

POLS 3330-900: Foundations of Peace and Conflict Studies

Texas A&M University–San Antonio

Fall 2026

Time: 11:00am-12:15pm, Thurs.

Location: Madla 237

Instructor:

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CAB 351-B

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Course Description

This course covers issues, developments, and international relationships between state and nonstate actors as well as post-conflict resolution processes and efforts made to pursue peace.

Course Information

Peace and conflict studies is a broad and diverse academic discipline that attempts to answer one of the oldest questions posed by politics: what causes war and what produces peace? This course interrogates foundational concepts found in international relations, in both theory and praxis, that are employed to make sense of the complex issues, developments, and events constituting relationships amongst state and non-state actors. A primary focus will be a critical assessment of post-conflict resolution processes and efforts made to pursue peace.

Conflict (or the threat of conflict) is consistently present throughout the world and occurs in many forms of governments: authoritarian, newly democratic, and advanced democratic systems have theorized, attempted, and continue to work through wide-ranging approaches to resolving disparate types of conflicts that have historically evolved in scope, practice, and efficacy. Similarly, the study of peace has also evolved as a field of inquiry. Beginning with the understanding that peace is more than the absence of conflict, we will discuss topics in the field of “peace studies,” critically assessing approaches made in both theory and practice towards peacebuilding, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and management, and conflict prevention.

Office Hours

Time: Monday/Wednesday 11:00 am – 12:30 pm or by appointment.

[Schedule Office Hours meeting](#)

I will be holding office hours via Microsoft Teams every Monday and Wednesday from 11 am to 12:30 pm. You are highly encouraged to make use of my office hours throughout the semester to discuss any ideas you have—big or small—pertaining to this course or your general course of study. If you cannot make the designated time, email me to set up an appointment that works with your schedule. Click the link above to schedule a meeting.

Student Learning Objectives

After completing POLS 3330:

SLO 1 | Students will be able to explain the foundational concepts and major theoretical frameworks of peace and conflict studies and describe how these frameworks account for the causes of war and the conditions for peace.

SLO 2 | Students will be able to analyze the arguments advanced in assigned primary and secondary texts, identifying their central claims, underlying assumptions, and the evidentiary or normative grounds on which they rest.

SLO 3 | Students will be able to compare and evaluate competing theoretical approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, assessing their relative strengths, limitations, and applicability to specific historical and contemporary cases.

SLO 4 | Students will be able to apply concepts from peace and conflict studies to concrete post-conflict cases in order to assess the effects of state and institutional action on individuals and communities.

SLO 5 | Students will be able to construct and defend an original, evidence-based argument on a question in peace and conflict studies, synthesizing course material into clearly organized academic prose with consistent citation.

Grading

Your grade rests on your classroom engagement across the semester, portfolio checks, writing assignments, writing assessments, and a Capstone Portfolio. To receive full credit for the course, your participation must be made and your work submitted by the stated deadlines. Late work will only be accepted for Portfolio Checks, with 15% being taken off for the first day and an additional 15% for the second. Portfolio Checks will not be accepted more than 48 hours after the original deadline. No late or makeup submissions will be accepted for any other assignments.

Submissions with vague and generic language that omit the specific issues/questions raised in the assignment prompt and class lectures will get a maximum grade of 49%. Submissions generated by an LLM/AI will receive a 0% and referred to the university for academic misconduct (this includes Grammarly and similar software; there is grammar editing software available in BB and MS Word).

Grade breakdown

20% Writing Assignments

15% Self-Assessments

20% Peer-Assessments

5% Portfolio Checks

40% Capstone Portfolio

Course Policies

- **Attendance** | “Students are expected to attend all scheduled activities for all of the classes for which they are registered” ([A&M-SA attendance policy](#)). Consistent and substantive participation in class is integral for success in this course—education is what happens after you read the book.
- **Materials** | You will need paper and pen for each class meeting. The use of phones, laptops, and headphones are not permitted during class unless approved by DSS.
- **Readings** | All assigned materials and required reading are integral to your success in this course. Details and nuance matter in political thought, and the details are in the text. Readings for each class period should be completed before Thursday’s class.
- **BlackBoard** | I will use BlackBoard for class announcements and course updates; students are expected to check BlackBoard and their A&M-SA email regularly. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure they have regular BlackBoard and email access.

Graded Assignments

- **Positional Essays** | Due no later than 11:59 pm on the posted deadline. Approximately 750

words in length and must address each topic/item in the assignment prompt to be considered for full credit. Weekly essays are graded Complete/Incomplete: a Complete is registered as 75% or better on the assignment; this requires thoughtful engagement with the assigned text and a clear, defensible position, submitted on time. These are not polished final products but working drafts meant to be critiqued and discussed. Three of your essays, substantially revised, will become your Capstone Portfolio. The true value of these essays is the feedback you receive from your peers, me, and your self-assessments during the semester. An essay posted late may still be read for feedback but will not count toward your Complete/Incomplete total for that week.

- **Self-Assessments** | Following Writing Assignments, you will conduct a Self-Assessment review of your work. This is an opportunity to develop your writing and communication skills, and to recognize your strengths and areas for improvement. Follow the detailed instructions in the Self-Assessment Guidelines closely.
- **Peer-Assessments** | Following Writing Assignments, you will conduct a peer assessment of your classmates' work. The peer-assessment process is an opportunity to provide feedback to classmates on their written communication by assisting them in identifying writing strengths as well as areas for development. Follow the detailed instructions in the Peer-Assessment Guidelines closely.
- **Capstone Portfolio (40%)** | To be eligible for the Capstone Portfolio, you must receive "Complete" on at least 5 of the 6 writing assignments. Your final grade rests heavily on a portfolio submitted at the end of the semester. You will select your three strongest weekly essays, revise and expand each one incorporating the peer and instructor feedback you received over the semester. There is no separate final exam. Follow the detailed instructions in the Capstone Portfolio Guidelines closely.

Required Books

- *Approaches to Peace: A Reader in Peace Studies* (2017). David Philip Barash. Oxford University Press.

If you opted into the ACCESS program registering for the class, the required e-textbook will be available in BlackBoard. If you *did not opt into the ACCESS program*, acquire your books early in the semester. Students with access to a credit/debit card can obtain the book online. Alternate editions/versions/formats are permissible for this course. *Email me if you have any questions.*

Course Schedule and Readings

Classes begin August 24th.

Week 1 (August 24 – 30): Introduction and Overview

- Read the syllabus thoroughly and familiarize yourself with the course in BlackBoard.
- Reading assignment: *Approaches to Peace*, "Introduction" (handout)

Understanding War

Week 2 (Aug 31 – Sep 6): Why War?

- Reading assignment: *Approaches to Peace*, pp. 5 - 37.
- Positional Essay 1: Due Sunday, September 6th

Week 3 (Sep 7 – Sep 13): Rethinking 20th Century Wars

- Reading assignment: *Approaches to Peace*, pp. 38 - 64.
- Self-Assessment 1 due Sunday, Sep 13
- Peer-Assessments 1 due Sunday, Sep 13

Building “Negative Peace”

Week 4 (Sep 14 – Sep 20): The Absence of Conflict

- Reading assignment: *Approaches to Peace*, “Building a Negative Peace,” and pp. 70 - 99.
- Positional Essay 2: Due Sunday, September 20th
- Portfolio Check 1 due Sunday

Week 5 (Sep 21 – Sep 27): International Law and Life Without War

- Reading assignment: *Approaches to Peace*, pp. 100 - 136.
- Self-Assessment 2 due Sunday, Sep 27
- Peer-Assessments 2 due Sunday, Sep 27

Responding to Terrorism

Week 6 (Sep 28 – Oct 4): “Us and Them”

- Reading assignment: *Approaches to Peace*, “Responding to Terrorism,” and pp. 140 – 150.
- Positional Essay 3: Due Sunday, October 4th

Week 7 (Oct 5 – Oct 11): Whose Peace, Whose Terrorism?

- Reading assignment: *Approaches to Peace*, pp. 150 – 159.
- Self-Assessment 3 due Sunday, Oct 11
- Peer-Assessments 3 due Sunday, Oct 11

Building “Positive Peace”

Week 8 (Oct 12 – Oct 18): Conditions for Peace

- Reading assignment: *Approaches to Peace*, “Building a Positive Peace,” and pp. 163 – 181.
 - o “Building a Positive Peace” by David Barash and pp. 161
 - o “The Land Ethic” by Aldo Leopold 163
 - o “Speech to the United Nations, 2015” by Pope Francis 171
 - o “How to Judge Globalism” by Amartya Sen 175
- Positional Essay 4: Due October 18th

Week 9 (Oct 19 – Oct 25): Human Rights

- Reading assignment: *Approaches to Peace*, pp. 182 – 208.
- Self-Assessment 4 due Sunday, Oct 25
- Peer-Assessments 4 due Sunday, Oct 25
- Portfolio Check 2 due Sunday

Nonviolence

Week 10 (Oct 26 – Nov 1): Civil Disobedience

- Reading assignment: *Approaches to Peace*, “Nonviolence,” and pp. 214 – 233.
- Positional Essay 5 due Nov 1

Week 11 (Nov 2 – Nov 8): Soft Power

- Reading assignment: *Approaches to Peace*, pp. 233 – 250.
- Self-Assessment 5 due Sunday, Nov 8
- Peer-Assessments 5 due Sunday, Nov 8

Peace Movements, Transformation, and the Future

Week 12 (Nov 9 – Nov 15): Empire and Democracy

- Reading assignment: *Approaches to Peace*, “Peace Movements, Transformations, and the Future,” and pp. 254 – 274.
- Positional Essay 6 due Nov 15

Week 13 (Nov 16 – Nov 22): The Structure of Forgiveness

- Reading assignment: *Approaches to Peace*, pp. 275 – 297.
- Self-Assessment 6 due Sunday, Nov 22
- Peer-Assessments 6 due Sunday, Nov 22
- Portfolio Check 3 due Sunday

Week 14 (Nov 23 – 29): NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

- No assignments

Week 15 (Nov 30 – Dec 6): LAST WEEK

- Work on Capstone Portfolio

Week 16 (Dec 7 – Dec 13): FINALS WEEK

- Work on Capstone Portfolio

FINAL PAPER DUE NO LATER THAN DEC 9 @ 11:59 PM