DESCRIPTION: Conflict is very destructive and does not seem to be a particularly good way to resolve disputes. Yet we see people engaging in it at all levels, from individuals, to larger groups, and entire societies. Why? Is conflict behavior irrational or can we make sense of it? The goal of this course is to introduce students to rigorous reasoning about conflict in an accessible manner. We will examine various explanations of conflict in great detail, and use them to explore substantive themes like the democratic peace, ethnic conflict, nuclear deterrence, and terrorism among others.

PREREQUISITES: This course is intended for advanced undergraduate students who have already taken at least one course in international relations. I will assume basic familiarity with fundamental approaches.

REQUIREMENTS: You will be evaluated according to your performance in four areas: participation (15%), preparation of references (5%), presentation and discussion (30%), and final examination (50%). You must complete all four components to pass the course.

Final Examination. During our first meeting, you will get to choose one particular war from a list I will provide. This list will have half as many entries as there are students in the class, which means that each war will get two students writing about it.

Your final exam will be to write a paper that explains the causes of that war. You will be expected to discuss at least three possible explanations suggested by the theories covered in class and to select the one that seems most persuasive given the evidence you find. The paper is due in print to me by noon on Monday, January 19. It must be double-spaced, with 1-inch margins all around, and in size 11 point typeface. There is no length requirement but if your paper exceeds 40 pages (references and footnotes not included), it is certainly too long.

Reference List Preparation. You must prepare a list of references for your paper and submit it to me for approval. The list is due in class on October 6. It has to be reasonable (i.e., you cannot realistically expect to read 10 books and 50 articles on the subject) but it has to be comprehensive (i.e., it includes recent scholarship without glaring omissions of important work). You should aim for 2 books (one general and the other more specialized on the origins of the war) and somewhere between 10 and 20 articles or book chapters. You
can include books that you will not read in their entirety. In these cases, list the appropriate page numbers (a chapter is roughly equivalent to a stand-alone article). These are just the references for the war you will be writing on. (You will have more references in your paper because you will need to cite theories and such.)

**PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION.** The last two meetings of this course (December 1 and 8) will be devoted to discussing preliminary drafts of your papers. These drafts need not be polished or even complete. They must, however, outline the basic possible explanations and suggest the way you intend to go with your argument based on the evidence. The drafts are due to me on November 24, either in print (in class) or in electronic form (by noon). I will make them available to the other students on Blackboard.

You will be responsible for preparing a presentation of your own draft as well as a discussion of the draft submitted by the student who is also writing about the same war. Your presentation and the discussion of your colleague’s draft will be on different days. The presentation cannot exceed 10 minutes, and the discussion is limited to 15 minutes. After you present your draft and your discussant finishes the critique, there will be a 15 minute general class discussion. You are expected to take the critique and the discussions into account when you write your final version of the paper. They often result in immense improvements.

**PARTICIPATION.** You are expected to engage the material frequently and you will be graded on your contribution to class discussion. This means that you have to read carefully the assigned material. This is a seminar, so I will tend to minimize lecture and maximize discussion. It will be helpful if you came to class with a summary and a list of questions for each reading. Some common questions to ask are:

- What is the question, what is being explained? (Yes, it will most likely be something about the causes of war, but what *specifically* is the author trying to explain?)

- What is the answer? What is the causal mechanism? What are the explanatory variables? What are the assumptions?

- What are some possible alternative explanations? How does this one relate to them: does it refine, refute, or subsume them? What other hypotheses does this explanation suggest?

- What are the logical structures of the competing explanations? What is the evidence supporting them? Can we measure or represent the theoretical constructs empirically?

- What are the broader implications of the theory?

Not all readings will require that you ask all these questions and many may not even provide you with clear answers. But you should try nevertheless.

**MISSED ASSIGNMENTS.** Only a note from a real MD or a Princeton dean excuses missing your course presentation, discussion, or the exam deadline. An unexcused failure to present the material assigned or submit the exam by the deadline generates a grade of F on the
work missed. If you know you cannot present or cannot make the deadline for a legitimate reason, notify me as soon as possible so we can work out a solution. It is your responsibility to make the appropriate arrangements with me.

GRADE APPEALS. You can expect to be graded solely on your academic performance. This includes clarity of thought, knowledge of the material, composition, spelling, and grammar. Students who believe to have received an incorrect grade or a grade based on non-academic criteria should formally appeal it to me. The appeal will consist of a single typed page that identifies the problem and presents a reasoned argument that the grade fits the appeal criteria listed above.

READINGS: The course readings will be drawn from a number of books and articles. The following required books are available for purchase at the bookstore:


In addition, we shall read a number of articles. The links are on the course website.

SCHEDULE: Topic numbers do not correspond to week numbers although the sequence is chronological. Some topics require more than one meeting to cover. Each topic begins a new page, the schedule begins on the next page. You can find the list of weekly assignments on the course website.
TOPIC 1: THEORY AND EXPLANATION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Required:


Recommended:

**TOPIC 2: SYSTEMIC THEORIES OF WAR**

**a) Structural Realism**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**b) Offensive and Defensive Realism**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**c) Balance of Power**

**Required:**

Recommended:


*d) Hegemony and Power Transition*

Required:


Recommended:


*e) Long Cycles and Cycle of Relative Power*

Recommended:


*Updated: September 10, 2008*
**Topic 3: Military Technology and Strategy**

*a) Crisis Stability*

**Required:**

**Recommended:**

*b) Offense-Defense Balance*

**Required:**

**Recommended:**

*c) Military Culture*

**Required:**

**Recommended:**

*Updated: September 10, 2008*

d) Arms Races

Required:


Recommended:

**Topic 4: Human Nature: Instinct, Cognition, Perception**

*a) Biology*

Required:


Recommended:


*b) Personality and Leadership*

Required:


Recommended:


*c) Psychology, Emotions, and Misperception*

Required:


Recommended:


*Updated: September 10, 2008*
**Topic 5: Internal Causes: Attributes**

*a) Norms and Culture*

Required:


Recommended:


*b) Nationalism*

Required:


Recommended:


*c) Religion*

Required:


Recommended:


**TOPIC 6: INTERNAL CAUSES: INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL PROCESSES**

*a) Domestic Strife*

Required:


Recommended:


*b) Institutional Constraints and Principal-Agent Problems*

Required:


Recommended:


*c) Partisan Politics and Socio-Economic Structure*

Required:

Updated: September 10, 2008

Recommended:


d) Public Opinion, Elites, and Media

Required:


Recommended:


e) Military Establishment

Recommended:


Updated: September 10, 2008
f) Organizational Routines and Bureaucratic Politics

Required:


Recommended:

**TOPIC 7: STRATEGIC CHOICE**

*a) General*

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


*b) Uncertainty, Optimism, and Signaling*

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


*c) Commitment*

**Required:**


*Updated: September 10, 2008*
Recommended:


*d) Reputation*

Required:


*e) Indivisibility*

Required:


Recommended:

**Topic 8: Weapons of Mass Destruction**

*a) Nuclear Deterrence*

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


*b) Proliferation*

**Required:**


**Recommended:**

**TOPIC 9: THE ORIGINS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

Required:


Recommended:


