Activities of International Organizations
Course IR 444e Spring 2020

I. COURSE OVERVIEW

1. Objectives

International organizations are a product of the evolution of international society and international law. They are persons of international law which play a tremendous role in its development and implementation. The emergence of IOs is a response to the growing complexity of modern international relations that require close cooperation between states to solve common and interdependent problems. According to the Yearbook of International Organizations (ed 52, 2015/2016) there are today 276 ‘conventional intergovernmental bodies’, 1785 ‘other international bodies’ and 5699 international bodies of ‘special types’, of which 812 are ‘dissolved or apparently inactive’. However, using different definitions, not all analysts agree on these numbers. Every organization has its own structure, objectives, legal personality and working methodology. Beyond their diversity, international organizations have in common the principles that govern their activities.

International Organizations play an important role in the development and implementation of international law. Geneva hosts many international organizations and bodies, in particular organizations that promote and protect human beings. The Activities of International Organizations course, which focuses on the role of IOs in the development and implementation of international law, looks at several different thematic areas relevant to these entities’ activities: the protection of human rights and universal treaty based mechanisms; the protection of victims of armed conflicts and the International Committee of the Red Cross; refugees and internally displaced people and the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees; the maintenance of peace and security and the role played by the United Nations; disarmament and arms control and the role played by the United Nations, and the fight against impunity and the role played by international courts and tribunals. The visits to the international organizations are compulsory and form an integral part of the course, including for the purposes of the final exam. In doing so, this course also expands upon many topics considered in the Introduction to Public International Law course.

2. Methodology

The course is taught through a combination of lectures, student’s presentations, and talks by and interactions with specialists. The latter will mostly occur during visits to various international institutions located in Geneva that will complement the lectures. Classes normally take place on Thursdays. You will normally have a two-hour break between the morning session and the afternoon session. The visits to the international organizations are compulsory and form an integral part of the course, including for the purposes of the final exam. While there are differences between the visits, for the purposes of the exam you are expected to know the international organization we visited, what the organization does and how it does it. It is very important to be on time, in particular for the site visits. Before each session, please make sure to complete the required readings as they will greatly facilitate our work (the readings to be read for each day of the course are indicated in the course schedule below).

3. Assignments and grading criteria

A) Research paper (30%)

A research paper (30%) of 10 pages maximum for two person group papers or 5 pages maximum for individual papers (Times New Roman 12, 1.5. space, excluding bibliography). There is a list of suggested topics in the syllabus.
but students may also propose an issue they would like to work on, provided that the issue fits with the subject addressed in the course. The suggested topics are fairly broad. As part of the assignment, students need to find an angle on how to address the topic and frame the arguments accordingly. If you need help, please consult the lecturer, but doing so in a timely manner is your responsibility. For the grading criteria, please consult the grading criteria sheet available on Blackboard.

The paper is due on **Sunday, 6pm before its presentation and to be distributed to the class. It is to be sent to all students and the lecturer by email.**

For the first three sessions with paper presentations, the final paper can be sent by **Sunday, 5 April, 6pm.** If for some reason, students need an extension, please contact the lecturer in advance so that a solution can be found. The grades for the papers will be uploaded to Blackboard by the last session before the exam.

The research paper accounts for **30% of the final grade.** A 10% penalty for any unexcused 8 hours delay in submission will be applied. The only exception to this penalty is by reason of medical illness, certified by a medical certificate provided by a doctor. In the research paper, students are to explain the issue, critically engage with it, take a position and provide adequate references.

**B) Presentation of the research paper (20%)**

The students are to present the research paper during the class: a **10 minutes presentation is to be followed by a class discussion of 10 minutes. It is the responsibility of the presenters to prepare and animate the class discussion.**

A list of possible topics for papers and presentations is provided below, under individual class headings; the presentations are supposed to be given on the day they are foreseen by the syllabus. We shall distribute the topics during the first class, so kindly reflect which topic you might want to take before the start of the course.

For the grading criteria, please consult the grading criteria sheet available on Blackboard.

**C) Final Exam (40%)**

A **2 hour final exam,** scheduled during the last week of the course. The exam comprises a question for each week of the class, including the visits to international organizations and students’ presentations.

**D) Active participation in class (10%)**

Students are required to actively participate in the class, in particular during discussion of research papers, during the site visits (where appropriate). The active participation in class grade covers your overall contribution to the class, including by being on time to the site visits. Punctual attendance at all sessions is required.

The final grade, from A to D is the total percentage of the assignments, with the following equivalence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93−100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81−84</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69−72</td>
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If a student receives less than 60-64 for their assignments, they receive an F (fail).

**4. Penalty unexcused absences and site visits**

All site visits are a mandatory part of the course, which will consists of at least 40 contact hours over 8 weeks. Punctual attendance at all sessions (lectures and visits) is required. Pavle Kilibarda and the Programme Director have to be informed by email of every excused absence in advance. There is a penalty of 5% for any unexcused absence.

**5. Plagiarism**

All students are responsible for having read the Boston University statement on plagiarism, which is available in the
Academic Conduct Code. Students are advised that the penalty against students on a Boston University program for cheating on the examinations or for plagiarism may be ‘expulsion from the program or the University or such other penalty as may be recommended by the Committee on Student Academic Conduct, subject to approval by the dean’.

6. Grade Appeal
Students are entitled to appeal their grade, in accordance with the instructions distributed by BU Geneva office at the introductory session of the program.
II. COURSE SCHEDULE

Additional information on the assignments, not fully developed in the present syllabus, can be found on the Learn Blackboard page of the course, into which all students are enrolled. The compulsory readings are also posted on the Learn Blackboard page of the course. In case of access problem, please contact Alexandra Garcia or Matthew Wellington.

1. Thursday, March 5: The Basic Principles Governing the Activities of International Organizations; The Protection of Human Rights and Existing Institutional Mechanisms, Part I

Morning session: 09:00-12:00: Lecture: The Basic Principles Governing the Activities of International Organizations
- Introductions & tour de table
- Overview of the course, objectives, and assignments – distribution of presentation / paper topics
  - Definition, international personality, rights and duties of IOs
  - Competencies and decision-making of IOs: principle of specialty, doctrine of implied powers, voting methods

Readings:

Afternoon session: 14:00-17:00: Lecture: The Protection of Human Rights and Existing Institutional Mechanisms, Part I
- Notion and History of Human Rights
- The Origins of Human Rights in International Law
- The Logic of Human Rights: Interference, Limitations and Derogations
- Scope of Application of Human Rights Law

Readings:
- Please take a look at the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948 and the International Covenant on *Civil and Political Rights* of 1966.

2. Wednesday, 11 March: Human Rights Council Visit

Afternoon: 14:00-17:00: HRC Visit
- We are to meet at 14:00 at the Pregny Gate of the Palais des nations. Bring passport or ID for security check as well as your UN pass confirmation for registration with the QCR code / UN badge.

Readings:

Morning session: 09:00-12:00: Lecture: The Protection of Human Rights and Existing Institutional Mechanisms, Part II

- Recap: Protection of HR, Part I and HRC Visit
- Implementation of Human Rights Law & Standards
- The Political Mechanisms: The Human Rights Council
- The Expert Bodies

Readings:

Afternoon session: 14:00-17:00: The Work of Geneva Call (Guest Lecturer)

- Student presentations: The Protection of Human Rights and Existing Institutional Mechanisms (14.00-15.00):
  **Presentation no. 1**: The universal human rights system: is there a need for an international human rights court?
  **Presentation no. 2**: Protest movements: what is at stake and how does international human rights law protect freedom of assembly?
  **Presentation no. 3**: Mass surveillance online: how do human rights apply in a digital world?
  **Presentation no. 4**: Freedom of expression in decline? What are the challenges and how does international human rights law protect freedom of expression, including press freedom?
  **Presentation no. 5**: Militarization of law enforcement: what are the human rights implications?
  **Presentation no. 6**: Mining companies and human rights: what are the human rights implications?

- Visit of a representative of Geneva Call at BU premises in Rue des Vollandes (15.00-17.00).


Morning session: 09:00-12:00: Lecture: The United Nations Collective Security System for the Maintenance of Peace

- Recap: The Use of Force in International Law
- The United Nations and Collective Security
- The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Framework
- Student presentations: The United Nations Collective Security System for the Maintenance of Peace
  (11.00-12.00):
  **Presentation no. 7**: The UN mission in the DRC: Peacekeeping or peace-enforcement?
  **Presentation no. 8**: The Security Council and so-called foreign terrorist fighters: measures taken and their implementation.
  **Presentation no. 9**: The gender dimension of international peace and security: Security Council resolution 1325 and its successors
  **Presentation no. 10**: Targeted sanctions by the UN Security Council: opportunities and challenges.
  **Presentation no. 11**: The role of the General Assembly in the maintenance of international peace and security

Readings

Afternoon session: 14:00-17:00: Lecture: The ICRC and the Law of Armed Conflict

- Henri Dunant and a Memory of Solferino: The Humanitarian Origins of the ICRC
- A History of Law in War
- The Basics of International Humanitarian Law
- A “War on Terror”?
- Student presentations (16.00-17.00)
  Presentation no. 12: Health care during armed conflict: challenges
  Presentation no. 13: ‘Human shields’ during armed conflict
  Presentation no. 14: The prohibition of torture during armed conflict and in the fight against terrorism
  Presentation no. 15: Engagement with armed non-state actors
  Presentation no. 16: Detention during armed conflict and in the fight against terrorism
  Presentation no. 17: Sexual and gender-based violence during armed conflict.
  Presentation no. 18: Case study: the armed conflicts in Syria. What are the international humanitarian law challenges?

Readings

5. Thursday, 2 April: Disarmament and Arms Control; The International Regime Protecting Refugees and IDPs

*Morning session: 09:00-12:00: Lecture and students’ presentations*
- The United Nations and Disarmament
- Weapons of Mass Destruction
- Students presentations (11.00-12.00):
  Presentation no. 19: Autonomous lethal weapons: should they be banned?
  Presentation no. 20: Nuclear weapons: law and policy
  Presentation no. 21: The Arms Trade Treaty regime: prevent human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law by prohibiting transfers in certain circumstances.
  Presentation no. 22: Armed drones: ethical, legal and humanitarian concerns
  Presentation no. 23: Explosive weapons in densely populated areas: humanitarian concerns
  Presentation no. 24: Gendered impact of weapons in armed conflict

Readings

*Afternoon session: 14:00-17:00: Lecture and students’ presentations*
- Student presentations:
  Presentation no. 25: Children fleeing gang violence in Central America: protection challenges
  Presentation no. 26: The fate of internally displaced persons in South Sudan: protection and durable solution
  Presentation no. 27: Migrants or refugees? The European refugee ‘crisis’.
  Presentation no. 28: Interceptions at sea and extraterritorial processing of asylum seekers: States’ extraterritorial obligations.
  Presentation no. 29: Sexual and gender based persecution as a ground for refugee status.
  Presentation no. 30: Climate change and refugee status.

Readings
• Please skim through the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement
• UNHCR, Protecting Refugees & The Role of UNCHR, 2014.

6. Thursday, 9 April: UNODA Visit; UNHCR Visit
   Morning session: 9:15 – 12:00: Visit to the UN Office on Disarmament Affairs
   • Please note that UNODA is within UN premises. Arrive at the visitor’s entrance (“Pregny Gate”, 14 avenue de la Paix) at 9.15 with your passport or ID for security.

   Afternoon session: 13:30-16.30: UNHCR Visit, Rue de Montbrillant 94
   • Introductory video of the role and work of UNHCR.
   • Presentation by a UNHCR speaker and Q&A session.
   • Please bring passport or ID for security.

7. Thursday, 16 April: The Fight Against Impunity; Revision
   Morning session: 9:00-12:00: Lecture: The Fight Against Impunity
   • The Role and Evolution of International Criminal Judicial Bodies: from ad hoc Tribunals to a Permanent Court
   • Core International Crimes
   • Transitional Justice
   • Students Presentations:
     Presentation no. 31: Prosecuting incumbent heads of state?
     Presentation no. 32: ‘Economic crimes’ under international law: the challenge of integrating economic, social and cultural rights.
     Presentation no. 33: Peace or justice? The case of Colombia
     Presentation no. 34: The gender dimension of transitional justice mechanisms
     Presentation no. 35: ‘Environmental crimes’ under international law: the challenges of integrating harm to the environment.

   Readings
   - Please take a careful look at the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Articles 5-8.

   Afternoon session: 14:00-18.00: Revision Session and Briefing on Exam
   • Briefing for the exam and discussion of mock exam
   • Revision for exam: Q&A

8. Thursday, 23 April: Final exam
   Morning session: 9:00 - 11:00: Final exam