

Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination in International Relations

Spring 2016

Morning Exam Study Guide

1. Create an outline for an international relations pre-seminar syllabus (a graduate course).

- What topics would you cover? What would you omit?
- Which works are essential readings for the course? Which readings would you omit?
- Offer a detailed justification for the topics and the works included/excluded.

2. What are the most significant theoretical and empirical contributions to the study of international relations over the past 25 years?

- Discuss at least one theoretical contribution and one empirical contribution, citing specific examples from the literature. Why have these contributions advanced the state of the field?
- What are some existing weaknesses in the field of international relations that offer particularly attractive opportunities for further research?

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 or paradigm in IR that is more useful than others for explaining international political phenomena?
- Is there a best approach for linking theoretical concepts and explanations to empirical operationalizations and tests?
- 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. 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?

5. 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 completely separate? Can insights from one inform the other? Why or why not?

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.