

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-

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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

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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' motivations; and the impact of globalisation on terrorism. It also examines the role of the state in the prevention and response to terrorism.

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

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.