



Exeter College Oxford Summer Program

Beyond International Relations: Theories and Challenges of Global Politics

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Course Description

Is politics possible beyond the nation-state? Will wars and conflicts ever become obsolete? This course introduces students to theories of International Relations (IR) and contemporary issues of Global Politics. It explores the historical and conceptual foundations of the field and investigates challenges currently shaping global politics. The course will be divided into two main sections. Following a brief historical introduction to the discipline, we will explore classical concepts and theories of IR, including power and anarchy (Realism), cooperation and human rights (Liberalism), norms and identity (Constructivism), followed by critical perspectives on global politics such as class and dependencies (Marxism), gender and the patriarchy (Feminism), and exploitation and orientalism (Postcolonialism). In the second section of the course, we will investigate pressing global issues like terrorism, AI, and the climate crisis, which have fundamentally altered the conduct of international politics. Finally, the module will conclude with a discussion of future (im)possibilities for global politics. The course is designed to be multidisciplinary and is suitable for students of all disciplines interested in International Relations, political theory, and twentieth-century history. There are no prerequisites, and no previous knowledge of international relations or political history is required, but it would be an advantage.

Topics

1. **What is IR?** Thinking global politics beyond the now
2. **History:** From Westphalia to US hegemony
3. **Liberalism:** Cooperation and human rights
4. **Realism:** Power and Anarchy
5. **Constructivism:** Making the international
6. **Marxism:** Hierarchies, class and dependencies
7. **Feminism and Gender:** International politics beyond the masculine
8. **Post-colonialism:** Exploitation, orientalism, and the 'West.'
9. **The Ethics of killing in war:** From 'just wars' to terrorism
10. **Technologies of warfare and surveillance:** Drones, AI, and Big data
11. **Planetary Politics?** Environmental Crises, the Anthropocene, and post-humanism
12. **The Future of Global Politics:** Dystopia or Utopia?

Course Objectives

- To introduce students to IR as it has historically developed from the rise of the modern state system to American hegemony from the perspectives of various theories that have shaped the discipline.
- To reflect upon contemporary issues and challenges in global politics.
- To develop students' critical analysis skills using historically based evidence in the context of political debate and discussion.

Teaching Methods and Assessment

- 12 x 1.25hr Lectures (15hrs)
- 6 x 1.25hr Seminars (7.5hrs)
- 4 x 1.25hrs Tutorials (2.5hrs)

Final Assessment: An essay of no more than 3,000 words (40%), a final three-hour written examination (40%), oral presentation (10%) and participation in seminar discussion (10%).

Background Reading

Baylis J., Smith S. & Owens, P. (eds) *The Globalization of World Politics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014).

Brown, C. and K. Ainsley, *Understanding International Relations* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2009).

Lecture Schedule

1. What is IR? Thinking global politics beyond the now

Considers the contours of the subject matter of International Relations, reviews the evolution of the academic field of IR, and introduces the discipline as a conceptual framework to deepen our understanding of global politics.

2. History: from Westphalia to US hegemony

Examines how the modern state system emerged and evolved into the post-war international order and the US-led contemporary world order.

3. Liberalism: Cooperation and Human Rights

Explores the promise of the liberal approach to IR by focusing on the scope for cooperation among states and the pacifying role of international institutions. Considers the possibility of cooperation 'beyond' the state.

4. Realism: Power and Anarchy

Reviews the realist school of international relations, considering the continued centrality of concepts such as ‘the state of nature’, power, anarchy, and the security dilemma.

5. Constructivism: Making the international

Reflects on the extent to which norms, rules, and identities construct the international order and how we perceive it. Questions some of the foundational assumptions of Realism and Liberalism.

6. Marxism: Hierarchies, class, and dependencies

Discusses Marxism as a critical approach to International Relations by focusing on how capital movement, class relations, economic dependencies, and global hierarchies shape the international order.

7. Feminism and Gender: International politics beyond the masculine

Examines how gender has impacted the construction of international politics and the discipline of IR. Reflects on how feminist theory can deepen our understanding of politics.

8. Post-colonialism: Exploitation, orientalism, and the ‘West’

Situates colonial and neocolonial hierarchies as crucial for making sense of the Western-dominated liberal order. Reflects on the extent to which the global south tends to be orientalised by ‘the West’.

9. The Ethics of killing in war: From ‘just wars’ to terrorism

Considers normative claims behind conflicts and wars and examines the ethics of inter-state killing and contemporary violence, including terrorism.

10. Technologies of warfare and surveillance: Drones, AI, and Big data

Reflects on how new technologies of war and surveillance have increased the reach of state power, altered international conflicts, and prompted the emergence of new global actors (i.e. Tech companies).

11. Planetary Politics? Climate Crises, the Anthropocene, and post-humanism

Discusses the interaction between nature and politics, the extent to which the climate crisis has impacted international relations, and the possibility of conceptualising a ‘post-human’ planetary politics.

12. The future of Global Politics: Dystopia or Utopia?

The module concludes on the contemporary state of the international order, and speculates on the horizon of international politics.