

Ethics in International Affairs

Last Updated: Mon, 01/05/2026

Course prefix: INTA

Course number: 2030

Section: A

CRN (you may add up to five):
35135

Instructor First Name: Mikulas

Instructor Last Name: Fabry

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

The purpose of this course is to survey central ethical problems in international relations. These include questions such as: What are a country's obligations to foreign states or peoples? Under what circumstances may armed force be used, and by whom? What should be the role of human rights in foreign policy? When is external intervention in civil conflicts acceptable? Can international law ever be justifiably defied? Is terrorism always wrong? Is torture always wrong? Is liberal democracy for everybody? To what extent are countries responsible for the mitigation of extreme poverty or environmental degradation beyond their borders? The course is divided into two parts. The first introduces major traditions of reflection on international ethics. It seeks to articulate their common assumptions and claims while paying attention to their internal richness and varying viewpoints. The second part then elaborates on some of the most significant contemporary issues in international ethics, integrating recent empirical cases into the discussion. The key focus is on issues related to the use of armed force, human rights, and international distributive justice.

Course learning outcomes:

The course has three intended learning outcomes. Students:

1. should demonstrate familiarity with select traditions of ethics in international affairs and different modes of normative reasoning and argumentation
2. should be able to analyze prominent ethical issues in international relations
3. should be able to apply different traditions of ethics in international affairs when analyzing concrete cases

Required course materials:

Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 5th ed. (Basic Books, 2015).

Grading policy:

Students will be evaluated according to the following format:

- Two closed-book exams, on February 11 and March 30 (worth 25% each)
- Final open-book take-home exam, handed out via e-mail on Thursday, April 23, and due to be uploaded on Canvas/Assignments on May 4 at 12:00 PM (40%)
- Class participation (10%) + extra credit up to 5%

You must take both exams and submit the final take-home exam on the assigned dates and times. The two closed-book exams can be appealed to the instructor within one week of their return. Students must attach a typed explanation to the exam specifying why their grade should be increased. The instructor reserves the right to re-grade the entire assignment (i.e., not just the appealed part) and to increase, uphold, or decrease the originally assigned grade.

You **must attend all classes** and have the assigned readings completed **before** each class. Completing the assigned reading prior to each class is important, as class time will regularly feature discussions. You should also follow course-related events and developments by reading respectable news publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Economist*.

In addition to being present in every class, you are expected to **participate actively**. Although this is a relatively large class, we will hold frequent discussions in various formats. Bring with you 3"x5" index cards to every class – I will repeatedly ask you to write brief discussion summaries or other written exercises and hand them to me at the end of the class. On some occasions, I may only take class attendance and count it in the same way as written index-card exercises. I also plan to conduct online discussions via the course's Canvas Discussion board, which must be completed by the beginning of the next class. Your participation grade will be determined by the ratio of the discussions you participated in (provided they show familiarity with the course material) to the total number of these exercises. If you participated in 90%-100% of the total number of exercises, your participation grade will be 10/10; if you participated in 80%-90% your participation grade will be 9/10, etc. Students can earn **up to 5 % extra credit** by making both **regular** and **informed** verbal contributions in class.

Attendance policy:

Students are required to attend every class.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

This is a Core IMPACTS course that falls under the Social Sciences area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help students master course content and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.

Course content, activities, and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion