

Political Economy of International Migration

POSC 136S | Winter 2026 | MW, 2–3:20 PM | Student Success Center, Room 308

Professor: Steven Liao

Teaching Assistant: Eunseong Oh (eunseong.oh@email.ucr.edu)

Syllabus Version: December 29, 2025

Contact Information

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Office Hours

Wed.

11–1 PM

(Email to set up Zoom/in-person meeting)

Description

This upper-level undergraduate course examines the political and economic causes and consequences of international migration. The first half of the course covers the politics of immigration in receiving countries. We will examine the formation of public opinion on immigration, models of interest group politics, and the formation of immigration policy. The second half of the course covers the effects and politics of emigration for sending countries. We will examine issues regarding brain drain, remittances, and diaspora engagement policies. We will also address the human rights aspects of migration, including policies towards refugees and asylum seekers. Course readings and lectures draw on major research in political science, economics, and sociology. The goal is to provide students both the theoretical tools and substantive information necessary to understand and analyze policy issues that now confront immigrant-receiving and migrant-sending states.

By the end of this course, students will know:

- why, where, and how people move
- the effects of migration in both sending and receiving countries
- how policymakers respond to these effects

Prerequisite

There is no formal prerequisite and the course will introduce all necessary economic concepts. Students are however recommended to take this course after they have completed introductory courses in international relations and economic theory. Students with this background will find the class more rewarding because they will already be familiar with key concepts and thus will more readily grasp the synergies between international migration and politics.

Exams, Assignments, and Grading

Take-Home Exam 1 (25%) and 2 (25%)

Each exam includes one long essay question that will require (1) a clear argument, and (2) the synthesis of lecture and course material across multiple topics to support the argument. Both exams will be open book and open notes. Working with others (or AI) on the exam is prohibited.

Essay answers must be within 2.5-pages long, typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, and have 1 inch page margins. Students can cite lecture materials and outside research (peer-reviewed articles, university press books, authoritative media sources, etc.). Citations should be in a standard format (e.g. MLA, APA, Chicago). The bibliography does not count towards the page limit, and should be on a separate page at the end of the essay.

Students will have 4 days to complete the exam on their own. Exam 1 is due on **Feb. 8** (Sunday) by 11:59 PM and Exam 2 is due on **Mar. 15** (Sunday) by 11:59 PM.

Essay answers must be uploaded to Canvas and checked by turnitin—a plagiarism detection system—before the due date and time. Essays that are turned in 1 minute to 24 hours after their due date will be penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade (i.e. 3.33 percentage points). Essays will be marked down a full letter grade for each additional 24 hour period they are late. For example, late 2 days ($-1\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade, or -13.33 points), late 3 days ($-2\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade, or 23.33 points), etc.

International Migration Report (35%)

Students must complete a five-page memo that analyzes current events on the politics of international migration in one country of their choice (**excluding the United States**) using concepts from the course materials. Please see the separate memo guidelines document that describes content requirements in detail. Students should confirm their country choice with their TA by **Feb. 6** (Fri.). Reports should follow the same format requirements as the exams.

Reports are due on **Mar. 4** (W) by 11:59 pm and should also be uploaded to Canvas and checked by turnitin. The same late penalties for the exams apply for the report.

Section Participation (15%)

Discussion sections will start the first week (**Jan. 5–9**). The goal of discussion sections will be to discuss the week's lectures and readings in more detail. TAs will circulate section policy statements clarifying how section participation will be assessed (e.g. attendance, class participation) and specific guidelines for the submission of papers.

Lecture Attendance (bonus 3%)

To encourage and reward students' attendance and participation during lectures, Professor Liao will randomly take attendance three times during the quarter. Each attendance will add one full point to students' final grades.

Grading Policy

In case of grading disputes students must meet with their TA within **one week** of receiving the contested grade to request clarification. If the TA's clarification is not satisfactory students may appeal the grade to the professor within one week of the TA meeting. The student must email to the TA and Professor Liao a 500-word written rationale for the appeal. If Professor Liao accepts the appeal he will independently assess the work and assign a new grade that may higher, lower, or the same as the original grade.

Readings

All reading materials are either hyperlinked in the syllabus or available on the course Canvas site. Files posted to Canvas will be under "Course Materials" and are named according to the authors' last name and the year of publication.

Course Policies

Lecture Mode

Following university policies, Professor Liao will now deliver all lectures in person. Zoom participation will only be granted in exceptional circumstances (prolonged emergencies or illness). To seek approval, students must email Professor Liao and copy their TA. Students will be required to provide documentation of their severe circumstance.

Disruptive behavior or discriminatory speech during lectures will not be tolerated.

Academic Integrity

All students are subject to the university's policies and procedures on academic integrity in all aspects of their course participation. If students have questions about any aspect of the policies, they should consult Professor Liao for guidance. Students should take particular care to adhere to standard practices for the citation of published work. Plagiarism is a deeply serious offense. Presenting the work of others as your own is strictly prohibited and will result, at minimum, in a failing grade for the class. For further details see: <http://conduct.ucr.edu/policies/academicintegrity.html>

Deadline Extensions

Please let Professor Liao and your TA know as soon as possible if you are encountering any serious challenges so that we can help. Exam or paper deadline extensions will be granted under severe circumstances (e.g., illness or emergency). However, job/internship interviews and deadlines in other courses do not qualify. Extension requests should be emailed to Professor Liao with the student's TA cc'ed at least **12 hours** in advance. Students will be required to provide documentation of their circumstance (e.g. note from Student Health or an Association Dean). Students are reminded that they are subject to the university's Standards of Conduct (<http://conduct.ucr.edu/policies/standards.html>) when requesting an extension.

Accommodation

Every effort will be made to accommodate students with disabilities. Please contact Professor Liao or the TA as early as possible about your needs, and we will treat the matter confidentially, within university policy, and with the resources provided by Student Special Services (<http://specialservices.ucr.edu/disabilities/>).

Student Needs

For additional supportive resources, see Student Health Services (<https://studenthealth.ucr.edu/>), Counseling & Psychological Services (<https://counseling.ucr.edu/>), and R’Pantry (<https://basicneeds.ucr.edu/rpantry>).

Course Schedule and Readings

Part I: Immigration

Course Overview: Why Study Migration?

January 5 (M)

Course syllabus

Freeman, Richard B. 2006. “People Flows in Globalization.” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* Vol. 20(2): 145–170.

Why People Move?

January 7 (W)

January 12 (M)

Massey, Douglas S. et al. 1993. “Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal.” *Population and Development Review* 19(3): 431–66.

Helms, Benjamin and Leblang, David. 2019. “Global Migration: Causes and Consequences.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. p. 1–11 *only*.

The Politics of Immigrants in the Labor Market

January 14 (W)

Smith, Noah. 2020. “Why Immigration Doesn’t Reduce Wages.”

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2017. *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. “Introduction” 197–210, “Natural Experiments” 222–224, “Key Messages and Conclusions” 264–268.

Freeman, Gary P. 1995. “Modes of Immigration Politics in Liberal Democratic States.” *International Migration Review* 29(4): 881–902.

Firms and Immigration

January 19 (M) **Martin Luther King Day—No Class**

January 21 (W)

Peters, Margaret E. 2015. “Open Trade, Closed Borders Immigration in the Era of Globalization.” *World Politics* 67(1): 114–54.

The Politics of Immigrants and Welfare

January 26 (M)

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2017. *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. p. 323–358.

Hanson, Gordon H., Kenneth Scheve, and Matthew J. Slaughter. 2007. “Public Finance and Individual Preferences Over Globalization Strategies.” *Economics & Politics* 19(1): 1–33. *Skip Section 4.*

Nativism

January 28 (W)

Higham, John, 1955. “Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925.” Rutgers University Press. Chapter 1, p. 3–11 *only*.

Huntington, S. P. 2004. “The Hispanic Challenge.” *Foreign Policy* 141(2): 30–45.

Regulating Immigration: Entry Systems

February 2 (M)

Wasem, R. E., and C. C. Haddal. 2007. “Point Systems for Immigrant Selection: Options and Issues.” In *Congressional Research Service Reports for Congress*.

Regulating Immigration: Citizenship and Rights

February 4 (W) **Exam 1 Distributed at 11:59 PM, due on Feb. 8 (Sun.) by 11:59 PM**

Weil, Patrick. 2001. “Access to Citizenship: A Comparison of Twenty-Five Nationality Laws.” In *Citizenship Today: Global Perspectives and Practices*. Edited by Aleinikoff T. Alexander and Klusmeyer Douglas. p.17–35.

Part II: Emigration

Why Do States Allow People to Leave?

February 9 (M)

Fitzgerald, David. 2006. “Inside the Sending State: The Politics of Mexican Emigration Control.” *The International Migration Review* 40(2): 259–93.

Brain Drain

February 11 (W)

Gibson, John, and David McKenzie. 2011. “Eight Questions about Brain Drain.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25(3): 107–128.

Remittances

February 16 (M) **Presidents’ Day—No Class**

February 18 (W)

Kapur, Devesh. 2004. “Remittances: The New Development Mantra.” *G-24 Discussion Paper Series*. United Nations.

How Migration Affects Trade and Investment?

February 23 (M)

Leblang, David. 2010. “Familiarity Breeds Investment: Diaspora Networks and International Investment.” *American Political Science Review* 104(3): 584–600.

How do Sending States Engage Their Diaspora?

February 25 (W)

Leblang, David. 2017. “Harnessing the Diaspora.” *Comparative Political Studies* 50(1): 75–101.

Refugee and Asylum: Definitions and History

March 2 (M)

Jastram, Kate, and Marilyn Achiron. 2001. “Refugee Protection: A Guide to International Refugee Law.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Chapter 1 *only*.

Watch: [The Donut King](#)

Asylum Proceedings in the US

March 4 (W) **International Migration Report Due by 11:59 PM**

Philip G. Schrag, Andrew I. Schoenholtz, Jaya Ranji-Nogales. 2007. *Refugee Roulette: Disparities in Asylum Adjudication*, 60 *Stan. L. Rev.* 295–412.

Watch: [POV: Well-Founded Fear](#)

The Politics of Refugee and Asylum Policy

March 9 (M)

Bansak, Kirk and Ferwerda, Jeremy and Hainmueller, Jens and Dillon, Andrea and Hangartner, Dominik and Lawrence, Duncan and Weinstein, Jeremy. 2018. “Improving Refugee Integration Through Data-driven Algorithmic Assignment.” *Science* 359:6373: 325–329.

The Future of International Migration

March 11 (W) **Exam 2** Distributed at 11:59 PM, due on March 15 (Sun.) by 11:59 PM