The underlying philosophy of this course is to take education seriously. The etymology of the term “education” is Latin (ex-ducere) and translates into “leading someone out of him or herself.” If we all participate in education — as teachers or as students — if we all are ready to go out of ourselves, then we might at times meet somewhere out there. When we meet, we can start to talk and begin to contribute to the emergence of more and better knowledge. Also the etymology of the term science is Latin and translated into “knowledge.” Such a step is necessary for if we remain within ourselves we are doomed to see the world from within our (self-imposed) boundaries which will prove as insufficient.

The purpose of this course is examine how international relations and foreign policy scholars have led themselves out of their disciplinary boundaries and benefitted from the knowledge psychologists are providing us with. It may come as a surprise to learn that traditionally international relations scholars, for the most part, have ignored scientific considerations of the human psyche. However, if we would ask whether psychology adds to our understanding of war and peace among nations, many psychologists would answer, of course, with an unequivocal “yes.” What could be more obvious? Psychology explores the causes of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of human beings. International relations are ultimately the products of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of human beings who decide to arm or disarm nations and to engage in war and peace processes.

In this class we will thus attempt to explain political behavior via psychological principles. This is an important domain of academic research; students (tend to) find it fascinating and very often troubling as they are exposed to some of the most shocking examples of political conduct; and policymakers would undoubtedly benefit greatly from a better understanding of political psychology. Understanding the psychological causes of political behavior in general and political leaders in particular is crucial if we are to affect patterns of behavior that are harmful to humanity and promote patterns of behavior that are beneficial to humanity.

Course Requirements

Before I introduce the specific course requirements, I want to emphasize that for all writing assignments you will be expected to demonstrate good writing abilities. A clear writing style is an absolute prerequisite for you to be able to communicate your substantive points and arguments effectively. It is also very important that you proofread your papers for grammar and style. Once you have finished, let it sit for a few hours and then revisit it. This way you are more likely to detect errors and correct them in time before the due date.

Here are the course assignments for our class. Please note that the descriptions provide you with guidelines; I will give you more details as we approach the specific due dates. All writing
assignments have to be typed, 1 1/2 spaced, 12 point font New Times Roman with 1 inch margins. You will have to demonstrate effectively that you seriously engaged with the assigned reading material(s). You are to identify key arguments and key concepts from the readings and relate them to the questions at hand. Your paper should be clearly structured featuring a well-organized Introduction, a Main Part, and a Summary and Conclusion. It is also important that all papers have a (creative) title and contain a bibliography. They should be 8-10 pages long. The due dates for the essays are noted in the Course Outline below.

1. First Paper

**Structural Theorizing versus Individual Level Theorizing (20 points)**

Henry Kissinger once remarked: “As a professor, I tended to think of history as run by impersonal forces. But when you see it in practice, you see the difference personalities make.” Because this statement makes intuitive sense, it is ironic that leaders, their beliefs and perceptions matter very little in the discourse of conventional international relations theory. These theories are mostly about “circumstances”/structures surrounding leaders and it is these externalities that carry all (or, at least, most of) the explanatory weight. Leaders are relegated to a residual role. Some scholars have argued that this shortcoming is unfortunate, because it leads to a faulty understanding of international politics, which is an inherently social and psychological process. They contend that denying agency as an important component of decision making processes leads to an impoverished understanding of political action.

In this paper you are to engage in a discussion of structural theories versus individual level theories. What are the advantages of each? What are the disadvantages? Which one is more meritorious? Why? This paper should feature at least three additional sources (in addition to what is on the syllabus).

2. Second Paper

**Was the Decision to Go to War with Iraq Rational? (20 points)**

How rational was the U.S. decision to initiate war with Iraq in March 2003? The answer depends on the capacities and inclinations of U.S. leaders to process information accurately as the basis for a rational choice. It also depends on what one understands rationality to be.

In this paper you are first to discuss the concept of rationality and what it means to be rational, or to make a rational decision. Then you are to analyze whether the decision to go to war with Iraq was rational or not.

OR

**Groupthink in the Prelude to the Iraq War? (20 points).**

Groupthink is a process in which a decision group adopts a consensus (decision) in a non-reflective and often premature way. Groups affected by groupthink ignore alternatives, do not engage in much “reality testing” and, in consequence, take irrational actions leading to foreign policy mistakes or even fiascos. A group is especially vulnerable to groupthink when its members are similar in background, when the group is insulated from outside opinions or when its members are psychologically “weak” or “pathological.” The term groupthink is often used pejoratively (especially with hindsight). It will perhaps not surprise that the top officials of the
Bush administration have been “accused” of engaging in groupthink in the prelude to the Iraq War.
In this paper you are first to discuss the antecedent conditions (group structures and dynamics) for groupthink. Subsequently you are to analyze whether the Bush administration was apt to groupthink and whether it indeed engaged in such.

OR

Peaceful Conflict Resolution (20 points).

The U.S. is finding itself in difficult situations with a variety of countries. Among them are so-called rogue states such as North Korea, Iran, Cuba, or Venezuela. However, also the relationships with countries such as Russia and China are getting “more interesting.”

In this paper you are to select one of the countries that is having an unfriendly/hostile/interesting relationship with the U.S. You are to discuss the psychology of the situation, i.e. how psychology can help us understand or interpret the situation. You are also to discuss how U.S. leaders can avert further escalation and resolve the crisis peacefully.

3. Written Examinations (2 x 20 points)

The written examinations are based on our readings and class discussions. Each of the two exams is preceded by a review. The purpose of the review is twofold. First, we will review the material that you will be examined on. Second, and related, the review gives us the opportunity to recapture and reevaluate early reading material in light of the newer material.

4. Class Attendance and Participation (20 points)

It is of crucial importance that you attend class and participate actively. You are expected to read all the assigned readings BEFORE the class meeting and you are to be able to discuss them. You cannot achieve a satisfactory score in this category if you merely “sit in.” I expect the following from you:

- Preparation — your contributions demonstrate that you carefully read the assignment and engaged in it.
- Quality of Your Argument — your contributions are original, accurate and relevant to the subject matter under consideration and you reason by reference to proper evidence.
- Quality of Your Expression — your contribution is intelligible, concise, and addressed to your peers and the instructor.
- Contribution to the Process — knowledge is a cumulative achievement. Therefore, your contributions should demonstrate that you are listening to other students’ comments, take their ideas into consideration when responding, respect them, and criticize their arguments (not them!) constructively.
- Critical Thought — your contributions show critical awareness, do not reiterate conventional and/or common wisdom and avoid basic logical fallacies.
- Academic Openness — the etymology of the term “education” is latin (ex-ducere) and translates into “leading yourself out of yourself.” Be open for alternative and dissident arguments as this is very important for our intellectual maturation.
Unexcused absences will result in a loss of points towards your final grade (1 point per missed class). Excused absences are those that are accompanied by a written explanation, together with legitimate supporting documentation. For example, if you miss a class due to extracurricular activities, please provide a letter from the faculty member organizing the event; if for medical reasons, a letter from your doctor and so on.

**Grading and Late Papers**

Your final grade is a composition of the items described above. Late papers are generally not tolerated and will lead to a deduction of 2 points per day on that particular assignment. Here is the grading scheme:

- 95-100 = A
- 90-94 = A-
- 88-89 = B+
- 85-87 = B
- 80-84 = B-
- 78-79 = C+
- 75-77 = C
- 70-74 = C-
- 68-69 = D+
- 65-67 = D
- Below 60 = F

Any student with a disability or special need should speak with me as soon as possible so that we can make any necessary arrangements or accommodations.

**Classroom Courtesy**

Laptop computers are not allowed in the classroom. Members of the class will be expected to exhibit appropriate behavior to the instructor and each other. Most importantly, students are required to give to others the respect and consideration they would wish for themselves. At its best, a classroom operates as a marketplace of ideas, where open discussion permits students to digest and evaluate information. Students must realize that while it is permissible to question a competing point of view, it is never appropriate to allow the conversation to degenerate into personal attacks. It is also expected that students will exhibit good manners, listen when others are talking, and generally behave in a professional manner. Students who behave inappropriately may be asked to leave the classroom and will have points deducted from their final grades.

**Academic Honesty**

Cheating on a test or other assignment will result in an automatic loss of all points for that assignment and possibly an F for the entire course. Cheating includes looking at notes/readings during closed-book tests. Cheating also includes copying any part of a classmate’s work or plagiarism of any kind. If you have any questions concerning what constitutes cheating and/or plagiarism, please consult with me.

**Course Schedule**

**I. SETTING THE STAGE**

13 January (Monday): Introduction
16 January (Thursday): Introduction


II. RATIONAL CHOICE VERSUS PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES


III. THE ENIGMA OF INFORMATION PROCESSING AND PERCEPTION


20 February (Thursday): **Exam**


**IV. APPLICATIONS I: LEARNING THEORY, PROSPECT THEORY AND EMPATHY**

10 March (Monday): Spring Break

13 March (Thursday): Spring Break


V. APPLICATIONS II: DECISION-MAKING IN GROUPS


7 April (Monday): tba.

10 April (Thursday): No class because of Furman Engaged

VI. APPLICATIONS III: SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY


24 April (Thursday): tba.

28 April (Monday): **Second Exam**

Final Exam Date (See Academic Records website for date): **Second Paper Due**