

# America in the Contemporary World

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**Office Hours:** A/B/C/D Days: 10am – 12noon, and A/B Days: 1:20-2:15.  
OR BY APPOINTMENT (So e-mail me a request!)

## Course Description:

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:

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

## Course Evaluation:

Class Participation	45%
Papers, PPTs and Projects	45%
UN-SDG Project	10%

## FYI: Class Participation:

This category represents two potentials for a grade. The first is the traditional effort to demonstrate knowledge of materials by verbal answers to questions or additions to discussions. If you have read the material this can even be seen from offering effective questions. But you will be required to speak during class. The second opportunity will come in a number of short, often written assignments that are due in class and will be graded for this category and will include timelines, maps, or notes.

## **Student Expectations:**

### **Absences and Lateness (Tardy):**

Class is mandatory (as per the Handbook). Any unexcused absence will result in “no credit” for that class period. Anyone late up to ten minutes will receive a “tardy” report and after ten minutes, an “absent” one. Please, as is humanly possible, do not be late. If you have a good reason for being more than ten minutes late, still come to class and we can discuss it after the period, but never during. If you do not have a good excuse, be honest about it.

There is also no automatic right to make-up a quiz or hand in a late assignment. Make-ups will be allowed, and late assignments accepted, only with a valid excuse. All work missed due to illness must be finished within a week of your return or will not count. Example of a valid excuse: An illness requiring medical care, a family crisis, a pre-arranged/approved attendance at a school function, or in the case of accidental dismemberment.

### **Assignment Policy:**

All assignments are due in class the day assigned. Period. There really are no good computer excuses. All short assignments that fall under class participation must be turned in that class period, no later. Failure to have materials in hand will result in no credit.

Papers and projects are due in class or will suffer a late penalty. Any paper turned in by the end of the day will lose one full letter grade. If turned in by the end of the second day, they lose another full letter grade, and after the third day the assignment will not be accepted at all (you receive a zero). This rule is not negotiable except in the case of recognized illness or having to leave IMSA for an emergency. Finally, for all late work, it is your responsibility to find me and give it to me, not just to “leave it on my chair.”

### **Class Room Decorum:**

Each student is expected to behave in a civilized and scholarly fashion toward his or her peers. Respect will be shown for those speaking and in addressing differences. Also, no headgear (i.e. baseball caps or bandanas) will be worn during the class period.

Further cell phones will NOT be permitted (if you have it, turn it off and place in your book bag. If it goes I will take it and keep it till next day.). Finally, sleep is an issue at IMSA. Don't do it in my class or you will be told to stand, or worse, leave.

If you are caught wandering on the laptop you will be told to turn it off for the day. That is a “first” warning. The second time you will no longer be allowed to use your laptop in class for the rest of the quarter. Seriously. The best solution for this is that you close all non-class associated windows on your screen.

### **Assigned Readings, etc:**

The reading assignments are given in detail and are listed on the day they are due. Failing to read them will undermine your ability to participate and undermine your grade on pop quizzes. Projects and written assignments will be injected into the schedule and are therefore not listed. However, all assignments will be given with ample time to complete.

### **Academic Dishonesty:**

Due to the limits of time here at IMSA, there will be the temptation to pass off other people's work as your own. In a culture where the value of ideas is rarely in their value for their own sake, it is crucial to appreciate them at an institution that thrives on developing new ones. All of the work you turn in for this course should be your own.

Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams in their book *The Craft of Research*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) explain:

“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 a referral for disciplinary action. See the IMSA Student Handbook for specific details and be sure to refer to the IMSA Chicago Style website for written assignments. Such activity can result in being dismissed from IMSA, so if you are in doubt, come see me.

### **Assigned Text:**

JL Gaddis, *Surprise, Security and the American Experience*. (Harvard U. Press) (This is also available on the course Moodle.)

ABC-CLIO online sources. <https://databases.abc-clio.com/Multi/>

These two websites are clearing houses for world newspapers in English. They are not perfect and not all the internal links work – but major papers are there.

<http://www.ipl.org/div/news/>

<http://www.world-newspapers.com/>

### **Schedule:**

We will reserve the right to alter our schedule as new issues and ideas come up. Keep that in mind.

### **January**

Wk 1:

Introduction and “Terms”

Wk 2:

**American Foreign Policy (Gaddis)**

Wk 3:

**The American Presidency.** (US Constitution) Presidential powers and influences, and the evolution of the present Presidency. The “departments.”

### **February**

Wk 4:

## **Building definitions for Human Rights and Social Justice.**

Wk 5:

Current Affairs, 1900 – Present: Topics

Wk 6:

Current Affairs, 1900 – Present: Topics

Wk 7:

Current Affairs, 1900 – Present: Topics

## **March**

Wk 8:

Current Affairs, 1900 – Present: Topics

Wk 9:

Current Affairs, 1900 – Present: Topics

Wk 10: Spring Break (March 16-20)

Wk 11:

National/State/Local Governments (Project)

## **April**

Wk 12:

Current Affairs, 1900 – Present: Topics

Wk 13:

Current Affairs, 1900 – Present: Topics

Wk 14:

Current Affairs, 1900 – Present: Topics

Wk 15:

Current Affairs, 1900 – Present: Topics

## **May**

Wk 16:

Current Affairs, 1900 – Present: Topics

Wk 17:

Current Affairs, 1900 – Present: Topics

Wk 18:

### **UN-SDG Research**

Wk 19:

### **UN-SDG Presentations/due**

Wk 20: **Final Exams**, May 26-29

**Potential Topics to Consider:**

PLEASE NOTE. As we get underway I will ask your class to make a decision about several topics that we will engage over the course of the semester. I have a few I have picked for us, but I am leaving the rest open. The list below is a good starter, but not meant to be final.

**Current:**

The US primaries for the 2020 Fall election.  
Syrian Civil War (2011 – Present)  
US – Russian Relations (Ukraine/NATO)  
US – China Relations  
China – Asia Relations  
Rise and Almost Fall of ISIS  
The War on Terror (2001 – Present)  
The UN and World Relations/Human Rights  
The evolving Saudi Arabian-Iranian conflict (Iran nuclear weapons)  
US “War on Drugs” (and Central/South America)/World Drug trade  
The European Union (EU)  
Overview of political/social/economies of Central and South America  
Nuclear and weapons ethics  
And?

**Historical:**

International Terrorism (1970 – 2000)  
Causes of the Peloponnesian War (Thucydides)  
Cuban Missile Crisis (1961)  
Suez Crisis and Hungarian Revolt (1956)  
US Policy and Afghanistan (1980 – Present)  
US Policy and the Middle East (1947 – Present)  
Causes of World War I (1890 – 1914)  
Causes of World War II (1919 – 1939)  
Causes of the Cold War (1945 – 1953)  
Arab – Israeli Relations (1948 – Present)  
**Economic Crisis, (2008 – 2012)/Understanding mortgages and finance.**  
And?