



The History of the Great Power System

Center for European Studies

The History of the Great Power System

Full course description

How do the most powerful countries in the world get along? How do they balance their own interests with the general desirability for the world to be a stable and peaceful place? Why do some nations fall out of the ranks of the Great Powers and others join?

This class will introduce students to the system by which powerful countries in the world have related to each other over the past 400 years. We will trace the centuries-old but still vital concept of global “Great Powers” and track how, through time, Great Powers have interacted with one another in war and peace.

This course consists of 32 class hours divided over 3 weeks. Students earn 6 ECTS credits when they obtain a passing grade. The course may include a field trip.

This course is coordinated and lectured by David Smith from Baylor University.

General disclaimer: on-campus education and activities, as well as trips and visits related to the course are conditional. E.g. (Dutch) travel advice should be positive regarding the region that will be visited and institutions should be able to accept visitors. In case a proposed activity, trip or visit cannot continue due to circumstances, (online) alternatives may be organized.

Course objectives

The aim of this course is to give students an understanding of how major world powers have managed their relationships and competing interests while crafting a stable system that allows them to pursue their own goals. We will investigate aspects of cooperation and competition as they manifest in military, economic, and cultural means and see how these fields have shaped the global order and how economics, technology, and culture have influenced the interaction.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to...

explain the origins and evolution of the Great Power System.
understand what constitutes a “great power” and see how these countries have interacted with one another over the centuries throughout the spectrum of war and peace.
be able to explain why and how over time countries move into and out of “great power” status and how the individual interests of Great Powers influence the way the system works.
understand the differences between universalist aspirations and state equality.
understand concepts of “soft power,” economic power, and diplomacy as these relate to ongoing competition between the Great Powers and how those Powers in turn relate to the rest of the world.

Prerequisites

Students should have a general interest in and basic knowledge of global world history and politics.

A minimum number of 8 students is required for the course to take place.

Recommended reading

Smith, David A. "A New Force at Sea: George Dewey and the Rise of the American Navy," Naval Institute Press, April 2023.
Kissinger, Henry. "World Order" (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), ISBN 978- 014327710, paperback.
Wright, Thomas. "The Return to a Great Power System was Inevitable," Atlantic, September 2018.
Shih-yueh Yang. "Power Transition, Balance of Power, and the Rise of China, A Theoretical Reflection about Rising Great Powers," China Review, vol. 13, no. 2, fall 2013.
Schroeder, Paul. "The 'Balance of Power' in Europe," 1815-1871, Naval War College Review, vol., 27, no. 5, March-April 1975.

HIS2002

Period 6

26 Jun 2024 - 12 Jul 2024

ECTS credits:

6.0

Instruction language:

English

Coordinator:

[S. van der Laan](#)

Teaching methods:

Assignment(s), Lecture(s), Paper(s), Presentation(s), Research, Work in subgroups, Working visit(s)

Assessment methods:

Assignment, Attendance, Final paper, Participation, Presentation, Written exam

Keywords:

**History ■ World History ■ Diplomacy ■ International Relations ■ War and Peace ■ Globalization
■ Economics ■ Global Powers ■ International Organizations**

Days:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday