

Politics of the European Union

Last Updated: Mon, 01/05/2026

Course prefix: INTA

Course number: 2221

Section: A

CRN (you may add up to five):
35066

Instructor First Name: Vicki

Instructor Last Name: Birchfield

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

The aim of this course is to provide an in-depth introduction and overview of the history and politics of the European Union from its inception to continuous development under the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon and the post-Brexit era. The course is organized into three main parts. **Part one** traces the evolution of European integration with a special focus on the fundamental debates about the nature and scope of European unification and its character as both a political and economic project. **Part two** examines the EU's institutions, decision-making processes and the scope and content of EU law and policy through the evolution of its treaties over the past seven decades of its history. After gaining deeper knowledge of the historical background of the EU and the nuts and bolts of what the EU is and how it works, **Part three** explores the extent to which the growing supranational and transnational nature of the EU challenges traditional concepts of domestic politics (citizenship, sovereignty, democracy) as well as foreign policy and international relations. This part of the course will also draw on the concepts of globalization and Europeanization inviting students to think comparatively and critically as they consider French and European politics and society in global perspective and in contrast to their own cultural and national backgrounds. Additionally, the course examines contemporary debates and policy challenges within the European Union such as the rise of Euroscepticism, democratic backsliding and the consequences of "Brexit" and the war in Ukraine. Finally, the course compares the EU with the United States as a model of democracy and political economy as well as a global actor and a diplomatic force in world politics. Overall, the course offers a dynamic learning experience that provides both traditional lectures with discussion-oriented classes complemented by field trips, film screenings, and visits to museums and historical sites.

Course learning outcomes:

- Build knowledge and understanding of the origins and current issues facing the European Union
- Develop basic analytical skills to assess the impact of European integration on domestic and international politics.
- Display an understanding of the functioning of European institutions and the policy making influence of the EU on regional and global governance
- Demonstrate the ability to describe the social, political, and economic forces that influence Europe and the global system.
- Increase awareness of the diversity of cultural, political and ethical systems across the EU.

Required course materials:

John McCormick (2021) *Understanding the European Union*

Copies are available in the GTL library and most required readings are posted on Canvas

Useful Websites:

To enhance the quality of classroom discussions it will be helpful to follow current events and the news related to developments in the EU, French and European politics. The best sources for staying informed about current issues in the EU for English speakers are the BBC and EuroNews websites, France 24 (English) *The Financial Times* and *The Economist*. Many articles from the latter two publications will be made available for required supplemental reading throughout the semester. For French speakers, *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* are leading national newspapers and France Info, France Culture and France Television (TF 1, FR 2, 3 and TV 5) are other useful sources of information. Der Spiegel is a German weekly news magazine that has an international version in English for news and analysis of German, European and International Affairs, Deutsche Welle (dw.com) is 24/7 on-line and available in English.

For a wealth of information on the institutions, Member States and current policies of the European Union, consult the EU's official website, Europa. The URL is:

<http://europa.eu.int>

Information from the European Union's Delegation to the United States can be found at:

www.eurunion.org

Grading policy:

Course Requirements and Grade Distribution:

Attendance and participation are essential to doing well in the course. Participation comprises 10% of the total grade for the course and absences must be due to illness or other compelling reasons. Readings should be completed prior to class meetings and you should be prepared for active and engaged discussion. All exams are short answer and essay /reflection pieces in format. Additionally, for 20 % of the total grade, each student will prepare a PowerPoint presentation on a Member State (or multiple countries depending on class size) of his or her choice that covers the key debates and issues surrounding that country's accession and integration process, key policy concerns/contributions, and overall attitudes and support for the EU. More guidelines for this assignment are provided at the end of the syllabus. Finally, 10 % percent of the grade comes from quizzes drawn from the MS presentations.

First Exam: 20 %

Second Exam: 20 %

Final Essay: 20%

Member State Presentations: 20%

Participation and Quizzes: 20%

Grading Rubric for Essays (20 point scale)

Grade

Points

Descriptors

A or 20, 19, 18 points

Felicitous and highly original execution of the assignment; unique and distinctive voice is clear throughout the essay; excellent attention to detail and impressive analytical points of connection made between site visits, course content, readings and concepts.

B or 17, 16, 15 points

Admirable performance and ability to meet the expectations of the assignment, interesting references made to subject matter and site visits; coherent and well-organized essay.

C or 14, 13, 12 points

Adequate performance demonstrating an acceptable understanding of the subject matter and a modest ability to handle the expectations of the essay prompt and assignment.

D or 11, 10 , 9 points

Minimally acceptable performance demonstrating only partial familiarity with the subject matter and inadequate understanding of the goals of assignment.

F, 8 points or below

Failure to demonstrate familiarity with the subject matter or capacity to follow instructions.

General Grading Scale for the course

A = 89.5-100; B = 79.5-89.4; C = 69.5-79.4; D = 59.5-69.5; F = below 59.5

A: Outstanding and original work; well-organized, coherent and consistent performance without significant error or omission.

B: Very fine work, reasonably executed, clearly organized, with only slight error or omission; clearly well above the average.

C: Solid work of a satisfactory nature; clear evidence of engagement and comprehension, but with some organizational, factual, or interpretive errors/omissions.

D: Passing, but only marginally acceptable work with clear deficiencies of length, fact, organization, or interpretation; incomplete work.

F: Unacceptable work submitted with such significant deficiencies that no credit can be awarded.

Attendance policy:

Attendance and participation are essential to doing well in the course. Participation comprises 10% of the total grade for the course and absences must be due to illness or other compelling reasons.

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 is part of 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 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