



PEPPERDINE
School of Public Policy

Special Topics Course Descriptions Fall 2026

Note: MPP 617.01 Designing and Writing Research Proposals (3 units) with [Marlon Graf](#) is strongly recommended/required for those students desiring to pursue an individual capstone. Those that do not will be required to submit a detailed research proposal (such as the one to be prepared in MPP 617) to be allowed into the capstone (see [Capstone Notice for MPP Students](#)). MPP 617 can count for one of the four specializations: Economics, American Politics, International Relations, or State and Local Policy. **Note: this class is suited well for those students interested in grant-making, human subject research, and related fields.**

MPP 647.01 Seminar in Political Issues: Sports Diplomacy (3 units)

[Steve Bilakovics](#)

***American Politics or International Relations
In-Person, Malibu Campus***

This course explores the impact of sports on international relations. What role has and might international sporting events like the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup, athlete and coach ambassadorships, and the growing reach of major American and international sports leagues and brands play in global politics and public diplomacy? Analyzed through theoretical frameworks from realism to liberal internationalism, and in the light of case studies ranging from the Cold War confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union to the present, we'll examine, among other topics, how sports promotes peace and drives conflict, projects "soft power" and advances policy-interests and prestige, serves as a tool of propaganda and a locus of greed and corruption, strengthens alliances and opens relationships between competitor-nations, and advances human rights and fosters development and humanitarian action. We'll also assess the political, diplomatic, and security challenges and opportunities presented by America's upcoming "mega-decade of sports" as it hosts both the Summer and Winter Olympics, the World Cup, and other major events.

MPP 647.02 Seminar in Political Issues: 20th Century Communism (3 units)

[Abbylin Sellers](#)

***American Politics or International Relations
In-Person, Malibu Campus***

"20th Century Communism" is classified as a "great works" course. The Latin word for "great work" is magnum opus, an honorable demarcation that is reserved for the peak achievements of mankind, whether they are artistic, literary, or even musical; yet, what is a great work?

On the most basic level a great work is not something that we have to reason to; it is something that is self-evident to the eye, the ear, or the mind. Speaking strictly of literary achievements, whether that of Homer's *Odyssey*, Dante's *Inferno*, or Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, all of these great works share in common authors who possess and express a profundity of thought about the most important questions of life: Is there a God? What is the purpose behind human existence? What is proper human conduct? What then of *Witness*? Chambers' *Witness* most likely will never be hailed as an achievement on the same plane as Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare, but Chambers takes part in the genre of great works because he possesses an acute, almost terrifying, insight into human nature and God. On its face, *Witness* reads like any other spy novel: conspiracy, mystery, sinister motives, murder, and investigative drama. Chambers was a communist spy in 1930s America, but later defected and exposed several American government officials who were engaged in communist activities subversive of the American government. In a sensational spectacle before a congressional committee, Chambers' testimony led to the conviction of Alger Hiss, a high-ranking American official who oversaw the establishment of the United Nations. These events are all chronicled and true, but the book is much more than that. *Witness* is a story about a war of faiths: Communism (atheism) vs. Freedom (God). The human soul, as Chambers portrays it, is a violent battleground where the evil of atheism wars with faith in the holy, Christian God.

Chambers explores and explains the philosophy and practicality of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Communism. He also speaks to the redemption of freedom and God. *Witness* is history, philosophy, and theology told through the autobiographical narrative of Whittaker Chambers. Although his *Witness* is one of the forgotten great works of the 20th century, it is crucial to understanding the schism in the American government and country during the late 1940s.

This course will provide students with a comprehensive study of the politics of Communism during the 1930s and 1940s via the framework of Whittaker Chambers work, *Witness*. This will be done in tandem by studying the historical rise of the communist state from the Bolshevik Revolution and birth of the Soviet Union, to examining Communism's reach throughout the 20th century, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the declassification of the Soviet VENONA Files.

MPP 668.01 Seminar in International Relations: Cybersecurity Policy (3 units)

[Andy Keiser](#)

American Politics or International Relations

Online with Three In-Person Malibu Classes

This seminar course will provide students exposure to the history and key policy issues related to cybersecurity, including the legal authorities and obligations of both the government and the private sector with respect to protecting computer systems and networks, as well as the national security aspects of the cyber domain including authorities related to offensive activities in cyberspace. The course will include a survey of federal laws, executive orders, and regulations related to surveillance, cyber intrusions by private and nation-state actors, data breaches, and privacy and civil liberties matters, among other things. The course will also explore the legislative and technology landscape in this dynamic area and will provide students with opportunities to discuss cutting-edge issues at the intersection of technology, security, and policy. The approach will be historical and topical. The history of signals intelligence and cybersecurity offers a surprising number of illustrative cases and themes—many of which can now be examined in detail using official records and contrarian views, and can be compared with analogues across nations and time periods.

MPP 668.02 Seminar in International Relations: Leadership and Diplomacy (3 units)

[Michael Keane](#)

International Relations Only

In-Person, Malibu Campus

This course has the objective of training students to achieve excellence in ethical leadership. We will distill the ingredients of successful leadership by studying a broad range of individuals from a variety of backgrounds including politics, the military, religion and civil rights. The course will examine the various theories of leadership, including the great man theory, great wave theory and traits theory, and dissect their strengths and weaknesses. We will also explore the narrative theme of the “hero’s journey” and the ideal of leaders and heroes from Greek and Roman mythology to Marvel Superheroes. Additionally, we will explore the critical role that leadership plays during times of crisis, both international and domestic, by reviewing a series of such historical incidents. Guest lecturers, from diverse backgrounds such as Navy Seals and entrepreneurs, will also be invited to share their own experiences and insights into leadership.

MPP 687.01 Seminar in Regional Politics: Public Budgeting and Financial Planning (3 units)

[Rowan Miranda](#)

State and Local Policy Only

Hybrid: In-Person, Malibu Campus for two sessions and Zoom for 13 sessions

This course focuses on the tools and techniques to develop and execute budgets and financial plans in the public sector. Course content is focused mostly on state and local governments, but we will also cover the federal budget process. Students will develop skills in constructing, analyzing, and using budget and accounting information. Topics covered include operating and capital budget development, expenditure and revenue forecasting, bond markets, evaluating fiscal stress, budget balancing strategies and financial management technology.

MPP 687.02 Seminar in Regional Politics: Leading in the Age of AI: Technology, Governance & the Public Good (3 units)

[Peter Pirnejad](#)

State and Local Policy or American Politics

In-Person, Malibu Campus

Artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, and digital platforms are already reshaping how governments serve communities, make decisions, and earn public trust. This course explores how AI and emerging technologies are transforming public service—examining both the extraordinary opportunities they present and the ethical, equity, and governance challenges they demand leaders be prepared to navigate. Students will leave with the analytical frameworks and policy judgment to lead confidently at the intersection of technology and the public good.