

Contemporary challenges and the shaping of international law

UGRA_017231

Departments	Department of International, European Union and Comparative Law
Teaching Languages	English
ECTS	6
Teacher responsible	Natalia Font Gorgorio - natalia.font@esade.edu

Course Goals

The goal of the course is to develop a deep understanding of contemporary international law and be aware to critical issues affecting peace, security, and cooperation in the modern global society, more precisely:

- Familiarize with regional and global challenges to modern public international law
- Comprehend and knowledgeably debate topics essential to the contemporary legal order
- Acknowledge rupture and resilience, as well as the place of international law and lawyers in the future of the global society

Previous knowledge

Command of English is necessary for the course.

It is likewise recommended to regularly read press articles, blog posts, and academic writings on international law and policy, including UN Pulse, EJIL, AJIL, Völkerrechtsblog, Just Security, Politico, The New York Times, or The Economist.

Prerequisites

None

Teaching methodology

The course will employ a Socratic teaching methodology, emphasising active student participation through continuous dialogue. Students will collaboratively construct their understanding of the subject matter. Assigned readings will be provided in advance, with a particular emphasis on contemporary case studies.

The course aims to foster critical thinking skills, encouraging students to analyse and evaluate complex issues within public international law.

Description

Short description

International law is under the spotlight. Conflict resolution seems less

about right and more about might, with the rules-based legal system framed within the context of the UN being challenged, even by representatives of the UNSC's permanent five. From traditional issues of sovereignty to emerging threats, there are multiple international legal topics that are no longer just theoretical, but which are being tested in practice often daily: Autonomous weapons systems lacking human agency, renewed economic protectionism, acts of aggression undermining transnational cooperation, unilateral coercive measures turned into ordinary practice, institutional inertia and underfunding, judicial impunity and ineffective accountability, scarcity of resources and inequality, human rights violations, and digital uncertainty and cyberattacks are some of the challenges facing contemporary multilateralism and marring respect for foundational principles.

This course will require students to ponder on international legal standards and discuss the difficulties of maintaining peace and security in inter-state relations nowadays. It will likewise require that they take an overview of the international legal system to comprehend how and where it needs to be preserved, but also where it remains coherent and robust.

Bibliography

, Malcolm Shaw (2026), International Law (10th ed.), Cambridge University Press (Book)
 , Leslie Johns (2026), Politics and International Law: Making, Breaking, and Upholding Global Rules (2nd ed.), Cambridge University Press (Book)
 , EJIL, AJIL (journals)
 , UN Pulse, Völkerrechtsblog, Just Security (Website)
 , Politico, The New York Times, The Economist (Website)

Content

#	Topic
1	Before and after 2001: Setting the tone of contemporary international law
2	Meeting the MDG and maintaining collective peace and security with a strained UN system
3	US novel exceptionalism in a polarized world: What family of nations?
4	Human boundaries and movements: Sovereignty, frontiers, self-determination, migrants, and refugees
5	Non-intervention, acts of aggression, and coercive measures: Is human agency still in the loop?
6	Variations of democracy and alternative political systems
7	Justice, accountability, courts, and tribunals: Litigation to protect human rights and other legal goods
8	Communications, AI, and the cyber international society
9	Tariffs and trade: Commerce, resources, and safe passage
10	The environment and sustainability: Climate change and global commons

Assessment

Tool	Assessment tool	Category	Weight %
Attendance and punctuality	Attendance and punctuality	Ordinary round	20.00%
Written and/or oral exams	End of semester written examen (closed book)	Retake and ordinary round	40.00%
Group project	Group Presentation	Ordinary round	40.00%

PROGRAMS

113-Law Exchange Program (Undergraduates: Law)
113 Year 1 (Optative)

GBD20-Double Degree in Business Administration and Law (Undergraduates: Law)
GBD20 Year 5 (Optative)

GDL20-Double Degree in Law and Global Governance, Economics and Legal Order (Undergraduates: Law)
GDL20 Year 5 (Optative)

GED20-Bachelor in Law (Undergraduates: Law)
GED20 Year 4 (Optative)