

# GAMBLING AND WAR

University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
Department of Political Science  
Spring 2018

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Professor Justin Conrad  
Email: justinconrad@uncc.edu  
Office Location: Fretwell 450B  
Office Hours: T/R 12:30-1:45 p.m.

Course: POLS 3030-B01/INTL 3000-B01  
Time: T/R 11:00 a.m.-12:15 p.m.  
Location: Fretwell 406

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## 1 Course Description

Diplomacy and war have often been compared to games of chance. In this course, we will examine in depth how international relations and international conflict resemble gambling situations. We will consider how states and non-state organizations bargain over issues, how they signal their capabilities and willingness to fight, and why they lie/bluff to get what they want. We will also discuss why these processes are often especially pronounced in civil conflicts. We will further examine the strategic and tactical choices that actors make in an effort to earn big payoffs and avoid big losses. Finally, we will consider at length the enormous role of chance in international diplomacy and warfare. In spite of sophisticated planning and strategic acumen, all international actors are subject to the whims of randomness, just like gamblers. The objective of the course is to increase your comprehensive understanding of international cooperation and conflict, while simultaneously developing your analytical skills. You will explore the similarities between gambling and war by playing in-class games and simulations, and you will apply your experiences to understanding real world scenarios.

## 2 Reading Material

Our primary text for the course:

Conrad, Justin. 2017. *Gambling and War: Risk, Reward, and Chance in International Conflict*. Naval Institute Press. ISBN 9781682472194.

- Many of the readings for the course will come from the primary text. It is available at the University bookstore and Grey's Bookstore, as well as online retailers such as Amazon.

- Many additional readings will be made available for download on the course website. The site can be accessed by logging into your student account: <http://canvas.uncc.edu>.
- Although I will do my best to make most assigned readings available on Canvas, if a reading does not appear there, it is your responsibility to find the reading (online or through the library).
- It is your responsibility to download and print the readings individually prior to each class.
- You are expected to do the assigned readings before the class period indicated on the syllabus.

### 3 Evaluation

- Exams (200 points – 2 exams at 100 points each)
- Game Responses (250 points – 5 game responses at 50 points each)

TOTAL POINTS = 450

#### 3.1 Exams

You will take one (1) midterm exam and one (1) final exam in this course. The midterm exam will cover material from lectures and readings assigned during the first half of the course. It will be a combination of essays and short answer questions, and will count for 100 points of your final course grade. The cumulative final exam will cover material from lectures and readings. It will also be a combination of essays and short answer questions. The final exam will count for 100 points of your final course grade.

#### 3.2 Game Responses

Six “Casino Days” will be held throughout the semester - refer to the Course Schedule for specific dates. Following the in-class games, you will be expected to answer a series of questions about your experiences. You will also be asked to apply your experiences in the games to real world situations. Each set of responses must be 1-2 pages in length. **Casino Days are always held on Thursdays, and the responses are due by 9 a.m. the following Tuesday.** The questions for each assignment and the links to upload your responses are available on Canvas. **Your lowest score will be dropped from your final grade, and you will receive credit for the remaining five (5) responses.**

### 3.3 Grading Scale

- A 90-100
- B 80-89
- C 70-79
- D 60-69
- F 59 and below

## 4 Administrative Policies

### 4.1 Gambling Disclaimer

Gambling is dangerous. In fact, this is the central premise of the course. The games played in class are intended for pedagogical purposes only, and no money is involved. The professor neither condones nor encourages actual gambling, and he accepts no responsibility or liability for such activity conducted outside the parameters of this course.

### 4.2 Course Website and Email

The course website can be accessed through Canvas ([canvas.uncc.edu](https://canvas.uncc.edu)). Please check this site regularly for readings, assignments, and other updates. Announcements may be sent out via email or posted directly on Canvas. You are responsible for all information disseminated via Canvas and/or email.

If you send me an email during business hours (8 am-5 pm) on a weekday, I will respond to you that same day. If you send me an email during non-business hours, or on a weekend or holiday, I will respond to you the following business day.

### 4.3 Attendance

I do not take attendance in this course. However, I cannot stress enough how important it is to attend class. Many students find the course challenging, and most of the readings are demanding and will require clarification. Furthermore, I will often discuss information in class that is *not included in the readings*. You will be responsible for that information on the exams, and I will not repeat the information to you one-on-one during my office hours. You also need to understand the course concepts and reference them in your game response papers if you want to score well on them. As a result, it is to your benefit to attend class regularly. In addition, missing just a couple of the in-class games can dramatically harm your grade. In other words, you may miss class *at your own risk*.

## 4.4 Absences from Exams and Late Work

Missed exams will only be rescheduled if you have received **prior** approval of your absence and you have documentation explaining why you cannot be in class that day. *Make up games will not be allowed under any circumstances*, but please remember that I do drop the lowest game response grade.

## 4.5 Academic Integrity

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the UNC Charlotte Code of Student Academic Integrity. In short, this means that cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students violating the Academic Honesty Policy in this course will receive a minimum penalty of a grade of zero for the assignment or test in question and may receive an “F” in the course and referral to Judicial Services.

## 4.6 Students with Disabilities

UNC Charlotte is committed to ensuring equal academic opportunities and inclusion for students with disabilities based on the principles of independent living, accessible universal design and diversity. Students with disabilities who anticipate needing an academic accommodation in this course should provide me with the proper documentation from the Disability Services Center within the first week of class.

## 4.7 Diversity

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte is committed to equality of educational opportunity and does not discriminate against applicants, students, or employees based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, or disability. In keeping with this commitment, UNC Charlotte actively seeks to promote diversity in its educational environment through its recruitment, enrollment, and hiring practices.

## 4.8 Courtesy in the Classroom

Attention to classroom courtesy is necessary to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn without distraction. As such, cell phones should be turned off or silenced during class and put away. *Do not talk on your cell phone or text message during class*. You are permitted to use laptops during class, but I reserve the right to ask you to put your laptop away if you are using it for purposes unaffiliated with my course. Please be on time to class and remain in class until you are dismissed. Being late to class is a sign of disrespect towards the instructor and your fellow students. Please refrain from talking during lectures, as well

as when other students are speaking. Similarly, please respect the opinions of your fellow students, even if you are in disagreement with them. Repeated disruption of class may lead to your being asked to leave the classroom and/or a reduction of your final grade.

## 5 Course Schedule

This schedule is a guide for the course and is subject to change at my discretion with appropriate notice. Please read the assigned materials *before* the course period for which they are listed below.

### Week 1

Tuesday, January 9, 2018: COURSE INTRODUCTION

*Reading 1:* Course Syllabus

Thursday, January 11, 2018: HISTORY OF GAMBLING AND WAR

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Introduction (pg. 1-17)

*Reading 2:* Kopper, Akos. 2017. What Image does IR Project? Chess, a Visual Metaphor for IR. *International Studies Review* 0: 1-17.

*Reading 3:* Weisberg, Jacob. 2016. Why Dictators Hate Chess. *Slate* December 22.

### Week 2

Tuesday, January 16, 2018: BETTING ON WAR AND THE PREFLOP

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 1 (pg. 19-30)

*Reading 2:* Fearon, James. 1995. Rationalist Explanations for War. *International Organization* 49(3): 379-414.

*Reading 3:* Walker, Greg. 2012. Starting Hand Selection. *The Poker Bank*.

Thursday, January 18, 2018: CASINO DAY - DICE GAMES

### Week 3

Tuesday, January 23, 2018: INFORMATION AND CREDIBLE COMMITMENTS

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 1 (pg. 31-45).

*Reading 2:* Powell, Robert L. 2006. War as a Commitment Problem. *International Organization* 60(1): 169-203.

Thursday, January 25, 2018: BLUFFING AND STRATEGY I

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 1 (pg. 31-45).

*Reading 2:* Streich, Philip and Jack Levy. 2014. Information, Commitment, and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. *Foreign Policy Analysis*.

*Reading 3:* Sklansky, David. 1999. *The Theory of Poker*. Las Vegas: Two Plus Two Publishing (pg. TBD).

#### **Week 4**

Tuesday, January 30, 2018: **BLUFFING AND STRATEGY II**

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 1 (pg. 45-53).

*Reading 2:* Zagare, Frank. 2017. Explaining the Long Peace: Why von Neumann (and Schelling) Got It Wrong. *International Studies Review* 0: 1-16.

*Reading 3:* Texas Hold'em Rules. 2010. *Poker Listings*.

Thursday, February 1, 2018: **CASINO DAY - POKER I**

#### **Week 5**

Tuesday, February 6, 2018: **WEAK VS. STRONG I**

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 2 (pg. 54-70)

*Reading 2:* Walter, Barbara. 1997. The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement. *International Organization* 51(3): 335-364.

Thursday, February 8, 2018: **WEAK VS. STRONG II**

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 2 (pg. 54-70)

*Reading 2:* Thomas, Jakana. 2014. Rewarding Bad Behavior: How Governments Respond to Terrorism in Civil War. *American Journal of Political Science* 58(4): 804-818.

*Reading 3:* Mao, Tse-tung. 1937. *On Guerrilla Warfare* (Chapters 2, 4).

#### **Week 6**

Tuesday, February 13, 2018: **RANDOMIZATION AND BLUFFING**

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 2 (pg. 70-85)

*Reading 2:* Berrebi, Claude and Darius Lakdawalla. 2007. How Does Terrorism Risk Vary across Space and Time? An Analysis Based on the Israeli Experience. *Defence and Peace Economics* 18(2): 113-131.

Thursday, February 15, 2018: **CASINO DAY - POKER II**

#### **Week 7**

Tuesday, February 20, 2018: **EXAM REVIEW - PLEASE COME PREPARED WITH QUESTIONS**

Thursday, February 22, 2018: **MIDTERM**

*Note:* Please bring a pen to the exam.

## **Week 8**

Tuesday, February 27, 2018: GAME FLOW AND REPUTATION I

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 3 (pg. 86-100)

*Reading 2:* Wagner, R. Harrison. 2000. Bargaining and War. *American Journal of Political Science*: 469-484.

Thursday, March 1, 2018: GAME FLOW AND REPUTATION II

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 3 (pg. 86-100)

*Reading 2:* Powell, Robert, 2012. Persistent Fighting and Shifting Power. *American Journal of Political Science* 56(3): 620-637.

## **Week 9**

Tuesday, March 6, 2018: SPRING BREAK (NO CLASS)

Thursday, March 8, 2018: SPRING BREAK (NO CLASS)

## **Week 10**

Tuesday, March 13, 2018: ENDING THE GAME I

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 3 (pg. 100-108)

*Reading 2:* Reiter, Dan. 2009. *How Wars End*. Princeton University Press (pg. 1-50).

Thursday, March 15, 2018: ENDING THE GAME II

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 3 (pg. 100-108)

## **Week 11**

Tuesday, March 20, 2018: OFFENSE AND DEFENSE

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 3 (pg. 108-114)

*Reading 2:* Van Evera, Steven. 1998. Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War. *International Security* 22(4): 5-43.

*Reading 3:* Blackjack - Card Game Rules. 2018. *Bicycle Cards*.

Thursday, March 22, 2018: **CASINO DAY - BLACKJACK**

## **Week 12**

Tuesday, March 27, 2018: LOSING!

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 3 (pg. 115-139)

*Reading 2:* Kahneman Daniel and Amos Tversky. 1979. Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Under Risk. *Econometrica* 263-291.

Thursday, March 29, 2018: LOSING!

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 3 (pg. 115-139)

*Reading 2:* McDermott, Rose. 1992. The Failed Rescue Mission in Iran: An Application of Prospect Theory. *Political Psychology* 13(2): 237-263.

### **Week 13**

Tuesday, April 3, 2018: MISPERCEPTION AND BIAS

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 3 (pg. 139-147)

*Reading 2:* Jervis, Robert. 1976. *Perception and Misperception in International Relations*. Princeton University Press (pg. TBD).

*Reading 3:* Duelfer, Charles A. and Stephen Benedict Dyson. 2011. Chronic Misperception and International Conflict: The US-Iraq Experience. *International Security*: 36(1): 73-100.

Thursday, April 6, 2018: NO CLASS

### **Week 14**

Tuesday, April 10, 2018: ROLE OF CHANCE I

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter (pg. 148-161)

*Reading 2:* Bhatia, Aatish. 2012. What does Randomness Look Like? *Wired* December 21.

Thursday, April 12, 2018: **CASINO DAY - POKER III**

### **Week 15**

Tuesday, April 17, 2018: ROLE OF CHANCE II

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 5 (pg. 161-168)

*Reading 2:* Gartzke, Eric. 1999. War is in the Error Term. *International Organization* 53(3): 567-587.

Thursday, April 19, 2018: ROLE OF CHANCE III

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 5 (pg. 168-177)

*Reading 2:* Taleb, Nassim N. and Mark Blyth. 2011. The Black Swan of Cairo: How Suppressing Volatility Makes the World Less Predictable and More Dangerous. *Foreign Affairs*: 33-39.



## **Week 16**

Tuesday, April 24, 2018: MANAGING AND PREVENTING WAR

*Reading 1:* Conrad, Chapter 6

*Reading 2:* Shafir, Eldar, ed. 2013. The Behavioral Foundations of Public Policy. Princeton University Press (Chapter 25).

*Reading 3:* Rules of Roulette: Guide and Instructions for the Casino Classic. 2017. *Masters Traditional Games*

Thursday, April 26, 2018: **CASINO DAY - ROULETTE**

## **Week 17**

Tuesday, May 1, 2018: EXAM REVIEW - PLEASE COME PREPARED WITH QUESTIONS

## **FINAL EXAM**

**Tuesday, May 8, 2018: 11:00 a.m.**

## **Syllabus Changes**

The policies, assignments and readings contained in this syllabus are subject to change with advance notice.