

Global Challenges and International law: Change and Continuity

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Class time	Afternoon

Course Description:

This course examines how international law responds to today's major global challenges—such as digital transformation, artificial intelligence (AI), cyber activities, climate change, and shifting global power relations—while remaining anchored in its foundational principles and institutions. Rather than presenting international law as a static set of technical rules, the course approaches it as a dynamic normative framework shaped by historical change and contemporary pressures. Designed for students from diverse academic backgrounds, the course introduces the core concepts, sources, and actors of international law and applies them to emerging issues that challenge traditional legal assumptions. Through focused case studies and guided discussion, students will explore both the strengths and limits of international law in a rapidly evolving global context, and gain insight into why legal frameworks continue to matter for understanding global governance and responsible global citizenship in the twenty-first century.

Materials/Text:

There is **no required textbook** for this course. Classes will be based on detailed lecture notes and selected materials provided by the instructor. For additional background and reference, students are encouraged to consult the following **open-access resources**, which offer accessible introductions to public international law and its contemporary relevance:

- **Public International Law (Open Online Textbook)**

An open-access textbook covering core concepts, sources, and institutions of international law.

https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Public_International_Law

- **International Law Handbook (United Nations)**

A UN-published reference providing key international legal instruments and foundational explanations.

https://legal.un.org/avl/studymaterials/handbook/english/book_1.pdf

Supplementary materials, including case studies and contemporary issue briefs, will be introduced throughout the course as needed.

Requirements:

This course welcomes students from diverse academic disciplines and does not presuppose prior knowledge of international law. What is required is intellectual curiosity about global challenges, readiness to think critically about norms and institutions, and active participation in discussion-based learning.

Schedule:

1. Course orientation

Key questions:

What is this course about, and why does international law matter in today's world?

How will global challenges such as climate change, digital transformation, and security be approached in this course?

How will students from diverse academic backgrounds engage with international law in this class?

2. Why international law?

Key questions:

Why do states accept legal constraints in the first place?

What distinguishes international law from politics or diplomacy?

Is international law "law" in a meaningful sense?

3. How is international law made?

Key questions:

How are international legal rules made?

Who participates in norm creation?

What roles do treaties, custom, and principles play today?

4. Sovereignty revisited: Power, consent, and limits

Key questions:

What does sovereignty mean in contemporary international law?

Is sovereignty eroding or transforming?

How does sovereignty coexist with global regulation?

5. Compliance without a world government

Key questions:

Why do states comply with international law?

What happens when they do not?

Is enforcement necessary for law to function?

6. International law and global inequality

Key questions:

Does international law reflect unequal power structures?

Can international law address global economic disparities?

Is international law neutral or distributive?

7. Security, use of force, and collective order

Key questions:

How does international law regulate the use of force?

What is the role of the UN Charter today?
How do security concerns challenge legal restraints?

8. Human rights as a global legal language

Key questions:

How did human rights become central to international law?
Are human rights universal or culturally contingent?
How effective is international human rights law?

9. Responsibility and accountability beyond the state

Key questions:

Who can help responsible under international law?
What about international organizations and individuals?
How does accountability function without central authority?

10. Global trade, development and legal order

Key questions:

How does international law structure global markets?
Who benefits from the existing economic order?
Can law reconcile free trade and fairness?

11. Technology, cyberspace and international law

Key questions:

Does existing international law apply to cyberspace?
How do cyber operations challenge legal categories?
What remains stable despite technological change?

12. Artificial intelligence (AI) and the future of legal regulation

Key questions:

Can international regulate AI?
Should AI be treated as a new legal problem or a variation of old ones?
What principles might guide future regulation?

13. From pandemics to climate crisis: Why international law still matters

Key question:

What do pandemics and climate change reveal about the foundations of international law?
How have existing legal principles been adapted to new global risks?
Why does international cooperation remain indispensable despite its shortcomings?

Assignments:

No formal assignments are required. The course emphasizes active participation, open discussion, and reflective engagement with the topics covered in class.

Evaluation:

Class participation and attendance (20%), midterm assessment (exam or short written assignment) (40%), final exam (40%).