International Law

Political Science 01:790:362, Summer 2026 (Session 2)

Course Information
Lecture Hours/Location: Online and Asynchronous
Instructor: Katie Shapiro

Contact Information
Email: Kathryn.shapiro@rutgers.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays 12pm-1pm via Zoom

Course Overview

This course introduces students to international law through the lens of political science, examining how legal rules and institutions influence—and are influenced by—international politics. Rather than focusing primarily on legal doctrine, the course explores why states create international law, why they choose to comply with it, how international law is enforced, and under what conditions it succeeds or fails in shaping state behavior. Although international law establishes rules governing relations among states and other international actors, it operates in an international system characterized by sovereign states and the absence of a central governing authority. Why, then, do states create international law? Why do they choose to comply with it? Under what conditions is international law effective, and when does it fail to influence state behavior? How does international law interact with domestic politics, foreign policy, and international institutions?

Throughout the course, we will emphasize the relationship between law and politics by examining why international law operates as it does and how it shapes cooperation and conflict in world politics. Rather than focusing primarily on legal doctrine, students will evaluate competing political science explanations for the creation, design, enforcement, compliance, and effectiveness of international law. Particular attention will be given to both the opportunities and limitations of international law as a tool for addressing contemporary global challenges.

The course begins by examining the foundations of international law, including its origins, primary sources, and relationship to state sovereignty. We then explore why states create international law, why they comply with it, how it is enforced, and why compliance varies across issue areas. Throughout the semester, students will apply these concepts to historical and contemporary case studies involving climate change, human rights, international trade, international courts, and the laws governing armed conflict. By the end of the course, students will be able to critically evaluate the role of international law in world politics, assess its effectiveness across different issue areas, and apply course concepts to contemporary international challenges.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. **Explain** the primary sources and institutions of international law.
2. **Analyze** why states create, comply with, and sometimes violate international law.
3. **Evaluate** the effectiveness and limitations of international law across different issue areas.

4. **Apply** course concepts to historical and contemporary international case studies.
5. **Assess** the relationship between international law, state sovereignty, and international politics.

Course Format

This is a *fully online* and *asynchronous* course that uses the Canvas platform. The course is structured around one module per week. All required materials needed for a given week are provided in the corresponding Canvas module. Each week, you will be expected to view the lecture video and slides as well as do the assigned readings. Regularly watching the lectures and completing the readings is essential to ensure an adequate performance in the class. Virtual office hours will be held once a week at the date-time listed at the top of the syllabus.

Grade Composition

Assignment	Number Total	Weight
Weekly Reflection Memos	6	**25%**
Case Study Assignment	2	**25%**
Pop Quizzes	2	**10%**
Meet with the Professor*	1	**10%**
Final Policy Memo	1	**30%**

Grading Scale

- A = 89.5–100
- B+ = 84.5–89.49
- B = 79.5–84.49
- C+ = 74.5–79.49
- C = 69.5–74.49
- D = 59.5–69.49
- F = 0–59.49

Note: These cut-points round up to the nearest grade. Requests to further round grades will be denied.

Assignment Breakdown

Weekly Reflection Memos (25%)

Each week, students will submit a short reflection memo (approximately 300–500 words) responding to a prompt based on the assigned readings, lectures, and case studies. Reflection prompts will be posted in the corresponding weekly Canvas module.

These reflections are designed to help students engage critically with the course material by applying key concepts rather than simply summarizing the readings. Students should develop a clear, well-supported response using examples from the week's materials and include appropriate in-text

citations when necessary. Successful reflection papers will demonstrate thoughtful engagement with the course content and the ability to connect theory to real-world issues.

Case Study Assignments (25%)

Each weekly module includes an instructor-selected case study that illustrates the module's central topic and demonstrates how international law operates in practice. These case studies are listed in the course syllabus under each weekly module and are also available on the corresponding Canvas page.

During the semester, students will complete **two Case Study Assignments**. Students may choose **any two** of the weekly case studies (one submission per selected week) and write a brief analysis of how the case illustrates the international law concepts discussed in that module. The purpose of these assignments is to encourage students to apply course concepts to real-world events and to evaluate how international law functions in practice.

Each assignment should be **no more than 500 words** and should address the prompt / question provided alongside the case.

3. Pop Quizzes (10%)

Two short, low-stakes quizzes will be administered throughout the course to reinforce key concepts and encourage students to remain current with the assigned readings. While students will know that two quizzes will be given during the semester, the exact timing of each quiz will not be announced in advance. Quiz announcements will be posted on Canvas during the week they become available, and students will have until the end of that week to complete the quiz.

Students are encouraged to stay current with the course material each week, as quizzes may cover any assigned readings, lectures, or concepts discussed up to that point in the course.

4. Meet with the Professor* (10%)

Each student is required to participate in one brief individual meeting with the instructor during the semester. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss course material, ask questions, receive feedback, and reflect on ideas explored throughout the course in a more conversational setting.This meeting is intended to be an informal conversation rather than an assessment and provides an opportunity for students to engage more personally with the course material and the instructor.

A sign-up sheet will be provided on Canvas at the beginning of the semester, allowing students to select a meeting time that best fits their schedule.

* **Scheduling Note:** I understand that many students have work, family, or other commitments during the summer that may make it difficult to attend a meeting during the available sign-up times. If you are unable to meet during one of the scheduled time slots, please email me ASAP and we will discuss an alternative.

5. Final Policy Memorandum (30%)

As the culminating assignment, students will prepare a two-page policy memorandum in which they assume the role of a foreign policy advisor to the President of Melos, a fictional democratic country. Drawing on concepts, theories, readings, and case studies from throughout the course, students will provide policy recommendations regarding the role of international law in Melos's foreign policy.

In the memorandum, students should address the following:

- **Provide a brief overview of international law**, including its main sources and origins.
- **Explain why states choose to follow international law** and discuss the primary mechanisms through which international law is enforced.
- **Identify circumstances in which states may choose not to comply with international law** and explain the political, economic, or strategic factors that may influence those decisions.
- **Select one issue area** (such as climate change, armed conflict, global health, etc.) and advise the President of Melos on how international law could be used to advance the country's interests in this area. Students should justify their recommendation using concepts and examples discussed throughout the course, including both the potential benefits and limitations of relying on international law.

The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate your ability to synthesize the major themes of the course and apply them to a practical policy scenario. Successful memoranda will present clear recommendations supported by evidence and concepts from the course. Please include in-text citations when appropriate. Any citation format is fine so long as it is consistent.

Course Resources

Library Services
Rutgers offers a vast array of research services through its library system. Students are encouraged to frequently visit the library website here (https://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/). Note that the library website stores a trove of academic articles that will be useful for your written assignments. It also provides you with the ability to identify subject specialists and contact librarians for assistance.

Respect and Politics
Our goal in this course is to scientifically analyze border politics. Instead of scrutinizing whether political preferences are morally dubious or normatively desirable, we take these preferences as a given and evaluate their relationship with political processes. The tools we develop should be equally useful for individuals across the political spectrum. As a result, we will generally avoid the discussion of our own (normative) political opinions. Nevertheless, throughout the course we will be discussing topics that naturally lend themselves to differing interpretations, experiences, and analyses. Everyone should feel welcome to share their personal assessment in the classroom without fear of ridicule, intimidation, or discrimination. Respectful disagreements are expected.

Plagiarism and Cheating
Don't do it. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and are treated as such by both the university and the instructor. All open-response assignments will be run through plagiarism checkers, which will

compare your work to that of other students and materials available online. These checks include comparing answers to ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence models. Be aware that the instructor is apt to impose the most severe penalty allowed by university rules, which includes but is not limited to issuing an automatic failing grade for the course. If students have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, or other matters of academic integrity, please consult the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy found here: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/.

Accommodations and Wellness Services

Many of us face personal challenges or have psychological needs that can interfere with our personal lives. Rutgers offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times.

Just In Case Web App (http://codu.co/cee05e)

Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/ www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/

CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 / www.vpva.rutgers.edu/

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty.

Disability Services

(848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / https://ods.rutgers.edu/

Students with disabilities are welcomed in this class and will readily receive necessary accommodations. Doing so requires students provide the instructor with a letter of accommodation from the above office. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form.

Scarlet Listeners

(732) 247-5555 / http://www.scarletlisteners.com/

Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline.

Course Outline:

***Subject to change**

Week 1: What Is International Law?

Guiding Question: How can law exist in an international system without a world government?

Required Readings:

Simmons, Beth. "International Law." Chapter 14, *Handbook of International Relations*. Sage Publications, 2012, pp. 352-378.

Lectures: Shapiro, "Introduction to the Course"

Key Concepts

- Sovereignty
- Cooperation
- Legitimacy
- Institutions
- Anarchy

Week 2: Where Does International Law Come From?

Guiding Question: What are the sources of international law?

Required Readings:

Greenwood, Christopher. *Sources of International Law: An Introduction.* United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law.

Fitzmaurice, Malgosia. 2017. "The History of Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice: The Journey from the Past to the Present." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Sources of International Law*, edited by Samantha Besson and Jean d'Aspremont, 171–193. Oxford: Oxford University Press *(skim this)

Chimni, B.S. 2018. "Customary International Law: A Third World Perspective." American Journal of International Law (pages 1-7; 20-27)

Lectures: Shapiro, "The Sources of International Law- An Introduction".

Key Concepts

- Customary Law
- Treaties
- Norms
- Great Power Politics
- Hard and Soft Law

Official Documents to Review:

Statute of the International Court of Justice. 1945. Article 38. Available at: https://www.icj-cij.org/statute

Case study: Diplomatic and State Immunity. How is this practice an example of customary international law?

Week 3: Why States Follow International Law / Enforcement Mechanisms

Guiding Question: Why do states obey international law when no global police force exists to enforce it?

Required Readings:

Chayes, Abram, and Antonia Handler Chayes. 1993. "On Compliance." *International Organization* 47 (2): 175–205.

Downs, George W., David M. Rocke, and Peter N. Barsoom. 1996. "Is the Good News about Compliance Good News about Cooperation?" *International Organization* 50 (3): 379–406

Recommended Readings:
Henkin, Louis. *How Nations Behave : Law and Foreign Policy*. 2d ed. New York: Published for the Council on Foreign Relations by Columbia University Press, 1979, chapter 1.

Lectures: Shapiro, "Understanding Why Most States Follow International Law Most of the Time".

Key Concepts:

- Compliance
- Reputation
- Reciprocity
- Domestic politics
- International institutions
- Norms
- Monitoring
- Naming and shaming

Case Study: Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (global treaty). Explore the enforcement mechanisms in this treaty.

Week 4: Does International Law Constrain State Behavior?

Guiding Question(s): Is international law just great power politics? Why do states sometimes violate international law despite agreeing to follow it?

Required Readings:

Morgenthau, Hans J. 1985. "The Main Problems of International Law." In *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, brief ed., 253–268. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Allison, Graham. 2016. "Of Course China, Like All Great Powers, Will Ignore an International Legal Verdict." *The Diplomat*, July 11, 2016. Available here: https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/of-course-china-like-all-great-powers-will-ignore-an-international-legal-verdict/

Posner, Eric A. 2020. "The Limits of the World Health Organization." Available here: https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/limits-world-health-organization

Lectures: Shapiro, "Limitations of International Law".

Key Concepts:

- Security interests
- Power politics
- Free riding
- Enforcement problems
- Great powers
- Collective action
- Domestic political pressures

Case study: - Nicaragua vs United States of America (1986). Explore how this case highlights potential weaknesses of international law.

Week 5: International Courts – Enforcement in Practice

Guiding Question: If there is no world government, who enforces international law?

Required Readings:

Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Mette and J.C. Sharman. 2021. "Enforcers beyond Borders: Transnational NGOs and the Enforcement of International Law." Perspectives on Politics 19(1): 131-147.

The National WWII Museum. "The Nuremberg Trials." https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/topics/nuremberg-trials

Young, David A. 1977. "Contributions to International Law and World Order by the World Court's Adjudication of the Icelandic Fisheries Controversy." *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 1(1): 1–34. (Skim this and watch the YouTube video below)

Watch:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjq30yhhgd0 (Fisheries Jurisdiction Case (UK v Iceland) (Coastal rights)

Lectures:

Shapiro, "An Introduction to Enforcement in International Law".

Key Concepts:

- International courts
- Economic sanctions
- Domestic courts
- International organizations

Case Study: The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and / or International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Explore how these tribunals were able to prosecute the leaders from each country.

Week 6: Does International Law Matter? Course Recap

Guiding Question: How much does international law actually shape world politics?

This week synthesizes everything students have learned.

Required Readings:

None.

Lectures: Shapiro, "Course Wrap Up".