

## Vesalius College

### Course description

**Course title:** Inquiry in International Affairs

**Course code:** POL 103E

**Teacher responsible:** A. E. Woodward and staff

**Course description:**

The course explores scientific discovery and explanation as applied to the specific issues of studying international affairs in the disciplines most represented in work on international affairs: history, sociology and anthropology, economics, and political science. Approaches and sources of data that are specifically associated with each discipline are singled out to illustrate advantages and disadvantages of information coming from different sources. Readings aim to provide students with overviews of some of the major questions in inquiry as well as introducing them to the voices of researchers grappling with scientific challenges. After completing the course students should have an understanding of the common language, core concepts and scholarly goals of researchers in international affairs and the ability to critically approach reports, news and social science articles and evaluate them.

The course treats the following elements:

- Differences between humanities and social science in studying international affairs
- The challenges of inter-disciplinarity- good examples
- What is science and scientific methodology?
- What are paradigms (examples in social science) and how do they help and hinder explanation
- The debate around positivism
- Types of evidence and resources for studying international affairs
- Strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative approaches
- Operationalisation of research problems
- Causal thinking in social science
- Challenges in making descriptive and causal inferences about international affairs
- Different models of presenting results

**Course objectives:**

The course provides core knowledge needed to be an International Affairs specialist capable of using research literature from the three represented disciplines. Skills developed include

- Understanding of issues in the production and visualization of research findings
- Use of the web as a research tool

- Critical approaches to texts, official statistics, international statistics
- Analytical reasoning, and critical reflection
- Ability to systematically approach problems
- Capacity to think through research problems independently

**Grade weighting scheme:**

4 written assignments (instructions distributed in class and posted on Pointcarré)	60%
Class participation (attendance, activities, in class writing)	10%
1 Mid-term exam including closed answer and essay questions	15%
1 Final Exam	15%

**Used course material (handbooks, readers, readings, newspapers, magazines) and references:**

Readings (provided by instructors) include overviews of the background to different approaches in social sciences by philosophers and social scientist as well as examples of substantive research using alternative methodological approaches.

Authors include: C.W. Mills, M. Kaldar, T. Kuhn, M. Maynard, D. Lazar, W. Chew, J. Tosh, C. Seale, R. Lee, C. Geertz, R. Schutt, F. Tonkiss, R. Lapiere, R.C. Lewontin, D. Silverman, E. Bardach, Steven D. Levitt, S.J. Dubner, J.J. Donohue III and M. Kremer.

Students are expected to subscribe to the Financial Times