

## DIP8020: A Sociology of Diplomacy Course Guide

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### Course Description

This course introduces students to a new approach to the study of diplomacy and world politics. Historically, diplomatic studies has been a theory-light if not atheoretical field, with diplomat's memoirs and diplomatic history serving as the standard reading material for the field. Over the past two decades the field of diplomatic studies has experienced a transformation. The up-close study of who diplomats are and what they do has emerged as the empirical launchpad for a theoretically ambitious attempt to revisit the study of international politics altogether. Better known by the labels "practice turn" and "international political sociology," this avowedly sociological sensibility aims to bring abstract international politics (a world of states and free floating norms and identities) down to the trenches of everyday life, flesh and blood actors, banal routines, and lived experiences. This approach draws on sociologists and anthropologists and show how domestic politics, everyday action, and social structures of class, race, and gender shape inequality, stratification, agency, power, and change in world politics. This new turn has not only put diplomatic studies on the map of big-debates in IR, it has also attracted a new generation of scholars who are pushing the boundaries of how to study world politics using new theories and methods, and working in new regional and historical contexts. This course surveys this important sociological shift in the study of diplomacy – and indeed, in IR – by introducing students to its key thinkers, writings, and unfolding debates.

### Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the major concepts and theories associated with the study of diplomacy in world politics.
2. Critically evaluate recent debates in diplomatic studies.
3. Cultivate skill in writing and advancing an argument in oral and written work.
4. Apply new approaches in diplomacy to the study of contemporary world affairs.
5. Demonstrate knowledge of diplomacy beyond in different world regions and beyond Western-centric frames.

## Seminars, at a glance...

### PART 1: Theory

Seminar 1: Diplomatic Studies Then and Now (aka "Why a Sociology of Diplomacy?")

Seminar 2: Inspirations: Macrosociologies

Seminar 3: Inspirations: Microsociologies

### PART 2: Applications

Seminar 4: Reading Class and Gender in Diplomacy: Iver Neumann's "Body of the Diplomat."

Seminar 5: Interrogating Hierarchy in IR: Vincent Pouliot's "International Pecking Orders."

Seminar 6: In Defence of Face-to-Face Interaction: Holmes and Wheeler on "Social Bonding in Diplomacy."

Seminar 7: Emotions in Diplomacy: Barbara Key's "The Diplomats Two Minds."

Seminar 8: Interaction Rituals in Diplomacy: Seanon Wong's "The Aggressive uses of Face-Work."

Seminar 9: Diplomatic Sociability: Deepak Nair's "Golf in ASEAN's Cold War Diplomacy"

Seminar 10: Digital Transformations: Kristin Eggeling and Rebecca Adler-Nissen's "The Synthetic Situation in Diplomacy."

Seminar 11: Staging Diplomacy: Naoko Shimazu's "Diplomacy as Theatre" on the Bandung Conference.

Seminar 12: Postcolonial Forays: Kira Huju's "Cosmopolitan Elites: Indian Diplomats and the Social Hierarchies of Global Order."

## Assessments

	Type	Due Date	Word Count	Weightage
1	Seminar Participation	N/A	N/A	10%
2	Oral Presentation	NA		10%
3	Short Essay	2 May 2025	1500	30%
4	Research Essay	6 June 2025	2500	50%

**Seminar Participation:** Students are assessed for reading assigned articles/chapters for each seminar. Contributions to class discussions should demonstrate their knowledge and engagement with the reading material.

**Oral Presentation:** Students will take the lead in presenting a particular assigned reading for seminars. This will be a short 8 minute presentation on an "essential" reading of their choice. Presentations will be assessed for their skill in distilling the core argument of the reading, its exposition, and in advancing a fair and considered critique.

**Short Essay:** This short essay will test students engagement with the theoretical literature and debates on diplomacy. Length is 1500 words (including text and footnotes but excluding bibliography).

**Research Essay:** A 3000 words essay that blends theoretical awareness with fresh and new empirical application of themes explored in the seminar. Topics to be shared soon.

## PART 1: THEORY

## Seminar 1: Diplomatic Studies Then and Now (aka "Why a Sociology of Diplomacy?")

Wednesday 16 April

### Essential Readings

Pouliot, V., & Cornut, J. (2015). Practice theory and the study of diplomacy: A research agenda. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 50(3), 297-315.

Rebecca Adler-Nissen. (2015) "Conclusion: Relationalism or why diplomats find international relations theory strange. In: Sending OJ, Pouliot V, Neumann IB, eds. *Diplomacy and the Making of World Politics*. Cambridge Studies in International Relations. Cambridge University Press, pp. 284-308.

### Supplementary Readings

Neumann, I. B. (2002). Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy. *Millennium*, 31(3), 627–651.

## Seminar 2: Inspirations: Macrosociologies

Friday 18 April

### Essential

- Christian Bueger, & Frank Gadinger (2015). "The Play of International Practice." *International Studies Quarterly*, 59(3), 449–460.

### Supplementary

David Swartz (2002). "The Sociology of Habit: The Perspective of Pierre Bourdieu." *OTJR (Thorofare, N.J.)*, 22(1\_suppl), 61S-69S.

Karl Maton (2012). "Habitus." In Grenfell ed. *Pierre Bourdieu* (2nd ed., pp. 48–64). Routledge.

Patricia Thompson (2012). "Field." In Grenfell ed. *Pierre Bourdieu* (2nd ed., pp. 48–64). Routledge.

Deepak Nair (2024) "Using Bourdieu's Habitus in International Relations,"  
*International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 68, Issue 2, June 2024  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqae007>

### Seminar 3: Inspirations: Microsociologies

Wednesday, 23 April

#### Essential

Ty Solomon & Brent Steele (2016). "Micro-moves in International Relations theory." *European Journal of International Relations*, 23(2), 267-291

#### Supplementary

Trevino, Javier. (2003). "Introduction: Erving Goffman and the Interaction Order." In *Goffman's Legacy*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

Randall Collins. (1981). On the Microfoundations of Macrosociology. *American Journal of Sociology*, 86(5), 984–1014.

## PART 2: APPLICATIONS

### Seminar 4: Reading Class and Gender: Iver Neumann's "Body of the Diplomat"

Friday, 25 April

#### Essential

Iver B. Neumann (2008). The Body of the Diplomat. *European Journal of International Relations*, 14(4), 671–695.

#### Supplementary

Merje Kuus (2015). Symbolic power in diplomatic practice: Matters of style in Brussels. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 50(3), 368–384.

Catriona Standfield. (2020). Gendering the practice turn in diplomacy. *European Journal of International Relations*, 26(1\_suppl), 140-165

Ann Towns and Birgitta Niklasson (2017). "Gender, International Status, and Ambassador Appointments" *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Volume 13, Issue 3 pp.521–540.

Jeremie Cornut (2015). To be a diplomat abroad: Diplomatic practice at embassies. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 50(3), 385–401.

## Seminar 5: Interrogating Hierarchy: Vincent Pouliot's "International Pecking Orders." Wednesday 30 April

### Essential

Vincent Pouliot (2016). *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy*. Cambridge University Press.

- Introduction
- Chapter 2: A Practice theory of Social Stratification
- Chapter 5: Permanent Representation: Relational Structure and Practical Logics

### Supplementary

Fiona McConnell (2018). "Performing Diplomatic Decorum: Repertoires of "Appropriate" Behavior in the Margins of International Diplomacy," *International Political Sociology*, Volume 12, Issue 4, December pp. 362–381.

## Seminar 6: In Defence of Face-to-Face Diplomacy: Holmes' and Wheeler on Social Bonding Friday 2 May

### Essential

Marcus Holmes, & Nick Wheeler (2020). Social bonding in diplomacy. *International Theory*, 12(1), 133–161.

### Supplementary

Holmes, M. (2013). The Force of Face-to-Face Diplomacy: Mirror Neurons and the Problem of Intentions. *International Organization*, 67(4), 829–861.

Wheeler, N. J. (2018). *Trusting Enemies: Interpersonal Relationships in International Conflict* (First edition.). Oxford University Press.

**Seminar 7: Emotions in Diplomacy: Barbara Key's "The Diplomats Two Minds."**  
Wednesday 7 May

Essential

Barbara Keys (2020). The Diplomat's Two Minds: Deconstructing a Foreign Policy Myth. *Diplomatic History*, 44(1), 1–21.

Supplementary

Todd H. Hall (2015) *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage* (1st ed.). Cornell University Press. Read Introduction + Chapter 1.

**Seminar 8: Interaction Rituals in Diplomacy: Seanon Wong's "The Aggressive uses of Face-Work."**  
Friday 9 May

Essential

Seanon Wong (2021). One-upmanship and putdowns: the aggressive use of interaction rituals in face-to-face diplomacy. *International Theory*, 13(2), 341–371.

Supplementary

Erving Goffman. (1967). "On Face-Work" In: *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior*. New York: Routledge.

Deepak Nair (2019). Saving face in diplomacy: A political sociology of face-to-face interactions in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *European Journal of International Relations*, 25(3), 672-697.

**Seminar 9: Diplomatic Sociability: Deepak Nair's "Golf in ASEAN's Cold War Diplomacy"**  
Wednesday 14 May

Essential

Deepak Nair, Sociability in International Politics: Golf and ASEAN's Cold War Diplomacy, *International Political Sociology*, Volume 14, Issue 2, June 2020, Pages 196–214

## Supplementary

David Brenner, Performing Rebellion: Karaoke as a Lens into Political Violence, *International Political Sociology*, Volume 12, Issue 4, December 2018, Pages 401–417

## Seminar 10: Seminar 12: Digital Transformations: Eggeling and Adler-Nissen's "The Synthetic Situation in Diplomacy."

Friday 16 May

### Essential

Kirstin Eggeling & Rebecca Adler-Nissen (2021). The Synthetic Situation in Diplomacy: Scopic Media and the Digital Mediation of Estrangement. *Global Studies Quarterly*, 1(2).

### Optional

Adler-Nissen, R., & Eggeling, K. A. (2022). Blended Diplomacy: The Entanglement and Contestation of Digital Technologies in Everyday Diplomatic Practice. *European Journal of International Relations*, 28(3), 640–666.

## Seminar 11: Staging Diplomacy: Naoko Shimazu on the Bandung Conference

Wednesday 21 May

### Essential

Naoko Shimazu (2014). Diplomacy As Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955. *Modern Asian Studies*, 48(1), 225–252.

### Optional

Minseon Ku (2022). Summit Diplomacy as Theatre of Sovereignty Contestation. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 17(4), 628–642.

Tan See Seng and Amitav Acharya (2008). *Bandung revisited: the legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for international order*. NUS Press. (A nice collection of essays for background on the Bandung Conference, especially see essays by Reid and Montesano).

## Seminar 12: Postcolonial Forays: Kira Hujū's "Cosmopolitan Elites: Indian Diplomats and the Social Hierarchies of Global Order."

Friday 23 May

### Essential

Kira Hujū (2023) "The Cosmopolitan Standard of Civilization: A Reflexive Sociology of Elite Belonging among Indian Diplomats. *European Journal of International Relations*, 29(3), 698-722.

### Optional

Sankaran Krishna. 2025. Vacuous Diversity: Caste and Secularism in Indian Diplomacy. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* (published online ahead of print 2025)

Kalathmika Natarajan. 2023. The privilege of the Indian passport (1947–1967): Caste, class, and the afterlives of indenture in Indian diplomacy. *Modern Asian Studies*. 2023;57(2):321-350.

Vineet Thakur. 2023. Casting and Casteing Indian Diplomacy. *Diplomatica*, 5(1), 130-137.

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