

FALL 2026 COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Number: 248-001

Course Title: International Law

Credit Hours: 3

Grading Mode: Letter grade

Meeting Day(s)/Time(s): Mon. 6:05-9:00 P

Meeting Mode: ON CAMPUS

Exam Day(s)/Time(s):

Final Exam Mode: ON CAMPUS

Prerequisite(s): N/A

Corequisite(s): N/A

Instructor(s):

Robert Harris / Robert Nightingale

Contact Information:

rharr27@gmu.edu / rnightin@gmu.edu

Office Hours:

We anticipate staying after class to answer questions or engage in course-related discussion.

Course Overview

This course provides a broad overview of international law, including the ways in which international law is created, the entities to which it applies, and the mechanisms by which it is enforced, or sometimes not enforced. In teaching a course of this breadth and scope, we do not expect students to exhaustively learn the huge array of international legal rules on topics ranging from the international law of armed conflict, international trade and investment, the international law of the sea, international aviation, human rights, and the extradition of fugitive criminals, to the prevention of terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and more. Instead, we hope you will develop the tools for understanding the rules and processes by which lawyers determine the relevant rules of international law and the possible mechanisms by which those rules might be enforced.

Much international legal scholarship highlights the ways in which international law differs from domestic law, notably the absence in the international political system of a single legislative (rule-creating) body, a comprehensive judicial system of courts to interpret and order compliance with those rules, and a powerful executive branch of government and other institutions (e.g., law enforcement personnel and prisons) to compel such compliance. These limitations in the international legal system put a premium on the legal practitioner's ability to identify if there is in fact a legally binding obligation on a State to take or refrain from taking some action and, if there is such an obligation, to identify some way in which that rule might be enforced. Ultimately, our goal is to expand your thinking about international law and its role in the international political system and have you leave the class thinking like an international lawyer.

Course Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, you will be able to:

- 1) Identify how international law is formed, evaluate assertions that there is an applicable rule of international law in a particular situation, and then identify the nature and source of that rule (e.g., a rule based in treaty or in customary international law) based on the analytical tools provided in this class;
- 2) Where relevant, evaluate whether and how a particular rule of international law is incorporated as law in the United States' domestic legal system;
- 3) Analyze fact patterns involving cross-cutting international legal concepts (e.g., including principles of "State responsibility") and determine whether there may be mechanisms by which there may be a formal determination and enforcement of relevant international law; and
- 4) Apply these tools and concepts in various specialized areas of international law covered in the second half of this class.

In addition, we hope you will have a more informed appreciation of the role that international law plays in the international political system and both the uses and limitations of international law.

Reading(s) & Supplement(s):

- Required casebook: Weiner, Hollis, and Keitner, *International Law* (8th edition).
- Optional document supplement: Weiner and Hollis, *International Law: Selected Documents* (2018). This book is available inexpensively as a used book and is a useful compendium of international agreements. That said, the readings we will use from the supplement will also be posted on the course's Canvas site, so there is no need to purchase the supplement unless you want a collected hard

copy.

- Required hornbook: Murphy, *Principles of International Law* (3rd edition). This is a very useful book to have in your personal law library, in addition to providing an excellent overview for use in this class.
- Required and recommended materials other than those in the Carter et al. and Murphy books will be distributed on the course's Canvas site.

We recommend that you try to be aware of current developments in international law and recommend looking periodically at a blog that covers international legal issues, such as *Opinio Juris* (opiniojuris.org), *Just Security* (justsecurity.org), *Lawfare* (lawfareblog.com), or *EJIL: Talk!* (ejiltalk.org).

Grading Policies

Participation & Preparation:

Class participation:

Instructors have discretion to add or subtract no more than 5 points (one half-step) based on "Classroom Performance." To encourage active, informed participation during class, we will avail ourselves of this. As noted below, students will participate on October 26 as advocates for the Philippines and China in a mock arbitration under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and it is essential that students, absent exigent circumstances, be in class on that evening. Additional practical information for effective class participation appears below.

Midterm %: N/A

Final %: 100

The grade for the class will be based on an open book exam, 240 minutes (four hours) in length, and will consist of short answer questions, short essays, and elaborate "issue-spotting" factual scenarios requiring longer essay-type responses.

Additional Information:

This is a relatively reading-intensive class. The syllabus below lists required and suggested background reading. It is essential that all students read the required readings before class and come prepared to discuss that material in class. Please be sure to have the reading materials at hand during class to facilitate discussion. We generally assign 30-35 pages of required reading per credit hour for each class, so 90-105 pages each week. Note that where we have included portions of the Murphy hornbook in the suggested reading for class, you do not need to read that material in order to be prepared for class, but the material provides a usefully straightforward overview that may be helpful to lay a groundwork for you to digest the casebook material, and later, to review in preparation for the final exam.

Please be sure to look on the Canvas site on a regular basis and before you begin to do the reading for a particular week, as it often contains required or recommended reading for particular classes and materials that are not always in the readings listed below. **For most classes, we will post discussion questions on Canvas in the week prior, assigning each question to a particular student or set of students.** The students assigned should be prepared to discuss their assigned questions in class.

Note that on Monday, October 26, students will make in-class presentations relating to a reality-based simulated arbitration between the Philippines and China involving the interpretation and application of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Students registering for the class should ensure that they will be able to participate in that class, absent unanticipated exigent circumstances.

Classroom Policies

Attendance: Per AR 3-1.4, “maintenance of matriculation requires regular class preparation, participation and attendance, registration in the course of study required for the student’s program (full-time or part-time), successive registration for each fall and spring term of each academic year until study is completed, and compliance with all other relevant requirements.”

Absences: Per AR 4-1.1, “if a student is absent for any reason for more than 20 percent of the sessions of a course, the student is not eligible for credit in that course. A student who is not present for at least 75 percent of a session of the course is absent from that session.”

Use of Technology & AI:

The final exam will be open book and open notes but without access to the internet or AI.

Use of Electronic Text Books During Exams:

Students are permitted one laptop computer for exam taking purposes. Additional laptop computers or any other electronic data storage devices are not allowed in an exam room, unless permitted by the course instructor's written exam instructions. Electronic text books (e-books) may be used during exams that are designated as open book by the instructor, and the instructor allows text books to be used during the exam and allows access to a student’s computer files during the exam (open exam). E-books may not be used in exams where the instructor does not allow students to access their computer files during the exam (secure exam) even if the instructor permits access to text books. If the instructor has blocked access to the internet or computer files, you must bring a hard copy of the allowed text book(s) you wish to consult. Students will need to borrow or otherwise locate a hard copy of the e-book or print resources needed from the e-book to take into the exam room. The

instructor determines the length of the examination and whether or not it is secure or open and what, if any, study materials are permitted during the exam. Students are responsible for adhering to the instructor's standards for all examinations, which are included in the examination materials.

Course Schedule & Assignments

A. Introduction

Week 1: Monday, August 17

Introduction to International Law

Please consider the following questions as you do the reading for this class:

- What is law, and what are its origins?
- What are the differences between the international legal system and domestic legal systems? In particular, what are the differences in areas of law-making (legislative functions), enforcement (executive functions), and adjudication (judicial functions) between these systems?
- Do States comply with international law? If so, when and why?
- Why do individuals comply with laws in domestic legal systems? Are reasons for compliance in the international system different?
- What are the costs of non-compliance with international law?

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 1-7 (stop after Question 6), 9-15, 28-40 (*skip Brune and Toope*), 42-44 (introduction to and history of international law), 545-554 (the United Nations; stop after #3 in Notes and Questions)
- Murphy: pp. 35-50 (States, recognition of States, recognition of governments, State succession)
- Canvas or document supplement: United Nations Charter (quickly skim the preamble and Chapters I, II, VI-VII for general content and structure)

Read quickly and be prepared to discuss in class:

- Canvas: *International Law: 100 Ways It Shapes Our Lives*. Please see class discussion questions on Canvas.

B. Sources of International Law (The Creation of International Law)

Week 2: Monday, August 24

The law of treaties

The law of treaties, part 1: evolution of treaty law; the formation, invalidation, and interpretation of treaties; and *pacta sunt servanda*

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 79-80 (skip "Why do States obey treaties?"), 83-88, (skip Notes and Questions), 91-107 (first paragraph; don't read Aust), 120-125
- Canvas or document supplement: Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT), arts. 1-18, 26-27, 29, 31-33,

46-53

- Additional materials on Canvas:
 - The International Law Commission background document on the VCLT (by Karl Zemanek)
 - State Department “Guidance on Non-Binding Documents”

Suggested reading:

- Murphy: pp. 81-101 (Chapter 3.A, “Treaties”)

The law of treaties, part 2: reservations, termination, suspension, and “material breach”

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 110-116, 126-136 (stop before Brexit section)
- Canvas or document supplement: VCLT, arts. 19-23, 54-72
- Canvas: U.S. reservations, understandings, and declarations with respect to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)
- Canvas: U.S. Statement Before the Human Rights Committee on Its Treaty Practice

Week 3: Monday, August 31

Other sources of international law, part 1: Customary international law (CIL)

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 136-155 (CIL)

Suggested reading:

- Murphy: pp. 101-112 (Chapter 3.B, “Customary International Law”)

Other sources of international law, part 2: *jus cogens*, general principles, and subsidiary means of determining the law

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 107-110 (*jus cogens*), 155-162 (general principles of law and subsidiary means)

Suggested reading:

- Murphy: pp. 112-138 (Chapter 3, Sections C-F; note Sections E and F concern categories we will not cover in class or in the exam, but that may be of general interest)

Case study on CIL and the law of the sea (Part 1; Part 2 will be in Class 7)

Required reading:

- Canvas: “CIL Exercise” reading and assigned discussion questions

Allocation of legal authority among States (bases of national jurisdiction)

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 581-589 (introduction and territorial jurisdiction), 597-618 (nationality, passive personality, and universal jurisdiction; stop before Notes and Questions), 645-647 (jurisdiction to enforce; stop before *Alvarez-Machain*)

Suggested reading:

- Murphy: pp. 319-338 (Chapter 8, Sections B and C)

C. Violating International Law: Responsibility and Remedies

Week 4: Wednesday, September 9 (no class on September 7)

State responsibility: attribution and breach; circumstances precluding wrongfulness; reparations; countermeasures

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 764-771 (stop at the end of the Notes and Questions)
- Canvas or document supplement: ILC Draft Articles on State Responsibility, skim arts. 1-55
- Canvas: *Case Concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia v. Serbia)*, 2007 ICJ 43, paras. 379-415 (Section VII of the Judgment)
- Canvas: *Case Concerning U.S. Diplomatic and Consular Staff in Tehran (United States v. Iran)*, 1980 ICJ 3, paras. 15-27, 56-75
- Canvas: *Case Concerning the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Project (Hungary v. Slovakia)*, 1997 ICJ 7, skim facts in paras. 15-18, 21-24, read paras. 49-57, 82-87
- Canvas: *Air Services Agreement Case (France v. United States)* (Dec. 9, 1978), 18 R.I.A.A. 416 (1979), paras. 81-98

Suggested reading:

- Murphy: pp. 229-251 (Chapter 6, “Rules on State Responsibility”)

Espousal/diplomatic protection

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 751-764 (diplomatic protection, nationality),

771-777 (property rights)

- Canvas: ILC Draft Articles on Diplomatic Protection (skim entire document)

Suggested reading:

- Murphy: pp. 392-398 (Chapter 10.B, "State Responsibility for Injury to Aliens")

D. International Law in U.S. Law

Week 5: Monday, September 14

Presidential foreign relations power; federalism issues

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 242-246 (Art. II powers of the President; stop before *Youngstown*), 266-268 (executive agreements; stop before *Hathaway, Bradley & Goldsmith*), 272-281 (types of executive agreements; stop before *Bodansky & Spiro*), 330-331 (federalism)

Suggested reading:

- Murphy: pp. 255-289 (Chapter 7, Sections A and B)

Treaties and CIL in U.S. law

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 192-206 (Art. II treaties; stop at Notes and Questions), 211-232 (the effect of Art. II treaties as domestic law; stop at Treaty Termination); 308-330 (CIL)

Suggested reading:

- Murphy: pp. 289-305 (Chapter 7, Section C)

E. Dispute Resolution

Week 6: Monday, September 21

International dispute resolution mechanisms: Negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, and judicial processes (including the International Court of Justice)

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 345-351 (introduction; negotiation, mediation, and conciliation), 432-441 (international arbitration and investor-state dispute settlement)
- Casebook: pp. 358-370 (stop before *Certain Norwegian Loans*)

case), 374-387 (stop before excerpt from *Nicaragua* case on admissibility), 391- 396 (advisory opinions),

Suggested reading:

- Murphy: pp. 141-173 (Chapter 4, "International Dispute Resolution," Sections A-D)

"Tailored" dispute settlement and the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

Required reading:

- Canvas: "Tailored" dispute settlement and assigned class discussion questions
- Canvas or document supplement: UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, arts. 279-299 (read for general content, but note that the compulsory dispute settlement articles will be relevant later in the semester)

F. Selected Topics in International Law

Week 7: September 28

The international law of the sea

--*General overview (maritime zones, rights of coastal States vs. other users of the sea, regime of islands, etc.)*

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 849-856 (stop at Notes and Questions), 858-862 (stop at Fisheries Case), 867-868 (Islands; stop before Notes and Questions), 879-888, 895-897, 906-908 (stop after Question 4)
- Canvas or document supplement: UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (LOS Convention), arts. 2, 3, 5, 7(1), 7(3), 8, 13, 24, 25, 33, 55-58, 76-78, 81, 86-94(1), 95, 121, and 192
- Canvas or document supplement: LOS Convention, Part XV (dispute settlement provisions), arts. 279-299

Suggested reading:

- Murphy: pp. 449-467, 469-472 (Chapter 11, Sections A and B)

-- *Maritime boundary delimitation*

Required reading:

- Canvas or document supplement: LOS Convention, arts. 15, 74, and 83

- Case Study on the Continental Shelf: the creation of CIL, its progressive development and codification, and the relationship between CIL and treaties. (*Be prepared to discuss in class the questions on CANVAS based on careful reading of the material.*)
- Additional materials available on Canvas

Week 8: October 5

International law and territorial and maritime disputes in the South China Sea

Required reading: on Canvas

Suggested reading: on Canvas

-- In the third hour, the class will break into teams to discuss the organization of work related to the October 26 Law of the Sea Convention arbitration in-class hearing. Note that each team by noon on Saturday, October 24 will submit a summary brief of 6-8 pages laying out their principal arguments on jurisdiction and on the merits.

Week 9: October 19 (There is no class on October 12)

International criminal law

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 1175-1209 (substantive international criminal law), 1213-1217 (ad hoc tribunals), 1220-1221 (hybrid tribunals), 1225-1230 (the ICC)

Suggested reading:

- Murphy: pp. 541-560 (Chapter 13, Sections D-E; Section G on Hybrid Courts may also be of interest)
- Canvas: The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

--Time will be allotted at the end of class for teams to further organize themselves for the arbitration hearing

Week 10: October 26

Philippines v. China Arbitration Hearing

- Team Presentations (Philippines v. China)
 - Jurisdiction
 - Merits

Discussion (stepping back)

- What bodies of international law are relevant to these disputes?
- To what extent and on what issues is the relevant international law based in treaty or in customary international law?
- Are there available dispute settlement mechanisms available to enable the parties to resolve the various types of disputes?
- What strategy might the Philippines have employed after the decision to maximize the usefulness of the decision?
- What does this problem tell you about the role of international law in the current international political system?

Required reading: on Canvas

Suggested reading: on Canvas

Week 11: November 2

Immunities

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 661-671, 675-677, 678-688, 714-720, 725-742
- Canvas: Scenario on Immunities (with associated questions)

Suggested reading:

- Murphy: pp. 345-370 (Chapter 9, "Immunity from National Jurisdiction," Sections A-D, stopping after the "commercial activity" exception to sovereign immunity)

International human rights law

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 778-807, 815-822
- Canvas: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (skim each for general content)

Week 12: November 9

The Use of Force (the *jus ad bellum*)

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 1013-14, 1017-22, 1036-1038, 1054-1056, 1066-

1071, 1086-1088

Suggested reading:

- Casebook: pp. 997-1008 (Chapter 11.A, “International Legal Norms Before World War II”)
- Murphy: pp. 573-602 (Chapter 14.A, “*Jus ad Bellum*”)
- Canvas: Report on the Legal and Policy Frameworks Guiding the United States’ Use of Military Force and Related National Security Operations (Dec. 2016), pp. 8-11 (International Law and the U.S. Use of Military Force)

The Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC)/International Humanitarian Law (the *jus in bello*)

Required reading:

- Casebook: pp. 1119-1127, 1130-1133

Required viewing:

- *Eye in the Sky* (2016) (this movie will underpin some of our discussion of LOAC; the movie is available for a small fee from Amazon Video, YouTube, iTunes, and other online services)

Suggested reading (on Canvas):

- Murphy: pp. 602-618 (Chapter 14.B, “*Jus in Bello*”)
- Report on the Legal and Policy Frameworks Guiding the United States’ Use of Military Force and Related National Security Operations (Dec. 2016), pp. 19-21 (The Law of Armed Conflict and Targeting), 23-24 (Treatment of Armed Conflict Detainees: sections on Fundamental Treatment Guarantees for Armed Conflict Detainees and The Prohibition on Torture and Ill-Treatment)

G. Review

Week 13: November 16

Making sense of public international law

Required reading:

- Canvas: Review questions and assignments for class discussion
- Canvas: Template for considering international law problems

Student Resources

[Antonin Scalia Law School Academic Regulations](#)

[GMU Common Course Policies Addendum](#)

[Mason Square Services](#)

[Mason Square Police](#)

Van Metre Hall, Room 110

Emergency - Dial 911

Escort Services - 703-993-8070

Dispatch – 703-993-2810

[Student Support and Advocacy Center \(SSAC\)](#)

Mason Square Sexual Assault Services:

Van Metre Hall, Room 222D

703-993-8186

Notice of Mandatory Reporting of Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment, Interpersonal Violence, and Stalking:

As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Non-Confidential Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If a student wishes to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. Students may also seek assistance or support measures from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

[Mason Square Clinic](#)

Van Metre Hall, Room B102

703-993-2831

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#)

[Student Health Services](#)

[Student Disability Services](#)

[University Life](#)