

Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination in International Relations
Fall 2016
Morning Exam Study Guide

1. IR scholars have traditionally justified separating international and domestic politics by asserting that international politics take place in an anarchic setting, while domestic politics take place in a hierarchical or ordered setting.

- Are there good reasons to doubt either part of this assertion? That is, is there reason to doubt that international politics are clearly anarchic, or that domestic politics are clearly not?
- Should the two fields be treated as completely separate? Can insights from one inform the other? Why or why not?

2. Lake (2011) argues that the field of international relations should eschew a focus on grand theory (or the “isms”) and “focus instead on developing contingent, mid-level theories of specific phenomena.”

- Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?
- If you agree, should we still teach our students about grand theory? Why or why not?
- If you disagree, explain what you see as the proper roles of grand and mid-level theories in international relations scholarship. Should all mid-level theories be derived from grand theory? Do grand and mid-level theories serve useful, but separate, purposes?

3. From your perspective, what does “good” international relations research look like? What defines best practices in terms of creating theories of international relations and connecting theories to empirical tests?

- Is there a theory, paradigm, or approach in IR that is more useful than others for explaining international political phenomena? If so, describe it and explain why it is superior to other approaches. If not, why not?
- Is there a best approach for linking theoretical concepts and explanations to empirical operationalizations and tests? If so, what is it, and why is it the best approach? If not, why not?
- Provide detailed arguments and guidelines about best practices. Support your argument with specific examples from the IR literature that can serve to represent good and/or bad practices.

4. Plan and outline a graduate seminar that you believe would serve as an appropriate introduction to international relations for all political science graduate students.

- What topics would you cover? What common topics would you omit? Why?
- Which works are the essential readings for the course? Which readings do you think would typically be included, but really should be omitted? Why?
- Offer detailed justifications for the topics and works included/excluded.

5. Explain your theoretical perspective on international relations. That is, how do you believe international relations work? Your answer:

- Should incorporate and account for key concepts in international relations, such as power, institutions, information, ideas, risk, conflict, anarchy, and cooperation;
- Can rest on all or part of existing theories or perspectives (for example, realism, neoliberal institutionalism, or constructivism). If you take this approach, justify what you include/exclude and be mindful of potential criticisms of your position;
- May blend existing theories - including mid-range theory-in unique ways. Again, justify your position if you do this.

References

Lake, David A. 2011. "Why "isms" Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress." *International Studies Quarterly* 55(2):465–480.