CIEE Madrid, Spain

Course title: Contemporary Controversies in International Relations
Course code: (GI) INRE 4007 MASP
Programs offering course: Madrid Open Campus Block
Open Campus Track: International Relations and Political Science
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3.00
Contact hours: 45.00
Term: Spring Block I 2021

Course Description

The course provides an overview of important international conflicts of our time, their causes, main agents, and recent developments. Investigating a number of case studies will allow us to not only identify and learn in detail about different areas of international controversy, but also to study models of international cooperation. Course participants are to analyze a variety of current conflicts by diagnosing the conflict, providing an outlook for the medium-term future, and proposing solutions. Classroom content is supplemented and enhanced by debate meetings with experts and practitioners from different organizations and institutions. The course addresses the following and other questions: In which policy domains do we find contemporary / future international controversies? What are the ways in which these controversies are diffused and settled? What are existing obstacles to the resolution and settlement of international conflicts? What major multilateral forums exist? Is global governance a realistic and desirable goal? What could possible forms look like?

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- Synthesize a range of current positions and debates in international relations to develop a nuanced analysis of the controversies studied
- Develop a firm understanding of foundational theories of international relations
- Acquire practice in addressing pointed and critical questions to politicians and members of government bureaucracies.
- Further develop critical thinking and communication skills by regularly debating political topics of current significance – in writing and in class
- Improve team work and public speaking skills by preparing and delivering presentations in a group

Course Prerequisites

Students should have completed two courses in modern history, politics, or international relations.

Methods of Instruction

The methodology will be characterized by lectures, presentations and class discussions based on the assigned readings. Lectures will be enhanced by PowerPoint presentations whenever these are helpful to explain international conflicts and controversies. The class debates will be prepared and conducted in such a way that they can serve as preparation for discussions and meetings with politicians, civil servants, NGO representatives as well as independent experts. Classroom activities will include individual, partner and group work and will be complemented by homework exercises.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Homework Assignments (2) 10%
2. Midterm Exam 15%
Course Requirements

Homework Assignments (2)

There are two written homework assignments that students will be required to submit during the course. These assignments are short, 750-word reflective responses to topics that have been discussed in class. Instructions and questions for these written assignments will be distributed at least one week prior to their due dates.

Midterm Exam

Students will sit a midterm examination that will assess their understanding of foundational theories of international relations. This exam will be based on 3 essay questions completed within the allotted time.

Individual Presentation

Students will be required to select a real-life event that connects to one of the international relations themes discussed in the class. They are to prepare a short 10-minute presentation describing the issue, and connect it to the course literature on that theme.

Group Project

Working in small groups, students will be required to write a position paper (approximately 2000 words in length) whereby students must take and defend a position related to one of the controversial topics presented in the course. Students will be asked to use course literature, concepts, and theoretical frameworks covered in the course to defend their position.

Final Digital Project

Using multimedia resources, students will submit and defend a position paper on a current international political challenge or crisis. Students will be asked to carry out independent research on a subject of their own choice, but that connects to the general theme of the course. Students will be required to formulate a research question to guide their research, and use course literature to structure a response. The project will be developed in two parts: the first is the submission of a short, 4-minute video essay where the student presents and defends their position. Videos are expected to present edited images, graphs, and other media resources into the allocated time to demonstrate the argument. The second part of the submission is ‘defense’ of the video, conducted in class in the final session. Students should have PPT slides and handouts at their disposal to respond to questions and critiques from the instructor. Each part of the project is worth 50% of the whole.

Participation

Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared in advance of each class session and to have regular attendance. Students must clearly demonstrate they have engaged with the materials as directed, for example, through classroom discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

Attendance

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all absences will result in a lower participation grade for any affected CIEE course. Due to the intensive schedules for short-term programs, absences that constitute more than 10% of the total course will result in a written warning.
Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.

For CIEE classes, excessively tardy (over 15 minutes late) students must be marked absent. Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursion or event, as well as to Internship, Service Learning, or required field placement. Students who miss class for personal travel, including unforeseen delays that arise as a result of personal travel, will be marked as absent. No make-up or re-sit opportunity will be provided.

Attendance policies also apply to any required class excursion, with the exception that some class excursions cannot accommodate any tardiness, and students risk being marked as absent if they fail to be present at the appointed time.

Absences will lead to the following penalties:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Total Course Hours Missed</th>
<th>Minimum Penalty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 10%</td>
<td>Participation graded as per class requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 20%</td>
<td>Participation graded as per class requirements; grade penalty &amp; <strong>written warning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20%</td>
<td>Automatic <strong>course failure</strong>, and possible expulsion</td>
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N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

Class: 1.0  (Re)-Introduction to the International System

In this class students will evaluate their perspective on the international system through a thorough re-introduction. The international system will be reviewed in the context of recent significant international developments, including, but not limited to, changes in the EU, changes in US foreign relations, international positions on the Middle-East, and international positions on the Korean peninsula.

Reading:


Recommended Reading:


**Week 2**

Class: 2.0  International Actors and the Politics of Cooperation
Cooperation is an assumed necessity in international relations. This class examines this assumption through an analysis of contemporary international organisations and the main parties / actors involved. Students will visit an organisation connected with research and / or international policy development.

Reading:

Recommended Reading:

- **Homework Assignment 1 due**

**Week 3**

Class: 3.0 Global/Alpha Cities

This class examines the emergence and in some cases intentional creation of “global cities” (aka “Alpha” cities) that function as essential sites for both exchange and intense competition in the global economy, e.g., Shanghai vs. Hong Kong (shipping), Hong Kong vs. Singapore (UNHWI), London vs. Berlin (as post-Brexit financial centers).

Readings:

Class: 4.0 Environmental Degradation and International Conflict

This class examines the correlation between environmental challenges and the rise of conflict throughout the world.

Reading:

Recommended Reading:

- **Midterm Exam due**

Class: 5.0 The United States and Paris Agreement

This class examines the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2016), why and how the agreement was reached, and subsequently, the US decision to withdraw from the agreement (2017), and consequences to-date.

Readings:

**Week 4**

Class: 6.0 Terrorism as International Conflict

Terrorism is often understood in public discourse as a particular form of conflict used by non-state
forces, yet there are multiple, and often conflicting, definitions of the term. This class examines the conflicting definitions and discourses on terrorism and other non-state acts of violence and discusses their relevance for geopolitics.

Reading:

Recommended Reading:

- **Individual Presentations due**

Class: 7.0 Human Rights and the Responsibility to Protect

Students will hear from a guest speaker pertaining to human rights and discourses on mutual responsibilities

Reading:

Recommended Reading:

- **Homework Assignment 2 due**

**Week 5**
Class: 8.0 Crises in the Middle East

This class evaluates the multiple security and economic challenges in the context of the Middle Eastern crises. Students will hear from a Guest Speaker researching on the crises in the Middle Eastern region.

Class: 9.0 Case Study: The Rohingya

This class examines the case of the Rohingya and the alleged ethnic cleansing they are facing in Myanmar, the broader discrimination they face in South Asia, and global reactions to the same.

Readings:
Ibrahim (2018), Introduction, Conclusion and Epilogue; Chaudhury and Samaddar, Eds. (2018), Introduction, Epilogue and Afterword

- **Group Project due**

**Week 6**
Class: 10.0 A New Cold War or Worse?

China’s rapid economic rise and increasingly assertive foreign policy has led to an expansion of conflicts with its regional neighbors as well as the United States and others who more and more often view China as a strategic threat despite Beijing’s assurances to the contrary. While some are predicting an inevitable war with China, it is clear that military positioning has already shifted, as well as on-going trade conflicts and increasingly, even, restrictions on cultural and educational exchanges. This class discusses these developments from contrasting perspectives in terms of existing conflicts and the potential for more serious ones to emerge. Class will include a screening of John Pilger’s documentary, The Coming War on China (2016).
Class: 11.0 The Future of International Conflict and its Management

In this final class before the exam, students review the course thus far, and examine the capacity and accuracy of forecasting international disputes.

Readings:

Recommended Readings:

Due - In-class final examination.

Course Materials
Readings


Online Resources


Global Terrorism Database. See: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/

