

**Master Syllabus**  
***Department of Geography***

**GEOG 470-570: Political Geography**

**Course Description**

Conflict is a part of our everyday lives, whether concerns over terrorism, active military service, or making travel, business, or career plans in a world in which war is commonplace. How can we gain an understanding of why war is fought, how it is portrayed or justified, and what the alternatives are? This class will help you address these questions and others through an examination of geopolitics. Geopolitics is the strategic evaluation and control of territory, and also a way of 'seeing the world' in a manner that promotes difference, competition, and ultimately conflict. Therefore, we will approach geopolitics critically, trying to understand how and why particular theorists and politicians have portrayed the world in a certain manner, the way these visions have permeated our world view, and the everyday implications of the pervasiveness of geopolitical thought. We will also look at those who have criticized geopolitical thinking. This class will be based upon weekly readings and response papers to generate a setting where we all have read and thought about the material. Evaluation is based upon the response papers, two exams, and class participation.

**Course Objectives**

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Distinguish the various meanings of geopolitics
- Grasp various theoretical approaches to geopolitics
- Use a number of geopolitical frameworks to interpret contemporary conflicts
- Contextualize conflict and conflict resolution in both space and time
- Understand the possible causes and consequences of war and armed conflicts

**Course Texts**

Recommended texts include:

John Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-visioning world politics*. 2nd Edition, Routledge, 2003.

G. O'Tuathail, S. Dalby, and P. Routledge (Eds.), *The Geopolitics reader*. 2nd Edition, Routledge, 2006

Christopher Hedges, *War is a force that gives us meaning*. First Anchor Books, 2003.

## Course Format

This course will be primarily lecture-based. Lecture sessions will be group discussions intended to cover the majority of the conceptual material. There will be assigned readings, and part of students' assessments will be based on their contributions to in-class discussions.

An example of a potential outline of topics of this course, with time allotment for each topic at the discretion of the instructor:

- Geopolitics and Geography
- Geopolitical Frameworks
- Geopolitics and the State
- Primacy and Hegemony
- Imperialist Geopolitics
- Cold War Geopolitics
- Post-Cold War Geopolitics
- Environmental Geopolitics
- Critical Geopolitics
- Anti-Geopolitics
- Geopolitics of Just War Theory
- Militarization and Geopolitics
- New Types of Geopolitics

The following assignments will be required in GEOG 470-570. Other assignments may be added at the instructor's discretion.

### 1. Exams:

There will be two exams consisting of essay questions covering approximately ½ of the course material each. Essay questions will be provided and students will submit double-spaced, typed responses.

### 2. Weekly response papers:

To encourage informed and engaged participation in class discussions, students will submit weekly reactions to the assigned readings every Monday. The response papers will be a 1 page double-spaced typed paper where students identify key questions, themes, problems, or contradictions in the week's readings and relate the week's readings to an issue or topic discussed previously in the class.

### 3. Participation:

Active participation in class is essential to succeed in this course. Students will actively engage with the ideas presented in assigned materials and will be expected to contribute with questions and thoughtful and informed reactions. All students will be asked to lead at least one group discussion of the material during the semester.

### 4. Synthesis Essay (GEOG 570 only):

Graduate students enrolled in the course will write a paper that discusses the utility, interconnections, and weaknesses of a least two of the concepts we have discussed in class with regard to potential to investigate a topic of your choice. The essay will utilize readings from the seminar, but the expectation is that students will expand their familiarity with the literature by including about 10 references.

## **Course and Instructor Evaluation**

Students will have an opportunity to participate in a formal evaluation of the course and the instructor's teaching performance at the end of the semester.