

Water Wars: Conflict and Cooperation POLI 3518:0001

Professor Sara Mitchell
309 Schaeffer Hall
Drop in Hours: Monday, 1:30-3:30pm, Tuesday 3:30-4:30pm
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Course website: <https://icon.uiowa.edu/>

Spring 2025
15 SH
TTh, 2:00-3:15pm

Course Description

Despite the fact that more than two thirds of our “blue planet” is covered with water, only 2.5% is fresh water. As populations have grown and nations have industrialized, the demand on freshwater has increased at an unsustainable rate. Climate change is projected to aggravate the shortage of freshwater in already water stressed regions. These existing and future shortages have resulted in warnings of increasing potential for conflict over international basins or potential “water wars”. U.S. intelligence agencies have warned of an increased possibility that water will be used as a weapon between or within states or to further terrorist aims in the future. Competition over maritime areas has intensified as well, as global fishing stocks have experienced dramatic losses and as states vie for resources in previously uncontested areas, such as the Arctic. This class examines the management of water resources including cross-border rivers and maritime areas. Topics include common property resources, piracy, maritime security, peaceful and militarized conflict management of water-based conflicts, environmental/climate issues, natural disasters, and cooperative and institutional strategies design to promote interstate cooperation over water issues, such as the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention.

Course Requirements

Your final course grade is calculated as follows:

Class Participation	30%
Examinations	40%
Research Paper	30%

Class Participation (30%)

This course will be run as an upper division seminar. Each class period (24 in total) will involve a discussion of the readings assigned for that day. You can gain or lose class participation points each day. To gain points, you need to make a positive contribution to class participation. Positive contributions are comments that build on, react to, challenge, or request clarification on the reading. Your final participation grade will be based on the total number of positive contributions (minus any points lost, see below), and will be calculated as follows: A (14 or higher), B (10 – 13), C (6 – 9), D (4 – 5), F (<4).

If no one volunteers, then I will randomly call on people. Each person will be assigned a number in the first week of class, which corresponds to a poker chip in a bowl. If your chip is drawn, then you must answer the question I raise. You will have the opportunity to pass once if you are unprepared for a particular question, although on the second strike, you will lose one point from your overall participation total. In short, if you are called upon and unprepared or absent, you will lose 1 point that day. But you will only lose points if your chip is drawn. Also, because your chip goes back in the bowl, such sampling with replacement suggests that you can be called upon more than once in a given class. This system will obviously work best if everyone volunteers and I never have to use the chips!

You may wonder why I have created such a system. The answer is that I want you to do the reading, so I have given you an incentive to do it. All of the papers and exams will make extensive use of the assigned readings, thus it is in your best interest to read everything. I will create a seating chart so make sure you find the seat you want for the rest of the semester by Thursday, January 23rd.

Examinations (40%, 20% each exam)

There are two examinations scheduled on Thursday, March 6th and Tuesday, April 29th. The exams may include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. Make-up exams will be given only to students with medical or personal emergencies (death in the family). If an emergency arises, you will need to contact the instructor **before** the exam or you will receive zero credit.

Research Paper (30%, 25% for paper and 5% for presentation)

You will write a research paper on a water conflict case (river or maritime) and present your paper in class (with slides) during the last week (May 6th or May 8th). I will distribute more information about the paper in class including a list of possible conflicts that you can select for your topic. If for some reason you are dissatisfied with the final grade received on the paper, you may submit a written memo to the instructor explaining why you think the grade is unfair, along with the graded copy of your paper. This memo must be submitted within two weeks of receiving the paper grade. The 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 rereading the paper a second time.

Required Readings

All assigned readings can be found on the ICON course website. The listed reading(s) for each class period is what we will discuss. You can earn two extra credit points by emailing me a picture of Sam and Dean from the TV show Supernatural before the first exam.

The grading scale (in percentages) for the course is as follows:

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

Outline of Topics and Weekly Readings

<u>Date/Topic</u>	<u>Assigned Readings</u>
<i>Week 1: Water Conflicts</i>	
Tuesday, January 21 Introduction	How Water Shortages are Brewing Wars https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210816-how-water-shortages-are-brewing-wars
Thursday, January 23 Water Wars	Gleick 2019, Water as a Weapon
<i>Week 2: Theoretical Approaches</i>	
Tuesday, January 28 Environmental Scarcity & Conflict	Homer-Dixon, 1994. "Environmental Scarcity and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases."
Thursday, January 30 River Conflicts	Gleditsch et al, 2006 "Conflict over Shared Rivers"

Date/Topic

Week 3: River Conflicts

Tuesday, February 4

Hydro-hegemony

Thursday, February 6

Mekong River

Week 4: River Cooperation

Tuesday, February 11

River Treaties

Thursday, February 13

La Plata River

Week 5 River Cooperation

Tuesday, February 18

Institutional Design

Thursday, February 20

Jordan River

Week 6: Maritime Conflict

Tuesday, February 25

General Patterns

Thursday, February 27

Resources: Oil & Minerals

Week 7: Maritime Security

Tuesday, March 4

Thursday, March 6

Week 8: Senkaku/Diaoyu Dispute

Tuesday, March 11

Theory

Thursday, March 13

Strategic Context

Week 9: Spring Break

Tuesday/Thursday 3/18 & 3/20

Week 10: UNCLOS

Tuesday, March 25

UNCLOS & EEZs

Assigned Readings

Zeitoun & Warner, 2006 “Hydro-Hegemony”

Kuenzer et al, 2013 “Impact of Hydropower Developments”

Zawahri & Mitchell 2011, “Fragmented Governance”

Gilman et al 2008, “Whither La Plata?”

Mitchell & Zawahri 2015, “Effectiveness of Treaty Design”

Fischhendler 2008, “Ambiguity, Israel-Jordan Agreement”

Nyman, 2013. “Oceans of Conflict”, “Global Fisheries”

Buszynski, 2012, “The South China Sea”, Nyman 2015
“Offshore Oil and Maritime Conflict”

No class, ISA conference

Exam #1

Wiegand, 2009. “China's Strategy in the Senkaku/Diaoyu”

Fravel, 2010. “Explaining Stability in the Senkaku (Diaoyu)”

No Class, spring break

Nemeth et al, 2014, “Ruling the Sea”

<u>Date/Topic</u>	<u>Assigned Readings</u>
Thursday, March 27 UNCLOS: Dispute Settlement	Schofield, 2009, “The Trouble with Islands”
<i>Week 11: Arctic Resources & Conflict</i>	
Tuesday, April 1	No class, work on research paper
Thursday, April 3 Arctic	Zysk & Titley, 20145, “Signals and Noise in Arctic” and “US Grand Strategy in Arctic”
<i>Week 12: Piracy</i>	
Tuesday, April 8 Piracy	Daxecker and Prins, 2012, “Insurgents of the Sea”
Thursday, April 10 IUU & Piracy	Mitchell and Schmidt, 2024, “IUU and Piracy”
<i>Week 13: Climate Change & Conflict</i>	
Tuesday, April 15 Overview	Koubi, 2019, “Climate Change and Conflict”
Thursday, April 17 Climate Volatility & Conflict	Schmidt et al, 2021, “Climate Bones of Contention”
<i>Week 14: Disasters and Conflict</i>	
Tuesday, April 22 <i>Disasters & Conflict</i>	Omelicheva, 2011. “Natural Disasters: Triggers of Instability”
Thursday, April 24 <i>Disaster Response and Conflict</i>	Mitchell et al, 2024, “Gov’t Response to Disasters & Violence in Peru”
<i>Week 15: Wrap up</i>	
Tuesday, April 29	Exam #2
Thursday, May 1	“Safeguarding Subsea Cables”
<i>Week 16</i>	
Tuesday, May 6 & May 8	Paper Presentations

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES
Information for CLAS Undergraduates, Spring 2025

Course Home: The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) is the home of this course, and CLAS governs the add and drop deadlines, the “second-grade only” option (SGO), academic misconduct policies, and other undergraduate policies and procedures. Other UI colleges may have different policies. This course is through the Department of Political Science; DEO: Brian Lai, 343 Schaeffer Hall, brian-lai@uiowa.edu.

Academic Honesty and Misconduct: All students in CLAS courses are expected to abide by the [CLAS Code of Academic Honesty](#). Undergraduate academic misconduct must be reported by instructors to CLAS according to [these procedures](#). Graduate academic misconduct must be reported to the Graduate College according to Section F of the [Graduate College Manual](#).

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 (or 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 Dean’s Office](#) 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.

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 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 in one day (see the [policy](#) here).

Communication: 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.

Mental Health Resources and Student Support: 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.

Student Care and Assistance provides assistance to University of Iowa students who are experiencing a variety of crisis and emergency situations, including but not limited to medical issues, family emergencies, unexpected challenges, and sourcing basic needs such as food and shelter. More information on the resources related to basic needs can be found at basicneeds.uiowa.edu/resources/. Students are encouraged to contact Student Care & Assistance in the Office of the Dean of Students (Room 135 IMU, dos-assistance@uiowa.edu, or 319-335-1162) for support and assistance with resources.

[Accommodations for Students with Disabilities](#)

The University is committed to providing an educational experience that is accessible to all. 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. 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](#).

Other University Policies

[Free Speech and Expression, Absences for Religious Holy Days, Classroom Expectations, Non-discrimination Sexual Harassment/Misconduct and Supportive Measures](#)