10% penalty per day late.
- **Grade Questions:** If for some reason you are dissatisfied with the final grade received on your group project, you may submit a written memo to the instructor explaining why you think the grade is unfair. This memo must be submitted within 1 week of receiving the grade. Your instructor will read the memo, re-read the paper, and then assign a new grade. The instructor reserves the right to assign a lower grade after reading the paper/assignment again.
- **Communication:** All electronic communications will be posted as announcements on ICON. I recommend you have ICON notifications sent to your University of Iowa email address. See information about the use of UI email for all communications in the university policies section.
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Usage:** Students may not use AI for any written assignments, papers, or exams. Penalties for AI usage include grade deductions or zero credit.

Course Structure

This course meets twice per week and is run as a lecture-based course with some discussions. Students will find course information on the ICON page (icon.uiowa.edu), including links for submitting paper assignments.

Students are expected to:

- **Review** the course syllabus to learn about the overall course structure, purpose, and deadlines.
- **Read** assigned readings before each class. The date listed after each reading is the day it is due.
- **Attend** class and participate in discussions.
- **Submit** assignments by designated deadlines **via the ICON "Assignments."**

Course Work

Class Attendance: 10%

Each class period (starting in week 2), I will send around an attendance sheet for students to sign. You are allowed to miss three class periods without penalty. Each missed class after the first three classes incurs a 5% deduction from the attendance portion of the grade. For example, if you miss a total of 5 class periods, you will receive a grade of 90% for the class attendance part of your grade. Arriving late or leaving class early can be treated by a missed class period based on the instructor's discretion.

Pop Quizzes: 15%

Several days throughout the semester, students will take a short multiple-choice quiz at the beginning of class. The quiz will contain questions related to the assigned reading on the day in which the quiz is administered. Students will be allowed to drop their three lowest quiz grades. There are no make-up quizzes. Any missed quizzes are automatically dropped as the lowest scores.

Group Project: 25%

Each student will be placed in a group consisting of seven to ten students. Each group will receive various pieces of information about a (fictitious) pair of countries and will be asked to predict whether these countries will fight a war based on this information. In this project, students will draw upon the theoretical material covered in class to make their predictions. Each group will be required to make a brief (10-15 minute) Power Point presentation during one of the last two class periods on May 5th and May 7th, in addition to submitting a paper summarizing the group's findings, and a short paper describing each group member's experience with the project. More information about the group projects will be posted on ICON.

Exams: 50%

Exam 1 (25%, 100 points) is scheduled on Tuesday, March 3rd and Exam 2 (25%, 100 points) is scheduled on Thursday, April 23rd. The exams may include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. A make-up exam will be given only to students with medical or personal emergencies. If an emergency arises, you will need to contact me **before** the exam or you will receive zero credit. Both exams are taken in the classroom.

Course Calendar

Learning Objectives	Learning Activities & Assignments (MV=Mitchell & Vasquez)
Week 1 Course and Warfare Introduction (January 19-23)	
Learning Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Introduction to scientific study of warfare● Learn about the Russia-Ukraine war	Learning Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Read: MV Introduction (1/20)▪ Read MV Chapter 20 (1/22)
Week 2 Dangerous Dyads and Power (January 26-30)	
Learning Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Learn about factors that increase dyadic risks for war● Assess how relative power influences chances for war	Learning Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Read *Bremer, "Dangerous Dyads" (1/27)● Read MV, Chapter 2; *Case: Iran-Iraq (1980-1988) (1/29)

Week 3 | Territorial Disputes and Issue Approach (February 2-6)

Learning Objectives:

- Evaluate why territory is a leading cause of warfare
- Assess how issue salience affects militarized conflict

Learning Activities

- **Read** MV Chapter 1, *Case: Mexican-American (1846-48) (2/3)
- **Read** *Hensel et al, Bones of Contention (2/5)

Week 4 | Alliances and Deterrence (February 9-13)

Learning Objectives:

- Analyze how alliances influence deterrence and war
- See how cultural similarity influences deterrence success

Learning Activities

- **Read** MV Chapter 3 *Case: Sinai (1956) (2/10)
- **Read** *Lee et al, "Do Birds of a Feather Deter Better?" (2/12)

Week 5 | Arms Races and Rivalry (February 16-20)

Learning Objectives:

- Determine why arms races are dangerous
- Understand why repeated conflicts and crises are dangerous

Learning Activities

- **Read** MV Chapter 4, *Case: Six Day (1967) (2/17)
- **Read** MV Chapter 5, *Case: Azeri-Armenian (1993-1994) (2/19)

Week 6 | Leaders and Environment (February 23-27)

Learning Objectives:

- See how leader characteristics and domestic conditions affect war
- Connect the environment & war

Learning Activities

- **Read:** MV Chapter 14 (2/24)
- **Read:** MV Chapter 13, *Case: Falklands (1982) (2/26)

Week 7 | Exam 1 and Nuclear Weapons (March 2-6)

Learning Objectives:

- Exam 1 (covers weeks 1-6)
- Understand why nuclear weapons maintain peace

Learning Activities

- **Exam 1, Tuesday (3/3)**
- **Read** MV Chapter 6, *Case: Kargil War (1999) (3/26)

Week 8 | Liberal and Territorial Peace (March 9-13)

Learning Objectives:

- Investigate liberal sources of peace and how settled borders reduce conflict

Learning Activities

- **Read** MV Chapter 8, *Case: Turko-Cypriot (1974) (3/10)
- **Read** MV Chapter 9 (3/12)

Week 9 | Spring Break (March 16-20): No Class

Week 10 War Financing (March 23-27)	
Learning Objectives:	Learning Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate how wars are financed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Class, ISA Conference (3/24) Read MV Chapter 15 (3/26) Submit "First Draft" for group project by 11:59pm on 3/26.
Week 11 Cyber Warfare and Decline of Warfare? (March 30-April 3)	
Learning Objectives:	Learning Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how technology is changing warfare Assess whether interstate warfare is declining or not 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read MV Chapter 12 (3/31) Read MV Chapter 16 (4/2)
Week 12 Peaceful Conflict Management and the Peace Puzzle (April 6-10)	
Learning Objectives:	Learning Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn about peaceful tools to manage conflicts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read MV Chapter 11, *Case: Chad-Libya (1986-1987) (4/7) Read MV Chapter 10 (4/9) Submit "Peer Review Comments" for group project by 11:59pm on 4/9.
Week 13 Outcomes and Consequences (April 13-17)	
Learning Objectives:	Learning Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appraise how outcomes of wars influence future conflicts See how war outcomes affect leader tenure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read MV Chapter 7, *Case: Franco-Prussian (1870-1871) (4/14) Read *Bueno de Mesquita & Siverson, *Case: Ogaden (1977-78) (4/16) Submit "Second Draft" for group project by 11:59pm on 4/16.
Week 14 Assessing the Scientific Study of Warfare and Exam 2 (April 20-24)	
Learning Objectives:	Learning Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review findings and take Exam 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read MV Chapter 19 (4/21) Exam 2, Thursday (4/23)
Week 15 Finish Group Projects (April 27-May 1)	
Learning Objectives:	Learning Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply course material to group projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time to work on Group Projects in class (4/28) Time to work on Group Projects in class (4/30) Submit "Final Paper Draft" for group project by 11:59pm on 4/30.
Week 16 Group Presentations in Class (5/5 & 5/7)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit "Final Paper" and "Presentation" for group project by 11:59pm on 5/4. 	

UNIVERSITY & ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES

Course's College (Administrative Home)

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) is the home of this course, and CLAS governs the add and drop deadlines, academic misconduct policies, and other undergraduate policies and procedures. Other UI colleges may have different policies.

Academic Honesty and Misconduct

All students in CLAS courses are expected to abide by the [college's standards of academic honesty](#). Undergraduate academic misconduct must be reported by instructors to CLAS according to [these procedures](#).

Student Complaints

Students with a complaint about a grade or a related matter should first discuss the situation with the instructor and/or the course supervisor (if applicable), and finally with the DEO (Chair) of the department, school or program offering the course. Sometimes students will be referred to the department or program's Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) or Director of Graduate Studies (DGS).

Undergraduate students should contact [CLAS Undergraduate Programs](#) for support when the matter is not resolved at the previous level. Graduate students should contact the [CLAS Graduate Affairs Manager](#) when additional support is needed.

Drop Deadline for this Course

You may drop an individual course before the drop deadline; after this deadline you will need collegiate approval. You can look up the drop deadline for this course [here](#). When you drop a course, a "W" will appear on your transcript. The mark of "W" is a neutral mark that does not affect your GPA. To discuss how dropping (or staying in) a course might affect your academic goals, please contact your Academic Advisor. Directions for adding or dropping a course and other registration changes can be found on the [Registrar's website](#). Undergraduate students can find policies on dropping CLAS courses [here](#). Graduate students should adhere to the [academic deadlines](#) and policies set by the Graduate College.

UI Email

Students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their UI email address (uiowa.edu) and must use this address for any communication with instructors or staff in the UI community. For the privacy and the protection of student records, UI faculty and staff can only correspond with UI email addresses.

Date and Time of the Final Exam

The [final examination date and time](#) will be announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes, and it will be announced on the course ICON site once it is known. Do not plan your end of the semester travel plans until the final exam schedule is made public. It is your responsibility to know the date, time, and place of the final exam. According to the Registrar's final exam policy, students have a maximum of two weeks after the announced final exam schedule to request a change if an exam conflict exists or if a student has more than two exams scheduled for the same day (see the [policy](#) here).

Resources for Students

Tutor Iowa: <https://tutor.uiowa.edu/>

Students will find the Writing Center and the Speaking Center very useful for this course.

Writing Center: <http://writingcenter.uiowa.edu/>

Speaking Center: <http://speakingcenter.uiowa.edu/>

Attendance and Accommodations

Absences from Class

University regulations require that students be allowed to make up examinations which have been missed due to illness, religious holy days, military service obligations, including service-related medical appointments, jury duty, or other unavoidable circumstances or other university-sponsored activities. Students should work with their instructors regarding making up other missed work, such as assignments, quizzes, and classroom attendance.

Absences for Religious Holy Days

The university is prepared to make reasonable accommodations for students whose religious holy days coincide with their classroom assignments, test schedules, and classroom attendance expectations. Students must notify their instructors in writing of any such religious holy day conflicts or absences within the first few days of the semester or session, and no later than the third week of the semester. If the conflict or absence will occur within the first three weeks of the semester, the student should notify the instructor as soon as possible. See [Policy Manual 8.2 Absences for Religious Holy Days](#) for additional information.

Absences for Military Service Obligations

Students absent from class or class-related requirements due to U.S. veteran or U.S. military service obligations (including military service–related medical appointments, military orders, and National Guard Service obligations) shall be excused without any grading adjustment or other penalty. Instructors shall make reasonable accommodations to allow students to make up, without penalty, tests and assignments they missed because of veteran or military service obligations. Reasonable accommodations may include making up missed work following the service obligation; completing work in advance; completing an equivalent assignment; or waiver of the assignment without penalty. In all instances, students bear the responsibility to communicate with their instructors about such veteran or military service obligations, to meet course expectations and requirements.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The University is committed to providing an educational experience that is accessible to all students. If a student has a diagnosed disability or other disabling condition that may impact the student's ability to complete the course requirements as stated in the syllabus, the student may seek accommodations through [Student Disability Services](#) (SDS). SDS is responsible for making [Letters of Accommodation \(LOA\)](#) available to the student. **The student must provide an LOA to the instructor as early in the semester as possible, but requests not made at least two weeks prior to the scheduled activity for which an accommodation is sought may not be accommodated.** The LOA will specify what reasonable course accommodations the student is eligible for and those the instructor should provide. Additional information can be found on the [SDS website](#).

Students are welcome to initiate **conversations** about any accommodations such as those related to any of the above reasons (disabilities, religious holy days, military service, etc.). If you would like to discuss accommodations, please send me an email to set up a time when we can discuss about what constitutes a reasonable accommodation for the specific circumstance.

Free Speech and Expression

The University of Iowa supports and upholds the First Amendment protection of freedom of speech and the principles of academic and artistic freedom. We are committed to open inquiry, vigorous debate, and creative expression inside and outside of the classroom. Visit the [Free Speech at Iowa website](#) for more information on the university's policies on free speech and academic freedom.

Non-discrimination Statement

The University of Iowa prohibits discrimination in employment, educational programs, and activities on the basis of race, creed, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, pregnancy (including childbirth and related conditions), disability, genetic information, status as a U.S. veteran, service in the U.S. military, sexual orientation, gender identity, or associational preferences. The university also affirms its commitment to providing equal opportunities and equal access to university facilities. For additional information on nondiscrimination policies, contact the Senior Director, Office of Civil Rights Compliance, the University of Iowa, 202 Jessup Hall, Iowa City, IA 52242-1316, 319-335-0705, ui-ocrc@uiowa.edu. Although not required, students have the option to share their pronouns and chosen/preferred names in class, and their [gender](#) and chosen/preferred [names](#) through MyUI. Instructors and advisors can find information about a student's chosen/preferred name in MyUI.

Classroom Expectations

Students are expected to comply with University policies regarding appropriate classroom behavior as outlined in the [Code of Student Life](#). While students have the right to express themselves and participate freely in class, it is expected that students will behave with the same level of courtesy and respect in the virtual class setting (whether asynchronous or synchronous) as they would in an in-person classroom. Failure to follow behavior expectations as outlined in the [Code of Student Life](#) may be addressed by the instructor and may also result in discipline under the [Code of Student Life](#) policies governing E.5 Disruptive Behavior or E.6 Failure to Comply with University Directive.

Class Recordings

The sessions in this course will be **not** recorded or live-streamed. The unauthorized video or audio recording of academic activities (e.g., lectures, course discussions, office hours, etc.) by a student is prohibited. Students with a reasonable accommodation for recording approved by Student Disability Services should notify each instructor and provide the Letter of Accommodation prior to using the accommodation. A student may record classroom activities with prior written permission from the instructor and notice to other students in the class that audio or video recording may occur. Any and all classroom recording must be for personal academic use only. The distribution, sharing, sale, or posting of recordings on the internet (including social media), in whole or in part, is prohibited and doing so may be a violation of the Code of Student Life and/or state or federal privacy, copyright, or other laws.

Mental Health

Students are encouraged to be mindful of their mental health and seek help as a preventive measure or if feeling overwhelmed and/or struggling to meet course expectations. Students are encouraged to talk to their instructor for assistance with specific class-related concerns. For additional support and counseling, students are encouraged to contact University Counseling Service (UCS). Information about UCS, including resources and how to schedule an appointment, can be found at counseling.uiowa.edu. Find out more about UI mental health services at: mentalhealth.uiowa.edu.

Basic Needs and Student Support

It can be difficult to maintain focus and be present if you are experiencing challenges with meeting basic needs or navigating personal crisis situations. The Office of the Dean of Students can help. Contact us for one-on-one support, identifying options, and to locate and access basic needs resources (such as food, rent, childcare, etc.).

[Student Care and Assistance](#)

132 IMU

dos-assistance@uiowa.edu

319-335-1162

Basic Needs info:

- [Food Pantry at Iowa](#)
- [Clothing Closet](#)
- [Basic Needs and Support Resources](#)

Sexual Harassment/Sexual Misconduct and Supportive Measures

The University of Iowa prohibits all forms of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and related retaliation. The [Policy on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Misconduct](#) governs actions by students, faculty, staff and visitors. Incidents of sexual harassment or sexual misconduct can be reported to the [Office of Civil Rights Compliance](#) or to the [Department of Campus Safety](#). Students impacted by sexual harassment or sexual misconduct may be eligible for academic supportive measures and can learn more by [contacting the Office of Civil Rights Compliance](#). Information about confidential resources and videos explaining these resources can be found on the [Office of Civil Rights Compliance website](#).

Conflict Resolution

The Office of the Ombudsperson is a confidential, impartial, informal, and independent resource for any member of the university community with a problem or concern. The Office of the Ombudsperson offers a safe place to discuss conflicts or concerns. Students are encouraged to reach out for assistance. The office will brainstorm with students to help identify options, answer any questions, and provide referrals to other offices as appropriate. More information about the Office of the Ombudsperson, including how to schedule an appointment, can be found at ombudsperson.org.uiowa.edu.