GU POLITICS FELLOW – ERIN C. CONATON
DISCUSSION GROUP OUTLINE
POLITICS AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Discussion Group Synopsis
This discussion group will explore recent and current national security policy from the lens of American politics. It will also look closely at how national security issues are part of the debates within the 2018 midterm elections and heading into 2020. Case studies will be an important way of focusing discussion. The overall goal is to prepare today’s Hoyas to engage knowledgably on these issues as voters and professionals.

Week 1 – Intro to Politics and National Security—Do Politics Still Stop at the Water’s Edge?
Many Members of Congress and Presidential candidates used to support the idea that American leaders should be united in matters of foreign policy and national security. Was that ever really the case and what do the politics of foreign and national security policy look like today?

Week 2 – Foreign Policy by Tweet—Has President Trump Rewritten the Way the United States Engages the World?
Most professionals agree—for good or for ill—that President Trump has changed from the way American Presidents have typically dealt with foreign and national security policy. Our group will discuss whether this is on balance a way of engaging the American people below the typical “elite class” of policy professionals and/or an oversimplification of complex issues that often plays to people’s fears and biases. We’ll also look at current national security issues from a professional’s eye and talk about alternative ways to engage the American public on these important issues.

Week 3 – Civil-Military Relations—Military Service, Defense Policy, and Politics
This week, we’ll discuss several issues involving the U.S. military. What is the impact of having senior current and former general officers in executive-branch political positions? How does the wave of Afghan and Iraqi veterans in Congress affect national security policy? What are the defense issues that impact the American voter and U.S. relationships in the world? Why do these things matter?

Week 4 – Why Should We Care About the Diplomacy and Development Today?
This week, we’ll look at the implications of the downsizing of the State and USAID workforce. Since President Trump took office, the ranks of senior diplomats and development professionals have been significantly reduced. Does it matter? And, if it does, what does it mean for American global leadership?

Week 5 – What Do Homeland and Economic Security Mean Today?
President Trump’s protectionism affects both the way homeland and economic security. We’ll discuss several issues here. Are limitations on free trade effective? For American voters, what matters—protection of a
particular industry or overall prices for goods and services? Similarly, we will look at the politics of immigration from the vantage point of homeland security. How do we engage American voters on what the facts are and the implications of these issues?

Week 6 – The 2018 Midterms—Executive v. Legislative Balance of Power
In the beginning of this discussion, we’ll talk about insights from the previous few weeks regarding how national security issues play into electoral politics. For much of the session though, we’ll talk about the Mueller investigation and Russian interference in U.S. elections. From the vantage point of national security, why does this matter? Moreover, how should voters think about checks on executive power through the election of a new Congress?

Week 7 – Looking to 2020—What National Security Issues Will Make a Difference?
This session will look ahead to 2020. Will issues of national security and foreign policy influence the choice of Presidential candidates? What issues do we think will be at play in the primaries? In the general election?

Week 8 – Informed Voters and Professionals—How Do We Carry the Message About Why It Matters?
Our final meeting will take a practical look at ways of engaging American voters on national security issues. It will also focus on roles for Hoyas as policy and political professionals.