



POL 350-A: International Organizations

Introduction to the United Nations and Model Diplomacy

Fall 2026 / Thursdays 7:00-8:40pm / Bomberger 128
Dr. Johannes Karreth

Office: Bomberger 216 or Corson 110G (see <https://www.jkarreth.net/contact.html>)

Office phone: 610-409-3126

Student hours: see <https://www.jkarreth.net/contact.html>.

Email: jkarreth@ursinus.edu

Course website: <http://www.jkarreth.net/modelun.html>

Course description

This course is the first part of the two-course sequence POL 350 for the Model United Nations program at Ursinus College. In the fall semester, we study international cooperation around global issues: foremost, we learn about the organization and operations of the United Nations, examine core questions of global governance and multilateral diplomacy, and explore how “ordinary people” with an interest in global issues can get involved in the United Nations and global problem-solving. We also study American involvement with, and perspectives on, international organizations such as the United Nations.

In the first week of the course, we select delegates for the 2027 National Model United Nations Conference in New York City. Delegates will be paired with a partner and assigned to a committee. They will prepare a position paper outlining their country’s stance on issues such as climate change, disarmament, economic development, human rights, refugees, and women’s rights. Students will also learn rules of procedure and gain experience with oral presentation and debate.

In the spring semester, students who are selected as delegates will continue with the course and represent one country at the 2027 Model United Nations (NMUN) Conference in New York City. In that semester, students will familiarize themselves with the politics and foreign policy of their country, with the NMUN rules and procedures, and act as that country’s representative on a UN committee during NMUN-NY 2027. Students will also reflect critically on the learning outcomes derived from model diplomacy exercises such as NMUN.

A considerable portion of the class in both semesters will be dedicated toward the development of so-called soft skills—team work, writing and speaking clearly, adapting to changing circumstances and interacting with others from different backgrounds. Toward this end, students will be practicing persuasive writing, public speaking, critical thinking, problem-solving, strategizing and group work. We will also host, for the campus community, several panel discussions and similar events covering global issues.

Note: This course is part of a two-semester sequence. Students should plan on enrolling in POL 350-B (Th 7:00-8:40pm) in the Spring, and on being available to participate in the National MUN conference in New York City during March 29-April 2, 2027.

Learning goals

Upon successfully completing both courses of the POL 350 sequence, you should:

- have developed and improved core skills in research, writing, public speaking and team work.
- understand the organization of the United Nations, its role in international politics, the contemporary issues that it faces.
- look at contemporary issues from a global perspective, considering the distinct viewpoints of other countries and actors. In so doing, students will gain a better appreciation for the benefits and challenges of multilateral diplomacy.
- understand the opportunities the United Nations and other international organizations provide for individuals around the globe to affect change in global affairs.

Materials

Book

All required readings (books, articles and book chapters/excerpts) will be made available to students as hard copies or in digital format; no purchases are necessary. Books mentioned in this syllabus include:

- Fasulo, Linda. 2015. An Insider's Guide to the UN. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Moore, John Alphin and Pubantz, Jerry. 2017. The New United Nations: International Organization in the Twenty-First Century. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Weiss, Thomas G., Forsythe, David P., Coate, Roger A., and Pease, Kelly-Kate. 2017. The United Nations and Changing World Politics. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

My role as instructor

I am looking forward to getting to know you and sharing my passion for studying international organizations with you. As the faculty advisor to the Ursinus Model United Nations delegation, I want to ensure that you have the best possible preparation to succeed in participating at the National Model UN conference.

Requirements and assignments

All assignments in this course are designed to give you the best possible preparation to be (1) an informed global citizen in an internationally connected world and (2) a successful delegate at the National Model United Nations conference in 2027.

1. Attendance & preparation (required to pass this course)

This class serves as preparation for the NMUN Conference. For this conference, it is important that your fellow delegates can rely on you. Missing more than one single class during one semester (for any reason) therefore means that you will become ineligible to attend the NMUN conference—**with one exception: If you feel unwell, please do not come to class**, but email me before the class you will miss.

Participation includes (1) your contributions in class, (2) short informal writing assignments in class, and (3) short informal public speaking requirements in class. Students must complete and take notes on all assigned readings prior

to the class in which they are scheduled to be discussed. You should plan on spending **about 4 hours per week outside the classroom** on this class, plus any additional time required for specific assignments.

The Institute for Student Success (ISS) is here to support you if you are experiencing significant health problems or other issues that may prevent you from performing adequately in your academic work. If you require this support in working with me during POL-350, please contact the ISS in person in their new offices in Myrin Library, or by email at instituteofstudentsuccess@ursinus.edu. To arrange accommodations for this class, please read the section on disability accommodations further below.

2. Online participation (10% of your course grade)

We will use a group email & chat to send reports on current events related to the United Nations and global governance. Each student will be responsible for contributing to this group during a specific time period during the semester. A sign-up list with names, days, and instructions will be posted on Canvas.

3. Group projects (20% of your course grade)

Learning how to working collaboratively on a project is not only valuable practice for the NMUN conference, it is a valuable skill more generally. Students will work on two group projects over the course of the semester, doing coordinated research on (1) a sustainable development goal and (2) a UN agency. Each of you will need to locate sources and share the information that you find with the rest of the group; groups will need to work together to plan how to present their findings to the rest of the class. Every student in the group will be expected to speak during the group's in-class presentation and group members should practice ahead of time, giving one another constructive feedback. Every student will also be required to submit a written description of his/her particular contribution and evaluate the contributions of other group members.

4. Oral exam (30% of your course grade)

During specific time slots in November, an oral exam will test your ability to communicate the knowledge acquired throughout the semester so far and to hold an informed conversation about international organizations and the United Nations. This exam will not test whether you can memorize detailed empirical facts or arguments. Time slots minutes will be scheduled individually. A grading rubric and sample questions for this exam will be posted on Canvas before fall break.

5. Final written exam (30% of your course grade)

This final exam will test your ability to retain and synthesize the knowledge acquired throughout the semester, and to identify critical challenges for the United Nations in the upcoming years. This will be a closed-book, in-person exam with a multiple choice section and essay questions. A grading rubric and additional information will be posted on Canvas.

6. Position paper outline (10% of your course grade)

In preparation for the NMUN conference, each student will submit a first draft of a position paper by December 9. Students will then receive feedback after winter break and revise their position paper and eventually merge it with their committee partner's draft for a final submission.

Grading

Rubrics for all assignments are posted on Canvas. The course grade consists of the components below, sums to 100, and converts into letter grades as stated below.

In-class participation	required	A	100 - 93.0	C+	79.999 - 77.0
Online participation	10%	A–	92.999 - 90.0	C	76.999 - 73.0
Group projects	20%	B+	89.999 - 87.0	C–	72.999 - 70.0
Oral exam	30%	B	86.999 - 83.0	D+	69.999 - 67.0
Final written exam	30%	B–	82.999 - 80.0	D	66.999 - 63.0
Position paper	10%			D–	62.999 - 60.0
Total	100%			F	59.999 - 0

Course policies

Disability accommodations. It is important for me to provide an inclusive environment. If you experience barriers to learning, please email or meet with me; I'd like to work on removing these barriers with you. The Office of Disability and Access works with students who need accommodations to enhance accessibility. Contact Karalyn McGrorty Derstine at disabilityandaccess@ursinus.edu or schedule a meeting at <https://kderstine.youcanbook.me/>. For more details, go to <https://www.ursinus.edu/offices/disability-and-access/>.

Religious observance. I will make every effort to accommodate religious observances and obligations. Please bring any possible conflicts with deadlines or assignments to my attention at the beginning of the semester. This applies especially to the timing of the NMUN-NY conference, which may take place during or close to several religious holidays.

Names. Please be patient with me as I learn all students' names and pronouns. I encourage you to correct me when/if I make a mistake (i.e., call you by the wrong name/pronoun or mispronounce your name).

Classroom interactions. In this class, we work to promote an environment where everyone feels safe and welcome, even during uncomfortable conversations. The topics we address can be political, personal, controversial, and provocative. As we explore these ideas, every voice in the room has something of value to contribute to group discussion. Because the group will represent a diversity of individual beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences, every participant must show respect for all others. You are encouraged to not only take advantage of opportunities to express your own ideas, but also to learn from the information and ideas shared by other students. Participation is crucial to the success of this classroom experience. Your insights, questions and comments will be useful not only to yourself and to your instructor, but to your fellow students as well. Remember that all ideas need to be well founded in class readings, and/or research in a civil and academic manner.

Academic honesty. TI; dr: do your own work, cite your sources all of the time, and don't cheat. And: **reach out to me when you feel you can't keep up!** Most assignments in this course are designed to help you develop your skills and prepare for the NMUN conference, so any shortcuts will be counterproductive for your success. Guidelines for using (or not using) generative AI are provided for each assignment. Unless otherwise noted, a passing grade and successful conference preparation requires original work created by you so that you can do this work in a fast-paced, stressful environment. Familiarize yourself with the college-wide academic honesty policy in full at <https://www.ursinus.edu/life-at-ursinus/handbook/academic-policies-including-academic-honesty/>.

Discrimination and harassment. Ursinus College seeks to provide an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. I am also a member of two faculty and staff groups that work toward this goal,¹ and committed to an inclusive campus environment.

Ursinus College considers sexual misconduct to include assault, harassment, stalking, and relationship violence of a sexual nature. If you have been the victim of sexual harassment, misconduct, or assault, we encourage you to report this. As a mandatory reporter, I am required to report any information I receive about sexual misconduct on campus. I am also simply happy to talk to you about issues you may be experiencing and refer to you to the appropriate resources on campus. You may choose whether you or anyone involved is identified by name. For more information about your options at Ursinus, please go to <https://www.ursinus.edu/title-ix/>.

If you have been the target of a discriminatory act, you can report this to the College. For more information and ways to report, please see <https://www.ursinus.edu/life-at-ursinus/handbook/policy-on-discriminatory-acts/>.

¹DART and SMART.

Schedule

This schedule will be updated prior and during the semester. It is likely that at least a few topics and readings will be modified. Please visit <http://www.jkarreth.net/modelun.html> for the most recent information on deadlines and readings.

Week 1 (Thursday, August 27)

General Model UN interest meeting, plus:
Why do the United Nations exist? What is Model United Nations?

Week 2 (Thursday, September 3)

Is the United Nations failing?
Suggested readings after class:

- Chapter 1 in Weiss, Thomas G. What's Wrong with the United Nations and How to Fix It. Cambridge: Polity Press. (distributed via email)
- Watson, Daniel and Fernanda Rios Herrera. 2025. "The UN at 80: repairing the multilateral order" (available [online](#))

Week 3 (Thursday, September 10)

Making global public policy at the UN and beyond
Simulation of an emergency session on food security & researching the institutional history of the UN

- Required reading: pages 1-18 in Mingst, Karen A., Karns, Margaret P. and Lyon, Alynna J. 2023. The United Nations in the 21st Century. 6th ed. London: Routledge.
 - Available as a PDF on Canvas or as an e-book via the Ursinus library [here](#).

Week 4 (Thursday, September 17)

What is the institutional structure of the United Nations? Short group presentations on UN agencies

- Required reading: pages 20-62 in Mingst, Karen A., Karns, Margaret P. and Lyon, Alynna J. 2023. The United Nations in the 21st Century. 6th ed. London: Routledge.
 - Available as a PDF on Canvas or as an e-book via the Ursinus library [here](#).

Week 5 (Thursday, September 24)

Continued: Short group presentations on UN agencies

Week 6 (Thursday, October 1)

TBD

Week 7 (Thursday, October 8)

What is the legal basis for the United Nations? A focus on decision-making

- Required reading: Fasulo, Chapters 2, 3, and 6

Week 8 (Thursday, October 15)

Group presentations on SDGs and issues, part 1

- Readings selected by presenters

Week 9 (Thursday, October 22)

Group presentations on SDGs, part 2

- Readings selected by presenters

Week 10 (Before and after Thursday, October 29)

During the week: Oral exams, scheduled individually. Recommended for preparation:

- Revisit notes and readings from class, including notes on group presentations
- Research basic information on our country assignment

Week 11 (Thursday, November 5)

The making of a resolution and its impact

- Before class: check your email for committee assignments
- Reading: United States Institute of Peace, "What is UNSCR 1325? An Explanation of the Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security." Available online at https://www.usip.org/gender_peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325.

Week 12 (Thursday, November 12)

Reflection on SDGs and goal implementation

Week 13 (Thursday, November 19)

Basic features of NMUN; position papers

- Required: read the NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide (<https://go.ursinus.edu/vW4u0S>)
- During class, we will study examples of position papers with creative solutions to pressing problems

No class meeting on November 26

Thanksgiving break starts the next day

Week 14 (Thursday, December 3)

NMUN and ____: facts and tips for position papers & final exams

1. Required: read the background guide for your committee
2. Required: read the position paper guide
3. Required: read up on ____ at ...
4. Review: Fasulo, Linda. 2015. An Insider's Guide to the UN. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Week 15 (TUESDAY, December 8)

Final exams taken during class time.