

POIR 670 First Week Script

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Welcome & Introduction

1. Introduce Yourself:

- a. I'm an international political economy (IPE) scholar with three distinct research streams:
 - i. A. Political risk and the political participation of firms
 - ii. B. The political economy of security
 - iii. C. AI tools for social science research
- b. I also run the SPEC Lab.

2. Invite Students to Introduce Themselves:

- a. Ask for brief elevator pitches: who they are, what they study, and what they're interested in exploring.
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What is IPE?

The Basics:

1. IPE looks at how economic and political systems interact across borders.
2. After the Industrial Revolution, the world became increasingly positive-sum economically (i.e., wealth can grow).
3. Security, however, is often seen as zero-sum—but this shifts with interdependence.

Core Assumptions:

1. IPE assumes all states want more money.
 - a. Looks a lot at how preferences over economic policy vary across states and groups within states
 - b. Often ignores the capacity of one state to bonk the other over the head with a stick and impose the rules they want.
 2. Security assumes all states want more security.
 - a. Ignores the fact they also want money, and that states often fight over money.
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Thinking Like a Social Scientist

1. Guiding Frameworks:

- a. We're beginning with “states & markets” readings to orient ourselves.
- b. We'll use Actors, Interests, Institutions as our analytical lens.
- c. Think in terms of models:

- i. “Models are to be used, not believed.”
 - ii. The value of parsimony
 - d. The Pathologies of Rational Choice
 - e. Pathologies of the Market:
 - f. Willingness to pay: within vs between individuals (wealth, inequality, power)
 - g. Students losing faith in capitalism
 - i. Retraining Day episode
 - ii. More folks have lived longer in post-scarcity communities
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Methods, Evidence, Humility

Approach:

1. We’ve (hopefully) moved past the quant/qual divide.
2. IPE tends to be quantitative (frequent, countable events), but not everything is regression-friendly.
 - a. There is only one global economy – some stuff is simply $n=1$.
3. Pay attention to effect sizes, not just p-values.

"Most strongly credible research designs show that interventions have no effect, small effects, or effects that don't replicate well." — Megan Stevenson
Show the xkcd effect size comic to illustrate this.

Class Goals

What You'll Learn:

1. How to think like a social scientist
2. How to create and refine research questions
3. How to critique and build on existing knowledge

Final Paper:

1. You'll write ~2/3 of a research paper based on your own question.
 2. Exit the course with a project that can plausibly be executed as your seminar paper and first publication if you so choose.
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Class Environment & Participation

1. Students will succeed if they:

- a. Show up prepared
 - i. This includes investing in learning economic fundamentals as we go.
 - b. Ask questions. Especially when they don't understand
 - c. Challenge papers and each other's ideas
 - d. Speak up—even if they're unsure
- 2. They won't do well if they:**
- a. They don't do the readings or take notes
 - b. They don't take ownership for self-study of economic fundamentals
 - c. They only speak when they think they're "right"
 - d. They challenge others unkindly
- 3. Culture Notes:**
- a. This is a place to fail safely. Fail often!
 - b. Nothing you say is stupid—it may be wrong, but that doesn't mean it isn't good to say it out loud
 - c. You're all smart.
 - i. Learn to tolerate criticism of your ideas, and learn when/how to push back.
 - d. I will challenge your ideas—you should challenge mine.
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Mentorship & Navigating Academia

- 1. Power & Boundaries:**
- a. Grad students can be exploited. Protect yourself.
 - b. Try to avoid having your whole research agenda dependent on one mentor/collaborator.
 - c. Build a community of mentors, inside and outside your department.
- 2. Self-Advocacy:**
- a. Learn when to say no to research opportunities.
 - i. Learn when to put projects in a drawer.
 - ii. Many projects that are wise to start are unwise to continue.
 - b. If you contribute significantly to a project, discuss authorship (define this explicitly).
 - c. Learn how to have these conversations—ask if you're unsure. Talk to a senior collaborator about their view on what level of intellectual contribution from a research assistant justifies promotion to co-author.
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What Makes a Good Research Question?

1. Literature Gap

- a. Pros: Helps build on theory.
- b. Cons: Can become academic navel-gazing.
 - i. If “gap in the literature” is your primary argument for pursuing a research question, it’s a boring question (or you haven’t yet figured out why its interesting).

2. Real-World Puzzle

- a. Something in the world that matters doesn’t make sense—can you explain it?
- b. Maybe the question’s been asked but the answer is flawed or incomplete.
 - i. Can you improve the answer or update it?

3. Readings as Inspiration

- a. Track what grabs your interest or confuses you.
- b. Turn that into a research question or pitch.

4. In-Class Pitching:

- e. Share your ideas, even if they don’t work—your peers might help shape the path forward.

Guided Notes & First Class Prep

1. Pre-Class Assignment:

- a. Watch a video explaining how to take empirical notes using the rubric.
- b. Read a foundational paper and take notes.

2. Learn:

- a. How to identify puzzle vs question
- b. How to spot the DV/IV
- c. How long to spend: ~30–45 minutes per paper

3. First Class:

- a. Discuss questions about reading/note-taking process.
- b. Then dive into the week’s readings.

Big Questions We'll Explore

1. What determines the form firms take?

- a. Especially domestic firms vs. MNCs, large firms vs. small, and the political implications of industrial organization.
- b. Arms-length transactions vs. internalization
- c. Where footloose firms choose to locate themselves and where they choose to conduct various economic processes.

2. What entities govern the economy?

- a. Supranational vs. national vs. subnational

- b. Where is power exercised, and how does delegation occur?
 - 3. **Where do people choose to live, and what constrains that choice?**
 - a. The distinction between nation and country has become meaningful
But humans seem to be tribal creatures. So the modern world is confusing.
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Archetypal 5-Year Plan

- 1. **Year 1**
 - a. Coursework – with an emphasis on learning core disciplinary methods and reading broadly through seminars.
 - 2. **Year 2**
 - a. Seminar paper – with preparation for qualifying exams, while still engaging in methods training and broad disciplinary reading.
 - 3. **Year 3**
 - a. Prospectus – students begin applying specific methods tailored to their dissertation, read deeply in their chosen research area, and write and defend their prospectus. This year also includes launching a co-authored side project.
 - 4. **Year 4**
 - a. Research Crankfest – advancing their scholarly presence—presenting and submitting the co-authored paper, preparing job market materials, and potentially beginning a second co-authored project.
 - 5. **Year 5**
 - a. Job Market and Dissertation Completion – present their job market paper at APSA, submit applications, polish their job talk, revise co-authored papers, and defend their dissertation in the spring.
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Conferences, Talks, Feedback & Networking

- 1. **If you want someone's time:**
 - a. Don't ask them to read something (yet)
 - b. Think of two questions you want their opinion on—want their thoughts on—that they can answer off the top of their head.
 - c. Before you meet with someone, read the abstracts of several things they have written, and read at least one of their articles or books.
 - 2. **Actively seek to build a community of your near-peers:**
 - a. Grad students, post-docs, assistant professors working in your area
 - b. Ties to senior folks are nice, but focus first on ties to peers
 - c. Send emails to your peers if you see a paper of theirs and you like it!
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Journal Prestige

1. **Why it might not matter:**
 - a. Reasonable people can disagree (at the margins) about relative prestige.
 - b. Influential work is sometimes published in low-prestige journals
 2. **Why it actually does matter:**
 - a. This is our best external tool for holding our own work to high standards. The people who review for top journals often also review for lower-tier journals. But those reviewers demand more when reviewing for top outlets.
 - b. There is a dizzying amount of knowledge being created every day. Most of it goes unread and uncited. Placing your work in the right outlet often determines whether it will be read or not, have an impact or not.
 - c. Your ability to place articles in competitive journals determines:
 - i. Whether you will get an academic job
 - ii. Whether you will get tenure
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Disseminating Knowledge

1. **Dissemination goes beyond peer-reviewed journals:**
 - a. Blogs in my day – *Blattman + Poverty Action Lab* (Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo) + *Gates Foundation*
 2. **Modern venues include:**
 - a. Twitter
 - b. TikTok
 - c. New York Times
 - d. Diana O'Brien is a contributor to *Ms. Magazine*
 - e. Guez Salinas is a contributor to *Rolling Stone*
 - f. *Monkey Cage*, *Foreign Policy Magazine*
 - g. Kyla Scanlon is a modern day hero.
 3. **Timing considerations:**
 - a. I view this mostly as a post-tenure thing to do, but not entirely.
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Closing Notes

1. Graduate seminars are small enough to be personalized.
2. I have time to invest in each of them and I want to do so effectively.
3. **PLEASE** talk to me about ways I can better understand how to support your professional development.