

Postgraduate Optional Modules

We offer a wide range of optional modules across all of our master's degrees. This gives you the flexibility to study a number of topics or specialise in a specific area.

Our optional modules are arranged on an annual basis and are subject to change. It is possible that a module may be modified in its content, suspended for a session, or discontinued. New modules may become available in any given year.

Building Peace after War

Since the end of the Cold War, the nature of conflict has changed, with civil wars becoming the most prevalent form of conflict and the number and type of actors involved evolving. As a result, the international community has developed new instruments and approaches to resolve conflicts and mitigate their consequences.

In this module, we will explore the different approaches chosen by the international community to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts, assessing both military and non-military instruments, and discuss the factors that promote and hinder effective conflict management. Drawing on a number of recent and contemporary case studies, we will examine peacemaking and negotiating an end to conflict, peacekeeping, statebuilding, and the relationship between peacebuilding and development. We will look at a variety of actors, including major international organizations like the UN, regional organizations, grassroots groups and NGOs, and local groups in war-torn countries, debating who is best-placed to build peace. In addition, we will consider what success looks like in post-conflict peacebuilding and how to measure it. We will draw on a variety of resources, including media and current events, in addition to scholarly work on peacebuilding.

Conflict in the Middle East

The Middle East has recently experienced a wave of potentially transformative revolutions. With the hope for democracy, however, has come the risk of widespread violence and destabilisation. Is the region about to descend into a long, dark 'Arab winter'?

This course addresses Middle Eastern conflict as a broad area of inquiry and investigates the political, economic and social conditions from which it arises. It begins with an examination of how the pre-modern heritage of the region, the impact of

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imperialism, the rise of competing ideologies and the advance of modernisation have shaped contemporary politics and engendered the power struggles of the present day.

This is followed by an assessment of the origins and evolution of religious fundamentalism, with a strong focus on political Islam and its many facets. We examine the dynamics of inter-state, intra-state and inter-ethnic conflicts, with a particular focus on Iraq, Iran, Syria and Lebanon and the role of foreign intervention. The course also covers all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

International Relations Theory

In thinking about contemporary problems in international relations, where should we begin? Theories attempt to provide an answer. They provide ways of conceptualising the international system, they present arguments about what drives state behaviour, and they reflect on the challenges that face international actors.

They also raise questions about how and why the world looks as it does, what we can know about it, how we can change it, and what we ought to do (and not do). This module provides an overview of the principal schools of thought that grapple with these problems within the modern discipline of international relations.

It thereby provides a core academic training for anyone thinking of working in this field and equips you with the intellectual tools required to start to make sense of the many and varied problems we face in the world today.

International Security Studies

As the nature of threats, risks, and dangers has changed significantly over the last decades, international security studies has struggled to adapt its conceptual and theoretical structure to this new, yet still dangerous world. What are the sources, forms and consequences of international insecurity today? How can we deal with them, perhaps even overcome them? Do traditional theories suffice to guide our inquiries, or do we need new approaches in order to understand this new world?

The module is guided by these questions, introducing you to both traditional and critical theories of security, as well as new ways to study insecurity and the particular political ideologies and doctrines that underpin it, and the practices put into place to manage and alleviate it.

Parliamentary Studies

This highly innovative module is offered in partnership with the Houses of Parliament and is co-taught by parliamentary staff alongside colleagues from the Department of Politics. The module gives you the opportunity to discover the inner workings of Parliament, in theory and in practice, and consider its place in our broader democratic system.

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You will develop a detailed knowledge and understanding of the functions of Parliament, how Parliament fits within the wider UK political system, how the UK Parliament compares to legislatures in other democracies and what role the legislature plays in the policy-making process. This understanding will be based on real-world engagement with Parliament and parliamentarians as well as the insights of scholarly research.

You will shadow one part of Parliament and reports regularly on its activities. Members of the parliamentary outreach service will come to Reading to lend their hands-on expertise during some sessions, and we will be inviting a series of senior politicians to come as guest speakers. We will also have a trip to Parliament itself during Enhancement Week, giving you direct access to the political world.

Terrorism in a Globalising World

This module aims to convey a sense of how terrorism relates to world politics, the individual, and everything in between. It proceeds by examining competing definitions of terrorism and the theoretical and practical implications; past, present and future trends in the history of terrorism; terrorists' motivation and the incentives to choose terrorism as a behaviour; terrorist methods; counter-terrorism options; regional patterns; and historical case studies.

The Origins and Causes of War

Scholars in many disciplines have been preoccupied with society's worst disease: war. Biologists have established that humans are not the only species to fight in organised groups; paleoanthropologists have tried to ascertain when war first occurred and why; psychologists enquire into the minds of those who wage it; anthropologists study culturally diverse attitudes to war; while historians generate and political scientists analyse the greatest data bank on wars and conflicts. Is aggression a biologically programmed part of human nature? Is organised violence an intrinsic part of any human society? Is it a function of how societies are organised, and of their acquired values and ideals?

This course draws on literature from all of these disciplines and examines examples drawn from all of human history, to reach conclusions about humanity and war from which all other attempts to contain this disease must start.

Politics of Public Policy

This module introduces you to the politics of public policy: the processes through which policy decisions are made and implemented. It looks at theories of policy-making, stages in the policy process, and the actors, institutions, ideas, and interests involved in the policy process. It includes both domestic and international domains and highlights the particular character of policy-making in a democratic context.

Strategic Studies

This module focuses on strategy, its theoretical grounding but also its real world applications. This module will consist of an examination of the core principles of strategic theory throughout history, but importantly it will also attempt to map these theories into the current environment. You will attempt to test the validity of strategic theory and principles in a number of contexts and assess whether previous teachings still maintain their validity. This module will provide you with the tools needed to engage actively and constructively with the contemporary strategic environment. Although drawing upon historical sources where necessary, this module aims to equip you with the tools to understand a variety of issues active today.

This module will cover the core areas of traditional strategic studies such as the long-standing environments of Land, Sea and Air, but it will also address newer topics such as Space and Cyber strategic thinking and practice. Also present in this module will be an examination of inter- and intra-state conflict, its causes and consequences, but also an investigation of how strategy and the context within which it is formulated and conducted has changed. This module will also highlight the similarities and differences in strategic thinking within the state and non-state context.

Contemporary Diplomacy

This module aims to provide students with an understanding of concepts and practices of contemporary diplomacy. It introduces key concepts in international diplomacy, shows the evolution of diplomatic practice since the Second World War across a range of actors, including states, international organisations, and non-state actors, and the application of different types of diplomacy, including public diplomacy, digital diplomacy and coercive diplomacy.

The unit aims to provide an understanding of ideas and concepts relating to diplomacy, the way diplomacy relates to the complex process of policymaking, both domestic and international, and how these measure up against actual diplomatic practice, explained by practitioners. You will become familiar with key academic works on the subject, to give them the conceptual analytical tools to study international diplomacy. The course will normally have an input from current and former diplomats or other civil servants.

Worlding International Relations

This module is directed to students interested in the history and current development of International Relations. It addresses the challenges formulated in diverse parts of the world to the Western dominance of the field of International Relations. Focusing on how central concept of IR are understood in different parts of the world, the module investigates how scholars from around the world think about central concepts such as sovereignty, the state, war, peace, religion and 'the international'. Highlighting the

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conceptual differences in non-Western approaches, the module casts light on their implication for IR and the study of world politics.

Contemporary Strategic Studies and International Relations

The module explores a range of topics designed to build on and further develop your existing understanding of contemporary debates in Strategic Studies and International Relations. You will develop knowledge of debates within Strategic Studies and International Relations about the changing nature and/or character of war and security as well as an understanding of a range of theories and concepts which may inform a critical understanding of the contemporary security environment.

You will also develop your capacity to engage in conceptually and theoretically-informed thinking about war, security, and strategy.

The module will enable you to articulate a clear understanding of the contemporary security environment and the UK's place within it.

RESEARCH TRAINING MODULES

Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods in Politics and International Relations

This module covers the basics of research design and focuses attention on a range of widely used qualitative research methods in the study of politics and international relations. The main topics covered normally include philosophical research traditions, research design, case studies and within-case analysis, small-n comparative analysis, historical approaches, archival research, interview and ethnographic techniques, critical discourse analysis, and qualitative comparative analysis.

The assessment for the module includes an online test, and a report in which you consider how you would apply the methods covered in the module to an actual research project. The module will be taught in weekly two-hour seminars in the Autumn and Spring Terms. You will be encouraged to use examples taken from your own field (and from your own research, where possible) in class discussion.

Introduction to Quantitative Research Methods in Politics and International Relations

The purpose of this module is to introduce you to the basics of research design and the principal quantitative methods used in political science and international relations. The course discusses the best practice for the collection and analysis of information about

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human behaviour and institutions. To help you understand and apply research methods, the discussion and many of the examples used in the module will be taken from existing quantitative research in international relations, comparative politics and political economy. You are then required to test hypotheses using the methods they have learned in the course.

Philosophical Issues in the Social Sciences

This module introduces you to the consideration of methodological, philosophical and ethical problems encountered in graduate research in the social sciences. You will study and discuss the difficulties involved in characterising the nature of social-scientific research and the status of the knowledge it produces, as well as a range of research traditions. It will also cover specific issues such as principles of research design, reflexivity, causation, conceptual and normative analysis.