**Contemporary International Relations**

**PO4700**

**Syllabus 2011-12**

**Senior Sophister Course**

**Convenor:** Dr Thomas Pegram

Email: [pegramt@tcd.ie](mailto:pegramt@tcd.ie)

**Office:** 2-3 College Green (above Starbucks), Room 4.06

**Office hours:** Friday, 2-3.30pm, or email for appointment

**Lecture location**

**Michaelmas Term (Wks 1-3):** Tuesday 2pm, Arts Room 4050B

**Group 1 (Wks 4-11):** Tuesday 2pm, Arts Room 4050B

**Group 2 (Wks 4-11):** Tuesday 3pm, Arts Room 4050B

**Hilary Term (Wks 1-12):**

**Group 1:** Tuesday 12pm Arts Room 4050B

**Group 2:** Tuesday 3pm, Arts Room 5039

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**Course Overview**

**Description**

Although a ‘common sense’ view of world politics is often presented in non-academic contexts, there is little agreement among experts on what international relations is, and how we should think about the discipline. This module enables students to critically examine the conventional wisdom and as a result to gain a more critical understanding of international relations. Part I provides a survey of theoretical perspectives in international relations, moving beyond the classical division between realism and liberalism. It also integrates a focus on security to animate key theoretical claims and their application. In Part II, the course turns to the thematic domain of international human rights regimes to assess how international relations scholarship is adapting to, and making sense of, contemporary developments in this fast-moving arena.

**Learning Outcomes**

On successful completion of this module students should be able to:

* Describe the key assumptions which distinguish contemporary theories of international relations from each other
* Analyse the purpose, coherence and contradictions of contemporary theories of international relations as they apply to the issues of security and international human rights regimes
* Apply knowledge of the different uses of theory, in particular problem-solving and critical reflection, and their respective contribution to understanding international relations
* Judge the contribution of different theories of international relations to understanding and explaining the significance of international human rights and the role of the United Nations in world politics
* Identify the role and interactions of governance actors (public, private and civil society) in the fields of security and human rights
* Critically evaluate the nature and impact of 9/11 on international relations theory and conceptions of security in world affairs
* Critically evaluate the nature and impact of international humanitarian and human rights standards on global politics since the end of the Cold War.

**Course organisation**

This course consists of an initial 50 minute lecture for weeks 1 to 3. The group will then be split into two and proceed with a series of 50 minute smaller group discussion-led lectures for the remainder of the course. The weekly lectures are valuable guides to the material and students are expected to attend them. However, deeper learning comes through your own reading. Lecture attendance is not sufficient to achieve mastery of the material. A passing grade will not be possible without demonstrating a knowledge of the materials in the course, both in the readings and lectures.

In order to promote participation in class we will move to smaller group lectures beginning in week 4 of teaching, October 15th. Sign-up sheets for the two groups will be distributed in class during Week 2. You should come to these smaller group lectures having read the required readings and prepared to discuss the questions listed at the beginning of each week’s readings. This will be an opportunity for everyone to develop their understanding of the material in a constructive peer group setting to complement the reading that you are doing each week. The study briefs will be a key resource in this regard.

**Preparation for class**

1. Comprehensive lecture slides for the topic will be available on WebCT at least a week in advance of the lecture. Please ensure you are registered for WebCT as soon as possible.
2. You will be expected to conduct your readings with reference to the slides. The slides will signpost our independent reading and will provide a firm foundation upon which to develop your understanding of the topic.
3. Review and comment on study briefs from Wk 4, MT.

**Class (from Week 4, MT)**

1. At each small group lecture, we will begin the class with any questions and concerns you may have regarding the slides, the topic and/or the readings. This will be an opportunity to seek additional guidance regarding any concepts, topics, or theories/theorists you encounter on the slides and which we may need to cover in more depth during discussion.
2. We will then proceed to conduct a discussion-led lecture for the remainder of our time together. This will entail everyone having done the readings and having a firm grasp of the basics prior to the study group meeting. In order to aid you in this task, the study briefs will be important.

**Study briefs**

ALL students will prepare ONE study brief prior to ONE lecture in both Michaelmas (Wks 4-11) and Hilary Term (Wks 1-9). Study briefs should be 800-1000 words in length (minimum 800 words, maximum 1000 words). The study briefs should be formatted in Microsoft Word not PDF, single spaced, and in 12 point font. The briefs must be sent as an email attachment to [pegramt@tcd.ie](mailto:pegramt@tcd.ie) by **5pm on the Friday** prior to the Tuesday lecture. Late submissions may be refused.

All study briefs will receive feedback within two weeks of submission. This feedback will be formative (i.e. will not form part of your formal assessment). However, an indicative grade will be provided.

The purpose of the study briefs is threefold. Firstly, they must address ONE of the questions at the top of each week’s readings, drawing explicitly on the principle points raised by the required readings. Secondly, they should pose at least two additional questions that arise in the course of writing your answer to the question. Thirdly, where possible, these questions should make reference to the general themes of the course (i.e. IR theory and security in MT; and human rights in term HT).

Examples of study briefs and online commentary can be found here:

<http://tompegram.com/teaching/po4700-study-briefs/>

Students who have prepared a study brief for that week should come to class willing and able to present aspects of their work, as well as indicate additional questions that they think should guide discussion of the topic. The study brief system is intended to raise the level of group learning as well as provide a chance for students to receive substantive peer feedback as the course progresses.

All students will be expected to read the study briefs prior to class and have provided at least ONE good quality substantive comment of at least 100 words on a study brief of your choice.

Online peer review will work as follows:

1. Study briefs (as noted above) must be submitted in Microsoft Word by 5pm on the Friday prior to the relevant Tuesday group meeting. The study briefs will then be uploaded onto this webpage: [www.tompegram.com/teaching](http://www.tompegram.com/teaching). The password to access the study briefs is security12.
2. From Week 4, MT everyone will be expected to visit their respective group webpage and leave an informed comment/argument/critique on at least ONE of their group study briefs, based on their readings. Please sign in using your full names and the comments must be both substantive and constructive.
3. Everyone is expected to comment on at least ONE study brief for their group. Anyone who does not provide a comment on any study briefs will be first line for discussant in class! **NB.** All the study briefs merit comment so please seek out the study brief with the least comments.

**Important: please remember to read the study briefs with a critical eye. It is important that you do not necessarily take the author’s claims at face value. Please refer back to your readings when assessing the veracity of claims made by your peers. In sum, study briefs should not be relied upon for revision purposes.**

**Assessment**

Two essays account for 40% of the mark (20% per essay). The annual exam at the end of semester 2 accounts for 60% of the mark.

Essay topics are provided at the end of this outline.