

**TOPICS IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY  
POLITICAL SCIENCE 790:569**

**COURSE PACKET**

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**Assignment Summary**  
**Topics in American Foreign Policy (790:569)**  
**Fall 2006**

Weekly/Everyone

- *Either* answers to the Four Questions *or* a Reverse Engineered Research Design for the assigned reading. (Alternating weeks, I will arbitrarily start you doing one or the other). **NB:** *Not necessary if you are presenting or writing a paper or research design.*
- Two copies of a one-page critique of the research design(s) submitted the previous week, one for the author and one for me. **NB:** *Due even when you are presenting or have a paper or research design of your own due.*

Over the course of the semester (dates assigned on the first day)

- Two 5 page research designs and rewrites. **NB:** Each of you is required to supply copies of your research designs to all members of the class on the day it is due. We will begin the following class with an “editorial board” meeting on your research, at the end of which you will, in effect, be issued a “revise and resubmit” order. You will then rewrite and resubmit your research design to me.
- Two class presentations. **NB:** On weeks when you are a presenter, you are also required to bring copies of a one page summary brief on the readings for the week emphasizing the relationship (substantive and theoretical) with the rest of the literature for everyone in the class (including me).

Final notes

- You are expected to attend all classes.
- As a matter of courtesy to the presenter, I expect you to arrive *on time*.
- As a matter of courtesy to me, I also expect papers to be typed and *on time*. Permission for late submission must be negotiated for *one week in advance*.
- Late submission of a research design requires that you ensure that all class members receive the paper in ample time to permit them to prepare their remarks on it.

**Assignment Schedule**  
**IPE 569: Fall 2006**

	<b>Present</b>	<b>RD # 1</b>	<b>RD #2</b>
September 11	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
September 18	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
September 25 Gaddis			
October 2 Mearsheimer			
October 9 Krasner			
October 16 Allison			
October 23 Western			
October 30 Sobel			
November 6 Coll		??	??
November 13 Sikkink			
November 20 Lumsdaine			
November 27 Hunt			
December 4 Goldstein			
December 11 Shafer		XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

## The Four Questions

To prompt close reading and ensure that everyone is ready to take on authors when we meet, every other week you will answer these four questions with one tight, cogent paragraph each.

1. What is the author's basic argument?
2. How does this book connect with/differ from those that have come before?
3. What is the author's research design and how well is it conceived?
4. If you were at a conference and heard the author present the argument from this book, what probing-devastating-reputation advancing question would you pose him/her?

**NB:** In answering these questions, you might bear in mind--though not feel slavishly bound to--the following questions from "Guidelines for Presenters" and suggestions from "Guidelines for Research Designs."

- What is the dependent variable? How (and how well) is it defined/specified? (I.e., what's this stuff about?)
- What is/are the independent variable(s)? How (and how well) are they defined/specified?
- What is the nature of the causal connection that is hypothesized/asserted between independent and dependent variables and how, exactly, is it operationalized? (E.g., is this a correlational argument or is there a clear assertion of causation with the actual process of influence detailed?)
- What is the universe of literature this week's readings "commune" with? How do they fit into this literature and, more generally, how does this literature fit into the broader sweep of the literature we've covered so far?
- What's the method (game-theoretic, aggregate data, case study, etc.)? How appropriate is it to the argument? What are the gains from its use--and what are the limitations it imposes?
- A statement of the "big question," including reference to the relevant, competing analytic approaches.
- A statement of the method *and its applicability to the question at hand*.
- A definition of the dependent variable and, for example, the expected range of variation, time period of variation, or whatever is appropriate.

- A specification of the independent variable(s) and, for example, their expected range of variation, etc.
- A statement of the hypothesized causal connection, the process linking independent and dependent variables.
- A statement of the unit of analysis--and a good justification of it. (I.e., how and why it is appropriate to the analysis.)
- A statement of the type of evidence used. How is it applicable to the question at hand? What constitutes confirming and/or disconfirming evidence?

## Reverse Engineered Research Designs

Books don't fall from heaven. In fact, the better the book, the less likely it is to have been immaculately conceived—though the big boys and girls in the field would like you to think so! The purpose of this assignment, therefore, is to get you to “reverse engineer” the books we read, to figure out how they were made, and why they were made the way they were. You need to be able to do so for two reasons: first, figuring this out is an essential part of assessing a book's strengths and weaknesses; and, second, understanding how the big boys and girls research and write books is an essential part of your learning to do it too—and learning to do it is, after all, what you're here for!

Like your answers to the four questions, your reverse engineered research designs should be short, tight sketches. They should, however, answer the following questions:

- What's the author's big question? What's the conundrum (empirical and/or theoretical) that so intrigued the author that (s)he *had* to write this book?
- Given this conundrum, what hypotheses did the author develop to get at the big question (dependent variable, independent variable(s), intervening variable(s), asserted causal connection(s) among them, etc.)?
- Given the author's conundrum, what were the alternative methods by which (s)he could have puzzled out an answer?
- Why did the author choose the method (s)he did?
- Why did the author choose the data (cases, time period, and/or whatever) (s)he did?
- How did the author define confirming/disconfirming data (i.e., how would (s)he know if (s)he was right--and so could write the BIG BOOK)?

## Guidelines for Presenters

Collectively, we all depend on the presenters to make this class work; individually, your grades depend on the quality of your presentations. Presentations should offer a *very* brief introduction to and overview of the week's readings. *The main function of the presentations, however, is to raise the critical questions (substantive and methodological) concerning them.* Presentations are not meant to be universally critical, but should be balanced assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of type of arguments made, variables used, etc. Your presentations should consider the following (incomplete) list of questions:

- What is the universe of literature this week's readings "commune" with? How do they fit into this literature and, more generally, how does this literature fit into the broader sweep of the literature we've covered so far?
- What is the dependent variable? How (and how well) is it defined/specified? (I.e., what's this stuff about?)
- What is/are the independent variable(s)? How (and how well) are they defined/specified?
- What is the nature of the causal connection that is hypothesized/asserted between independent and dependent variables and how, exactly, is it operationalized? (E.g., is this a correlational argument or is there a clear assertion of causation with the actual process of influence detailed?)
- What's the method (game-theoretic, aggregate data, case study, etc.)? How appropriate is it to the argument? What are the gains from its use--and what are the limitations it imposes?

**REMEMBER:** The point of your presentation is *not* to answer all these questions; it is to *raise* them. Nothing kills discussion quicker than the presentation of an open-and-shut case! And, to reemphasize the professional socialization theme I will bore you with all semester, learning how to identify the core questions--and then pose them provocatively--is an essential skill if you are to succeed in the classroom.

## Guidelines for Research Designs

The point of this course is not merely to make you into informed consumers of the American foreign policy literature; it is also to prepare you to produce it. Thus, two of the papers you must prepare for this course will not be critiques of the work of others, but proposals for research that you might undertake. And, to make this as realistic as possible, you will distribute copies of your research design to everybody else and have to defend it for the first half hour of the next class. Furthermore, to keep everybody honest, all the *other* students in the class will give you (and me) a page of comments on your research design. Their comments will stress the following which are, by extension, the essential elements of a good research design that you must keep in mind while preparing yours for them (and me) to critique:

- A statement of the "big question," including reference to the relevant, competing analytic approaches;
- A statement of the method and its applicability to the question at hand.
- A definition of the dependent variable and, for example, the expected range of variation, time period of variation, or whatever is appropriate.
- A specification of the independent variable(s) and, for example, their expected range of variation, etc.
- A statement of the hypothesized causal connection, the process linking independent and dependent variables.
- A statement of the unit of analysis--and a good justification of it. (I.e., how and why it is appropriate to the type of analysis you are proposing.)
- A statement of the type of evidence you intend to study. How is it applicable to the question at hand? What will constitute confirming and/or disconfirming evidence?

## **The Academic Whodunit Or, How to Write the Perfect Formula Paper**

I have talked with hundreds of students about how to attack a paper assignment. Many have commented on the usefulness of my "formula." So, for the benefit of one and all--and to save myself repeating this to each one of you separately--let me rehearse once again the official D. Michael Shafer whodunit approach to paper writing.

What is the first thing that happens in your average whodunit? You find a body--sometimes in the first sentence, but inevitably within the first couple of paragraphs. This, in turn, occasions a series of thoughts and questions on the part of the reader like: oh, look, a body; and who is it? and what did they die of? and why were they killed? and whodunit? And, of course, the rest of the book then provides the reader with a logical deductive process by which all these questions are slowly answered and the beastly murderer unmasked.

Now, as in all good whodunits, the first, most essential thing in writing a good paper is the body. Like Agatha Christie, you may want to take a sentence or two to "set the scene"--but no more. Remember, your readers, unlike hers, want to get to the meat (sorry) immediately. What's the "moral equivalent" of a body? Your "problem," your "issue." From the very first sentence or two you've got to make your reader sit up and think, "Well, hello, what have we here?" Then, in rapid succession, you have to raise all the other appropriate questions: what happened? why? with what consequences? Having done so, you can now take the reader in hand and lead them gently through the unmasking process. And remember, it is a logical process (no surprises here) that ought to proceed in precisely the order suggested by the first paragraphs which were skillfully conceived to aim your unsuspecting reader unerringly in the murderer's direction. (I've always detested whodunits that achieve their effect only by leaving the reader ignorant of the one essential clue and so unable to sleuth along with the sleuth.)

Finally, let us recall the all-so-important *differences* between a whodunit and your perfect paper. First, unlike the author of a whodunit you've got to give the reader the answer, your answer, your murderer, up front with no pussy-footing around. From the very beginning, your reader ought to know what the question is, why it is important, what the debate about it is, how you intend to analyze it, and what your conclusion is. Second, unlike the author of a whodunit, your job is *not* to baffle and amuse by dragging in a clutter of interesting people, issues, data and other red herrings. This is why the hardest part of writing a good paper is writing the first, tight, perfect introductory paragraph or two--because they must define what can *and cannot* be included in what follows. If a given fact, issue, etc. is not essential to unmasking the murderer, kill it! Remember, what impresses is *not* a tedious catalogue of all that you have read on the general subject of whatever, but a neat, efficient, no-frills presentation of just that which is essential to your case.

## Final Evaluation

### I. Substance

1. The books: Which books did you like best and why? Least and why? Are there books you believe should be added? Dropped?
2. The sections: Which week's readings/theme-topic were the most interesting and important? Which were worst? Are there theme-topics you would drop? Add? Why?

### II. Organization

1. Was the logic of the course's organization clear and did it work for you? If not, why not?
2. How might the course as a whole be organized better?

### III. Requirements

1. Readings: Too light? Too heavy? O.K.?
2. Written assignments: What of the *number*? What of the *nature*? Please compare to other professor's expectations and refer specifically to the research designs requirement.
3. Cases: Did you find the cases useful? Worth the effort? Should I drop them? Add more of them? Keep things as is?

### IV. Classroom Practice

1. How did the basic format of presentations-discussions work?
2. Would you prefer more "lecturing" by me or more discussion?
3. Me: What could/should I do differently? (Talk more? Talk less? Be nicer? Be meaner?) How do I make you feel as a student? How does my classroom "feel"?
4. My expectations: Do I expect too much? Too little? Or, more to the point, do I provide you the means to meet my expectations?
5. How does this seminar compare to others you've taken? Skip the names, but tell me the important stuff—e.g., How much you think you learned substantively (compared to some "average")? How much you learned about writing/thinking/etc. (compared to...)?
6. Does this seminar serve a unique function in the graduate program (other than purely substantive)? I.e., are there things you learned here that you haven't gotten elsewhere? What are they? Should I do more of them? Are there things I do that are done elsewhere/better elsewhere such that I should cut them from this seminar to make room for what's unique to it?

### V. Everything Else I Forgot to Ask