

Topics in Current Affairs
Spring 2018

Mr. Patrick Kearney

Office: A128A

Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy

pkearney@imsa.edu

Office Hours: M-F 11am-12n for drop in
and by appointment

About the Course:

Topics in Current Affairs will consolidate the array of material learned in history and social science classes since sophomore year at IMSA. The course will engage in a series of student-selected case studies that involve research on contemporary national and international issues. This work will facilitate a deeper knowledge of how to digest information and understand various media sources. Students will become problem-solvers, critical-thinkers, and an effective collaborators and communicators.

Course Objectives:

- Students will gain knowledge of the events and main actors in examples given.
- Students will learn to present their ideas and research as individuals or in small groups.
- Students will explore the complex relationship between political ideals and the realities of constructing and implementing geopolitical policy in different and diverse societies.
- Students will confront the issues of ethical policy-making in the context of varied political theories.
- Students will look to evaluate the fulfillment (or failures) or developing political theories in light of contemporary events and political systems.

Text and Readings:

There are no textbooks for this course.

Rather, I will be posting articles (or links to articles) from the contemporary press that you will be expected to read for the course on Moodle [courses.imsa.edu (Current Affairs – Kearney S18)].

Additionally, you are expected to keep up with national and international news so that you are able to fully participate in the course. Source suggestions include, but are not limited to, nytimes.com, economist.com, cnn.com, bbc.com, and npr.org. Part of this course is learning to be an educated consumer of the news by evaluating sources and stories.

Components of the Grade:

Classroom Participation – 45%

- Students are expected to complete readings assigned for each class and contribute to class discussions. Student comments need to demonstrate thoughtful consideration of core ideas in the assigned texts.

Papers and Projects– 45%

Quizzes – 10%

- Quizzes may be administered (announced or unannounced) throughout the semester. If students are prepared and engaged, I reserve the right to not implement quizzes in this course in which case this component of the grade will be distributed between the other two (i.e.50/50).

Assignment Policies:

All written work will be submitted via the website Turnitin.com (I will provide you with details of how to access the site for this course). When given the prompt for each assignment you will also be given a due date and time. This time is binding (as the ability to upload the assignment will be locked afterwards). Late papers will lose one full letter grade for each day they are late.

There are no make-ups for unexcused absences. Excused absences will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Additional Expectations:

Classroom Behavior

Above all, I expect you to respect your classmates. Social Science courses offer the opportunity for students to express a wide variety of opinions, but an open mind and respect are necessary for us to learn from one another. Part of learning the social sciences, however, is understanding that opinions must be backed up with evidence. As such, I expect all debates to be of the scholarly variety. Finally, I expect this professionalism to extend beyond the classroom, be it office hours, e-mail correspondence or any other interaction you might have with me or your classmates. I also understand that technology and devices are a part of the learning process. That said, it is easy to become distracted when devices are in front of us. I expect students at IMSA to employ proper judgement when it comes to the use of devices in classrooms. Phones used improperly during class will be taken and handed over to Student Life. Improper computer usage will result in a decrease in one's participation grade and/or dismissal from class accompanied by an unexcused absence.

Academic Integrity

All of the work you turn in for this course should be your own. Booth, Colomb, and Williams in their book *The Craft of Research*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) state:

"You plagiarize when, intentionally or not, you use someone else's words or ideas but fail to credit that person. . . . You plagiarize even when you do credit the source but use

its exact words without using quotation marks or block indentation. . . .You [also] plagiarize when you paraphrase a source so closely that anyone putting your work next to it would see that you could not have written what you did without the source at your elbow.”

Claiming as your own the work of others, in whole *or in part*, will result in an immediate failure (here no credit) for the assignment and referral to Student Affairs for disciplinary action. See the IMSA Student Handbook for specific details. Such activity can result in being dismissed from IMSA, so if you are in doubt, come see me.

Course Outline

Below are a list of topics that I would like to cover this semester. When these topics will be covered during the course of the semester will be determined primarily by two factors. First, what is actually going on in the world. The news cycle moves fast in 2018 and pressing topics may pop up without notice. If that is the case, we will certainly discuss relevant news items. Second, student interest. I would like, as much as possible, for this course to be about you and driven by your interests. While I will be the ultimate arbiter about what we discuss in a given week, your input is important.

Potential topics...

Domestic Issues

Tax Reform/Fiscal Policy
Economic Crises
Health Care Reform
Race/Charlottesville/Black Lives Matter
Gender Equality/Sexual Harassment
Immigration Policy
Gun Control
Trump Presidency
2018 Election Cycle

International Issues

Brexit/the EU
North Korea/Iran/Nuclear Weapons
Climate Change
Global Trade
Terrorism/Counter-terrorism
Israel-Palestine Peace Process
Human Rights (e.g. Rohingya Muslim Crisis)