General Instructions and Advice:

Students must answer three (3) of the following questions. Choose questions that enable you to demonstrate a broad knowledge of international relations. Examination answers should demonstrate knowledge of the history and development of the field. Relevant real world examples should be integrated into the answer and important recently published literature should be cited. It would be to your advantage to avoid excessive overlap across your answers.

A good exam is characterized by coherent and forceful arguments based on existing work and evidence in the field, with justifications for perspectives and concepts chosen. A weak exam is one where the argument is made in isolation from the literature and/or where no argument is made. Almost all the questions are designed to allow you to take a position on an issue. Do so, and do not simply produce an annotated bibliography. In other words, use the questions to show that you both know the material and can present an argument as a scholar.

We anticipate that each question can be answered in approximately 3000 words. Please double-space your answers, provide reasonable margins, and number the pages.

1. Contrary to the pessimistic conclusions of Political Realism, Liberal IR theory contends that the perverse consequences of anarchy can be overcome or mitigated. Pick two approaches within liberalism and discuss the basic logic behind this claim. Is there empirical validation for each approach? Are these approaches successful in answering realist critiques?

2. An increasing number of IR scholars have been exploring possibilities of creating a synthetic approach to the study of international relations combining the mainstream theories with critical and new perspectives (e.g., bridging realism and constructivism, etc.). Do you agree that a synthesis of perspectives is possible? If so, what is the nature of this synthesis and how it can be useful for the study of IR?

3. International relations research has been, for the most part, state-centric. What are some examples of recent research that examines the political motivations and behaviors of non-state actors? Discuss examples from the fields of international security, international political economy, and international organizations. In each case, describe the implications of this research for state-centric work that relevant to each debate. Are these implications important? Are these innovations valuable?

4. Consider the level of analysis debate in international relations. In light of this debate, which level of analysis explains the most about great powers’ foreign policies? What interactions exist between different levels of analysis? Frame your response by considering the tradeoffs between explanation and prediction and citing concrete historical and contemporary evidence.
5. What role does public opinion play in foreign policy decision-making? Research in American Politics says the public is ignorant about international politics. Research in international relations suggests that public opinion is one of the major forces that motivates and constrains foreign policy behavior. In your answer describe two areas where public opinion is theorized to affect foreign policy decisions. Discuss whether public opinion is important for each area. If opinion is important, how is it important? If opinion is not important, why is it not important?

6. Why do wars occur? Fearon (1995) argues that wars are the consequence of incomplete information, commitment problems, and issue indivisibility. Is this a complete list of the causes of war? Which seems most important empirically? Why?

7. Conflict scholarship has traditionally focused on the causes of war. While war continues to occupy a major role in world politics, terrorism has increasingly come to present an important form of violence and a significant threat for states. Compare and contrast the major causes of war with the causes and determinants of transnational terrorism. What differences and similarities can you identify when comparing these causes? What are the implications of these differences and similarities for conflict scholarship?

8. What does international relations scholarship say about the power of international institutions? How, and under what conditions, do weak international institutions wield power in world politics? In your discussion, illustrate your points with at least two examples of international institutions and explain how they exert their influences.

9. Identifying the preferences of actors is an important part of IPE research. Please discuss how IPE scholars identify the preferences of actors in the area of trade politics. In what ways do these expectations conflict with each other? What are the controversies over this issue? Which sets of expectations receive the more empirical support. Which sets of expectations receive more empirical support at different levels of analysis? Which approach in your view is most promising? Why?