



Department of Political Science & Public Administration · College of Arts & Sciences

INR 6607

International Relations Theory

Fall 2026 · Master of Arts in International Affairs (MAIA) · Required core course · 3 credits

Mondays 6:00–8:45 PM · Building 51 (Social Sciences), Room 1101

Thales Castro, PhD · Adjunct Professor

Office hours: Mondays 3:30–5:45 PM (before the seminar), Building 51 (PSPA) — and by appointment

Contact: n01691164@unf.edu · thales@cognitrends.com

AT A GLANCE

- No textbooks to purchase. All readings are digital and free to access — open-access and public-domain texts, Internet Archive books, and seminal articles by permanent DOI (via the UNF Library).
- Seminar format: a conversation, not a lecture. The professor leads and presents the first four classes — a phenomenological introduction to IR; the nine school seminars are then shared, three presented by each student and three by the professor.
- **Three registers:** (1) foundational classics; (2) the static dimension — state, power, method, epistemology; and (3) the dynamic dimension — ontology and praxeology.
- Each session is led by that week's presenter, anchored to a contemporary event, and read once through a Global South lens.
- Each class runs in two defined parts separated by a 5-minute recess at about 7:20 PM.
- **Assessment:** Rotating Presentation & Seminar Leadership (40%) + In-Class Essay Exam (40%) + Participation (20%).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What constitutes the subfield of International Relations, and through what conceptual instruments do scholars apprehend the interactions among states, non-state actors, and individuals within the international system? How is the discipline reconfigured when read from perspectives epistemically grounded in the Global South rather than reproduced from its traditional Atlantic centers of enunciation?

This graduate seminar offers an advanced theoretical introduction to International Relations for students in the Master of Arts in International Affairs (MAIA) program at UNF. INR 6607 is a required core course (3 credits) within the 36-credit MAIA curriculum (18 core credits, 15 elective credits, and 3 credits of thesis or field experience). The seminar is organized around two freely available textbooks — Brown & Ainley's *Understanding International Relations* and Burchill et al.'s *Theories of International Relations* — supplemented by canonical primary texts, all available in digital form. The seminar proceeds across three interrelated registers:

1. Foundational classics of strategic and political thought, situating Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, and Kant as the deep substrate from which subsequent IR traditions draw.
2. The static dimension of the discipline — phenomenology, theory of the state, theory of power, methodological foundations, and the principal epistemological schools.
3. The dynamic dimension, which interrogates the ontology and praxeology of international politics.

The seminar is conceived as an exercise in critical theoretical reconstruction. Rather than rehearsing canonical positions cumulatively, the course interrogates each school against its own epistemic assumptions, its location in the sociology of the discipline, and its capacity to illuminate contemporary phenomena from non-hegemonic vantage points. Because the

group is small, the course is built as a close working conversation: each week one of us leads on the assigned school and the group thinks it through together.

HOW THE SEMINAR RUNS

This is a deliberative conversation, not a lecture. The professor leads and presents the first four classes — a phenomenological introduction to International Relations — the nature and limits of theory, the theory of the state, the theory of power, and IR methodology — that also asks whether current global politics is best read as an international society, scenario, community, or system. From Session 5 the nine school seminars are shared among the three of us: each student presents three and the professor presents three, with everyone else in the discussant's chair. With so small a group, preparation is the whole game: everyone reads everything, every week.

Weekly session structure — two parts (6:00–8:45 PM, 5-minute recess ≈ 7:20)

Part 1 · 6:00–7:20 PM

- **Opening (10 min).** The professor frames the week's topic and a live 2026 event it speaks to.
- **Presentation (40 min).** That week's presenter walks the group through the topic — core assumptions, key theorists, main debates — following the slides or handout and connecting it to the current case.
- **First discussion (30 min).** Clarifying questions and first reactions to the presentation.

— 5-minute recess (≈ 7:20 PM) —

Part 2 · 7:25–8:45 PM

- **Open discussion & Global South lens (45 min).** Deeper conversation among the group; at least once we ask how the topic reads from Brasília, Lagos, or Jakarta rather than Cambridge or Chicago.
- **Genealogy & synthesis (25 min).** We tie the topic back to the foundational classics and prior weeks; the professor adds the diplomatic-practice dimension.
- **Close (5 min).** Each person offers one reasoned takeaway or forecast, and we update the shared running notes that become a study resource for the exam.

Slides for the opening block. For each of the first four classes, the professor posts the PDF slide deck to Canvas in advance, so you can read, visualize, and follow the presentation as the class unfolds.

Norms. Disagreement is welcome and drives the seminar; critique arguments, not persons, and value intellectual honesty above rhetorical performance. Because the room is small, coming prepared is not optional — an unprepared participant stalls the whole session.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

On successful completion of this seminar, students will be able to:

1. Define the subfield of International Relations and locate it within the broader architecture of the social sciences.
2. Trace the genealogical relationship between the foundational classics (Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, Kant) and the modern theoretical schools they have given rise to.
3. Characterize the principal theoretical schools of IR — realist, liberal, international political economy, English, critical, postmodern/poststructural, critical-constructivist, postcolonial, and green/ecopolitical (with analytical eclecticism) — as surveyed in the course textbooks and the assigned primary texts.
4. Apply IR theory to the analysis of contemporary international phenomena and to the formulation of reasoned anticipations regarding their evolution.
5. Critically appraise scholarly work using theoretical and empirical resources drawn from both core and semi-peripheral traditions.
6. Present a school of thought clearly and lead a substantive scholarly discussion focused on it.

GRADING

Components

Component	Weight
Rotating Presentation & Seminar Leadership	40%

Component	Weight
In-Class Essay Exam (final session · Dec 7)	40%
Participation	20%

Letter scale

Score	Letter	Score	Letter
93+	A	78–79	C+
90–92	A–	70–77	C
88–89	B+	60–69	D
83–87	B	Below 60	F
80–82	B–		

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Rotating Presentation & Seminar Leadership — 40%

The professor leads and presents the first four classes (the phenomenological introduction). The nine school seminars (Sessions 5–13) are then divided evenly: each student presents three, and the professor presents three. Assignments are fixed in Session 2; your grade reflects your work across the three seminars you lead. On the weeks you present, you:

- **Give a structured presentation (30–40 min).** Lay out the school — core assumptions, key theorists, internal debates — using the relevant textbook chapter and the assigned primary texts.
- **Anchor it to a current case.** Connect the school to a live 2026 international phenomenon.
- **Lead the discussion.** Prepare a few guiding questions and steer the conversation, including at least one Global South angle read from Brasília, Lagos, or Jakarta.
- **Circulate a one-page handout** via Canvas or email by 11:59 PM the Saturday before your session: outline, discussion questions, key citations, and the current-affairs case.

2. In-Class Essay Exam — 40% — Monday, December 7, 2026

In lieu of a term paper, the seminar concludes with a closed-book in-class examination during finals week. You respond, in essay form, to four prompts drawn from the seminar's three registers and from the principal schools surveyed.

The four prompts

- **Foundational genealogies.** Trace the lineage of a designated modern school of IR to one or more foundational classics (Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, Kant). Specify what is inherited, what is transformed, and what is silently abandoned.
- **Comparative theoretical analysis.** Adjudicate between two schools on a single conceptual problem (e.g., the nature of anarchy, the constitution of state interest, the sources of order). Attend to ontological commitments, methodological dispositions, and explanatory scope.
- **Global South critique.** Reconstruct a canonical IR position from a non-hegemonic vantage point. Identify the implicit geography of the original formulation and articulate what is gained, displaced, or rendered visible when the same problem is read from Brasília, Lagos, or Jakarta.
- **Praxeological application.** Apply a school of your choosing to a contemporary international phenomenon. Mobilize its conceptual apparatus to explain the phenomenon, and identify what the chosen school structurally cannot account for.

Format & logistics

- Exam runs the full seminar period (165 minutes), with the usual 5-minute recess at the midpoint. Each response should be approximately 500–850 words.
- Closed book, closed notes. No electronic devices. No handwritten notes may be brought into the exam.
- A study guide outlining the thematic scope of each prompt will be distributed two weeks in advance; the shared seminar log is a permitted preparation resource.

- Responses are evaluated on theoretical accuracy, internal coherence of argument, appropriate use of authors and concepts engaged in the seminar, and capacity for synthetic judgment.

3. Participation — 20%

Participation is operationalized as preparation and substantive engagement with the seminar conversation across every session — as First Chair, as Second Chair, and in open dialogue: completion of readings, thoughtful contribution, and intellectual presence throughout your partner's sessions. With only two participants, consistent preparation is the precondition of the seminar; consistent, substantive engagement across the term is what is evaluated, not raw airtime.

REQUIRED READINGS — DIGITAL & FREELY ACCESSIBLE

No textbooks to buy. The two core textbooks (free PDFs via the CSP Forum library) and the public-domain classics are free to everyone; the other canonical books are free to read or borrow on the Internet Archive; and the seminal articles are linked by permanent DOI, with full text via the UNF Library (several also open access). If a link ever fails, notify the instructor and a copy will be posted to Canvas.

Core textbooks — free PDF

Brown, C. & Ainley, K. (2005). *Understanding International Relations* (3rd ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (*intro concepts, the state, power, world order*). [Free PDF \(Google Drive\)](#)

Burchill, S., Linklater, A., et al. (2005). *Theories of International Relations* (3rd ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (*one chapter per school — the seminar basis*). [Free PDF \(Google Drive\)](#)



Scan for both free PDFs, or click a title above. Source: [CSP Forum IR library](#).

Foundational classics (public domain — Project Gutenberg)

Sun Tzu (5th c. BCE). *The Art of War*. Trans. L. Giles. [Project Gutenberg #132](#)

Thucydides (5th c. BCE). *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. Trans. R. Crawley. [Project Gutenberg #7142](#)

Machiavelli, N. (1532). *The Prince*. Trans. W. K. Marriott. [Project Gutenberg #1232](#)

Hobbes, T. (1651). *Leviathan*. [Project Gutenberg #3207](#)

Clausewitz, C. von (1832). *On War*. Trans. J. J. Graham. [Project Gutenberg #1946](#)

Kant, I. (1795). *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay*. Trans. M. C. Smith. [Project Gutenberg #50922](#)

Kant, I. (1793). "On the Common Saying: This may be true in theory, but it does not apply in practice" (Theory and Practice). [PDF \(Univ. of Groningen\)](#)

Canonical IR books (Internet Archive — free to read or borrow)

Morgenthau, H. (1948/1985). *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* — selected chapters (Six Principles + power chapters). [Internet Archive](#)

Waltz, K. (1979). *Theory of International Politics* — chs. 5–8 (structural realism core). [Internet Archive](#)

Bull, H. (1977). *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* — chs. 1–3. [Internet Archive](#)

Keohane, R. & Nye, J. (1977). *Power and Interdependence*. [Internet Archive](#)

Seminal articles (permanent DOI — free via the UNF Library / open access)

Wilson, P. (2012). "Where are we now in the debate about the 'first great debate'?" — on the myth of the disciplinary "great debates." [PDF \(LSE Research Online\)](#)

Doyle, M. (1986). "Liberalism and World Politics." *American Political Science Review* 80(4): 1151–1169. [DOI](#)

Wendt, A. (1992). "Anarchy Is What States Make of It." *International Organization* 46(2): 391–425. [DOI](#)

Cox, R. (1981). "Social Forces, States and World Orders." *Millennium* 10(2): 126–155. [DOI](#)

Finnemore, M. & Sikkink, K. (1998). "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change." *International Organization* 52(4): 887–917. [DOI](#)

Acharya, A. (2014). "Global IR and Regional Worlds." *International Studies Quarterly* 58(4): 647–659. [DOI](#)

Sil, R. & Katzenstein, P. (2010). "Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* 8(2): 411–431. [DOI](#)

Research portals (free)

E-International Relations — full open-access publications portal. [e-ir.info](#)

MIT OpenCourseWare — Introduction to International Relations (17.40). Free lecture notes and syllabus. [MIT OCW](https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/17-40-introduction-to-international-relations/)
 Project Gutenberg — 70,000+ public-domain texts. [gutenberg.org](https://www.gutenberg.org/)
 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy — peer-reviewed entries on Hobbes, Kant, Machiavelli, sovereignty, just war, political realism, and more. plato.stanford.edu

DISTRIBUTION OF TOPICS & READINGS ACROSS THE TERM

The fourteen sessions are mapped below with the specific readings assigned for each week; these double as the source material for the presentations. The professor leads the first four classes — a phenomenological introduction to International Relations. The nine school seminars (Sessions 5–13) are then shared: each student presents three and the professor presents three (shown in the Presenter column as Professor or Students; specific assignments are fixed in Session 2). The term closes with synthesis and the exam. Every class runs in two parts around a 5-minute recess (≈ 7:20 PM), and for Sessions 1–4 the professor's slide deck is posted to Canvas beforehand. Color-coding marks the three phases.

Session	Date	Topic	Assigned readings (basis for presentation)	Presenter
1	Mon 8/17	Orientation & syllabus. What is a theory? — its role, scope, and limitations. Key IR definitions and scopes: polarity and laterality; historical epochs and world-order analysis. The framing question: is current global politics best read as an international society, scenario, community, or system?	Castro (2016), <i>Teoria das Relações Internacionais</i> — excerpts, chs. I & IV; Brown & Ainley, chs. 1–3 (defining IR; the development of IR theory; IR theory today); Wilson (2012) on the "great debates" myth.	Professor
2	Mon 8/24	Phenomenology of IR (I) — Theory of the state: formal and substantive theory of the state; state and non-state actors, recognition, and diplomatic dynamics; taxonomy (classification) of states by institutional framework; levels of analysis. Definition of the seminar assignments.	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs. 13–14, 17; Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> , chs. 15–19; Brown & Ainley, ch. 4 (The State and Foreign Policy); SEP entry on sovereignty.	Professor
3	Mon 8/31	Phenomenology of IR (II) — Theory of power: definitions, key assumptions, hierarchies, mechanisms, measurement indices of power, spheres of influence, and hegemonic transitions. Case-study analysis.	Morgenthau, <i>Politics Among Nations</i> (Six Principles; concept of power); Clausewitz, <i>On War</i> , Bk. I ch. 1; Brown & Ainley, chs. 5–6 (Power and Security; The Balance of Power and War); Sun Tzu, <i>Art of War</i> (selections).	Professor
—	Mon 9/07	<i>No class — Labor Day (university closed)</i>		
4	Mon 9/14	International Relations methodology: the dialectics of theory and reality; abstraction and practical knowledge; the four main functions of IR theory — description, explanation, prediction, and prescription. Case-study analysis. Bridge from the introduction to the school seminars.	Kant (1793), "On the Common Saying: This may be true in theory, but it does not apply in practice"; Burchill, ch. 1 (frameworks of analysis; evaluating theories); Sil & Katzenstein (2010), "Analytic Eclecticism"; MIT OCW 17.40 lecture notes.	Professor
5	Mon 9/21	Realism: classical & contemporary; neorealism. (Professor presents — modelling the seminar format.)	Burchill, ch. 2 (Realism); Morgenthau, <i>Politics Among Nations</i> (Six Principles); Waltz, <i>Theory of International Politics</i> , chs. 5–8; Thucydides, <i>Peloponnesian War</i> Bk. V (Melian Dialogue).	Professor
6	Mon 9/28	Idealism & Liberalism: humanitarianism, international law, diplomacy.	Burchill, ch. 3 (Liberalism); Doyle (1986), "Liberalism and World Politics"; Kant, <i>Perpetual Peace</i> (definitive articles); SEP entries on just war and cosmopolitanism.	Students

Session	Date	Topic	Assigned readings (basis for presentation)	Presenter
7	Mon 10/05	International Political Economy: liberalism, Marxism; globalization & deglobalization.	Burchill, ch. 5 (Marxism); Brown & Ainley, chs. 8–9 (The Global Economy; Globalization); Keohane & Nye (1977), "Power and Interdependence"; Cox (1981), relevant sections.	Students
8	Mon 10/12	English School.	Burchill, ch. 4 (The English School); Bull, <i>The Anarchical Society</i> , chs. 1–3.	Students
9	Mon 10/19	Critical Theory.	Burchill, ch. 6 (Critical Theory); Cox (1981), "Social Forces, States and World Orders."	Students
10	Mon 10/26	Postmodernism / Poststructuralism.	Burchill, ch. 7 (Postmodernism); supplementary readings posted to Canvas.	Students
11	Mon 11/02	Critical Constructivism. (Professor presents.)	Burchill, ch. 8 (Constructivism); Wendt (1992), "Anarchy Is What States Make of It"; Finnemore & Sikkink (1998), "International Norm Dynamics."	Professor
12	Mon 11/09	Postcolonial theory (Global South lens foregrounded).	Acharya (2014), "Global IR and Regional Worlds"; Brown & Ainley, ch. 10 (The International Politics of Identity).	Students
13	Mon 11/16	Green Theory & Ecopolitics, with Analytical Eclecticism. (Professor presents.)	Burchill, ch. 10 (Green Politics); Sil & Katzenstein (2010), "Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics"; course synthesis (both textbooks' concluding chapters).	Professor
—	Mon 11/23	<i>No class — Thanksgiving break (university closed)</i>		
14	Mon 11/30	Course synthesis and exam review. We draw the schools together, consolidate the term, and preview the exam prompts.	No new readings — consolidate the term via the shared running notes and the exam study guide.	Professor
Exam	Mon 12/07	In-Class Essay Exam (finals week). No instructor presentation. Exam administered during the full seminar period.	No readings due.	—

Color key: Professor-led introduction School seminars (Professor / Students) Synthesis & exam

ABOUT THE PROFESSOR

Thales Castro, PhD, is Adjunct Professor of International Relations in the Department of Political Science & Public Administration (College of Arts & Sciences) at the University of North Florida, and was tenured Professor at the Universidade Católica de Pernambuco (UNICAP) in Recife, Brazil from 2000 to 2024. He holds a BA, *cum laude*, and an MA from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He also holds a doctorate in Political Science from UFPE (Brazil) with research at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and his research and teaching focus on IR theory, multilateralism, the United Nations system, diplomatic history, and Brazilian foreign policy. He is the author of several books on International Relations and multilateral diplomacy, including *Teoria das Relações Internacionais* (2nd ed., FUNAG / Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brasília, 2016) — a systematic IR theory monograph widely used in Brazilian graduate programs and in preparation for the Brazilian diplomatic service — and *Conselho de Segurança da ONU: unipolaridade, consensos e tendências* (Juruá, 2007), a standard reference on UN Security Council reform. His earlier *Elementos de política internacional: redefinições e perspectivas* (Juruá, 2005) introduced several of the conceptual tools later developed in the FUNAG volume. Dr. Castro has lectured at universities in Brazil, Latin America, North America, and Europe (Portugal, Germany, Malta) and in Asia (India, China, and Japan), and is Honorary Consul of the Republic of Malta in Brazil and CEO & Founder of COGNITRENDS Global Strategic Intelligence, LLC.

He can be reached at n01691164@unf.edu or thales@cognitrends.com. Faculty bio: webapps.unf.edu/faculty/bio/N01691164 · LinkedIn: [in/thales-castro-bb4443](https://www.linkedin.com/in/thales-castro-bb4443). Office hours are Mondays, 3:30–5:45 PM, before the seminar (Building 51, PSPA), and walk-ins are welcome during office hours. Remote appointments beyond office hours can also be arranged on other weekdays by Zoom or Google Meet; please email to schedule.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance. Expected — and, in so small a seminar, decisive. If you must miss a session, notify the instructor in advance; if you are the scheduled presenter, arrange to reschedule your seminar. The dynamic only works with consistent presence.

Late submissions. Reduced one full letter grade per day. Make-up consideration is granted only for an unforeseen emergency communicated within one week.

Academic integrity & ethics. UNF defines academic integrity as the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage, and expects every member of the community to exhibit integrity and ethical behavior at all times. All submissions must be your own work; properly cite all ideas, writing, and content not your own. Academic misconduct — plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, misuse of materials, or misrepresenting authorship (including AI-generated work) — violates the UNF Student Conduct Code and is handled under the university's academic-misconduct procedures. Full definitions appear in the [University Catalog — Academic Integrity](#) and the [Student Conduct Code \(Reg. 5.0010R\)](#).

Artificial intelligence. This course follows UNF's current institutional AI guidance — that AI is a tool to be used with accountability, integrity, excellence, and care, and only when authorized by the syllabus or a specific assignment, with any authorized use disclosed and appropriately cited ([UNF AI guidelines](#)). In this seminar, AI-generated content is not permitted in your presentations and handouts or in the In-Class Essay Exam. You may use AI only to brainstorm or research while preparing a presentation; if you do, cite the tool, version, and prompt — e.g., OpenAI. (2026). ChatGPT [version]. Retrieved [date], from <https://openai.com/chatgpt>. Presenting AI-generated work as your own is academic dishonesty. Use of AI during the in-class exam is strictly prohibited; consistent with UNF guidance, concerns are addressed through academic-integrity procedures rather than unreliable AI-detection tools.

ADA accommodations. Students seeking accommodations must register with the UNF Student Accessibility Center (Bldg. 57, Rm. 1500; 904-620-2769).

Non-discrimination. UNF prohibits discrimination on the basis of genetic information, race, color, religion, age, sex, disability, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, or veteran status.

Recording. Class lectures may be recorded for personal educational use only. Recording seminar discussions or student presentations requires written consent.

Classroom electronics. Phones silenced. Laptops are for note-taking and accessing assigned readings only.

UNF Student Handbook. All policies derive from the UNF Student Handbook (2025–2026), available online for easy access: unf.edu/deanofstudents/student-handbook · [Student Code of Conduct](#).

DR. THALES CASTRO

Adjunct Professor, Department of Political Science & Public Administration

College of Arts & Sciences | University of North Florida — UNF

Address: 1 UNF Drive, Building 51 (PSPA), Jacksonville, FL 32224

Emails: n01691164@unf.edu | thales@cognitrends.com

LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/thales-castro-bb4443](https://www.linkedin.com/in/thales-castro-bb4443)

Faculty Bio: webapps.unf.edu/faculty/bio/N01691164

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