Government 341: Seminar in International Politics: Weapons of Mass Destruction

Syllabus (revised version of 12/20/07)
Spring 2008: Tuesdays 3:00-4:50
Prof. Jacques E. C. Hymans, Smith College (jhymans@email.smith.edu or x3677).
Office Hours (Wright Hall 105): Tues-Wed 3-4 or by appointment.

Course description: This seminar explores the politics of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Topics covered include the nature of WMD, the relationship of scientists and engineer with WMD, the relationship of politicians and warriors with WMD, and WMD policy alternatives. 4 credits.

Prerequisites: Government 241 or permission of instructor. Note that this is a very work-intensive course, and success in the course depends on your having a passion for the subject matter and a firm grounding in political science.

Readings: This course is focused on extensive readings in books. All books, except those available on-line, are required and available for purchase at the Grecourt Bookshop. Most of the books are also available on reserve at Neilson Library, but given the amount of reading required, I strongly counsel you to buy them.

Requirements and Grading: 1-Page Final Paper Question: 10%; 4-5 Page Final Paper Outline: 10%; 8-10 minute In-Class Presentation of Final Paper Findings: 10%; 15-20 Page Final Paper: 30%; Class Discussion Leader: 20%; General Participation: 20%.

Note on the Final Research Papers. In the first third of the semester, you will develop a research question pertaining to WMD, I will review your 1-page description of your question, and then I will provide you with a beginning bibliography. By the second third of the semester, you should have done enough research to draw up a 4-5 page outline of your answer to the question. Toward the end of the semester, your work should have progressed further, to the point where you can make an 8-10 minute oral presentation of your findings. Finally, at the end of the semester you will turn in your paper, which will be between 15-20 pages in length. Papers will be graded on the basis of their originality and logic of argument, quantity and quality of supporting research, and readability and elegance of writing style.

Note on Class Discussion Leadership responsibilities. For each class, one or two students will be designated “class discussion leaders.” In this capacity, you will in part take the place of the professor, e.g., you will know the material inside and out, and you will develop a written strategy for guiding the seminar through the material. In order to do this successfully, you should bring a proposed outline to my office hours that take place the week before the class you are to lead.
**Note on General Participation.** As the grading indicates, it is important that you make your presence felt in a positive way throughout the semester. This means systematically doing the reading before class and speaking up often in class about it.

**Policy on Make-ups and Extensions.** It is my policy not to give make-ups or extensions. I believe to give such special treatment is unfair to your classmates. If you miss a deadline for an assignment or an in-class graded exercise, you will be given a failing grade for that part of the course. The *only* exceptions to this rule are for major illness (e.g., you are bedridden for multiple days) or tragedy in the immediate family. In such cases you will be allowed an extension or make-up, but *only* if you come to me *at least a day before* the paper is due/class exercise is to take place.

**Class Meeting Topics and Reading Assignments:**

**SECTION I: THE WMD CHALLENGE**

**Week 1 (1/29/08):** Brief description of the course. Students introduce themselves and describe their interest in the subject. Assignment of class discussion leader responsibilities.

**Week 2 (2/5):** Nuclear weapons: why should we care? Read John Hersey, *Hiroshima*, entire (total=150 pp.).

**Week 3 (2/12):** How to build the bomb. Read William Langewiesche, *The Atomic Bazaar: The Rise of the Nuclear Poor*, entire (total=180 pp.)

**SECTION II: WMD: HIGH POLITICS AND STRATEGY**


**Week 5 (2/26):** Why and how terrorists seek WMD. Read Jessica Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists*, entire (160 pp.)

**Week 6 (3/4):** Cold War nuclear strategy. Read Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, chs. 1, 5 (i.e., pp. 3-46, 169-234).


3/18: SPRING BREAK.
Week 8 (3/25): CLASS CANCELED. PAPER PROPOSALS DUE BY EMAIL AT 5 PM SHARP.

SECTION III: WMD: THE TECHNICAL IS THE POLITICAL

Week 9 (4/1): Discovering the bomb. Read Michael Frayn, Copenhagen, entire including postscript (total=132 pp.).


Evening of 4/10 (Thurs.): SPECIAL MOVIE PRESENTATION: “Dr. Strangelove”


Week 13 (4/29): ALL STUDENTS GIVE 8-10 MINUTE ORAL REPORTS ON FINAL PAPER FINDINGS. (Note: depending on how many students enroll, this class session may run over time)

Last day of finals (5/9): Final Research Papers DUE AT 3 PM SHARP.