POP88071: International Politics B
Instructor: Miceal Canavan
MT 2025-26

Course Description

This course examines the major theoretical approaches to international relations while investigating how these theories emerged, whose interests they serve, and what alternatives exist. We begin with IR's foundational concepts including sovereignty, anarchy, and power alongside core theories such as neorealism, liberalism and constructivism. We then explore how these ideas developed and became dominant through specific historical contexts, while also examining their explanatory power and limitations in understanding contemporary global challenges. We then turn to more contemporary IR developments which draw on political economy, political psychology and other fields. We finish with some discussion of the most pressing challenges in international relations and whether our existing theories and institutions are capable of meeting these demands. Throughout the course we will interrogate the relationship between knowledge and power in IR theory, asking why certain perspectives achieved canonical status while others remained marginalized. Students will engage with both traditional scholarship and contemporary critical work that questions IR's assumptions about rationality, cooperation, development, and progress. Students will be equipped not only to engage with conventional IR scholarship but also to evaluate how theoretical choices shape our understanding of global politics, inequality, and possibilities for change.

Learning Outcomes

- Understand the purpose of IR, its distinctive features and its role in contemporary politics.

- Understand and articulate core concepts which underlie IR theory.

- Elaborate, critique and discuss IR theories, their purpose, origin, and limitations.

- Engage broadly with alternative perspectives on IR, their potential and limitations.

- Apply IR theories to contemporary issues and evaluate their explanatory power.

Assessment

- Presentation 10%

- Participation 10%

- Response Papers 30%

- Final Essay 50%