

Course Proposal

International Organisations: How they work and what they achieve.

The course will explore how international organisations (IOs) work. They are an important feature of the international regime; membership is extensive; the expectations are high; new IOs are often created. Yet too often they seem to be gridlocked, unable to decide what to do. Why are they both welcomed and frustrated?

This course will explore the world of IOs. It will ask why they were created, what structures were agreed, how they work, what their problems are, how they are perceived and used by different members and what they are able to achieve. The course will concentrate on those IOs that have an economic logic, that try to deliver programs and projects: The World Bank, the IMF, the World Trade Organisation, and the UN agencies: the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). It will also ask if new agencies, particularly the regional development banks and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, will be better able to assist their member states.

The purpose of the course is to introduce students to the problems, practices and promise of international collaboration through these intergovernmental institutions, providing a realistic account of why they collaborate and what are the benefits or disadvantages for both large and small, rich and poor, member states.

Course Structure. The topics of the eight sessions will be:

1. The world of IOs: why they were founded, when states wish to belong, what the ruling structures are and why; how do they differ from one IO to another;
2. IOs as seen by member states, both large and small; how member states can or cannot control the activities, how they understand issues, negotiate and decide; the different perspectives of the big donors and big recipients;
3. Leadership of IOs: who wins the top positions, how, and with what implications; the roles of Directors general/presidents as managers, diplomats and politicians;
4. Staff and secretariats: what is their formal position, what influence can they exert, what are their strength and problems;
5. IOs at work: the World Bank and the IMF;
6. IOs at work: WTO: negotiation trade, governing by consensus;
7. IOs at work: UN economic agencies: FAO, WHO, WIPO;
8. IOs at work: the regional banks and the AIIB: how do they work, can they do it better. Concluding section: Who decides in IOs? Who has the authority?

Delivery

The first half of each session will be in lecture form.

In the first week the second half of each session will involve student discussion of pre-set reading. There will be 2-3 short pieces circulated that will ask them to think about the issues in the lecture the day before. I will ask them to prepare a brief summary of the main points of the readings as that will assist in their contributions to the discussion. In the second week, teams of students will be required to analyse the working of a particular IO. The students' class contributions over the two weeks will be assessed and count for 25% of their final mark.

The students will individually write up their findings from the presentation in the second week in a paper (1500 words) that will count for 35% of their assessment.

In session 8, there will be a short examination, requiring the students to provide a combination of definitions and short answers that will count for the final 40% of the assessment.