Students interested in taking International Relations (IR) as one of their two major fields should:

1. Take the IR course sequence (PS 410A, 410B and 400C*).

*Students designating International Relations as their second subfield do not need to take PS 400C as part of their IR field requirements if they will take it as part of their Comparative Politics or American Politics subfield requirements. PS 400C should be taken only once.

The course sequence has three main objectives:

- To give students a brief introduction to the large academic literature on international politics, with a view to helping them to prepare for the synthesis and analysis they will be required to carry out in the IR field exam. This is done primarily in PS 410A and B. Typically, the literature on international security will be stressed in 410A and international political economy in 410B, though content may switch depending on the faculty teaching the courses in a given year. PS 400C covers additional topics, at the discretion of the instructor.

- To introduce students to a variety of frontier research problems that animate current work in the field, so that they can see and evaluate examples of how empirical research is actually conducted rather than just commenting on “the classics” or reading pure theory. Thus course syllabi typically mix “classics” and recent articles and books that illustrate the concerns, problems, and potentials of current research in IR.

- To help students initiate one or more of their own empirical research projects, to gain practical experience in elaborating a theoretical argument, drawing out testable implications, assembling and analyzing relevant evidence, and presenting the work in stages before colleagues. In PS 400C, students develop an original research project, generally culminating in a full-length paper.

The research-related goals of the sequence constrain the instructors’ ability to provide a really thorough survey of IR literature over the three quarters of PS 410A, B and 400C. We expect that students taking the IR field exam will have read extensively in the literatures of IR theory, security studies, and international political economy beyond the specific
materials assigned for these classes. To assist with this task the syllabi for these courses will provide suggestions of recommended extra reading that IR students should most likely be familiar with prior to taking the exam.

2. Take the IR field exam

This is given on or around the second week of Autumn quarter and on or around the seventh week of Spring Quarter each year. We recommend that students take the IR exam in the Autumn quarter following the year in which they complete the PS 410A, B and 400C sequence, to give ample opportunity to read and re-read, think, and assimilate the literature over the Summer. Copies of past exams are available from the Graduate Program Administrator. We recommend that students planning to take the exam meet with the Field Convenor to ask for advice about how to prepare and what a strong exam looks like.

3. (Possibly) write a field paper

Field papers are due in students’ sixth Quarter, and some will want to write a paper on a question that might be considered “IR.” As noted above, the PS 410A, B and 400C sequence and colloquium provide structure, guidance, and multiple sources of feedback for students writing IR field papers. Field papers are assessed by two faculty readers, usually in one of the student’s major fields. In Winter Quarter of the student’s 2nd year, the student consults with faculty to determine which two faculty will read the paper. The two readers will be reported to the Graduate Administrator by the end of Winter quarter using the Field Paper Readers and Approval Form. By the end of Spring Quarter the faculty readers must indicate their approval of the paper by again signing the Field Paper Readers and Approval Form. Students then return the signed approval form and a copy of the approved paper to the Graduate Administrator.

4. Avail themselves of other IR learning and research opportunities

Beyond the core PS 410A, B and 400C sequence, the department sometimes offers specialized seminars on selected topics in international relations. And beyond PS 400C, there are numerous opportunities in a range of workshops, inside the department and also in Stanford research centers, for students to present their own research and to hear presentations by outside speakers. Of particular importance is the Workshop in International Relations (PS 411A, B), which meets in the Autumn and Winter quarters. This workshop features presentations by students, Stanford faculty, and faculty from other leading institutions and is an important forum for students to engage with new and exciting IR research. The workshop offers students an opportunity to further integrate themselves into a professional community comprised of Stanford faculty, scholars from other institutions, and most importantly, student peers at all stages of doctoral work. IR students are strongly encouraged to enroll in and attend the IR Workshop regularly.