

**Course Assignment: Why Trade Matters?**  
**RPOS 383: American Foreign Policy**  
**Instructor: Keith A. Preble**

This is an assignment I have given to students in my US foreign policy courses as well as courses on US politics. If I were to teach a general course on international relations, I would use this assignment (I have shared this assignment with colleagues who have taught the Introduction to International Politics first year course at UAAlbany, as well).

**Premise:**

Do you know where goods come from? What about the everyday things that you use or consume? How much do these goods cost and what affects how much do they cost? By “come from,” I mean where goods originate, keeping in mind that your local supermarket or Amazon gets its merchandise from some place.

By “goods,” I mean anything we buy and consume (excluding services). Goods can be licit (legal) or illicit (less than legal). Even goods that are somewhat “circumspect” are affected by trade or those goods that you probably shouldn’t be buying if you’re under 21. For example, how do economic sanctions, trade barriers, and economics affect the price of vodka or the beer you drink? Or even the marijuana you may (or may not) consume? Even goods that are made locally or domestically are affected by trade.

As you write the paper (see instructions below), think about ways in which foreign policies developed by countries impact the price and availability of these goods. Also, think about what would you do if you could no longer have access to this good or might be unable to replace it should the item your currently possess were to break, get stolen, or become lost? Do substitutions for your good exist? What would you do if you lost access to this good? How might you respond to these changes? What are your options as a consumer, voter, and taxpayer to the changing variability of the good/item you are profiling?

For this assignment, choose something that you have purchased, plan to purchase, or regularly consume and write a short paper following the prompt below (2-page max). The assignment consists of two sections.

You must complete both sections; each section should be a maximum of 1 page.

## **Section 1: Trade good profile**

*Feel free to use bullet points for section 1*

- Where this good comes from (its provenance)
- How much it costs on average and how much it cost you
- What do you think affects the cost of this good
- What substitutions exist for the good/item in question? Keep in mind that substitution may be necessary if the good you've profiled is a) now too expensive to purchase or b) is no longer available in your market.

## **Section 2: Short Essay**

*Now that you have a profile of this good, think about how the price and availability of this good might be affected by politics and other social factors. Then answer one or two of the following prompts:*

- If the good you have profiled suddenly became unavailable, what would you do?
- Is the substitution you identified suitable for you needs? Why or why not? Does a substitution even exist?
- Would having to give up this good for a substitute impact your politics? If so, why?
- If it does impact your politics, who might you blame for the changes in supply and/or price and what actions might you take to punish (or reward) your government?

Please submit your paper on Blackboard by October 31, 2021. It is imperative that you complete the assignment as we will debrief and discuss the assignment, profile our goods, and engage in a lengthy class discussion based on your responses.

## **Class Discussion Questions:**

*These may appear on the final exam. Even if you don't answer or participate actively in class for a particular question, please make sure you review and understand how you might answer them.*

1. Do you think policymakers consider the impacts of their foreign policy decisions on consumer spending? Why or why not?
2. What goods are the most affected by foreign policy?
3. What goods are the least affected by foreign policy?
4. As a consumer and voter, would you displeasure with losing access to your good change how you think about government or politics or impact how you might vote?
5. Did you learn anything about your good that surprised you that you were unaware of previously?