

**Candidacy Examination – IR Major  
May 2014  
Prepared for William McCracken**

**Answer one question from each of the following three Parts. You must submit your answers to Courtney Sanders, copied to Alex Thompson, by 5 p.m.**

**Part I. Theory. Answer one of the following questions.**

1. Thinking Systematically about Systemic Change

IR scholars have long complained that we do not have good theories for thinking systematically about systemic change – historical case studies yes, but nothing that would allow us to tie these studies together in a broader explanatory framework. In recent years however two candidates for such a framework have emerged: evolutionary theory and self-organization theory (the latter often implemented in the form of Agent-Based Modeling). Yet these two approaches are also in many respects quite different and not easily reconciled, leaving us with the prospect that we will be just as confused about systemic change as we were before they came along.

Compare and contrast evolutionary and self-organizational reasoning as they have been applied to the international system. What assumptions do they make about the nature of the system, the drivers of change, and its dynamics? To what extent do these assumptions lead to different conclusions about the direction of systemic change, and why? Finally, how should young IR scholars who are interested in getting into the study of systemic change think about choosing between them?

2. The Value of Theoretical Paradigms

The study of international relations has traditionally been built around broad theoretical paradigms such as “realism,” “liberalism,” and “constructivism.” Yet some literature on the philosophy of social science contends that general theories of social behavior are beyond our grasp and that social scientists should narrow their focus to search for specific and context dependent causal mechanisms. To what extent do you believe that the effort to build broad paradigms has helped or hindered our growth of knowledge about international politics? Assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of these two theory-building approaches.

**Part II. Methods. Answer one of the following questions.**

1. Network Theory

Recent years have witnessed a surge in the number of IR books and articles that utilize network theory. In what general ways is network theory useful for understanding international relations, and in what ways is it not? How might it usefully be improved to fit the needs of IR scholars?

2. When Theory Follows Method

A common critique of quantitative studies of international relations is that theory follows method rather than vice-versa—once we learned regression, our theories suddenly became linear and additive. How would you rectify this situation? Name one example of a theory or phenomenon in international relations that is poorly captured by the quantitative methodologies that we commonly use and discuss a quantitative technique—imported or invented—that you could use to model it. You don't need to create a new method to answer this question, but you should give a sense of what such a method's major characteristics would be.

**Part III. Security. Answer one of the following questions.**

2. Nuclear Proliferation

Why should anyone care about nuclear proliferation? Hasn't deterrence worked for almost 70 years now? Haven't Indo-Pakistani relations improved since both went nuclear? Why are not Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer right? Under what conditions would nuclear proliferation be welcome?

3. Civil and Transnational Conflict

Recent work on military conflict has increasingly focused on the study of civil and transnational military conflict in addition to the more traditional work on international conflict. What theories or empirical findings about international conflict do you believe are likely to be most relevant to the study of civil and transnational conflict? Why? What kinds of theories of international conflict are likely to be least helpful in understanding civil and transnational violence?