

Course Title	LAI308 International Relations	Instructor(s)	Rui Saraiva
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Class Style	Lecture	Office Hours	TBA
Track	Global liberal arts	Mode of Instruction	Single
Credits	2	Allocated Year	3 rd year, Spring
Active Learning	2.3. Presentations, 4.1. Interactive lectures, 4.3. Free discussions, 4.4. Case studies, 4.8. Informal debates, 4.9. Group work on questions, 4.10. Think-pair-share and Think-group-share.	Compulsory or Elective	Elective
Course Overview	This course examines international relations through foundational, theoretical, and empirical approaches. Students engage with classical questions: What constitutes a political community? What obligations transcend borders? When is conflict inevitable, and when is cooperation possible? What is the nature of power in anarchic systems? Students also examine morality in international affairs, regime type effects on foreign policy, challenges to state sovereignty, and international law's function without enforcement. Through systematic analysis of theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, students develop capacities for causal reasoning, theory evaluation, and analytical distinction between empirical claims and normative judgments in international relations.		
Course Objectives	Upon completion of this course, students will analyze international relations through systematic reasoning, distinguishing between levels of analysis and recognizing how explanatory frameworks vary across analytical levels. Students will examine core concepts—sovereignty, anarchy, human nature—by distinguishing empirical observations from philosophical assumptions. They will critically assess international institutions and question binary frameworks, recognizing how categories such as war/peace and cooperation/conflict overlap in practice. Students develop capacities to extract arguments from primary sources and construct original arguments using evidence and logic while acknowledging limitations and counterarguments.		
Prerequisite			
Course Schedule	No	Contents	Homework
	1	What are International Relations? Defining Key Terms. What makes international politics "international"? What is a state? What distinguishes domestic from international politics? Can we define "the state" without reference to violence?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
	2	Anarchy—The Structural Foundation. What follows logically from the absence of world government? Is anarchy the same as chaos? If anarchy is a structure, not a condition, what behaviors does it mandate versus merely permit? Can cooperation exist under anarchy, or does structure determine outcome?	Preparatory readings and assignments.

3	Human Nature and the Thucydides Trap. Do states behave “badly” because humans are flawed, or because the system makes them act that way? Is the Athenian position (the strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must) a descriptive claim or a normative one?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
4	Security Dilemma—When Good Intentions Create Bad Outcomes. Paradox: Why do states seeking only security often produce insecurity? If every state's defensive measures appear offensive to others, is perpetual mistrust inevitable? What assumptions about information and intentions underlie the security dilemma?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
5	Sovereignty—Supreme Authority or Convenient Fiction? Foundational Challenge: What is sovereignty? Who grants it? Can it be absolute and conditional simultaneously? If sovereignty is violated constantly (humanitarian intervention, economic sanctions, etc.), is it a meaningful concept?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
6	Balance of Power—Automatic or Constructed? Do balances of power emerge naturally, or must actors consciously create them? If balancing is automatic, why do some states bandwagon instead? If it's conscious, what motivates states to bear costs for systemic stability?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
7	Midterm Review and Assessment	Students deliver presentations and share reflections on topics covered in the first six weeks.
8	Can Morality Exist in International Relations? Ethical Dilemma: Are states bound by moral obligations, or is ethics purely domestic? Is E.H. Carr right that morality in international politics is usually the morality of the powerful? Can we distinguish between universal moral claims and disguised interests?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
9	International Law Without a Sovereign—Logical Possibility or Contradiction? Can law exist without enforcement? What makes international law "law"? If law requires enforcement and international law lacks reliable enforcement, is it law or mere coordination? Do states obey international	Preparatory readings and assignments.

	law because it's law, or does it become law because states obey it?	
10	Institutions—Constraints or Arenas? Do international institutions change state behavior or merely reflect it? What would count as evidence that institutions matter independently? Can we design a test to distinguish institutions-as-constraints from institutions-as-reflections-of-power?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
11	Identity and Interests—Are They Fixed or Socially Constructed? Do states have pre-existing interests, or do interests emerge from interaction? If interests are socially constructed, what constrains their construction? Can anything be constructed, or do material factors limit possibilities? How do we know?	Preparatory readings and assignments
12	Democracy and Peace—Empirical Pattern or Liberal Ideology? Do democracies behave differently, or is the "democratic peace" selection bias? What would disprove the democratic peace thesis? Are we defining democracy to fit the conclusion? Do democracies treat non-democracies differently than they treat each other—and what does that tell us?	Preparatory readings and assignments
13	Globalization—Integration or Fragmentation? Does economic interdependence reduce conflict, increase vulnerability, or both? If trade creates interdependence, does it create peace or leverage? Can economic and security logics contradict each other? Which dominates when they conflict?	Preparatory readings and assignments
14	The Rhetoric of "International Community"—Who Speaks for Whom? Does an international community exist, or is it a rhetorical device wielded by powerful actors? Can community exist without shared identity and enforcement mechanisms? What interests are served by the claim that it does? Does the future lie in sovereign individuals?	Preparatory readings and assignments
15	Final Review—Synthesis and Application	Final examination: Analyzing one current international issue through course frameworks.

Grading	<p>Participation (30%)</p> <p>Assignments and presentations (20%)</p> <p>Midterm Examination (25%)</p> <p>Final Examination (25%)</p>
Textbooks	<p>Students will be asked to read sections of the books listed in the reference section. Other relevant reading materials will be provided by the instructor. Students should bring printed or digital copies of the assigned reading to each class.</p>
References	<p>Bull, H. (2012). <i>The anarchical society: A study of order in world politics</i>. Columbia University Press.</p> <p>Carr, E. H. (2001). <i>The twenty years' crisis, 1919-1939: An introduction to the study of international relations</i>. Palgrave Macmillan.</p> <p>Gilpin, R. (2016). <i>The political economy of international relations</i>. Princeton University Press.</p> <p>Jervis, R. (1978). Cooperation under the security dilemma. <i>World Politics</i>, 30 (2), 167-214.</p> <p>Krasner, S. D. (1999). <i>Sovereignty: Organized hypocrisy</i>. Princeton University Press.</p> <p>Layne, C. (1994). Kant or cant: The myth of the democratic peace. <i>International Security</i>, 19 (2), 5-49.</p> <p>Mearsheimer, J. J. (1994). The false promise of international institutions. <i>International Security</i>, 19 (3), 5-49.</p> <p>Morgenthau, H. J. (2006). <i>Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace</i>. McGraw-Hill.</p> <p>Niebuhr, R. (1995). <i>Moral man and immoral society: A study in ethics and politics</i>. Simon & Schuster</p> <p>Thucydides. (1972). <i>History of the Peloponnesian War</i> (R. Warner, Trans.). Penguin Classics.</p> <p>Waltz, K. N. (1979). <i>Theory of international politics</i>. McGraw-Hill.</p> <p>Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics. <i>International Organization</i>, 46 (2), 391-425.</p>
NOTES	<p>Attendance: Mandatory. Missing more than 2 sessions significantly impacts your participation grade. Missing more than 5 sessions means you will not be able to pass this course.</p> <p>Preparation: Students must complete readings and assignments before each class. Unprepared students cannot participate meaningfully in class.</p> <p>Academic Integrity: All work must be original. Use of AI to generate arguments or analyses violates the spirit of first principles thinking and will be treated as academic misconduct.</p>