

International Relations Theory

Code: 101089
ECTS Credits: 6

2025/2026

| Degree | Type | Year |
|---|------|------|
| Political Science and Public Management | OT | 3 |
| Political Science and Public Management | OT | 4 |
| International Relations | OB | 2 |

Contact

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Teaching groups languages

You can view this information at the [end](#) of this document.

Prerequisites

Students should have some basic background knowledge in International Relations.

Objectives and Contextualisation

In this class we want to become knowledgeable about theorization in IR: its concepts, tools, history and practical use. We want to do so in a reflexive manner: we also want to understand theorization as socially produced and as reflective of intellectual, cultural and often political projects. We also want to locate that story in the framework of theoretical and methodological debates in social sciences.

This requires:

- Understanding what theories are and what they are for. We respond to these questions by way of broad definitions that can encompass all that is perceived as theorization in IR, rather than by proposing narrow takes on what theories should be about.
- Taking the history of theorization and the history in which theorization takes place seriously. You will be reminded of certain historical processes, events and trends that have shaped IR in the last century and a half -and to which theorization in IR has tried to respond/can be traced back to. Some additional reading from your part might be useful, if you feel such references escape you.
- Becoming familiar with at least a modicum of knowledge about the debate over how we get to know what we know. Debates over epistemology link theorization in IR with broader trends in social sciences.
- Being able to juggle with diverse, and sometimes contradictory, maps of the discipline that redraw the divide lines between schools of thought, or have different takes on what such divides are about.

Specific objectives

- Locate theories of International Relations in the broader frameworks of a) history, b) theorization in social sciences, and c) the most basic epistemological debates

2. Understand the concepts of theory (and metatheory), with its nuances and complexities, as well as its use in International Relations.
3. Master the key schools of thought in theory of International Relations. We will do this by way of: a) understanding how they are represented in their *handbook* version; b) using other sources not designed to convey information to students, texts that have become key milestones in the development of theorization in IR; c) providing guidance and basic explanations at class; d) studying theories in use in real world cases.
4. Map theories and understand the relationships with each other and with the different versions of each other and of themselves.

Competences

Political Science and Public Management

- Arguing from different theoretical perspectives.
- Demonstrating they know theoretical tendencies and classical and recent analytical approximations of International Relations.
- Distinguishing the discipline's main theories and different fields: conceptual developments, theoretical frameworks and theoretical approaches underlying the discipline's knowledge and different areas and sub-areas, as well as their value for the professional practice through concrete cases.
- Interpreting and applying English texts in an academic way.
- Managing the available time in order to accomplish the established objectives and fulfil the intended task.
- Producing and planning researches or analytical reports.
- Realising effective oral presentations that are suited to the audience.
- Synthesizing and critically analysing information.
- Working autonomously.
- Working in teams and networking, particularly in interdisciplinary conditions.

International Relations

- Identify the main theories of international relations and their different fields (international theory, conflicts and security, international politics, etc.) to apply them in professional practice.

Learning Outcomes

1. Arguing from different theoretical perspectives.
2. Critically assessing the impacts of globalization in several areas: safety, environment, human rights, migrations and peace.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of theoretical trends and classical and recent analytical approaches to international relations.
4. Demonstrating they know theoretical tendencies and classical and recent analytical approximations of International Relations.
5. Describe the major approaches to international relations (realism, transnationalism, structuralism).
6. Describing the international order: anarchy versus order, society of states and transnational society.
7. Describing the main characteristic elements of the international society as a whole (1945-2000).
8. Evaluate the different aspects of the different trends and analytical approaches in international relations from a specific methodological and conceptual viewpoint.
9. Explaining the major approximations to the international relations (realism, transnationalism and structuralism).
10. Interpreting and applying English texts in an academic way.
11. Make adequate use of the theory and concepts of international relations (Hobbesian, Grotian and Kantian thought).
12. Managing the available time in order to accomplish the established objectives and fulfil the intended task.
13. Producing and planning researches or analytical reports.

14. Properly using the theory and concepts of international relations (traditions of Hobbesian, Grotian or Kantian thought).
15. Realising effective oral presentations that are suited to the audience.
16. Synthesizing and critically analysing information.
17. Working autonomously.
18. Working in teams and networking, particularly in interdisciplinary conditions.

Content

Block I. General overview, tools, basic concepts

1. Theory: why. Case study: the birth of International Relations, things seen and unseen.
2. Theory: what. Types, functions, theory change, theory change in social sciences and International Relations. Grand-theories and middle-range theories. Basic concepts.
3. Maps of theorization in IR. Classical maps (traditions, debates) and a more complex proposal.

Block II. Grand-theories of International Relations. Atomistic ontologies

4. Classical realism.
5. Structural realism and neoclassical realism
6. Liberalism. Idealism, functionalism, transnationalism
7. Neoinstitutionalism and bringing back liberalism

Block II. Grand-theories. Social ontologies

8. English School and international society
9. Constructivism. Ontological and epistemological constructivisms.
10. Marxism, structuralism
11. Critical theory. Frankfurt school and neo-Gramscians
12. Feminist IR Theory

Block III. Theories about theories

Part of lessons 11 and 12.

13. Post-structuralism

Activities and Methodology

| Title | Hours | ECTS | Learning Outcomes |
|--------------------------------|-------|------|-------------------|
| Type: Directed | | | |
| Lectures | 40 | 1.6 | |
| Practical cases and activities | 4 | 0.16 | |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|------|------|
| Seminaries | 6 | 0.24 |
| Type: Supervised | | |
| Control of readings and papers | 25 | 1 |
| Exam | 7.5 | 0.3 |
| Type: Autonomous | | |
| Readings and cases | 67.5 | 2.7 |

The dedication to the class is divided into different types of activities that, in coherence, are materialised in different requirements and methodologies. This is a 6 ECTS subject, therefore 150 hours. These 150 hours are divided into the following activities:

a) Face-to-face or directed (50 hours, 33.3 %)

Lectures and debates: 20 sessions (40 hours).

Seminars in the classroom: 3 sessions (6 hrs)

Evaluated classroom practical sessions: 2 sessions (4 hrs)

b) Supervised activities: reading controls, text commentaries, tutorials for assignments, comments on exams and assignments: 25 hrs (16.7%).

c) Assessment: 7,5 hrs (5%)

d) Autonomous work of the student (study and work at home and/or library): 67,5 hrs (45%)

2. Practical instructions on the virtual campus material and classroom activity:

Each lecture (or group of related lectures) will have a) a specific outline to guide the face-to-face/directed sessions and related activities; b) one or two compulsory readings; and c) some additional readings or references.

The compulsory readings (beyond references to books or web pages) will be available on the virtual campus, grouped in specific tabs related to each lectures or group of related lectures.

Annotation: Within the schedule set by the centre or degree programme, 15 minutes of one class will be reserved for students to evaluate their lecturers and their courses or modules through questionnaires.

Assessment

Continuous Assessment Activities

| Title | Weighting | Hours | ECTS | Learning Outcomes |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-------|------|---|
| Final Exam | 50% | 0 | 0 | 1, 4, 6, 15, 12, 10, 16, 18, 14 |
| Participation, small deliverables | 10% | 0 | 0 | 1, 3, 4, 7, 6, 5, 9, 12, 10, 16, 17, 11, 14, 2, 8 |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Two case studies/seminar sessions | 40% | 0 | 0 | 1, 4, 6, 13, 9, 15, 12, 10, 16, 18 |
|-----------------------------------|-----|---|---|------------------------------------|

Written exam (at class):50% of the final mark

Two practical exercises (at class):20+20% of the final mark

Participation, little deliverables (to be prepared at my demand during the lecture), other small exercises:10% of the final mark

Important. Passing the course requires two different marks to be equal or higher than 5/10: (1) that of your exam, and (2) your overall average of marks. Failing the former condition (1), your final mark will be that of the exam.

Re-takes. There will be a retake of the exam, plus a retake of the two practical exercises. Only students with a grade below 5 will be able use those opportunities. In other words: you cannot re-take any of those elements if you have already passed it. Re-takes of the practical exercises will consist of additional questions at the final exam.

Single-day evaluation. If you have signed up for it (and you are not an exchange student) you can opt for a single-day evaluation. This means that at the day of the final exam you will:

-answer the normal final exam

-answer the re-takes of the two practical exercises

-orally answer two questions that same day, at my office, after the "normal" exam ends.

Bibliography

Only two handbooks are proposed here. In Campus Virtual, required and optional readings will be detailed for each group of related lessons.

Dunne, T., M. Kurki & S. Smith (eds.) (2020, 5th edition) Theories of International Relations: Discipline and Diversity, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jorgensen, Knud Erik (2010), International Relations Theory. A New Introduction, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Software

In this course, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies is not allowed in any of its phases. Any work that includes fragments generated with AI will be considered a lack of academic honesty and may result in a partial or total penalty in the grade of the activity, or higher penalties in serious cases.

Groups and Languages

Please note that this information is provisional until 30 November 2025. You can check it through this [link](#). To consult the language you will need to enter the CODE of the subject.

| Name | Group | Language | Semester | Turn |
|------|-------|----------|----------|------|
|------|-------|----------|----------|------|

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|----------------------------|----|---------|-----------------|-----------|
| (PAUL) Classroom practices | 51 | English | second semester | afternoon |
| (TE) Theory | 51 | English | second semester | afternoon |