POLS 333: Topics in Global Politics (WI)
   Japan by Rail
   3 credits/45 contact hours
   No prerequisites

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Course Description
Students of Japanese politics are well acquainted with the power of the “iron triangle” (Japan’s bureaucracy, Liberal Democratic Party and business) but probably have not spent too much time thinking about railways, the other iron that is central to Japanese politics, economics, and culture. Railways play a central role in everyday life in Japan. We will spend this semester investigating national and international politics in Japan using rail as a lens. Issues of global and local significance intersect in train stations and along rail lines. We will cover local urban planning issues such as location of rails and stop and the significance of these on community life and local development, the accessibility of rail travel as a central aspect of disability politics, how the episode of domestic terrorism by Aum Shinrikiyo in the mid-1990s influenced the understanding of terrorism and other security threats, how rail impacts international Japan’s international political economic and diplomatic relations through contracts awarded to build high-speed rail in India and those lost to China to build high-speed rail in Indonesia. We will also explore questions of national identity imbedded in the use of rail in Japan’s colonial projects in Manchuria, Korea, and Taiwan and how this identity is threatened by recent collisions attributed to the extreme focus on punctuality in Japanese culture and society.

Student Learning Objectives and Outcomes
Students will (be able to):
1. analyze and explain the significance of rail in Japanese politics, economics, and society.
2. assess peer writing assignments.
3. give constructive feedback to peers on writing assignments.
4. develop drafting essays as part of their writing practice.
5. work in diverse groups to achieve a common goal.
6. reflect on cultural identity and understand how it shapes experiences.
7. use class materials as a framework to understand their experiences.
8. gain confidence as an independent and conscience international traveler.

Books and Materials
Required:
Stanford University Press.

Other Resources:
Naotaka Hirota. The Lure of Japan’s Railways.
All other reading will be provided electronically.

**Assignments and Grading**

**Attendance (5%)**
You will receive full points by attending class. Please arrive on time. If you arrive more than ten minutes late or leave more than ten minutes early, you will not receive credit for attending.

**Participation (15%)**
Participation in this course is a significant part of your final grade. Students are required to actively participate in class discussions; you will be given in-class assignments including “five minute papers” that count as part of your participation. These in class assignments are designed for you to demonstrate your mastery of the reading for the day, to analyze readings and explain them to others. At some point during each class period you might be asked to write for five minutes on a question related to the day’s topic and the reading. Your written answers will provide a basis for your participation in class discussion. I also consider both the quantity and quality of your contributions, whether they are meaningful to the development of the class discussion, and demonstrate sustained engagement over the course of the semester. To earn full participation points you must regularly contribute to every class discussion and demonstrate that you have done the reading. Asking questions, offering insight, critique and analysis are all ways to participate. We will also undertake a mapping exercise over the duration of this course. Each class we will begin by discussing trips we’ve taken by rail during the week. When these trips are outside of our normal commute, each participant will be asked to discuss there they went, their route (with specific attention to which modes of transportation, costs, length of the trip), any encounters they had along the way or at their destination, etc. The mapping exercise will encourage each of us to seek out new experiences and make the most of our time in Japan; it is meant to integrate class work and experience.

“Five Minute Papers”— At the beginning of class you might be asked to write an informal one page thought piece on a question that will require you to reflect on the course reading, discussion, and lecture in a structured way. The answers to these questions will form the basis of our class discussions. Having time to write down your thoughts will allow you to practice writing and make it easier for you to participate in discussion. This informal writing activity will enable students to experience writing without the stress and anxiety that often accompanies the start of a formal writing assignment. I will usually give students feedback on their thought piece in the course of the discussion, but I will occasionally collect them to get a better sense of how well you are grasping the material. Most students usually find that they have much more to say on a given topic than they originally thought and they often ask for more time to write so don’t worry about whether you’ll be able to fill one page. Just start writing!

**Short Papers**
There will be three short papers during the semester. Drafts of these assignments will be ungraded but they will count as an in-class assignment. Below you will find brief

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descriptions of each assignment; a more detailed assignment sheet will be distributed in class. The papers will be graded on mechanics, format, organization, style, substance, and logic. We will discuss this further in class.

To facilitate the writing process, you will workshop a draft of each paper in class by a small group of your peers. You will rewrite the paper based on those comments then you will submit the rewrite to the professor for a grade and written comments. Working in this way will give you an opportunity to help each other improve and allow you to improve your writing through the processing of drafting then rewriting. There will be individual meetings with the professor during the course to discuss issues specifically related to writing.

The size of the writing workshop groups will depend on the number of students in the class. You will be responsible for submitting copies of your work to your group members the class before the in-class workshop is scheduled.

Railway Museum Analysis Essay 5 pages (20%)
This five-page paper will be based on our visit to the Railway Museum. You will receive a detailed assignment sheet and essay on how to do museum analysis in advance of this trip. You will workshop the draft of your essay in class and turn it in for a grade after revising it based on comments from your peers.

Train and Train Station Observation Essay 5 pages (20%)
This five-page essay will be based on your observations on a train and in an associated train station. Using public transportation is a great way to learn about everyday life, culture, and society in Japan. Train stations and their surroundings are hubs of activity. In large stations, we experience living on “different levels” as shops can extend from several sub-basements to several floors above ground. Each station area has its own character and all stations, even the smallest local ones offer basics such as food and drink.

Rail Trip Plan 7-10 pages (20%)
This essay is a trip that you plan from beginning to end. It can be a day trip, a weekend trip or anything in-between. You should write for an audience unfamiliar with Japan and the rail system. Imagine that your essay will be published in a travel guide or on a travel blog. Your essay should include details of how to get there including getting to the station (walk, taxi, bus), which ticket to buy and how much it costs, stops to make along the way and the ultimate destination. You should write in detail about the sites worth seeing (or ones to avoid), including anything of historical, cultural, or political importance. Make note of possible pitfalls such as mistakes in train or train platform. You should also include (as much as possible) information on the history of the rail line(s) used to get to your destination. It might be possible to do this assignment in pairs or as a small group of three people with prior approval. You should avoid trips to the well-known attractions in the area such as Nikko, Kamakura, etc. You do not have to actually take the trip but there will be plenty of opportunities for you to explore by rail this semester and you are
encouraged to base your assignment on a trip that you take. A detailed assignment sheet will be provided in class.

Presentation (20%)
In class presentation of Rail Trip Plan. Detailed assignment sheet will be provided in class.

Field Trips
Railway Museum (Tetsudō Hakubutsukan)

Reading Schedule
Week 1 (Wednesday April 12)
Introductions/Discussion of Course Requirements

Week 2 History and Development (Wednesday April 19)

DUE WEEK 2: Complete Train and Train Station Observation

Week 3 History and Development (Wednesday April 26)


DUE WEEK 3: Draft of train/station observation essay due to writing group/partner

Week 4 Urbanization/In Class Writing Workshop (Wednesday May 3)


Week 5 Film (Wednesday May10)
Film: Densha otoko (Train Man), Murakami Shosuke, 2005.

DUE WEEK 5: Revised observation essay to be turned in for grade

Week 6, 7, 8 Gender and Sexuality (Wednesday May 17, 24, 31)


Week 9 & 10 Privatization, Deregulation, and Labor/In Class Writing Workshop (Wednesday June 7 & 14)


Week 11 Trip to Railway Museum/Individual Meetings with Professor (Wednesday June 21)

Week 12 Accessibility, Health, and Lifestyle (Wednesday June 28)


“Japan’s Suicide Rate Rises Among Young,” The Register Guard, May 15, 2009.


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DUE WEEK 12: Draft of museum analysis due to peer writing groups/partners. Drafts will be workshoped in class this week.

Week 13 Fear and Insecurity (Wednesday July 5)
Film: “A” (Tatsuya Mori, 1998)


DUE WEEK 13: Revised museum analysis should be turned in for grade.

Week 14 Food Culture (Wednesday July 12)

DUE WEEK 14: Draft of Rail Trip Plan due to writing groups/partners. Drafts will be workshoped in class this week.

Week 15 In Class Writing Workshop/Film (Wednesday July 19)
Film: Desu Noto (Death Note) Kaneko Shunsuke, 2006.

Week 16
Presentations
Wrap up & Review
DUE WEEK 15: Revised Rail Trip Plan to be turned in for a grade