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) IR theories usually take the structure of the international system and the nature of its main actors as given. Do you believe this assumption impedes theory building in IR? Should IR theory be able to explain fundamental changes in the structure of the international system and the emergence of new actors? Why or why not?

2) International relations as a discipline has been criticized for “reactivism:” it has always responded to rather than anticipated significant world events. Do you agree with this criticism? Can we claim as IR scholars that we possess generalizable and predictive knowledge about the present and future of world politics? In answering this question, choose one or two subfields in IR to develop your argument.

3) What insights are to be garnered from the “constructivist turn” in international relations? A cogent critique is that the turn is damaging to IR insofar as it jettisons generalizable theories, objective criteria, and disfavors measurement. Do you agree with this critique? Why or why not?

4) In recent years a growing number of Realists have sought to incorporate theories of domestic politics into their models of foreign policy making. Has this strengthened realism’s contribution to foreign policy analysis? How successful would you judge their efforts? Explain (with examples) what domestic variables scholars have brought to bear on understanding of foreign policy.
5) Until the end of the Cold War, students of international politics mainly studied interstate wars. Since the end of the Cold War, however, the focus of attention has shifted to asymmetric conflict. To what extent are ideas that are relevant to understanding interstate wars applicable to these other types of violent conflict?

6) The democratic peace research agenda has put forward structural and normative explanations for understanding why states do not fight one another. Do you find either explanation more compelling to understanding the lack of war between democracies? Discuss with respect to the limitations and strengths of each approach to the democratic peace.

7) Human rights is a new addition to the practice and study of international relations. Do IR theories offer anything to help us develop a detailed understanding of human rights? Be specific in discussing contributions (or lack thereof) of the selected IR theories.

8) Do international organizations have power? If so, what constitutes the power of international organizations? Why does it matter, especially with regards to IOs’ ability to make a difference in how the world addresses global and regional problems? In your answer, discuss whether IOs have power drawing on at least two relevant theoretical approaches to IOs in making your arguments.

9) What is “cooperation” in international relations? Why do states engage, or not engage, in cooperative conduct? And, what effect, if any, do patterns of cooperation among states in particular issue areas have on the conduct of international relations?