Aims and Objectives
The course aims to introduce students to the subject of International Relations (IR), whose main focus is the nature of politics at the international level. Students should acquire the empirical and conceptual foundations needed to understand a complex world which is neither pure anarchy nor close to any form of global government. The starting point is the notion of ‘international society’, which refers to the set of institutions and common procedures generated by states over the last three and a half centuries in their attempts to manage co-existence, but which has evolved to include many non-state actors and a number of different levels of activity – military, diplomatic, economic and cultural. By the end of the course you should be able to have an informed discussion about the historical origins of the present system, what is distinctive about international politics as opposed to politics inside the state, and the main challenges which confront humanity in the twenty-first century.

Brief Description of the Paper
The subject of International Relations (usually given capital letters, as opposed to international relations as events) has a huge range. Some see it as covering everything that has happened on the globe during recorded history, and requiring a multidisciplinary approach to do justice to it. This is not the approach taken here, not least for reasons of manageability. Although the course still has a wide scope, it is structured around four main themes, each of which takes a different ‘cut’ at the subject and selects certain key areas of knowledge, or debates, from which (in conjunction with your supervisor) you may choose your topics for supervisions.

The themes are as follows:

1) History: The way the international system has evolved from a world in which the interaction between continents was limited, through the rising predominance of the European states system and balance of power, to the current post-imperial and multi-level structure, which has 192 states as members of the United Nations (together with a small number of unrecognised states), thousands of intergovernmental organisations, and even more nongovernmental actors in civil society, often operating transnationally.

2) The Idea of International Society: What are the key concepts of international relations? How order exists in the system, and how is it sustained? What are the respective roles played by states, regions, organisations, law and economic exchange in the international political system? Are states still the main players, and what can they do via their foreign policies? How significant are the effects of interdependence and globalisation?

3) War: As a major part of the human experience – what it represents, why it happens, and what are its effects – at home and in the international system. Is war in decline, or simply changing its nature? Is war essentially a continuation of politics, or its opposite?

4) Ethics: What is it reasonable to expect of states in terms of ethical behaviour in international relations? How many competing ethical systems, or cultural traditions, be reconciled in a world which is both globalising and competitive? What are the major moral dilemmas thrown up at the global level?

Modes of teaching
The paper is taught by a combination of 28 lectures, six hours of supervision for each student, for which essays are written, and two classes in the Easter term. The lectures will usually be accompanied by an illustrative outline on PowerPoint, which will subsequently be made available on CamTools. This outline is not a full summary of the lecture, and thus not a substitute for attendance. In their turn the
lectures are intended to provide a structure for your work, and must be built upon by your reading and by your supervisory discussions. There will be two lectures a week in the Michaelmas term and one a week in the Lent term, with the last two weeks of the latter left free for catching up with essays and reading. The classes in the Easter term are provided as a way of pulling together the main ideas and themes examined in the course, and of assisting you in your revision.

Mode of Assessment
There will be a three hour unseen examination paper in the Easter term, in which you will be required to answer three questions from a choice of twelve. These questions will focus on the four main themes outlined above.

General background
The following books are recommended both for preparatory reading before the course, and for background during it. All of the below, except for Brown and Ainsley, and Mayall, both of which reward reading straight through, are best read selectively, according to interest. The course is not designed around any single book, but if you wish to purchase one or two for regular reference then those by Baylis et. al and Hanhimaki et. al. would be the best investments. Secondhand copies of most will be available from online retailers. For this course you need to recognise that you will need varying kinds of knowledge; some historical, some understanding of key concepts, theories and debates, and some awareness of the contemporary world.


Burchill, Scott and Andrew Linklater (eds), Theories of International Relations (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013). [Exceptionally clear and comprehensive collection of essays on all the main theories].


Jackson, Robert, Global Politics in the 21st Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). [A lively, accessible and up to date survey of most issues covered in the course. Note that there are two Robert Jacksons whose books appear in this guide].


