

International Relations 4703F
Contemporary Challenges in the Global Community I
Fall 2026

Instructor: **Oleksa Drachewych**

Email: **odrachew@uwo.ca**

Office: **Department of History, Lawson Hall 2233**

Office Hours: **TBA**

This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

Course Description

In this seminar, students will work independently and collaboratively to develop a plan responding to a key issue in international relations, drawing on historical research and current-day analysis with an eye to both Canadian and global foreign policy. In this year's class, the primary theme will be the issue of morality in the global order. With notable wars around the world, the return of a potentially multipolar world, and with several Great Powers engaging in aggressive acts, there have been a multitude of pieces proclaiming the end of the rules-based international order. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney in his feted speech at Davos in January 2026 agreed with such assessments while arguing that middle powers, including Canada, should come together to counteract the aggressive acts by major powers and engage in cooperation while fighting for the world they wished to be a part of – one that presumably included certain moral principles.

Morality has played a significant role in international relations for centuries. First, norms between nations often determined the relationship between nations, diplomatically and the rules of war. These norms often then turned into laws as new technologies developed. Later, following the Second World War, the enormities of the Holocaust and the crimes against humanity committed during that war led to a global effort to codify human rights. But in 2026, several nations have had political or military leaders targeted by International Criminal Court arrest warrants for actions their nation's forces have committed in war. Wars in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, to name just a few, fight for worldwide attention and principles of justice have, at times, seemed secondary (or absent) in any attempts to resolve these conflicts or other crises.

What does it mean to operate with morality in international relations in 2026? What is justice? What is Canada's role in this current reality? What can be done to reflect the realities of the present day system where some nations do not recognize the jurisdiction of international institutions? What about the United Nations that attempts to highlight international solidarities but appears helpless in the face of aggressive states? While fair to say these institutions are acting as intended, based on the contexts they were developed, how do we modernize or reform such institutions? And finally, how do we combat the growing cynicism that seems to also

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undergird how so many view world affairs in 2026? These are just some of the questions we will tackle in the capstone project in Fall 2026.

Prerequisite(s): Enrollment in year 4 of the Honours Specialization in International Relations Module, or permission of the departments.

Antirequisite(s): The former International Relations 4701E, the former International Relations 4702E.

Course Syllabus

Students should, by the end of IR4703F:

- Evaluate scholarship that discusses, in some way, historical cases of morality in the world order, Canada's role in those orders, or any key issues that have defined how morality has been dealt with in world affairs
- Engage in debate and discussion with fellow students, scholars, and policy makers
- Refine your academic writing and develop skills to communicate to a non-academic audience
- Work collaboratively in small and large groups to develop a class wide policy brief
- Present the collaborative policy recommendations to a panel of experts and respond to their feedback

Methods of Evaluation

15% - Case study memo (due September 29)

55% - Work for group project (ongoing, final version due November 30)

30% - Participation

Case Study Memo: Students are to determine a specific case study relevant to the theme of the course and write a piece highlighting why it should be a priority in our final policy program. Multiple students may write on similar or related topics, but they are responsible for their own work at this point. How does the case study reflect a key issue on the matter of morality in the global order? What are the key discussions informing this topic? What is Canada's role in these matters? What about certain regions? The idea is to write a memo with the aim of convincing the rest of the class that this theme is important enough to warrant entry into the group project. This memo should be 1250-1500 words, with footnotes or endnotes (although these will not count as part of the word count), in Chicago Style. A bibliography should also be included. These memos are due September 29 and should be uploaded on the Brightspace discussion boards for the entire class to review for class on October 5.

The case study memo is due September 29 at 11:59 pm ET on OWL. This assignment has an automatic 3 day grace period, should students need additional time, to complete the assignment (Especially as it is early in the term). As a result any other requests for accommodation through academic advising will generally be declined.

Case Study for and Work on Group Project: Once the class has determined the themes that will be included in the final project, students will work collaboratively (both individually and in different sized groups) over the majority the course and class time. Students will take leadership

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in one topic, but also overlap with other related themes to allow the final capstone to have a degree of consistency across its many parts. This work is worth 55% of the class grade and will reflect a number of items including the work done on their assigned case study including the work done more generally to support the completion of the capstone project before our final presentation. As part of this work, there will be certain deadlines to ensure that work is being completed in a timely manner. Marks will be given for each draft reflecting the work that has been done and with a potential mark should students maintain their efforts through the remainder of the course. While one's final mark will not be an average of these marks, earlier marks will be considered in the final evaluation, especially if students are failing to keep up with the rigor necessary for the success of the capstone.

For much of this class, students will be expected to remain engaged. If need be, the professor will step in in case class time is not being used effectively, to resolve any disputes, or to make executive decisions to ensure the completion of the final product. The more work completed in October means the less work that may need to be completed in November!

Participation: The success of the group project requires students to be active each week and providing consistent contributions to its many moving parts. Each week, this mark will focus on student involvement in class discussions and their participation in the development of the project. Contributing to discussions, resolving disputes, taking on leadership roles, formatting the project, taking notes, and so forth are all ways students can earn marks. Finally, presenting ideas in discussion with our experts at the end of the term will play a role in this mark too. Additionally, students will submit a survey at the end of the course following the meeting with experts, outlining their contributions to the group project and reflecting on the conclusions of the experts. This, too, will be considered in the final mark.

Late Penalty:

As consistent and timeliness are necessary to keep the group project on schedule, each assignment has a late penalty of 5% per day including weekends. Each assignment is due for 11:59 pm ET on the date it is due.

The case study memo is due September 29 at 11:59 pm ET on OWL. This assignment has an automatic 3 day grace period, should students need additional time, to complete the assignment (Especially as it is early in the term). All other assignments will maintain their deadlines, more to ensure our class time can be utilized effectively, and will focus on work completed through the submission of drafts to ensure students are staying on schedule.

Course Materials

Most materials will be located on OWL Brightspace, using ebooks or online sources. The following items will be made available for purchase at the UWO Bookstore:

Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton University Press, 2009)

Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1:

September 14: Introduction, discussion of group project, initial discussion to frame class theme

Week 2:

September 21: Historical discussion of morality and world orders; brainstorming implications for capstone project

Readings for September 21:

Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace* (The whole book)

Week 3:

September 28: Discussion of potential case studies; brainstorming session

Students should have already started work on their case studies and this is an opportunity to soft pitch your ideas, while also soliciting feedback.

CASE STUDIES DUE SEPTEMBER 29

Week 4:

October 5: Discussion of case studies and final pitches to class; confirm sections for capstone project. Depending on course size, a vote may be taken to determine which topics are given priority

Week 5:

October 12: THANKSGIVING & READING WEEK – NO CLASS

Week 6:

October 19: Confirm common format and begin collaborative work on case studies

Week 7:

October 26: Continued research and group work.

First drafts will be due by October 30 for professor feedback and progress check

Week 8:

November 2: Progress reports; initial troubleshooting. Collaboration between groups begins to ensure coherent policy recommendations

Week 9:

November 9: Continued collaboration and active work to determine coherent final report

Week 10:

November 16: Polished drafts of case studies to be submitted for peer review; Determine full plan to maximize remaining class time

Drafts as they stand to be submitted for professor review at end of class November 16

Week 11:

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November 23: Work in feedback from peer review and professor; Full draft mostly completed for final edits

Week 12:

November 30: Finalize project for submission to experts

Week 13:

December 7: Meet with the Experts

Additional Statements

Communication policies: Students are welcome to come to the professor's office hours or to arrange another time to meet the professor at his office if they have questions or concerns about the course. Additionally, they may contact the professor via email. The professor will aim to respond to students within 24 hours on weekdays and within 48 hours on weekends. Please use your UWO email address for any correspondence.

Use of electronic devices: Students are welcome to use electronic devices for the purposes of writing notes, reviewing course materials, and working on the capstone project during class. Recording tools are not allowed without written permission from the instructor.

Use of generative AI tools: You may use generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in this course for activities related to improving the structure of your paper, such as drafting an outline to organize your thoughts—but not for generating prose or for your research. All writing submitted in this course must be your own. Any use of such tools must be fully cited, acknowledged, and explained. If in doubt, please ask the professor for clarification and advice

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.