International Relations

Written Preliminary Exam

The IR prelim is designed to:

1) Assess the student's understanding of questions and debates generally considered to be central in the field of International Relations;

2) Determine the student's ability to analyze and synthesize arguments and evidence from different scholars into a coherent, focused, original essay.

3) Illustrate that the student has developed intellectual independence by going beyond the material presented in their formal coursework, exploring new insights and examining material in greater depth.

4) Evaluate the student's understanding of an array of substantive issues in international relations as embodied in the following five subfields. Questions may fit within one subfield or address issues and concepts that cross multiple fields.

   a. International Relations Theory and Methods
   b. Foreign Policy Analysis
   c. International Conflict and Conflict Resolution
   d. International Ethics, International Law, and International Organization
   e. International Political Economy

The IR faculty will compose a list of nine questions, with at least one question from each of these five subfields. Students are expected to select and answer three of these questions in three essays of approximately 3000 words each, excluding the bibliography.

Advice to the student:
Choose questions that enable you to demonstrate a broad knowledge of history and development of the field international relations. Relevant real world examples, preferably from more than one region, should be integrated and important recently published literature should be cited. A good exam is characterized by coherent and forceful arguments based on existing work and evidence in the field. 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 not simply produce an annotated bibliography. In other words, use the questions to show that you can analyze and integrate the relevant concepts and materials and can present an argument as a scholar.
Students should make a concerted effort to consult (early and often) with faculty in the international relations subfield about how best to prepare for the qualifying exams.  

*Last updated December 2008.*