

Globalisation Summer Programme

Girton College, University of Cambridge

This Globalisation Summer Programme allows ambitious students to take a globalisation course comprising three modules covering different cutting edge topics in globalisation. The three modules will be:

- **The Economics of Globalisation**
- **International Relations Theory**
- **Non-State Actors and the International Order**

Contact Hours: 45 hours of contact time (three 15-hour modules)

Assessment: Presentations

The Economics of Globalisation

This course provides students of international relations with a foundational understanding of key economic concepts, analytical tools, and policy debates relevant to global politics. Designed for those with no prior training in economics, it introduces the basic methodological toolkit of economic reasoning, with a particular focus on its application to questions of public policy, international trade, and global governance.

The course covers the functioning of markets, the causes of market failure, and the rationale for government intervention, as well as the economic and institutional dynamics of the global trade system. It also encourages critical engagement with orthodox economic frameworks by examining how contemporary developments in international political economy — such as industrialisation strategies, global value chains, and shifting power in trade governance — have challenged conventional wisdom.

The overarching aim is to cultivate both an intuitive grasp and a critical awareness of how economic forces shape the global order. Students will learn to identify and evaluate the economic dimensions of international relations, assess the role of economic policy in shaping state behaviour, and understand how globalisation has transformed the interaction between political and economic institutions.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Apply economic reasoning to analyse international affairs.
- Recognise the limits of economic models in explaining political and social outcomes.
- Engage in informed debate at the intersection of economics, politics, and global governance.

Assessment

Assessment will take the form of group presentations delivered in the final seminar. Students will work collaboratively to analyse a set question drawing on material from across the course. Presentations will be assessed on the clarity and coherence of argument, the application of economic reasoning, the quality of critical engagement with alternative perspectives, and the effectiveness of delivery and teamwork. Participation in earlier seminars will provide structured preparation for the assessment.

Structure

Lecture 1 – Markets and Efficiency: Social Interactions and Economic Outcomes

What is the market? What is efficiency? This lecture introduces the basic framework of market analysis, the concept of efficiency, and the economist's perspective on the proper role of government. It lays the groundwork for understanding market failures and the circumstances in which policy interventions may be justified.

Lecture 2 – Public Goods

An exploration of goods characterised by non-rivalry and non-excludability, and why such goods are difficult to provide via market mechanisms. We examine public goods, congestion goods, and socio-economic dilemmas such as the prisoner's dilemma, the free-rider problem, the collective action problem, and the tragedy of the commons.

Lecture 3 – Externalities

Many public policy issues involve externalities, from environmental pollution to public health. This lecture considers how externalities arise, why they can lead to suboptimal market outcomes, and the economic rationale for corrective policy measures.

Lecture 4 – Trade and International Dimensions

Applying the results from market analysis to the sphere of international trade, this lecture examines the case for free trade, conditions under which trade protection may be justified, and the role of global governance in shaping trade policy.

Seminar 1 – Exercises and Practical Examples on the Economics of Trade

A seminar devoted to applying the concepts from Lectures 1–4 to practical trade-related problems. This session will help consolidate learning and provide an early opportunity to practise the analytical and presentation skills needed for the final assessment.

Lecture 5 – Industrialisation and Protectionism

An examination of the arguments for deviating from free trade to foster industrialisation, drawing on the traditions of economic nationalism, protectionism, and mercantilism. We review historical cases of successful industrialisation and assess their contemporary relevance.

Lecture 6 – From GATT to WTO: Institutions of Global Trade Governance

This lecture traces the institutional evolution of global trade governance, from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). We analyse the embedded liberal compromise, its implications for global trade, and the challenges facing weaker states in the system.

Lecture 7 – Global Value Chains

An introduction to the global value chains (GVC) framework, its empirical findings, and its policy implications. We critically assess whether current policy prescriptions based on GVC analysis are justified and revisit its origins as a tool for advocating changes in developing countries' trade strategies. The lecture also examines trade–labour linkages and the distribution of value across global production networks.

Seminar 2 – Exercises and Practical Examples on the Economics of Trade

A seminar focused on applying the insights from Lectures 5–7 to specific questions, with an emphasis on policy evaluation and institutional analysis. This will also serve as targeted preparation for the final group presentations.

Seminar 3 – Group Project Presentations (Assessment)

Working in groups, students will deliver a presentation analysing a set question that synthesises material from the entire course. Assessment will focus on the coherence and persuasiveness of the argument, the application of economic reasoning, the depth of critical engagement with alternative viewpoints, and the quality of collaboration and delivery.

International Relations Theory

This course will introduce the canon of international relations theory with a focus on what it means to think about the concept of the “international” differently. In the academy, we think of this term as meaning the relationships between sovereign nation-states, but this obscures other political processes, meanings and relationships that exist across and beyond nation-state borders. Students will thus consider orthodox and critical approaches to the study of the international across six topics.

At the beginning of the week, students will be put into groups and will choose from a set of real-life questions pertaining to ‘international’ problems or phenomena. Using the theoretical tools and approaches discussed in class, students will work together to explain different ways of understanding these problems to their classmates, in a final presentation.

Topic 1 Realism and neorealism

Topic 2 Liberalism and neoliberalism

Topic 3 Constructivism and Marxism

Topic 4 Critical Theory and poststructuralism

Topic 5 Gender and feminism

Topic 6 Postcolonialism and indigenous thought

Assessment: group presentations

Students should analyse their chosen topic through at least two different theoretical lenses, showing how a different way of thinking about the international might lead to different understandings of the causes, outcomes and solutions in that case.

Example topics:

- Russia/Ukraine War
- Nuclear proliferation
- Chinese investment
- Migration into Europe
- Violence against women
- Pandemic preparedness
- Digital security
- Development aid
- Climate disaster response

Non-State Actors and the International Order

Within the international order, non-state actors - including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other private charity organizations, as well as multinational corporations and the media - are playing an increasingly important role. These organizations are subject to far less regulation than state actors, but in many ways act in a state-like manner: they form alliances but are in competition with each other; they represent interest groups (as, arguably, do states) but seek to remain largely separate from state control; they can act alongside state-based organisations such as the United Nations, but are not subject to the same degrees of scrutiny and accountability, and largely exercise power without oversight.

This module will examine some key issues that question whether it is just the State that holds political power at the international level today, and if not then what are the implications? Starting with a review of the (theoretical) world order and then the role that war has played in shaping both the world order and driving the rise of the NGO sector, the module will then continue with an examination of the NGO Sector and the role of both the conventional media and the ever-growing role and importance of social media (which is often even less subject to control and examination than other forms of media). The role of major corporations and international finance will then be considered, and finally the role of regional organisations which are both made up of states and increasingly act in a state-like manner.

There will be three seminars in the series: first, a discussion of War in the modern world; second an examination of the role of social media; and third an opportunity to bring the module together by discussing whether the state-based world order is still fit for purpose.

Lecture 1. The (Theoretical) World Order

- How did the State become the building block of International Politics.
- Different ways of defining "The State".
- Governance and the rise of the UN.

Lecture 2. The Role of War in Shaping International Politics

- War and History
- Maps and Identity driven by war.
- The need to maintain Peace today.

Lecture 3. The Rise (and Rise) of the NGO

- How and why did NGOs become major players in International Politics
- The Western Dominance
- Can the NGO sector be controlled?

Lecture 4. The NGO Sector: Undermining or Reinforcing Global Governance?

- Do NGOs reinforce or undermine the State-based Order?
- The positive (and negative) roles that NGOs play in maintaining the world order.

Lecture 5. It Is a Media World: The Role of the Media in the Modern World

- The role of the conventional Media, both State controlled and independent.
- Controlling conventional Media.
- The rise, and the impact, of Social Media.

Lecture 6. International Finance and the Role of Multi-National Companies

- Is Finance the driving force in modern politics?
- Can Finance be truly controlled?
- The ever-increasing power of Multi-National Companies.

Lecture 7. Is it a State or is it Not a State? The Rise of Regional Bodies

- The positives and negatives of Regional Bodies
- The role of Regional Bodies in International Politics.
- Can Regional Bodies be controlled in the same way as States?

Seminar 1. Will We Ever See The End Of War?

- Why does war continue to play a role in International Politics today?
- Are efforts at controlling war ultimately doomed to failure?
- Will we ever see the end of war?

Seminar 2. Social Media: A Positive or Negative Force for the International Order?

- Is Social Media the future defining characteristic of everyday life?
- Is Social Media the future defining characteristic of International Politics?
- A force for good? Or an increasingly selfish world?

Seminar 3. Time for a Re-Set: Is the World Order Overdue a Reset?

- Is the present International Political Order fit for purpose?
- Is there a future for the State?
- Visions of the future

Assessment: group presentations