

Pols 429: Issues in World Politics Syllabus

Course Information

Course Number: POLS 429
Course Title: Issues in World Politics
Section: 502
Class Size: 35
Date: 01/13/2025 - 04/29/2025
Time: MWF 1:15 PM-2:05 PM
Location: ALLN 1016
Credit Hours: 3
Office Hours: 2:05 PM -3:05 PM, Wednesday, Friday, or by appointments,
in-person (ALLN 3101) or via Zoom.

Instructor Details

Instructor: Qiang (Steven) Wu, Aggie Classes of '25
Office: ALLN 3101
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Course Description

This semester, the course focuses on the theme, "The United States, China, and the World Order." The relationship between the United States and China is a critical factor shaping today's global landscape. Throughout the semester, we will explore the dynamics of their relationship and competition across various domains, including politics, economics, security, and technology. You will engage with book chapters, foreign policy essays, and academic papers to deepen your understanding of these issues. The instructor will guide you through the readings, facilitate discussions, and organize a simulation game that will require your active participation.

The instructor emphasizes interactive learning methods, including peer collaboration, hands-on practice, and experiential activities. Given current challenges in authenticating written work, the course evaluation relies more on in-class presentations than traditional essays. Rather than concentrating assessments in midterm and final examinations or papers, assignments are distributed evenly throughout the semester to help students manage their workload more effectively.

The assessment methods will help you develop:

1. Analytical Skill – by writing essays
2. Presentation Skill – by presenting authors' works
3. Critical thinking – by raising discussion questions and trying to answer them
4. Group work skill – by playing Strategic Competition game

Course Prerequisites

POLS 206 or approval of department head.

Course Learning Outcomes

- Acquire substantive knowledge on the course theme.
- Apply these theories into real world politics.
- Develop analytical skills to explore the great power competition and world order.
- Explore causal relations related to great power politics.
- Polish writing skills.

Letter Grade Policy

Grades are assigned based on final averages as follows: A = 100 – 90; B= 89.9 – 80; C = 79.9 – 70; D = 69.9- 60; F = below 60

Assignments and Grade Distribution

Attendance (10%)

Discussion Leadership 1 (10%)

Discussion Leadership 2 (10%)

Group Essay 1 (10%)

Group Essay 2 (10%)

Group Presentation 1 (10%)

Group Presentation 2 (10%)

Audience Evaluation 1 (10%)

Audience Evaluation 2 (10%)

Group Member Peer Evaluation (10%)

Discussion Leadership (0-100 scale)

Each student will serve as a discussion leader for weekly readings twice in the semester. Each time covers half of the date's class materials. A discussion leader should present a short summary of the readings, bring discussion questions to the class, and moderate class discussions. The summary should include the research question, motivation, links to the literature, main argument, case studies, empirics, methods, and findings (not all of the above, depending on the paper/article). Please try to draw linkages among the readings for one week and across weeks. The presentation and discussion time for each student is about twenty minutes.

Students should submit the slides of their presentation/discussion questions by the end of the day (11:59PM) before the presentation date. No submission results in 20 points deducted; late submission results in 10 points deduction from the Discussion Leadership grade.

Since there are not enough slots for each student to do the discussion leadership twice, students who did one time of discussion leadership are required to write a response paper instead. In this case, the student chooses any article / paper in the syllabus and writes a response paper on that. The response paper should include both summary and comments of the paper it is responding to and should be about two pages.

Process for Discussion Leadership (Two students in a class session)

Student A presents Article 1 and leads class discussion by asking thoughtful questions (~15 min)
Student B presents Article 2 and leads class discussion by asking thoughtful questions (~15 min)
Instructor provides comments and guidance on both articles (~20 min)

Strategic Competition Game: U.S., China, and the World Order

I. Overview

The **Strategic Competition Game** is a dynamic, simulation-based exercise held during Friday class sessions. It aims to immerse students in the complexities of international relations by representing key stakeholders in real-world scenarios. Each game features two groups competing on a specific topic, with at least one group representing either the **United States** or **China**. These simulations can be set in one of the two distinct contexts below:

1. **United Nations General Assembly Meetings, or**
2. **National Security Committee Meetings.**

II. Simulation Settings and Process

1. United Nations General Assembly Meetings

- **Scenario:** Groups role-play as representatives of countries or entities presenting their positions in a global forum.
- **Game Process:**
 1. **Group X Presentation:** Group X presents their perspective and main arguments (15 minutes).
 2. **Group Y Presentation:** Group Y presents their perspective and main arguments (15 minutes).
 3. **Debate:** Groups X and Y engage in a structured debate, alternating speaking turns (10 minutes).
 4. **Audience Participation:** Students in the audience act as representatives of other countries, asking questions or providing comments. Instructor input is also included (8 minutes).
 5. **Voting:** The audience votes for the group they believe presented the strongest case (2 minutes).

2. National Security Committee Meetings

- **Scenario:** Groups role-play as members of their respective countries' National Security Committees, briefing the President on strategy and crisis management.
- **Game Process:**
 1. **Group X Presentation:** Group X presents their analysis and strategy (20 minutes).
 2. **Group Y Presentation:** Group Y presents their analysis and strategy (20 minutes).
 3. **Audience Participation:** The audience, acting as the President, asks questions or provides feedback. Instructor input is also included (8 minutes).
 4. **Voting:** The audience votes for the group they believe delivered the better analysis (2 minutes).

III. Group Forming and Topic Generating

1. Group Formation (before or during the second class session)

- Students form groups of **three members** (I may add a fourth member when necessary).
- Each group selects a **leader** responsible for coordinating meetings and submitting assignments. Leaders receive a **2-point bonus** (out of 100 total course points).

2. Strategic Competition Topics

- Groups propose an international issue involving the **U.S.** and/or **China** as key stakeholders.
- Issues can be contemporary or historical. Its setting should lay on the ground of facts, though you can propose new strategies in later group works. It can specify an event with clear scope of time and space, such as a dispute or competition in a specific region, industry, or sector. It can also be a broader field where the two great powers compete.
- Groups that are uncertain on their topics can seek for help from the instructor, who will offer them some choices in class (I will not send them to you since that will make it unclear whether you come up with the topics by yourself or by reading my references). However, groups that initiate their own topic gets an extra **1-point** for each group members.

*3. Deciding the Sequences and Role (during the **second class session**)*

In the game, the group initiating the topic is referred to as the **Initiator**, while the group opting to participate in that topic is the **Responder**.

During the second class session, groups will meet with me to provide the following details:

- Group members and leader(s)
- The topic they plan to simulate (or select one from a list I will provide), including possible roles in that issue
- The role they intend to play in the game.

Topics are assigned on a first-come, first-served basis. If your proposed topic has already been taken by another group, you must select a different one.

The order in which groups meet with me will also determine their presentation schedule:

- The first group to meet with me will present during the first week of the Strategic Competition Game.
- After all groups have indicated their topics as the Initiator, the first group can choose which week they would like to present as the Responder, followed by the second group, ..., until the last group.

4. Group Formation by the Instructor

If voluntary group formation is unsuccessful for some students, the instructor will assign groups randomly. This will occur either:

- **20 minutes into the second class session**, or
- **Once no more groups are waiting to meet with the instructor**, whichever comes later.

Once assigned, these groups should meet with the instructor to indicate their proposed topic or select one from the provided list.

*5. Submission of Strategic Competition Issue Background (By **Friday, 11:59 PM of Week 2**):*

After the second class session, groups refine and substantiate their proposed topic. By **Friday, 11:59 PM of Week 2**, the group leader must submit a **Strategic Competition Issue Background** document to both the class Canvas and a shared Google Drive folder.

This document should:

- Be at least one page long
- Clearly outline the setting (e.g., UN or National Security Committee) and essential facts about the competition issue
- Appropriate citation is needed.

The goal for this document is to lay out the foundation which the two groups compete on. While this document is not graded, late submissions will result in point deductions from group presentations, following the Late Work Policy explained later in this syllabus.

IV. Thinking Points for the Simulation

1. Original Context:

- International situation, domestic political pressures, economic conditions, and military postures.

2. Key Decision Points:

- Initial response options, escalation/de-escalation choices, public communication strategies, and alliance management.

3. Historical Outcomes:

- Actual decisions, alternative possibilities, long-term consequences, and lessons learned.

4. Resource Constraints:

- Military capabilities, economic leverage, diplomatic capital, and time pressure.

5. Stakeholder Positions:

- Domestic constituencies, international allies, opposition groups, and business interests.

V. Roles and Responsibilities

For presentations and essays, group members can role-play key decision-makers to explore domestic dynamics and stakeholder perspectives (suggested but not required). Suggested roles include:

U.S. Team Roles:

- Secretary of State, Defense Secretary, National Security Advisor, Chief Intelligence Officer, Trade Representative, Congressional Leaders, etc.

China Team Roles:

- Foreign Minister, Military Committee Vice-Chair, Intelligence Chief, National People's Congress Chair, etc.

VI. Division of Labor

- Groups have full flexibility to divide tasks based on members' strengths and interests.
- The entire group is graded collectively for presentations and essays, but contributions can be recognized through peer evaluations.
- The presentation can be given by any number of group members. The group essay can also be written by any number of group members. It is under the discretion of the group members themselves to decide who to do what.
- The copyright of things like the group essays or presentation slides should be regarded as belonging to those who have contributed to them.

VII. Assignments and Grading

1. Group Presentation (0–100 Scale)

- Evaluates the group’s ability to present a coherent, well-researched argument.
- Includes adherence to the simulation process, role-playing effectiveness, and responsiveness during debates and audience participation (More detailed rubrics in the appendix).

2. Group Essay (0–100 Scale)

- Each group will submit two essays, one following each of their group presentations. The purpose of these essays is to help students develop skills in tracing processes, identifying evidence, constructing arguments, and even formulating theories. I will provide feedback on both the writing and content through Canvas, with comments typically displayed on the right-hand side of your main text.
- Essays Guidelines:
 - Length: 800–2,500 words (the same requirement with the *War on the Rocks*).
 - Minimum of five academic citations. Citations should be in the format used by the American Political Science Review, and follows the Chicago Manual of Style.
 - Submitted via Canvas by the group leader **One Week** after their group presentation (i.e., the next Friday at 23:59 PM).
 - They should be double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font and one-inch margins.
- Essay Style Options
Groups may choose one of the following styles for their essays, different styles have a different ceiling of their maximum points:

Style 1. Summary of the Presentation (Maximum: 90 Points)

- This option involves presenting a concise, essay-style summary of the group's presentation.
- Avoid bullet points; instead, focus on crafting a coherent narrative that clearly communicates the key information presented.

Style 2. Expanded Analysis (Maximum: 95 Points)

- Rather than merely repeating the content of the presentation, the essay discusses the issue broader by analyzing additional players, factors, or dimensions.

- May include a chronological account of the events, specifying key actors, their objectives, and the actions they took.
- May use the analysis to propose a generalizable theory / broader argument that may be applicable to similar events.

Style 3. Broader Thematic Exploration (Maximum: 100 Points)

- Go beyond the specific event discussed in the group's Strategic Competition Game by addressing a broader, related question.
 - Begin by framing a clear and important question, explaining its relevance.
 - Incorporate existing literature to contextualize the question, then present a theory or argument that addresses it.
- Analysis Types (choose one of them)
 - **Qualitative analysis** involves using case studies and process tracing to provide depth and context. For instance, you could examine a specific case where the argument has been validated, tracing the sequence by analyzing real-world scenarios. You could provide a rich narrative that highlights causal mechanisms and uncovers nuances often missed in broader approaches. Process tracing can further illustrate intermediate steps, strengthening the argument's plausibility.
 - **Quantitative analysis** requires you to develop a testable hypothesis and establish a systematic causal relationship. For example, you could identify key independent and dependent variables, articulate how one affects the other, and propose a research design involving statistical testing or regression analysis. This method enables broader generalizability and provides empirical evidence for your argument. Statistically significant results can reinforce the validity of your theory and hypothesis.

3. Audience Evaluation Grade (0–100 Scale)

- After each game, the audience votes for the better-performing team.
- Example: If Group X receives 20 votes and Group Y receives 10 votes, Group X receives 100 points. For Group Y, the vote difference ($D = 20 - 10 = 10$) is deducted from the full score of 100. Thus, Group Y receives a score of **$100 - 10 = 90$ points**.

4. Peer Evaluation Grade (0–100 Scale)

- At the semester's last class day (4/29/2025), each student assesses their group peers, emailing their respective grades (0–100 scale) to the instructor.

- The instructor calculates the mean of these evaluations for each student. However, if there is too big a variance between the grades to the same student, the instructor may try to figure out more details.
- Late submissions follow the late work policy (I.e., If you submit the grade one day later, you get 90% of your grade, etc.), and failure to submit within four days of the deadline results in default scores of 100 for all group members.

Attendance Grade

Attendance is expected to students and will be taken randomly by the instructor. Attendance Score is calculated by this formula:

Number of Attended Classes / Number of whole classes taking attendance

Announcements

Announcements posted in Canvas will be my primary means of broadcast communication. These announcements will be forwarded to your TAMU email account by Canvas. To ensure you do not miss any important changes or updates, please check Canvas or your TAMU email for any new announcements at least once a day. Whenever I announce a change to the schedule, an assignment, or any other aspect of the course, I assume that all of you will have received notification of any such changes within 36 hours of the announcement.

Emails

When contacting me via emails, please:

DO NOT use Canvas messages to contact me. I require that you email me via your TAMU email account instead of through Canvas. This is because messages sent through Canvas arrive without any context and prevent me from replying with attachments. I use only my TAMU email account and never send personal messages through Canvas.

Ensure that every subject line in every email starts with your course ID, followed by the reason you are contacting me. For example:

- Subject: POLS 429-502 - Request for excused absence
- Subject: POLS 429-502 - Help with Activity

Late Work Policy

Late submissions passed the due will be deducted the 10% of the entire grade (e.g. if the full grade is 100,

the maximum grade after the due & before 12am the next day =90

the maximum grade after 1 day & before passing 2 days (12am)=80

the maximum grade after 2 days & before passing 3 days (12am)=70

the maximum grade after 3 days & before passing 4 days (12am)=60)

Late submission after 4 days the due date will not be graded and earn 0% of the grade assigned.

Work submitted by a student as makeup work for an excused absence is not considered late work and is exempted from the late work policy ([Student Rule 7](#)).

If it appears that you may be late submitting your work, then I recommend you consider submitting an incomplete assignment before the deadline to earn some points rather than be late and lose all of them.

Forum on the United States, China, and the World Order

Occasionally in our classes, there will be "Forum on the United States, China, and the World Order," where scholars present their latest research to the class. By directly dialoguing with scholars, you can get to the forefront of research in the field, as well as asking questions about their work and research in general.

TAMU-POLS Student Journal on the United States, China, and the World Order

I will select four best paper among your group essays, and publish them in this journal.

University Policies

This section outlines the university level policies that must be included in each course syllabus. The TAMU Faculty Senate established the wording of these policies.

NOTE: Faculty members should not change the written statements. A faculty member may add separate paragraphs if additional information is needed.

Attendance Policy

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Makeup Work Policy

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the timeframe for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1](#)).

"The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2](#)).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See [Student Rule 24](#).)

Academic Integrity Statement and Policy

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do."

“Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one’s work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case” ([Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20](#)).

Texas A&M at College Station

You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at aggiehonor.tamu.edu.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Resources office on your campus (resources listed below) Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

Texas A&M at College Station

Disability Resources is located in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit disability.tamu.edu.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

With the exception of some medical and mental health providers, all university employees (including full and part-time faculty, staff, paid graduate assistants, student workers, etc.) are Mandatory Reporters and must report to the Title IX Office if the employee experiences, observes, or becomes aware of an incident that meets the following conditions (see [University Rule 08.01.01.M1](#)):

- The incident is reasonably believed to be discrimination or harassment.

- The incident is alleged to have been committed by or against a person who, at the time of the incident, was (1) a student enrolled at the University or (2) an employee of the University.

Mandatory Reporters must file a report regardless of how the information comes to their attention – including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Although Mandatory Reporters must file a report, in most instances, a person who is subjected to the alleged conduct will be able to control how the report is handled, including whether or not to pursue a formal investigation. The University's goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and to ensure access to the resources you need.

Students wishing to discuss concerns related to mental and/or physical health in a confidential setting are encouraged to make an appointment with [University Health Services](#) or download the [TELUS Health Student Support app](#) for 24/7 access to professional counseling in multiple languages. Walk-in services for urgent, non-emergency needs are available during normal business hours at University Health Services locations; call 979.458.4584 for details.

Students can learn more about filing a report, accessing supportive resources, and navigating the Title IX investigation and resolution process on the University's [Title IX webpage](#).

Statement on Mental Health and Wellness

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors influencing a student's academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in healthy self-care practices by utilizing the resources and services available through [University Health Services](#). Students needing a listening ear can call the Texas A&M Helpline (979.845.2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends for mental health peer support while classes are in session. The [TELUS Health Student Support app](#) provides access to professional counseling in multiple languages anytime, anywhere by phone or chat, and the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline offers 24-hour emergency support at 988 or [988lifeline.org](#).

Students needing a listening ear can contact University Health Services (979.458.4584) or call the Texas A&M Helpline (979.845.2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends while classes are in session. 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988) or at [988lifeline.org](#).

Appendix: Presentation Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
Content	Clear, thorough, and well-researched; all key points covered.	Adequately researched with most key points addressed.	Superficial or incomplete; some key points missing.	Minimal research; critical points overlooked.
Organization	Logical, cohesive structure with strong introduction, body, and conclusion.	Organized with minor lapses in flow.	Somewhat disorganized; transitions unclear.	Disorganized or incoherent; no clear flow.
Delivery	Confident, engaging, and professional; excellent eye contact and voice projection.	Confident but inconsistent engagement; voice clear.	Nervous or hesitant; some difficulty engaging audience.	Unconfident, poor projection, or disengaged.
Visual Aids	Highly effective and well-designed; enhance the presentation.	Effective, though some areas for improvement.	Basic visual aids; somewhat detract from presentation.	Poor or no visual aids; irrelevant or distracting.
Time Management	Perfectly timed; covers all content without rushing.	Well-timed with minor adjustments needed.	Either rushed or too slow; some content omitted.	Significantly over or under time; key content omitted.

Appendix: Discussion Leadership Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
Preparation	Deeply prepared; thoroughly understands the material and discussion goals.	Prepared with a good understanding of the material.	Limited preparation; some gaps in understanding.	Unprepared or unfamiliar with the material.
Question Quality	Thought-provoking, open-ended, and relevant questions.	Relevant questions that spark some discussion.	Basic or closed questions; limited depth.	Few or irrelevant questions posed.
Facilitation	Encourages all voices; skillfully guides the conversation.	Encourages participation; keeps discussion mostly on track.	Some effort to involve others; struggles to maintain focus.	Little to no facilitation; discussion derails.
Engagement	Actively listens and builds on contributions; connects ideas.	Listens and responds; attempts to connect ideas.	Minimal active listening or idea integration.	Fails to engage with or respond to participants.
Time Management	Paces discussion well; covers all planned topics.	Pacing mostly effective; minor issues with timing.	Poor pacing; some topics neglected.	Poor time management; discussion feels rushed or incomplete.
Critical Thinking	Encourages deep analysis and multiple perspectives.	Encourages some analysis and perspective-taking.	Limited critical thinking or perspective-taking.	No effort to encourage critical thinking.