

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Political Science 447/547, Summer 2025
Portland State University
ONLINE COURSE

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Description

The international system has been called an “anarchical society”—anarchic because there is no authority above that of individual states; a society because state behavior is nevertheless influenced by norms, laws, and institutions that states create for themselves. Yet among scholars there is a great deal of debate over the real importance of international rules and institutions and the degree of order they bring to the society of states. And among policymakers in the United States and elsewhere there is disagreement over the extent to which governments ought to be constrained by rules and institutions in the conduct of their foreign policies.

The course examines the myriad ways in which states have brought order and organization to their international conduct, with special emphasis on the functions and activities of formal international institutions. We will cover general purpose organizations, like the UN and (increasingly) the EU, as well as those with more specialized functions, like NATO (security), the WTO (trade), the IMF and World Bank (finance and development), WHO (global health), and the ICC (criminal justice). These organizations are the creations of states, but we will also look at nongovernmental organizations, like Greenpeace and Human Rights Watch. Such organizations, as well as many less formal transnational networks, are the creations of private actors, but designed to serve the global public good.

This is a required course for the [international development option](#) in political science.

Learning Objectives

- **Understanding the Structure and Role of International Organizations:** Students will learn about the basic structure and functions of major international organizations, including the United Nations, European Union, NATO, WTO, IMF, World Bank, WHO, and ICC. This objective will also cover the role of these organizations in the international system and their impact on state behavior and international relations.

- **Exploring the Influence of International Norms and Laws:** This objective focuses on the influence of international norms, laws, and institutions on state behavior. Students will examine how these elements contribute to the order and organization of international relations, despite the anarchical nature of the international system.
- **Analyzing the Debate on the Effectiveness of International Organizations:** Students will critically engage with scholarly debates regarding the effectiveness and importance of international rules and institutions. This includes understanding different perspectives on how much order these organizations bring to the society of states and the degree to which they should influence national foreign policies.
- **Evaluating the Role of Non-Governmental Organizations and Transnational Networks:** The course will delve into the impact of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and transnational networks, such as Greenpeace and Human Rights Watch. Students will analyze how these entities, created by private actors, contribute to the global public good and interact with formal international institutions and states.

Readings and Lectures

For each module, there are assigned reading and "lectures." The lecture are actually relatively brief write-ups of lecture topics I deliver in the on-campus version of this course, sometimes with screenshots from PowerPoint presentations. As is true of on-campus lectures, they are intended to highlight the most important lessons to be drawn from the module. The link in Canvas will take you to a PDF file, which you may then download or read online. There are two or three lectures per module, each running 3-4 pages.

All assigned readings are available online; there are no books to purchase for the course. Unless an assigned reading is accompanied by a link, it is available online from the PSU library. You must retrieve these readings (mostly journal articles) by logging into the [PSU library website](#) and locating and downloading the article from one of the library's full-content subscription services. Where a link is provided, it will open a new window in your browser and take you to the reading on the Web. A few readings are stored on the Canvas website, in which case a link is also provided so you can view the PDF in your browser or download it.

Quizzes

You will take three quizzes in this course, each consisting of 10 to 15 multiple-choice questions. Quiz A covers material covered in modules 1-3; Quiz B, modules 4-6; and Quiz C, modules 7-8. Each quiz is timed for 45 minutes and will be available to take anytime during a designated three-day bloc. You may consult your notes or downloaded course material while you are taking the quiz.

Final Project

As a final project, students will analyze the real-world operations of an international organization. Choose one international organization (IO) and analyze a specific intervention, mission, or policy initiative it has undertaken in recent decades. Your task is to critically assess how the IO operates in practice: What it set out to do, what it accomplished, and what challenges it faced. You may select an IO we cover in detail during the course or one we don't.

For example, you could choose North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as your IO and examine the issue of military and logistical support for Ukraine in its war with Russia. Or you could choose the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and examine the delivery of aid and basic service in Gaza during the Israel-Hamas war.

Your case study should include:

1. **Introduction:** Identify the IO and briefly describe the issue or region it addressed. State your central analytical question or thesis.
2. **Case Description:** Provide a factual account of the IO's intervention: goals, timeframe, activities, involved actors, and resources deployed.
3. **Assessment of Outcomes:** What were the intended and actual results? What explains the degree of success or failure?
4. **Organizational Analysis:** Discuss how the IO's structure, mandate, or political dynamics shaped the outcome. Draw on course themes (e.g., legitimacy, enforcement capacity, cooperation problems).
5. **Lessons Learned:** What broader conclusions can we draw from this case about the role or limitations of IOs in world politics?

Formatting

- Length: 1,300 words (about 5 pages double-spaced) for undergraduates; 1,900 words (7-8 pages) for graduate students.
- Include in-text citations using any consistent style. The list of references at the end of the document is not part of the word count.

Grading

Your course grade is based on your three quiz scores (20 percent each) and your final project grade (40 percent). To get your quiz grade, I add the scores for your three quizzes and then use a curve based on the distribution of quiz scores for the entire class. I use your curved quiz grade *only if it is an improvement* relative to the standard grading distribution -- that is, 90-

100% = A, 80-90% = B, etc. I do it this way because I don't want to penalize students if the course material wasn't communicated as effectively as I had hoped.

Courtesy, Conduct, and Resources

Academic dishonesty. Students are responsible for being familiar with the PSU [Code of Student Conduct and Responsibility](#), especially the section concerning academic misconduct -- that is, plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty. If you are unsure of the definition or consequences of academic misconduct, please consult with me.

Use of Generative AI tools. Using tools to check and correct your own writing (built-in spelling and grammar checkers or third-party tools like Grammarly) is different from using generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to create content or structure in response to your prompts (like ChatGPT). In your work for this course, use of the first sort of tool is encouraged, while use of the second sort of tool is subject to the following limitations. Using generative AI to complete written assignments, including examinations, is not permitted. However, you may use these tools to study, help conduct research, or brainstorm ideas and argument. The use generative AI tools outside these parameters qualifies as [academic misconduct](#). If you are uncertain about the allowable use of generative AI in the course, please consult with me in advance.

Discrimination. PSU's policies require faculty members to report any instance of sexual harassment, sexual violence, or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about these experiences with an employee who does not have these reporting responsibilities and can keep the information confidential, please contact a confidential advocate (503.725.5672 or [online](#)) or another confidential employee listed on the sexual misconduct resource [webpage](#).

Disabilities. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the [Disability Resource Center](#) to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The [PSU CARES](#) Team, hosted by the Dean of Student Life, is available to consult with you regarding any issues of students in distress, including sexual misconduct.

READING SCHEDULE

- *An open bullet indicates that the reading is required for graduate students, but optional for undergraduates.*

Module 1 Global IOs: The League of Nations and the UN

- The United Nations Office at Geneva, "About: The League of Nations." (No date) Read all six segments (boxes in left-hand margin). ([web](#))

- Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (Vintage, 2007), chap. 1. (Canvas)
- Max-Otto Baumann and Sebastian Haug, “Embracing Universality: Toward the Future of United Nations Development Work.” *International Studies Perspectives* 26 (2025): 188-208.

Module 2 **Collective Security: UN Security Council**

- Council on Foreign Relations, “What is the UN Security Council?” 25 April 2023. ([web](#))
- United Nations, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines* (United Nations, 2008), chaps. 1-3. ([web](#))
- Ian Hurd, “The Myths of Membership: The Politics of Legitimation in UN Security Council Reform.” *Global Governance* 14 (April-June 2008): 199-217.

Module 3 **NATO and European Security**

- North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “A Short History of NATO.” 3 June 2022. ([web](#))
- Matthew Evangelista, “A ‘Nuclear Umbrella’ for Ukraine? Precedents and Possibilities for Postwar European Security.” *International Security* 48 (Winter 2023/24): 7-50.
- Mary Elise Sarotte, “Perpetuating U.S. Preeminence: The 1990 Deals to ‘Bribe the Soviets Out’ and Move NATO In.” *International Security* 35 (Summer 2010): 110-137.

Module 4 **Regional Organization and Integration: European Union**

- Council of Foreign Relations, “Backgrounder: How Does the European Union Work? 11 March 2022. ([web](#))
- Waltraud Schelkle et al., “Brexit – The EU Membership Crisis that Wasn’t.” *West European Politics* 47 (2024): 997-1020.
- Alexandru D. Moise and Chendi Wang, “Appeasement or Solidarity? Uncovering the Drivers of European Public Opinion on the EU’s Foreign Policy.” *European Union Politics* 26 (2025): 418-441.

Module 5 **Law and Justice: International Courts and Humanitarianism**

- International Court of Justice, “History” ([web](#)) and “How the Court Works” ([web](#)). No date.
- Chimène Keitner, “Understanding South Africa v. Israel at the International Criminal Court.” *Lawfare*, 16 January 2024. ([web](#))
- International Criminal Court, “How the Court Works.” (No date) ([web](#))
- Nada Ali, “Through the Glass Darkly: The ICC , the UNSC and the Quest for Justice in International Law.” *International Criminal Law Review* 19 (2019): 669-697.

Module 6 **Economic Governance: WTO and Bretton Woods Institutions**

- Chad P. Brown, *Self-Enforcing Trade: Developing Countries and WTO Dispute Settlement* (Brooking Institution, 2009), chap. 1, “The WTO and GATT: A Principled History,” pp. 10-21.
- Ngaire Woods, *The Globalizers: The IMF, the World Bank, and Their Borrowers* (Cornell University Press, 2006), chaps. 1-3. (Canvas)
- Kristen Hopewell, “Unravelling of the Trade Legal Order: Enforcement, Defection and the Crisis of the WTO Dispute Settlement System.” *International Affairs* 101 (May 2025): 1103-1117.

Module 7 **Global Environmental and Health Regimes**

- Oran R. Young, “The Architecture of Global Environmental Governance: Bringing Science to Bear on Policy.” *Global Environmental Politics* (February 2008): 14-32.
- Jeremy Youde, *Global Health Governance* (Polity Press, 2012), chaps. 1-2. (Canvas)
- Sverker Sörlin et al., “The Great Dispersal: The Fall and Rise of Global Environmental Governance.” *Ambio: A Journal of Environment and Society* (May 2025).

Module 8 **Global Civil Society**

- Raffaele Marchetti, “Global Civil Society.” E-International Relations, 28 December 2016. ([web](#))
- Mary Kaldor, “The Idea of Global Civil Society.” *International Affairs* (May 2003): 583-593.
- Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1998), chap. 1. (Canvas)

This syllabus is available online at web.pdx.edu/~kinsella/ps447a25.pdf. Last updated on 22 June 2025.