

ADVANCED SEMINAR IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE POLITICS OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Winter 2026

First version of the syllabus: December 22, 2026

This version of the syllabus: January 26, 2026

For an up-to-date version of the syllabus please visit the [course Moodle page](#).

Course number:	POLI 486	Delivery mode:	In person
Department:	Political Science	Faculty:	Arts and Sciences
Instructor:	Prof. Alexandra O. Zeitz	Time:	Thursdays, 14:45-17:15
Email:	alexandra.zeitz@concordia.ca	Course Website:	POLI 486 Moodle
Room:	H 613 SGW		
Office hours:	Thursdays, 12:30-14:30 in H1225-07 or on Zoom . By appointment only, sign-up on Moodle.		

MODE OF DELIVERY

This course will meet in person. You must attend seminars in person on Thursday every week. Since this is a seminar class, premised on discussion and exchange with your peers, full participation is an important part of your final grade, making up 10 %. You cannot fully participate if you do not attend the seminar.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the politics of international development. It starts from a foundational question in politics: Why are some countries rich and some countries poor? And how does international development cooperation seek to address these disparities? The course investigates the historical evolution of international development cooperation, examining the legacies of colonialism, changing intellectual frameworks, and the contemporary rise of emerging powers. After examining different approaches to development, students will evaluate the institutions and norms of contemporary international development cooperation, particularly foreign aid. Which countries and institutions give aid and why? What does it mean for aid to be effective? How does the governance of international financial institutions affect their accountability and effectiveness? Are shifts in the international distribution of power, including the rise of China, altering the institutions, ideas, and governance of development?

Learning outcomes

Students who take this course will:

- Understand, compare, and critique different accounts of what development is and why it happens
- Critically evaluate the relationship between development and economic growth
- Appraise the role of foreign aid in international politics
- Interpret and critique changes in the actors and institutions of international development

COURSE STRUCTURE

Session	Date	Topics covered
Part 1		DEBATES IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
1	Jan 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why take this course? What's at stake in international development? • Defining development: What is the goal? Is it only about economic growth?
2	Jan 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colonialism, independence, and early development cooperation • What are the historical roots of disparities in development?
3	Jan 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debt crises, structural adjustment, and the Washington Consensus • What are contemporary legacies of the Washington Consensus?
4	Feb 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Outlining assessment</i> • New development norms for a new millennium
5	Feb 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging donors and alternative development perspectives • How do changing development approaches reflect the influence of China?
Part 2		AID AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
6	Feb 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In-class essay 1</i> • What is foreign aid?
7	Feb 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do donor countries give aid? How have motivations changed over time? • Does it matter whether donors give aid bilaterally or multilaterally?
8	Mar 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The politics of aid in recipient countries • How do developing countries manage, contest, and deploy foreign aid?
9	Mar 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has foreign aid been effective? What does aid effectiveness mean? • What do recent cuts to foreign aid mean for aid effectiveness?
10	Mar 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In-class essay 2</i> • NGOs, non-state actors, and international development
11	Apr 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change and development cooperation • What is the role of foreign aid in addressing climate change?
12	Apr 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review

ASSESSMENT

Assessment	Weight	Date
1. Group discussion prep sheets	10%	Weekly, from week 3
2. Seminar participation	10%	Weekly
3. Reading quizzes	15%	Weekly, from week 2
4. In-class outlining assessment	5%	February 5
5. In-class essay 1	12.5%	February 19
6. In-class essay 2	12.5%	March 26
7. Final exam	35%	TBD

1. Weekly group discussion prep sheet

Seminars are an opportunity to explore texts and ideas in-depth. To facilitate this, we will structure some of the class discussion into group work. Students will be divided into reading groups of five to six students each. Over the semester, each student will rotate through five roles designed to engage with different aspects of an assigned reading. You will prepare a short reading group prep sheet for your role and submit this on Moodle on the day of class at 10am. These group discussion prep sheets will be graded on a simple fail, pass, high pass scale.

In the reading list below, the reading for each week's reading group exercise is highlighted with a checkmark symbol (✓). Some weeks have no reading group exercises.

These are the five roles (outlined in more detail at the end of the syllabus):

1. Discussion leader: responsible for facilitating group discussion, calls on other students to contribute from their role
2. Theory master: responsible for summarizing key concepts and theoretical arguments
3. Evidence supporter: responsible for explaining the empirical part of the paper that supports the argument
4. Devil's advocate: responsible for raising objections and being critical of the paper
5. Creative connector: responsible for expanding beyond the paper to link it up with current events, other theories, topics, readings, etc.

2. Weekly seminar participation

The expectation is that all those enrolled in this course will attend each seminar in person. Grades for seminar participation are given based on active engagement in seminar discussion. The components of seminar participation are:

- Preparation: Demonstrating advance preparation for the seminar through prepared notes or referencing texts without consulting open texts.

- Listening: Respectfully and actively listening to others in the group, including noting down relevant contributions from others
- Frequency of contributions: Contributing regularly and respectfully to the discussion
- Quality of contributions: Showing understanding and critical engagement with texts, outside material, and contributions of others. Not simply summarizing, but analyzing, critiquing, and comparing the readings
- Impact of contributions: Moving the discussion forward through your contributions

Let me know if there is anything I can do to support your participation in the seminar. If you find it difficult to engage in seminar discussion, know that by practising it in this setting you are also cultivating a valuable skill for outside the seminar context!

3. Reading quizzes

Every week, starting in week 2, there will be a short reading quiz at the beginning of class. This quiz will have 1-2 simple questions on the required readings. If you have done the reading, you will be able to easily answer the quiz questions, they will not require any interpretation or analysis.

4. Outlining assessment

A core learning objective of this course is for you to critically evaluate arguments about international development. To help you practice the skills required for written critical evaluation and argumentation, you will do an in-class assessment in which you practice writing two outlines in response to an essay question. The feedback on this assessment will help you to write stronger essays throughout the course.

5-6. In-class essays

You will write two in-class essays over the course of the semester. These will be closed book, timed essays. You will be given 2-3 questions to choose from and will select one on which to write an in-class essay. I will provide you with a rubric ahead of time for how I will evaluate these essays. I will be looking for your ability to present a clear and compelling argument in response to the question, showing how you draw on the class readings to support your argument.

7. Final exam

The final exam will be a closed book, timed essay exam, similar to the in-class essays you wrote over the course of the semester. You will choose two questions from a list of questions on which to write an essay.

Note

Final grades may be adjusted to bring grades in line with the expected distribution in the course. In making those adjustments, I will reward those whose performance has improved over the course of the term, reflecting the effort they put into improving their grades.

PART 1 - DEBATES IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Session 1 - Defining development and international development cooperation

- What constitutes development? How can we measure it?
- What are the politics of international development cooperation?

Readings:

- Justin Fox. “The Economics of Well-Being”. *Harvard Business Review* (2012), available via Concordia’s Library’s access to the [Harvard Business Review](#).
- Homi Kharas. “Development Assistance”. *International Development: Ideas, Experience, and Prospects*. Ed. by Bruce Currie-Alder et al. Oxford University Press, 2014. Chap. 50, pp. 848–865, available as an eBook via Concordia Library

Session 2 - Colonialism, independence, and early development cooperation

- What are the continuities from colonialism to development cooperation?
- What were the political priorities of early development cooperation in the post-colonial period?
- What are the lasting impacts of colonialism on developing countries?

Readings:

- Corinna R. Unger. *International Development: A Postwar History*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, ch. 4 “The Emergence of Development in the Mid-Twentieth Century”, available on Course Reserves.
- Thandika Mkandawire. “On Tax Efforts and Colonial Heritage in Africa”. *Journal of Development Studies* 46.10 (Nov. 2010), pp. 1647–1669

Session 3 - Structural adjustment and the “Washington Consensus”

- What was the understanding of development that underpinned the “Washington Consensus”?
- What were structural adjustment programs intended to address?

Readings:

- Sarah Babb and Alexander Kentikelenis. “Markets Everywhere: The Washington Consensus and the Sociology of Global Institutional Change”. *Annual Review of Sociology* 47.1 (July 2021), pp. 521–541
- ✓ Dani Rodrik. “Goodbye Washington Consensus, Hello Washington Confusion? A Review of the World Bank’s “Economic Growth in the 1990s: Learning from a Decade of Reform””. *Journal of Economic Literature* 44.4 (2006), pp. 973–987

Session 4 - New development norms for a new millennium

- How useful are the SDGs as an expression of shared development goals?
- How does the concept of “ownership” change the relationship between donors and recipient countries?

Readings:

- Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and Desmond McNeill. “Knowledge and politics in setting and measuring the SDGs: Introduction to special issue”. *Global Policy* 10 (2019), pp. 5–15
- ✓ Malin Hasselskog. “What happened to the focus on the aid relationship in the ownership discussion?” *World Development* 155 (July 2022)
- Activity: Explore the list of Sustainable Development Goals <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>. Which goal do you think is the most important? Is it well captured by the related targets?

Session 5 - Emerging donors and alternative development perspectives

- In what ways is Chinese development finance different from traditional donors’ aid?
- What alternative approaches to development does China introduce into international development cooperation?

Readings:

- ✓ Gregory T. Chin and Kevin P. Gallagher. “Coordinated Credit Spaces: The Globalization of Chinese Development Finance”. *Development and Change* 50.1 (Jan. 2019), pp. 245–274
- Andreas Fuchs and Marina Rudyak. “The motives of China’s foreign aid”. *Handbook on the International Political Economy of China*. Ed. by Ka Zeng. Edward Elgar, 2019. Chap. 23, pp. 392–410, available as an eBook via Concordia Library

PART 2 - AID AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Session 6 - The design and politics of contemporary development cooperation

- What counts as official development assistance (ODA)? Why does it matter?
- How do the politics of providing development and humanitarian aid differ?
- What does it mean for aid to be effective?

Readings:

- Finn Tarp. "Aid, Growth, and Development". *Foreign Aid for Development*. Ed. by George Mavrotas. Oxford University Press, Feb. 2010. Chap. 2, pp. 20–54, on Course Reserves.
- ✓ Roger C. Ridell. "Does Foreign Aid Work?" *Doing Good or Doing Better: Development policies in a globalizing world*. Ed. by Monique Kremer et al. 2014, pp. 47–79, available as an eBook via Concordia Library

Session 7 - Donor motivations

- Why do donor countries give aid? How and why have donors' motivations changed over time?
- Is multilateral aid less politicized than bilateral aid?

Readings:

- Sarah Blodgett Bermeo. "Aid Allocation and Targeted Development in an Increasingly Connected World". *International Organization* 71.04 (2017), pp. 735–766
- ✓ Richard Clark and Lindsay R. Dolan. "Pleasing the Principal: U.S. Influence in World Bank Policymaking". *American Journal of Political Science* (May 2020)

Session 8 - The politics of aid in recipient countries

- What do developing countries bargain for in aid negotiations?
- For a developing country government, what are the opportunities and constraints of foreign aid?
- Why might developing countries not implement the conditions they agreed with donors?

Readings:

- Lindsay Whitfield. *The Politics of Aid: African Strategies for Dealing with Donors*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, ch. 1, available on Course Reserves.
- ✓ Ryan S. Jablonski. "How Aid Targets Votes: The Impact of Electoral Incentives on Foreign Aid Distribution". *World Politics* 66.2 (Mar. 2014), pp. 293–330

Session 9 - Aid effectiveness

- Has the legacy of foreign aid been a failure or a success?
- Are some forms of delivering aid more effective than others? Why?
- What has been the impact of recent cuts to foreign aid?

Readings:

- Axel Dreher et al. "Aid Effectiveness and Donor Motives". *World Development* 176 (2024), p. 106501
- ✓ Simone Dietrich. "Donor Political Economies and the Pursuit of Aid Effectiveness". *International Organization* (2015), pp. 1–38
- Atul Gawande. "The Shutdown of U.S.A.I.D. Has Already Killed Hundreds of Thousands". *The New Yorker* (Nov. 2025), <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-documentary/the-shutdown-of-usaid-has-already-killed-hundreds-of-thousands>

Session 10 - NGOs, non-state actors, and international development

- Can development cooperation through NGOs and civil society organizations bring aid closer to its intended targets?
- How are non-state actors held accountable for their role in international development?
- What is the appropriate role of private philanthropy in international development?

Readings:

- David Lewis et al. *Non-Governmental Organizations and Development*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2020, Ch. 5, "NGO roles in contemporary development practice," on Course Reserves.
- ✓ Kendra Dupuy et al. "Hands Off My Regime! Governments' Restrictions on Foreign Aid to Non-Governmental Organizations in Poor and Middle-Income Countries". *World Development* 84 (Aug. 2016), pp. 299–311

Session 11 - Climate change and development assistance

- What role can development aid play in addressing climate change?
- Why has climate finance so far fallen short of international goals?

Readings:

- ✓ Florian Weiler et al. "Vulnerability, good governance, or donor interests? The allocation of aid for climate change adaptation". *World Development* 104 (Apr. 2018), pp. 65–77
- Jakob Skovgaard et al. "Multilateral Climate Finance Coordination: Politics and Depoliticization in Practice". *Global Environmental Politics* 23.2 (2023), pp. 125–147

Session 12 - Review

TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather. Tiohtiá:ke/Montréal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

This territorial acknowledgement and resources were created by Concordia University's Indigenous Directions Leadership Group (2017). To read the entire territorial acknowledgement and learn more about why it was written this way, please visit <https://www.concordia.ca/about/indigenous/territorial-acknowledgement.html>.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES

Course expectations

This is a seminar. I expect that you attend seminars having completed the required readings, reflected on them, and prepared questions and reflections to contribute to the discussion. I also expect that you participate in the seminar in a constructive, open-minded, and respectful manner. If you ever feel that the seminar environment is discouraging your participation, please let me know.

Computers and technology in class

To facilitate engaged discussion within the group, you will not be allowed to use computers, tablets, or phones while in the seminar. Please ensure that you have notes on the readings with you to be able to participate in the seminar discussion.

Policy on attendance and absences

Attendance at seminar is mandatory. If you are unable to attend a seminar because of a religious observance, please contact me ahead of time. If you are ill and unable to come to class, please complete the university's [short-term absence form](#), which does not require a medical note. If you have a medical or personal reason for a longer absence, please let me know as soon as possible. To make sure you do not fall behind, it is important that I know sooner rather than later if you will not be able to come to class, but you never need to divulge personal information about your health or well-being.

Policy on late work

If you are ill, please complete the university's [short-term absence form](#), which does not require a medical note. If you are unable to submit a piece of work on time for another reason, please contact me ahead of time to work out a plan. Work that is more than two days late without a previous extension will receive a reduced grade, and work that is more than seven days late without a previous extension will receive a failing grade.

Policy on generative artificial intelligence (AI)

Students may use artificial intelligence tools, including generative AI, in this course as learning aids or to gather information. However, students must write their own text for submission. Material drawn from ChatGPT or other AI tools must be acknowledged; *representing as one's own an idea, or expression of an idea, that was AI-generated will be considered an academic offense*. Students may not directly copy from any generative artificial intelligence applications, including ChatGPT and other AI writing and coding assistants, for the purpose of completing assignments in this course.

Acknowledging the use of AI: Students must submit, as an appendix with their assignments, any content produced by an artificial intelligence tool, and the prompt used to generate the content. Any content produced

by an artificial intelligence tool must be cited appropriately. You can refer to Concordia's [explanation](#) of how to cite AI.

Course materials

There is no textbook for this course, nor will you need to buy any books for this course. All required readings are articles and Ebooks available through Concordia Library or have been made available as e-reserves through the Course Reserves system. The further readings are truly optional, they are intended to give you the opportunity to read further into topics you find interesting, and to give you suggestions for your research paper.

Accessibility and accommodations

I am committed to the full inclusion of all students. If you require accommodations or modification of any of the following course procedures because of a disability or other condition, please inform me early in the semester. You may contact me via email or speak with me during office hours. For more information, students may contact the [Concordia Access Centre for Students with Disabilities \(ACSD\)](#).

Behavior

All individuals participating in courses are expected to be professional and constructive throughout the course, including in their communications. Concordia students are subject to the [Code of Rights and Responsibilities](#) which applies when students are physically and virtually engaged in any University activity, including classes, seminars, meetings, etc. Students engaged in University activities must respect this Code when engaging with any members of the Concordia community, including faculty, staff, and students, whether such interactions are verbal or in writing, face to face or online/virtual. Failing to comply with the Code may result in charges and sanctions, as outlined in the Code.

Changes to the syllabus

I may amend the schedule of meetings and assignments listed in this syllabus as might become necessary based on events throughout the semester. I will announce any changes to the syllabus announced and students will receive an updated syllabus on the Moodle course page.

Extraordinary circumstances

In the event of extraordinary circumstances and pursuant to the Academic Regulations, the University may modify the delivery, content, structure, forum, location and/or evaluation scheme. In the event of such extraordinary circumstances, students will be informed of the changes.

Third party technology

Students are advised that external software, website and/or tool ("Third Party Technology") will be used in the course and students may be asked to submit or consent to the submission of their work to an online service. Students are responsible for reading and deciding whether or not to agree with the Third Party Technology's terms of use. Use of any Third Party Technology is voluntary. Students who do not consent to the use of Third Party Technology should identify themselves to the course instructor as soon as possible to discuss alternate acceptable modes of participation that do not require them to give the third party intellectual property rights. By using the Third Party Technology, students agree to provide and share their work and certain personal information (where applicable) with the third party provider. Students are advised that the University cannot guarantee the protection of intellectual property rights or personal information provided to any third party provider (website or software company) and that applicable intellectual property and personal information laws could be those of foreign jurisdictions.

Academic integrity and plagiarism

Submitting someone else's work or ideas as your own (even if you worked together as a group) is plagiarism.

Using someone's ideas without citing them appropriately is also plagiarism. You must give a citation when you use someone else's ideas in-text, even if you do not quote them word-for-word. It's completely normal to draw on the ideas of others, but you must acknowledge their intellectual contributions! Develop good note-taking and citation habits to ensure you adequately and appropriately reference others' work. If you have any questions, please get in touch. See the Political Science Department Statement on Plagiarism at the end of the syllabus for more information.

Intellectual property

Content belonging to instructors shared in online courses, including, but not limited to, online lectures, course notes, and video recordings of classes remain the intellectual property of the faculty member. It may not be distributed, published or broadcast, in whole or in part, without the express permission of the faculty member. Students are also forbidden to use their own means of recording any elements of an online class or lecture without express permission of the instructor. Any unauthorized sharing of course content may constitute a breach of the [Academic Code of Conduct](#) and/or the [Code of Rights and Responsibilities](#). As specified in the [Policy on Intellectual Property](#), the University does not claim any ownership of or interest in any student IP. All university members retain copyright over their work.

READING GROUP ROLES

Discussion leader Your job is to develop at least two possible discussion questions that you can discuss in groups to help everyone understand the main points of the assigned reading. Don't worry about the small details. Your task is to help people talk over the big ideas in the reading and to share reactions to the text. One way to get started is to think about how this reading connects to the big themes in the class — e.g., What is development? What are countries' and other actors' motivations in development policy? Be prepared with your own brief answers to your questions. You will also be responsible for facilitating the group discussion. You will need to turn in at least two discussion questions with your own short answers.

Theory master Your job is to identify the key argument and concepts in the paper. One way to get started is to highlight a few important passages in the reading. These may outline the core argument, distinguish the author's argument from counterarguments, or summarize the author's key points. How would you re-state the author's argument in your own words? What would we need to see in the world to know if the argument was correct? You might also select any passages that are particularly well written, or might be controversial or contradictory with other reading or other information learned in class. You will need to turn in a very brief re-statement of the key argument in the reading and at least one key passage from the text that elaborates it, as well as a short explanation of why you think the passage is important.

Evidence supporter Your job is to lay out the author's case for why their argument is valid. What pieces of evidence does the author use to support their argument? What is the research design? You will need to turn in a brief summary of the research design and an example of how evidence is used to support the author's point.

Devil's advocate Your job is to challenge the ideas in the article by developing a list of critical, thoughtful questions and arguments that might be raised by critics of the authors or by those with different points of view. You will need to turn in at least two challenging questions or arguments, including a brief explanation of why you are making this critique.

Creative connector Your job is to help everyone make connections to other important ideas, both to ideas from this class and also to other political ideas. You may make connections to other readings for that week, from other weeks, to other classes, events in the news, movies, or other experiences. You will need to turn in at least two connections, with a short description of the connections and discussion questions to help others make the connections themselves.

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE STATEMENT ON PLAGIARISM

The Department of Political Science has zero tolerance for plagiarism.

1. What is plagiarism? The University defines plagiarism as “the presentation of the work of another person, in whatever form, as one’s own or without proper acknowledgement” ([Concordia Undergraduate Calendar 2020/2021, section 17.10.3](#)). Plagiarism is an academic offence governed by the Code of Conduct (Academic). To find out more about how to avoid plagiarism, see the [Concordia University Student Success Centre](#).

2. What are the consequences of getting caught? Students caught plagiarizing are subject to one or more of the following sanctions: (a) a written reprimand; (b) a piece of work be re-submitted; (c) a grade of zero for the piece of work in question; (d) a grade reduction for the course; (e) a failing grade for the course; (f) a failing grade and ineligibility for a supplemental examination or any other evaluative exercise for the course; (g) the obligation to take and pass courses of up to twenty-four (24) credits in addition to the total number of credits required for the student’s program as specified by the Dean or Academic Hearing Panel. If the student is registered as an Independent student, the sanction will be imposed only if he or she applies and is accepted into a program; (h) suspension for a period not to exceed six (6) academic terms. Suspensions shall entail the withdrawal of all University privileges, including the right to enter and be on University premises; (i) expulsion from the University. Expulsion entails the permanent termination of all University privileges. In the case of a student who has already graduated, the only two available sanctions are (i) a notation on the student’s academic record that he or she has been found guilty of academic misconduct; or (ii) a recommendation to Senate for the revocation of the degree obtained ([Concordia Undergraduate Calendar 2020/2021, section 17.10.3](#)).

3. For complete regulations and resources on avoiding plagiarism, see:
 - [Academic Integrity and the Academic Code of Conduct Concordia Undergraduate Calendar](#)
 - [Concordia Political Science Guidance on Plagiarism](#)
 - [Student Services Resource “Avoiding Plagiarism”](#)