



Academic
WorldQuest

Topics and Narrative Descriptions
Last Updated: August 2024

The final version of these topics, along with resources, will be published in the Academic WorldQuest Study Guide in Fall 2024. These can be used as preparatory guidance until then.

The USA and Foreign Languages

U.S. language education policy aims to enhance students' global competencies, improve their communication skills, and foster cultural understanding. Historically, the focus has shifted from emphasizing a few major languages such as Spanish, German, and French to encouraging proficiency in a broader array of languages to meet global demands. With increasing recognition of the importance of multilingualism in a globalized world, recent policies often emphasize early language acquisition, integration with technology, and the promotion of bilingual education to prepare students for a multilingual, interconnected world.

Space and National Security

Space has become a crucial domain in U.S. national security. As technology advances, there is an increasing focus on protecting space-based assets from potential threats including cyber attacks, space debris, and adversarial actions from other nations. The establishment of the U.S. Space Force in 2019 underscored America's commitment to safeguarding space as a critical component of national security, by not only defending space infrastructure but also developing capabilities to ensure the U.S. can maintain its strategic advantages in this evolving arena.

Gender, Peace and Security

Increasingly, political theorists are researching policy frameworks to promote justice by prioritizing needs and voices of marginalized groups through a gender-sensitive lens. This can take the form of ensuring diverse voices and perspectives are included in foreign policy decisions, recognizing the interconnectedness of forms of discrimination and inequality, and focusing on human well-being rather than just national security. It has led to innovative approaches in diplomacy, development, and conflict resolution. At the same time, such approaches have also faced criticism regarding the challenges of translating these larger ideals into effective policy actions.

Music and Globalization

Music has played a significant role in the process of globalization by transcending cultural and national boundaries, fostering cross-cultural exchange, and shaping global identity. Streaming platforms, social media, and digital downloads are making it ever-easier to reach worldwide audiences. Music can be a powerful tool for social change and political expression, addressing global issues, challenging cultural norms and provoking dialogue on important topics. Globalization through music not only enriches cultural diversity but also bridges gaps between different cultures and fosters a more interconnected world.

Indigenous Peacebuilding

Around the world, Indigenous peoples often live in contested border areas on the front lines of violent conflict, insurgency and organized crime. And with limited employment opportunities, Indigenous peoples are disproportionately recruited into armed groups. Meanwhile, traffickers and criminals target their lands for natural resources, ranging from violence from extractive industries operating illegally to the poaching of protected species and land theft. Yet despite these many risks and obstacles, Indigenous communities have consistently drawn on their traditions, culture and religious practices to resolve violence and build local peace. While often highly successful, these efforts are underappreciated by the peacebuilding community or ignored entirely in formal peace processes.

Critical Minerals in Africa

The United States is seeking to diversify its critical minerals supply chains to strengthen its economic and national security. Meanwhile, many African countries are aiming to develop critical mineral industries, taking economic advantage of the growing demand for their natural resources. The mining sector in Africa presents many challenges, however, including the potential for environmental destruction, labor abuses and even violent conflict due to weak governance. USIP experts are focusing on how the U.S. and its allies can better forge mutually beneficial critical mineral partnerships with African governments in the face of competition with China, which has been growing its presence on the African continent for decades.

Borders and Boundaries

When international borders do not match cultural boundaries, it can create a range of issues related to identity, governance, economics, social cohesion, and human rights. Some effects of this include cultural displacement, political and administrative challenges, economic disparities and inequality, and social tensions and conflicts. Addressing these issues requires nuanced approaches that consider both the political and cultural dimensions of the affected regions.

Focus Country: Mexico

The U.S.-Mexico relationship is shaped by a complex interplay of political and cultural interactions. Political issues like trade, immigration, and security are crucial, while cultural factors like shared history, cross-border communities, and cultural exchange significantly influence and enrich the relationship between the two nations. Against the backdrop of Presidential elections in both countries in 2024, the foreign and domestic policies of the two nations remain intertwined and influential in addressing both regional stability and global interests.

Great Decisions (GD)

GD is an annual program for informed civic discussion on critical international issues facilitated by the Foreign Policy Association (FPA), a member of the World Affairs Councils of America. Since 2024, we have chosen two topic areas from the eight yearly themes to include in Academic WorldQuest. FPA has not yet made the text of these articles available, but once released, they will be added to the topic descriptions below.

The Future of NATO and European Security

European security is more uncertain than it has been for decades. Putin's Russia has launched a war with Ukraine on its doorstep, and America's role as leader of NATO and security provider has been called into question with the failure of Congress to pass supplemental military support for Ukraine. What are Europe's options, and how might developments on both sides of Western Europe – in Ukraine and across the Atlantic – impact its choices? What are America's stakes in NATO and Europe's strategic dilemmas?

AI and American National Security

The AI revolution is the leading edge of a larger high-tech revolution which promises to transform the world. Experts argue that international cooperation is needed to expand the opportunities these new technologies hold while protecting societies from their dangers. What are the key policy debates in this area, and what are the opportunities and limits on global AI rules of the road? How will the AI revolution impact American national security? What are its policy options to secure the benefits of AI and guard against its dangers?

Current Events

The annual dive into the dynamic world of current events in the global space is designed not only to test your knowledge of recent developments across the world but also identify wider narrative arcs in these developments. The sources for this round and the questions you will be asked are designed to engage with diverse perspectives and news sources to sharpen your ability to critically analyze information. Understanding current events helps you make informed decisions, participate in discussions as young leaders, and choose how to act in your community.