

Mind the Gap: Using Formative Assessment to Narrow Perception Gaps in Tutorial Teaching

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1. Introduction

This portfolio details my attempts to use formative assessment techniques in tutorial teaching in International Relations for students in Politics, Philosophy and Economics, and Modern History and Politics, at the University of Oxford. It is divided into three parts. Section one gives an overview of a small selection of material on the pedagogical justifications and potential benefits of formative assessment. Section two outlines my attempts to operationalise these insights in my own teaching. Section three briefly describes some of the results and my reflections on them. In general I have been highly impressed by the positive impact of using formative assessment techniques in narrowing the gap between students' perceptions and my own, helping to focus feedback to students, flagging up the need for more intensive help, and making ongoing adjustments to my teaching.

2. Why Use Formative Assessment? Lessons from the Literature

In this section I will give a brief summary of some of the relevant literature on the importance of student perceptions in the learning process, the way that teaching sometimes fails to address this issue adequately, and on the potential for formative assessment to provide one potential remedy.

When I first began teaching in October 2006, I was very struck by William Perry's classic description of the intellectual development of students from an initial position of believing everything could be explained and all knowledge is good/bad or right/wrong, through to an acceptance of the contestable nature of knowledge and relativism, to a position where all knowledge is regarded as contingent, but commitments to principles positions are possible.¹ As Suzanne Shale reports, Perry's schema intuitively appeals to many teachers based on their own trajectories and experience of seeing students develop.² Conversely, Haggis has argued that educational paradigms like the ubiquitous deep-surface paradigm, onto which Perry's schema would map quite naturally, appeal to academics largely as a means of 'constructing images of ourselves' and pays little attention to the needs of students in an era of mass education. Haggis instead argues for a greater focus on meta-skills that will be useful in the workplace.³ But what is most appealing about Perry's schema and the

¹ William G. Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years - a Scheme* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 4.

² S. Shale, *Understanding the Learning Process: Tutorial Teaching in the Context of Research into Learning in Higher Education* (Oxford: IAUL, 2000).

³ T. Haggis, 'Constructing Images of Ourselves? A Critical Investigation into "Approaches to Learning" Research in Higher Education', *British Educational Research Journal* 29:1 (2003).

attendant notion of 'deep' approaches to learning is not its capacity to help academics clone themselves, but in its humanistic appreciation for the real purpose of education, which is not to train workers for the marketplace but to inculcate skills of critical thinking, intellectual independence, social awareness and mobility and other attributes relating to personal liberty, which is the traditional focus of a 'liberal' education.⁴ In other words, we want students to develop beyond simplistic notions of knowledge to become sophisticated, independent-minded thinkers not so they can succeed in the workplace but so they can flourish as human individuals and make progressive contributions to society as citizens. As Shale notes, the sort of values humanistic education promotes, and the sort of classroom experiences we aspire to, are available only through inculcating 'deep' approaches.⁵ This, despite the literature's obsession with measurable 'learning outcomes', is the ultimate justification of encouraging 'deep' approaches.

Perry's schema makes it clear that students' understandings of knowledge must be transformed for 'deep' approaches to take hold, and as Shale points out, this requires students' 'active participation in the process of re-ordering currently perceived realities'.⁶ The implicit focus of most of the pedagogical literature is on how to secure this active participation. Along the way, the importance of students' *perceptions* has been identified. Shale's review of the literature shows that the two most important factors in shaping the learning process are student perceptions/ approaches and the nature of assigned tasks.⁷ Lizzio et al.'s study is devoted to the importance of the learning environment. However, other studies seem to illustrate that the nature of tasks and the learning environment is itself filtered through perceptions. Trigwell and

⁴ See Alan Ryan, 'A Liberal Education - and That Includes the Sciences!' in David Palfreyman, (ed.), *The Oxford Tutorial* (Oxford: 2002). Without this appreciation for the underlying values we are trying to promote through education, arguments for 'deep' approaches are often circular and stale. See, for instance, Alf Lizzo, Keithia Wilson, and Roland Simons, 'University Students' Perceptions of the Learning Environment and Academic Outcomes: Implications for Theory and Practice', *Studies in Higher Education* 27:1 (2002). This study found that surface approaches actually produced better outcomes than deep approaches, and recommended altering assessment procedures to reward deep approaches instead. Given the paper's quantitative approach, the only justification for this suggestion (which exposes the circularity of the justification that deep approaches create better measurable learning outcomes) was that deep approaches improved acquisition of meta-skills (p. 37). This is neither a good basis on which to justify the existence of university education (meta-skills can probably be developed far more efficiently through alternative means), nor, probably, an accurate reflection of the values Lizzio et al. wish to promote. This is a good illustration of Barrow's observation of the tyranny of concern for 'relevance' and 'skills' and that quantitative-positivist approaches in the pedagogical literature 'are of no use if they are not embedded in an articulation and defence of the implicit values' of pedagogy. Robin Barrow, 'The Higher Non-Sense: Some Persistent Errors in Educational Thinking', *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 31:2 (1999).

⁵ Shale, *Understanding the Learning Process: Tutorial Teaching in the Context of Research into Learning in Higher Education*, section II.i.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Ashwin's large-*n* study of Oxford undergraduates' learning experiences found that 40 per cent of Oxford undergraduates did not share Oxford's 'deep' approach ethos and were (apparently consequently) less likely to perceive the learning environment as supportive, less likely to experience teaching as good, and less likely to do well in final examinations.⁸ Lizzio *et al.*, noting many studies showing that perceived appropriateness of workload is positively correlated with academic performance, suggest that this is likely a function of students who learn to successfully manage their workload coming to perceive it as appropriate.⁹ Higgins *et al.* illustrate that, despite Haggis's claims to the contrary, most students do not simply view higher education as a means of skills training but are motivated 'intrinsically' by the subject; yet, their desire to do well is often thwarted by their poor comprehension of assessment criteria.¹⁰

It is this latter point I want to develop in this portfolio. It is generally accepted in the literature that assessment drives student behaviour like no other aspect of the learning environment.¹¹ It therefore seems obvious that we ought to design assessment to drive students towards the adoption of deep approaches. However, the evidence suggests that such attempts often encounter severe difficulties, and many of these relate to students' (mis)perceptions of what academics are looking for, and presumably communicating rather badly in many instances. Chanock's small-*n* study found that over half of students surveyed did not understand a commonly-used remark on their essays.¹² Higgins *et al.* found that half of third-year students they surveyed 'were unclear on what the assessment criteria were', with only a third claiming to understand academics' feedback.¹³ This is a real problem given that feedback is the main means through which academics tend to teach, and is generally highly valued by students.¹⁴ Longhurst and Norton's review of the literature suggests similar problems are well-reported, while their own study shows persistent gaps between students' and tutors' understandings of assessment criteria, even in a department that has been making special efforts to make those criteria very

⁸ Keith Trigwell and Paul Ashwin, *Undergraduate Students' Experience of Learning at the University of Oxford* (Oxford: IAUL, 2003).

⁹ Lizzo, Wilson, and Simons, 'Students' Perceptions', p. 37.

¹⁰ R. Higgins, 'The Conscientious Consumer: Reconsidering the Role of Assessment Feedback in Student Learning', *Studies in Higher Education* 27:1 (2002).

¹¹ Filip J.R.C Dochy and Liz McDowell, 'Introduction: Assessment as a Tool for Learning', *Studies in Higher Education* 23:4 (1997), p. 291; Paul Black and Dylan William, 'Assessment and Classroom Learning', *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice* 5:1 (1998); D. Royce Sadler, 'Formative Assessment: Revisiting the Territory', *Assessment in Education* 5:1 (1998).

¹² Kate Chanock, 'Comments on Essays: Do Students Understand What Tutors Write?' *Teaching in Higher Education* 5:1 (2000).

¹³ Higgins, 'Conscientious Consumer', p. 56.

¹⁴ Higgins *et al.* found that despite many of them not really understanding feedback, 80 per cent of students disagreed that feedback was not useful, and student complaints suggested a demand for more substantive feedback to help them understand their grades and help them improve - a finding consistent with other investigations. *Ibid.*, p. 58..

explicit.¹⁵ Despite Shale's praise for the 'apprenticeship' system of the Oxford tutorial, Trigwell and Ashwin's findings suggest a gap between the 'deep' ethos and the understandings held by a substantial minority of Oxford undergraduates.

It would therefore seem that one important task for teachers is to devise ways to narrow the perception gap between themselves and their students, to help them come to share our understandings of what the educational process is about, what we hope to achieve, and what are the likely routes to success. Formative assessment is generally accepted as a potentially useful method to achieve this. Formative assessment differs from summative assessment in that while the latter occurs at the end of an educational experience and seeks to evaluate what has been learned, formative assessment seeks to provide feedback to students to allow them to reflect on and improve their performance in an ongoing process.¹⁶ Formative assessment has two related justifications:

1. Ontological: despite the technocratic bent of some of the pedagogical literature, the 'constructivist' view of students as actively participating in the constructing of meanings, understandings and knowledge (rather than being passive recipients of knowledge) is generally accepted. In line with this, formative assessment seeks to provide opportunities for students to mediate their own understandings of the purpose, process and assessment of academic work.¹⁷
2. Practical: at a 'commonsensical', observational level, Sadler points out that 'few physical, intellectual or social skills can be acquired satisfactorily simply through being told about them. Most require practice in a supportive environment which incorporates feedback loops'. Feedback is information about the gap between actual and desired levels of performance which is used to alter that gap. Formative assessment is an important way of providing this information in a way that is intelligible to the student (cf. summary grades, which may be 'too deeply coded' to suggest appropriate remedial action; ditto, certain academic jargon calling, e.g., for 'more analysis'). It demands that teachers 'download' to students their understandings of assessment. As Sadler notes, this is challenging because of the qualitative nature of teachers' judgements and the 'fuzziness' of the criteria being used. Ultimately it demands developing a shared understanding through

¹⁵ Nigel Longhurst and Lin S. Norton, 'Self-Assessment in Coursework Essays', *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 23:4 (1997).

¹⁶ Higgins, 'Conscientious Consumer', p. 54.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

repeated practice in a supportive environment whereby students are inducted into 'guild knowledge' held by academics.¹⁸

Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick make similar points to Sadler, arguing that for assessment to be an effective part of the learning process, students must know:

1. what good performance is;
2. how current performance relates to good performance;
3. how to close the gap between current and good performance.

They also voice an additional insight that is crucial to underpinning the practice of formative assessment: points two and three above imply that students are capable of engaging in many of the evaluative judgements also made by their teachers. In practice, even standard assessment methods actually assume some of this capacity - otherwise writing feedback on essays, for instance, would be a pointless activity. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick suggest seven aspects of good feedback practice, based on their three requirements:

1. **clarify what good performance is:** this involves closing the gap between teachers' and students' understandings of tasks. Standards can be expressed in writing but need to be supplemented through, e.g., exemplars, criteria sheets, discussion of criteria in class, peer assessment, etc.
2. **facilitate the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning:** this involves developing criteria and providing opportunities for self-assessment which are ideally integrated with external feedback, e.g., asking students what aspects of work they would like feedback on; identifying strengths and weaknesses in their work against pre-agreed criteria; reflecting on their achievements and selecting a portfolio; reflecting on progress made against milestones.
3. **deliver high-quality information about learning:** help students 'troubleshoot' performance and take corrective action to reduce the gap between current and good performance; this depends on recognising the discrepancy between intentions and results and might involve 'playing back' to students how an essay read or 'worked' for a reader. Feedback should also be focused around pre-defined criteria, timely, corrective, limited to a comprehensible/ actionable level, and prioritise areas for

¹⁸ D. Royce Sadler, 'Formative Assessment and the Design of Instructional Systems', *Instructional Science* 18 (1989), pp. 121-9. Arguably, this is, broadly speaking, the task of education as a whole: see Janice Malcolm and Miriam Zukas, 'Bridging Pedagogic Gaps: Conceptual Discontinuities in Higher Education', *Teaching in Higher Education* 6:1 (2001); Andrew Northedge, 'Enabling Participation in Academic Discourse', *Teaching in Higher Education* 8:2 (2003).

improvement.

4. **encourage teacher and peer dialogue around learning:** this involves avoiding comments like ‘more analysis needed’ in favour of a dialogue to close perceptual gaps and foster mutual understanding. Strategies might include reviewing feedback in tutorials; asking students for examples of particularly helpful feedback received; encouraging descriptive peer feedback based on pre-defined criteria.
5. **encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem:** research indicates that it is worth avoiding giving grades only, since weaker students will regard this as a reflection on their intrinsic ability. Feedback should focus on the task, not the person, and allowing time for students to reflect and act on feedback to encourage recognition of their ability to improve.
6. **provide opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance:** this may involve giving feedback on stage one of a task that can be used for stage two; providing models for how performance can be improved; generating specific ‘action points’ to be taken.
7. **provide information to teachers that can help shape teaching:** this might involve ways of checking students’ understandings of the purpose of teaching activities and moving to close gaps between this and the teacher’s goals; asking students to identify what kind of feedback they want when submitting work and to identify any difficulties encountered, when submitting work.¹⁹

This section has drawn on a small selection of literature on teaching and learning in higher education (TLHE) to argue that we should be motivated to inculcate ‘deep’ approaches in learning in order to inculcate the values that drive the process of higher education, but that in order to do so, we need to closely attend to the issue of the gap between teachers’ and students’ perceptions. It is not immediately obvious to students what their teachers want them to achieve; many students, perhaps even a majority in some departments, fail to develop a clear idea of this even by their final year as undergraduates. Seeking to make assessment criteria clear is a necessary but not sufficient means of conveying teachers’ requirements to students; for this to be achieved it requires an ongoing dialogue enabling students to develop an understanding close to that of their teachers, and this in turn demands changes to the way work is traditionally assessed.²⁰ However, even this is a necessary

¹⁹ D. Nicol and N. Macfarlane-Dick, ‘Formative Assessment and Self-Regulated Learning: A Model and Seven Principles of Good Feedback Practice’, *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 31:2 (2006).

²⁰ Naturally, it also requires that students agree with the assessment criteria being deployed. Haggis argues that many students today may resist the criteria associated with ‘deep’

but not sufficient means of improving students' performances: this demands that students develop the means to assess their own work, notice the gaps between their own output and the criteria they are being assessed on, and take steps to close those gaps. This necessitates further ongoing dialogue specifically aimed at developing these skills, within the context of discipline-specific tasks. In the next section I outline the means through which I tried to encourage the development of these skills among my own students.

3. Putting Formative Assessment into Practice

In this section I briefly outline the sort of teaching activities I have engaged in and my motivations for introducing formative assessment, and the means I have introduced in an effort to narrow the perceptual gap between myself and my students.

I am a doctoral candidate in International Relations (IR) and teach courses in IR to second- and third-year undergraduates at the University of Oxford in Politics, Philosophy and Economics and Modern History and Politics. I focus here on the IR core course, which aims to introduce students to the basics of IR theory and post-Cold War international politics. Teaching takes the form of weekly tutorials over eight weeks, lasting one to one-and-a-half hours. Students are taught singly or in pairs and write between six and eight essays of around 2,000 words per term, discussion of which forms the basis of the tutorial each week. These are submitted and marked in advance of tutorials. Lectures, examinations, and reading lists are provided centrally by the Department of Politics and International Relations. Despite the fact that much undergraduate teaching in IR is carried out by graduate students and that Trigwell and Ashwin uncovered serious perceived shortcomings of teaching by graduate students by their undergraduate tutees at Oxford, there is virtually no training offered to graduate students on how to carry out teaching. My initial preparations for teaching involved a short departmental induction, discussions with colleagues with teaching experience, and a perusal of a couple of the more practical books in the TLHE literature. I also sat in on one colleague's tutorial as an observer, which helped me grasp how tutorials are run. This was important since my only experience of tutorials is as a Masters student.

approaches as elitist and irrelevant to their lives. One approach, as suggested by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, would be to formulate criteria through discussions with students. However, this should still be guided by the teacher's sense of the values being promoted through pedagogy, and Higgins's study suggests that while many students have at least partly internalised the consumerist and utilitarian attitudes that have penetrated the academy, they are at the very least 'conscientious consumers' who are often 'intrinsically' motivated, i.e., genuinely interested in the subject matter and developing 'deep' understandings of it; and of course good teaching can increase such motivations. Whether or not Haggis's insight is valid is an empirical question whose answer will naturally vary by context, but arguably her critique of academic elitism ironically sets the aspirational bar rather too low for the 'masses' in 'mass education'.

However, my preparation was rather brief and superficial. As such, a great deal of trial, error, learning and experimentation was involved on my part.

I became aware of perceptual gaps as a potential problem in teaching in my first term delivering tutorials when I was asked to tutor two visiting students and discovered that no one had told them what the Oxford 'system' was, what was expected of them, and so on. It occurred to me that perhaps this was also true for Oxford's regular students, who while having had a year's experience might never have had the purposes of tutorials, essays, etc, explained to them explicitly. I therefore drew up what I thought were the goals and purposes of tutorials and how they ought to work, which I tried to convey in writing and in my first meetings with students, and which I sought to reinforce generally through my conduct in tutorials, essay feedback, etc (Appendix I). The Oxford system of tutorials arguably also offers good potential for a sort of formative feedback, since it is based around the submission of work and the provision of high-quality feedback in a timely manner. Students' informal feedback was generally positive and students' performance increased, but I was dissatisfied with the amount of progress being made, and incremental changes were not satisfactory. At the beginning of my fourth term teaching, having read some of the literature on formative assessment, I made some more substantive changes to try to introduce formative assessment explicitly rather than merely implicitly, based on the 7-point framework outlined in the previous section.

a) Reading List

The departmental reading list contains 26 pages, 12 topics and 36 potential essays questions. Core texts are identified but are generally of such volume that students cannot possibly tackle them in a week, and the wider reading lists for each week generally extend to several pages. No other guidance is provided as to readings. All of IR theory is covered in a single week. The list's eclecticism and apparent disorganisation is meant to maximise academic autonomy for both tutors and students, but clearly it has severe drawbacks. I produced a much-abbreviated reading list in place of the departmental list, with two weeks for IR theory, and one question per week. Questions were based in part on past examination questions to more closely align coursework assessment and final assessment. Readings were kept short and to the point, to keep the workload realistic while providing coverage of the main perspectives in the literature and introducing at least one 'critical' (i.e., non-mainstream/canon) perspective per week. Links were also provided to articles and chapters (the main focus of the reading list) where they were online, and shelfmarks provided for the Social Science Library otherwise, in an effort to save students time. In addition, the reading list was prefaced with explicit explanations of the purpose of the list and the way it ought to be used. I also set out basic requirements such as the number of essays, the sharing of essays before tutorials to supply potential exemplars and create opportunities for peer review. The reading list is attached as Appendix II.

b) Essay Coversheet

Based on a similar device used by an established academic in a different department, I introduced coversheets for essays (Appendix III). The coversheets ask students to rephrase the question so as to reveal their understanding of the task set and thus flag up any gaps between their conception and mine, or between what they thought they were doing and what they actually produced. The sheet also sets out some basic criteria for decent essays and links explicitly to departmental assessment criteria, against which students were asked to judge the quality of their own work. This encourages students to develop their own evaluative skills and encourages them to develop an understanding of what makes a good essay which is closer to tutors' understanding. The criteria checklist would hopefully allow students to identify some problems before work is even submitted, which might create opportunities for corrective action either on that piece of work or on the next piece, and would raise students' awareness of problems, increase their willingness to ask for help, and enhance their receptiveness to discussion and advice. In addition, other basic criteria like spelling, punctuation and grammar and the provision of a bibliography were added to secure basic academic standards.

The coversheet then became the basis for targeted feedback. My standard way of delivering feedback was to add an A4 sheet to the essay, with one or two paragraphs of descriptive feedback on the work as a whole, followed by numbered remarks referencing particular points in the essay. I now based my descriptive feedback much more around the criteria explicitly identified on the coversheet by me and the students. Progress against these criteria was explicitly identified and praised with the goal of building on successes to enhance progress. Exemplars of good performance were provided either from the students' own work, from peer performance, or from my own suggestions of how the material already contained in students' work could have been put to more successful use. Feedback was returned to students at the beginning of tutorials to allow for questions and discussion, which helped clarify and develop shared meanings of assessment criteria and allowed misperceptions on my part to be changed (e.g., students rephrasing questions often gave me a good sense of what they were trying to achieve, but it was sometimes not until the discussion stage that this was fully clarified). In this way ideas about present and good performance were brought out, and students could use the targeted feedback to help close the gaps between their present and desired output.

c) Mid-Term Feedback

A brief mid-term questionnaire was distributed to students half-way through the term (attached as Appendix IV). This questionnaire was a mixture of questions that would give me a general sense of how the course was going (e.g., is it sufficiently challenging, is the reading list adequate), but also of how the students perceived their progress and the purpose of what they were doing. It asked, for instance, whether students felt comfortable sharing their

opinions, what the purpose of essays and tutorials were, what the strengths and weaknesses of their essays were, how useful feedback was, and how tutorials and feedback could be improved. This served a twofold purpose. It allowed me to check on students' perceptions of how feedback might be shaping their understanding of their progress. As many scholars note, feedback can unwittingly reinforce 'surface' approaches. Targeting feedback around 'deep' approach-style criteria is one way to try to avoid this, but miscommunication and misperception can persist; the feedback sheet allowed me to see if my feedback was being correctly articulated and understood.

Secondly, it provided an opportunity to reflect on and adapt my teaching to students' needs. Although it may seem premature to seek feedback after only four weeks of teaching, it is generally accepted that, in order to be useful to students, feedback needs to be acted on in a way that gives opportunities to enhance future performance.²¹ End of term feedback clearly does not provide an opportunity for me to enhance my teaching with a view to helping students, while mid-term feedback does. This is particularly important for graduate student tutors since we often encounter students only for one or two terms during their Oxford careers and thus a mid-term review is the only opportunity for us to decisively tailor our activities to the needs of individual students.

d) End of Term Review

A final questionnaire was distributed to students after I had written their end of term reports and anonymous responses were solicited (attached as Appendix V). Again this was a mixture of general reflections on the course to get a sense of how well I had conveyed the purpose of the course and how well students felt I had delivered against those objectives. Since it was not possible to tailor my teaching to this set of students, I asked for feedback that might be more useful to reforming the course in the future, e.g., on the usefulness of the reading list, the degree to which IR theory was engaged with (something I have found students tend to struggle with), etc. But I continued to ask about students' perceptions of the purpose of tutorials and essays, to see whether these had changed and to check on the potential impact of feedback, and asked whether anything in particular had enhanced or impeded the learning process.

In the next section I report some of the results from using these new devices, focusing on the coversheets and feedback forms.

4. Experiences of Using Formative Assessment

a) Coversheets

²¹ John Richardson, 'A Review of the Literature', in John Brennan and Ruth Williams, (eds.), *Collecting and Using Student Feedback: A Guide to Good Practice* (London: HEFCE, 2003), p. 38.

Students were generally honest about perceived shortcomings in their work, sometimes correctly identifying, for instance, that their arguments did not flow from point to point. Having to assess their work prior to submission meant they were already thinking through potential problems in advance and were looking for constructive feedback to address them. Having students swap and discuss essays outside of tutorials also provided peer review in addition to my own feedback, which was targeted around pre-defined criteria and any areas flagged up by the students themselves as offering particular difficulties.

I found the coversheets very useful in structuring and focusing my feedback. Some examples of one student's coversheets and my feedback are attached as Appendix VI. One of the most useful functions of the sheet was to flag up perceptual gaps: I could 'play back' how an essay read, and show the student how this diverged not merely from the task set, but from their own intentions. Often the gap between my understanding and their understanding of the tasks were less significant than the gap between their intent and their actual performance. Understanding this is clearly important for deciding how to help the student in specific ways. This particular student was not quite clear on how essays should be structured and how arguments should be advanced, and so their intentions were not reflected in their essays. I was able to focus initially on this and provide suggestions of how his own material might have been better used to achieve his desired result. I was also able to use informal peer review in tutorials by discussing parts of the essay and to make 'exemplars' out of specific parts of his own and his tutorial partner's work.

Once the basics were in place, I could then identify the main problem as being a question of depth of analysis. But rather than calling for 'more analysis', I could give further concrete examples of how work could be improved within the context of the question set. However, having earlier flagged up some quite basic problems, the coversheets inductively highlighted criteria to focus on in the future, to make sure that basic aspects like structure, argument, evidence, etc, were maintained, which was particularly important for this individual. Focusing comments in this way helped reinforce the most important assessment criteria and allowed the student to better understand what they were being assessed on. Praise and positive reinforcement where the student successfully narrowed the gap between desired and achieved performance could be appropriately delivered. This is important since Archer et al., in their study of Oxford undergraduates, specifically found that students are often demoralised when they perceive themselves to be making changes and tutors appear to fail to notice this.²² This is presumably simply because tutors take for granted that some aspects of work should be covered as a bare minimum, and move on to comment on other things, which ignores the efforts made by students to achieve that bare minimum in the first place.

²² Ian Archer et al., *Students' Experiences of the Formative Assessment of Essays in Modern History and Archaeology at Oxford* (Oxford: Unpublished MSS, 2006), p. 14.

The coversheets therefore helped flag up areas for intervention to narrow perceptual gaps between myself and students, and within students' own understandings of their work. They encouraged students to reflect more on what they were doing and develop evaluative skills. The student whose coversheets are at Appendix VI showed marked improvement throughout the term, and I was impressed with the level of progress achieved by other students, too, which seemed to be greater in previous terms where I had not used the coversheets.

b) Mid-Term Review

The mid-term reviews showed that students had mostly acquired conceptions of the purpose of tutorials and essays that were reasonably close to my own and that the feedback I had provided was being internalised, since areas they flagged for self-improvement clearly related to remarks I had made in essay feedback and tutorials. The general sentiment also seemed to be that I was generally delivering well against what they believed I ought to be doing.

However, this was not the case with one student, whose feedback is appended as Appendix VII. His two main issues were that he was not sure how to improve his essays, and he was dissatisfied with the conduct of tutorials. We arranged to meet separately to discuss these issues, which provided me with a good opportunity for targeted assistance, and to again address the issue of perceptual gaps.²³

On essays, the student understood what was required in order for him to improve the quality of his essays, e.g., in terms of structure and the further integration of IR theory, but did not know how to achieve this. In formative assessment terms, he had acquired the ability to identify the gap between his current and desired performance levels, but not the ability to close it.²⁴ We spent time discussing basic study skills (in particular, he was reading inefficiently) and focusing on one specific essay to provide more examples of how he might alter his essay writing technique and bring in more IR theory where appropriate. I was also able to reinforce my basic line on theory, which is that it should be used where it is helpful in explaining reality, and not for its own sake - whereas students seem extremely keen to use theory regardless, and thus sometimes inappropriately. This student's essays then showed a distinct improvement and continued to get better over the rest of term.

²³ This justifies the option of allowing students to submit feedback without anonymity, which is usually a basic principle of feedback to maximise honesty. Anonymity was required for the end of term feedback, but for mid-term feedback I wanted the opportunity to give specific help where needed.

²⁴ This is consistent with the findings of Archer *et al.*, *Formative Assessment*, p. 16. Their research showed that students' 'capacity to recognise what makes a good essay proceeds faster than their capacity to enact what they have understood'.

The meeting was a useful reminder of a persistent gap between my perceptions and those of students. For instance, it is wrong simply to assume that, by the second year, students will have mastered the basic elements of their day-to-day work, largely because they have probably never received any explicit instruction in, e.g., how to read books, how to organise their notes. Assuming this is understood, in the same way that tutors' remarks about 'structure', 'analysis', etc, implicitly assume understanding, is misguided.²⁵ Having discussed this with other colleagues who teach, I might in future alter my teaching to ask students explicitly at the beginning of terms how they actually go about producing their work. This would allow me to intervene earlier and provide better training, so that students can improve more quickly.

On tutorials, the discussion was useful for flagging up another perceptual gap. This student and his tutorial partner were rather reticent to discuss material in tutorials. Rather than allow tutorials to degenerate into a mini-lecture, my general approach is simply to ask lots of questions in an attempt to draw quiet students out. However, this student perceived this technique as interrogatory and precluding the discussion I was attempting to foster. In addition my questions were often perceived to be too abstract; my intention was to avoid narrow or leading questions that would provoke yes/no or otherwise 'surface'-level responses, but clearly I was instead just confusing this student. This helped me flag up a perceptual gap between my own intended and actual performance. I was able to try to explain what I was trying to achieve, why I was doing it - i.e., because discussion did not seem to flow very well - and what both he and I might do differently. I encouraged him to challenge obtuse questions in the future. And from then on I sought to kick-off discussion in tutorials by stimulating peer-review first, and then drawing from their remarks a short list of points around which to structure the rest of the tutorial. This 'inductive' approach seemed to work far better than my attempt to impose a structure through my own questions and I would definitely use this technique again.

Of course, not all student feedback and suggestions can be acted upon. One student suggested a mid-week meeting to discuss early ideas about essays, perhaps look at plans, etc, to allow time to reflect and change performance before the essay was submitted. On the one hand, this was an example of a student wishing to get *more* formative feedback, and is positive. On the other, students are already writing two or more essays a week, and to produce another plan on top of that would be quite burdensome. I was also somewhat

²⁵ Trigwell & Ashwin found that only 36 per cent of Oxford students felt the degree of support they received for the development of study skills required to be successful was sufficient. As one student interviewed said: 'The Oxford attitude that you're bright so should be able to figure it out gets taken too far sometimes. More skills help would be good... lots more guidance on quality of work expected and marking systems so one knows what to aim for' (*Undergraduate Students' Experiences*, p. 40). However 'bright' Oxford students might be, they are never psychic.

dubious of the value of a second meeting each week; to be substantive it would need to be somewhat lengthy, and there was the risk that students would simply strategically adapt their own thinking on a topic to mirror my own, which is clearly not desirable. In other circumstances such a pre-submission review would be a valuable part of a formative assessment regime, e.g., where students submitted, say, only two or three pieces of work over a ten-week term. Oxford's intense workload provides plentiful opportunities for formative assessment without this additional step. So for this student I explained my reluctance to implement her request, and suggested instead more peer interaction as an alternative approach: this might formative assessment benefits, particular in a context where formative assessment is being used each week by the tutor, without having the same potential to distort the students' own ideas and output. Other remarks and suggestions were simpler but more surprising, but again flagged up the importance of perceptual gaps: one student complained that the setting of my office for tutorials made him feel 'unequal', since my chair was higher than the couch where students sit. This was, again, not my intention, and I was not even aware of it; my goal was to encourage a friendly, informal setting to facilitate free-flowing discussion. I moved tutorials to a room where we sat around a table, which in some ways I preferred. It gave me the use of a whiteboard, which I found a surprisingly useful teaching aid. Students also flagged up issues they would like to review, which I went over in the last tutorial - this was mostly IR theory.

c) End of Term Feedback

Some of these forms are attached as Appendix VIII. Naturally there is a real problem in collecting 'anonymous' feedback among such a small cohort of students, i.e., students may think there is a good chance that their comments will be identified as theirs and thus moderate their feedback. The only way to offset this concern is to communicate, as I did, that their comments could not affect their assessment as their reports had already been submitted, and I was unlikely to be teaching them again in future terms.²⁶

In general I was very pleased with the feedback forms: they showed that students' understandings of what essays and tutorials were meant to be about were relatively close to my own, and that they felt I had generally delivered fairly well against these objectives. At best, one student remarked that essays were about argument, structure, evidence and understanding and welcomed the detailed feedback, adding that tutorials were about 'advanc[ing] and broaden[ing] our personal perception[s] of the world' and had shown up the contested nature of knowledge in IR - and suggested this understanding was a product of the term's work. Other feedback manifested a good sense of progress and achievement on the part of students. I would suggest this was at

²⁶ One in fact requested specifically to take another course with me, but not until the process was completed; and this at least suggests she was not concealing too much dissatisfaction. My overall impression was that students understood the constructive purpose of feedback loops and welcomed a chance to engage cooperatively with me.

least partly due to the introduction of formative assessment. It is not really possible to verify this - perhaps the feedback form ought to have included, say, a question about the purpose and usefulness of the coversheets as part of assessing the usefulness of feedback overall. Probably the number of criteria on the coversheet needs to be cut down somewhat, and perhaps the most important criteria should be fleshed out a little.

The anonymous feedback also gave me pointers for thinking more about my teaching in the future and about potential changes to the course. One student in particular flagged this up as a problem, suggesting that they at least felt comfortable voicing complaints even among a small cohort of students. In the past I had divided up IR theory explicitly between two weeks, while this time I tried to begin with a more thematic introduction before considering variants of IR theory in week two, and IR theory was introduced where appropriate in the remaining weeks, which related to specific issue-areas (like alliances, institutions, etc). Difficulties with IR theory were identified in the end of term feedback, however, which suggests that my new approach was not entirely successful and perhaps pitched the material at too high a level for newcomers to the subject. Before providing this course again I would need to rethink how IR theory should be covered. The technique I used to review IR theory in week eight (breaking down theory into its component parts and comparing these across theories to emphasise commonalities and differences) might be useful in helping establish a firmer grasp in the early weeks.

5. Conclusion

This portfolio has engaged with the use of formative assessment in tutorial teaching. It has focused particularly on the issue of perceptions and perceptual gaps between teachers and students. This is such a broad issue that it has been possible to cover it only relatively superficially here, but the introduction of formative assessment has not only enabled me to identify perceptions and perceptual gaps and helped to transmit skills of evaluation and self-correction to my students to help close these gaps, it has helped me reflect on the gaps between my own perceived and actual levels of performance as a teacher. Furthermore, it has confirmed to me the importance of 'minding the gap': assumptions about students' levels of understanding about assessment, feedback, study skills and so on are often quite misplaced and to fail to recognise this is to miss opportunities for targeted assistance; likewise assumptions about the way the teaching I provide, and the environment in which teaching takes place, are perceived and understood, are likewise potentially wrong. Formative assessment and feedback have become an indispensable part of my teaching as a way of recognising and countering misperceptions, and encouraging active reflexivity both among my students and for myself.

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Appendix I: Goals of the IR Course

This is a set of notes that I used to refer to when meeting with visiting students for the first time in an attempt to explain what the IR core course, and the 'Oxford system', are actually supposed to be about.

Goals of the IR Core Course (214)

- Transform students' understanding of international politics to one of greater sophistication, informed by various competing social scientific approaches and theories
- Develop an understanding of these approaches and assess them critically, getting a good sense for the current state of the field and an understanding of critical theory's assessment of it
- Gain knowledge of major political developments since 1990 and understand the links between them and what has gone before, putting current events into historical context

Important points to note

- If you do not know, do not be ashamed to ask! I will always try to answer questions but I am not here to dispense authoritative knowledge. My role is to engage with your ideas, probe the limits of your understanding and to help you develop critical faculties. This will mainly involve asking lots of questions!
- This means the emphasis is on your ideas, not mine. In these sessions, you do most of the talking, not me (cf. lectures). This may seem very different to prior experiences where you mostly listened to people lecture and reproduced what they said in term papers and exams. Teaching at Oxford is not about the transmission of some absolute truth, it is about helping you to develop your own thinking so that you can better understand the world we live in - it's about training you to think, rather than telling you what to think.
- This should be challenging and exciting rather than frightening or intimidating. The word 'essay' comes from the French verb 'essayer', 'to try': in essays you can test your thinking, try ideas out, develop arguments and find out what you think and believe. To do this honestly means taking risks: not being rash or simply being argumentative, offering no evidence to back up wild assertions, but developing confidence in your own thinking to advance an argument with clarity, even in the absence of expert knowledge.
- Essays will be a little bit more rough and ready than "term papers", because you will be producing sometimes 2 a week. This means you need to work very hard. There will be no time for lengthy plans or first drafts. You must plan your argument - there should always be an argument to answer a question, an explanation of your point of view that aims to persuade - and then execute it relatively quickly. Essays are not literature reviews or narratives, but arguments. They should have a clear structure, with a quick introduction laying out what you are going to argue and how, and then a main body that follows this structure and builds up the argument, and finally a conclusion that brings it all together.
- In the subsequent discussions, which we call tutorials, we discuss your essays and I give you as much feedback as I can. I will always provide written feedback on your essays, so there is no need to take extensive notes. Ideally

you should discuss the tutorial later and that should (a) help you remember the key points, (b) clarify some points you perhaps didn't understand and (c) identify any outstanding questions for next time. The more cooperatively you work together, the more you will get out of the course. Competitive approaches damage learning.

- Some tutors make students read out essays and then interrupt to ask questions. I've asked that you send each other your essays by email on the day you submit them to me in hard copy (Tuesdays by 5pm), and read and think about them before coming to the tutorial. I might ask you to summarise each other's arguments at the beginning of tutorials, and for your reactions to them. In addition to being a good basis for discussion, this exercise is also useful to develop your critical reading skills: identifying arguments and seeing how effective they are, and where their weaknesses lie. Again this is not about competition. It is entirely possible to be critical of someone's ideas in a supportive and mature way. If you are academically serious, you believe that the point of doing academic work is to find answers. That is impossible alone - it is always a collaborative effort. We can try to find answers together in a non-threatening environment.
- I will ask lots of questions during tutorials about your work and your reading. Again, this is not meant to be threatening. I ask questions to find out what you meant by phrases, what are the assumptions (perhaps unconscious ones) behind your arguments, what you thought about aspects of the reading, and so on. We then chat about them. I am not some sort of God with all the answers interrogating you from on high -- I'm just someone who has been doing this for longer than you have. The idea is that we explore questions and answers together. In Oxford parlance, you are here to "read for a degree", and you are invited to "read with" professors, emphasising mutual learning.
- The most important point is that we are here to develop our understanding of the world. Everything else is secondary. 2,500 words should be enough to explore your ideas each week. If you need more, go over a bit, but don't become undisciplined in your prose - writing concisely is an important skill. Likewise, if you need less, don't fill up to 2,500 with waffle. Don't worry about your GPA. I won't be giving you scores. Comments are much more helpful to improve your performance and you are much more than a number. Essay deadlines are important to make the learning process work - stick to them. If you have troubles, academic or otherwise, contact me ASAP and I will try to help. I work out of my office here most days and am happy to meet at any time

Appendix II: Reading List

International Relations Core Course (214)

Syllabus and Reading List

Introduction

This document maps out the 214 course over 8 weeks, giving precise essay titles and suggested readings. Some general points to bear in mind:

- Each student will produce six to eight essays during the term. These must be handed in (along with a completed [cover sheet](#)) before the specified deadline to allow time for marking. If no essay is submitted in time, your tutorial is forfeit. You should also send your essay to your tutorial partner immediately after the deadline and make sure you have read each other's work in advance of the tutorial. If you do not intend to write an essay in a given week, please email me in advance. Coordinate with your tutorial partner to ensure that at least one essay is being submitted each week.
- In addition, by Week 6 at the latest each student should submit three summaries of post-Cold War events. Each should fill one side of A4 paper. Devote a third to one half of the page to describing the event, and the remainder to analysing its significance for International Relations. You may choose which events to cover, but avoid major recent events such as Iraq and Afghanistan. If you are at a loss, try to cover one instance of conflict, one of cooperation, and one institution. The idea of this exercise is to ensure your ideas are empirically grounded. Ask me for guidance on topics/ readings if necessary.
- You will get most out of the course if you come well-prepared to tutorials: the more effort you put in, the more you will get out of it. Likewise you will benefit a great deal if you discuss the topics and concepts with your tutorial partner outside of the tutorials. Cooperation, not competition, is vital.
- The reading list below selects and adds to readings from the departmental list and is annotated with shelfmarks from the Social Science Library; your colleges may also have copies. The selections have been made to highlight relevance and bring out the key issues; they are bare minimums and you can supplement them with additional texts from the main reading list, which you can find here: <http://tinyurl.com/36rrbk>. For each week you may find appropriate chapters in the Baylis & Smith, *Globalization of International Politics* useful primers.
- One of the big underlying themes of the course, which always pops up on the final exam, is international order, so each week reflect and jot down a few ideas on how what you are working on relates to international order or disorder.
- Also, keep in mind the major IR theories/ approaches covered at the beginning of the course, and consider each week how they would interpret particular questions or problems. E.g., what would the realist/ liberal/ international society take on NATO be?

Questions and Readings

Week 1: 'Utopianism', 'Realism' and International Relations

Question: What does Carr see as the foundation of international order: power and interests, or ethics and morality?

Texts: E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-39: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (1939; latest edition 2001) [JZ1305.CAR]

Week 2: International Relations Theory

Question: Using empirical evidence to illustrate your argument, which IR theory gives the best account of the post-Cold War international order?

Texts: **Neo-Realism**

- Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, esp. ch. 5 & 6 [JZ1237.WAL]
- John Mearsheimer, 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War', *International Security* vol. 15 (1990), 5-56 <http://tinyurl.com/35t6jw>

Liberalism

- Michael Doyle, 'Liberalism and World Politics', *American Political Science Review* vol. 80 (1986), 1151-69 <http://tinyurl.com/2khos3>
- Robert Keohane, 'Moral Commitment and Liberal Approaches to World Politics', in Eivind Hovden & Edward Keene (eds.) *The Globalization of Liberalism* (2002) [JC574.GLO]

International Society

- Kai Alderson & Andrew Hurrell (eds.) *Hedley Bull on International Society* (2000), esp. Ch. 1, 3 [JZ1310.BUL]
- Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society: English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (2004), esp. ch. 8 [JZ1318.BUZ]

Constructivism

- Emmanuel Adler, 'Seizing the Middle-Ground: Constructivism in World Politics', *European Journal of International Relations* vol. 3 (1997) <http://tinyurl.com/2vn9sy>
- Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of International Relations', *International Organization* 46:2 (1992) <http://tinyurl.com/3bzo9>

Week 3: The United Nations

Question: How should we explain the role and limitations of the UN in global security since the Cold War?

- Texts:**
- Charter of the United Nations www.un.org/aboutun/charter
 - Karen Mingst & Margaret Karns, *The United Nations in the Post-Cold War Era* (2000), esp. ch. 1-4 [JZ5005.MIN]
 - Richard Price & Mark Zacher (eds.) *The United Nations and Global Security* (2004), esp. ch. 4, 5, 7, 9, 11 [JZ5588.UNI]
 - Adam Roberts & Benedict Kingsbury (eds.) *United Nations, Divided World* 2nd edition (1993), esp. ch. 3, 4, and pp. 211-39 [JZ4984.5.UNI]
 - Mats Berdal, 'The United Nations Security Council: Ineffective but Indispensable' in *Survival* 45:2 (2003), <http://tinyurl.com/2tz5rd>, or Michael Glennon, 'Why the Security Council Failed', *Foreign Affairs* 82:3 (2003) <http://tinyurl.com/9v3b>
 - Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict* (2004), esp. ch. 1, 9 [JZ5538.PAR]

Week 4: NATO

Question: Why has NATO not been disbanded?

- Texts:**
- Robert Keohane, Joseph Nye & Stanley Hoffmann (eds.), *After the Cold War: International Institutions and State Strategies in Europe, 1989-1991* (1993), esp. ch. 3, 11 [D860.AFT]
 - David Yost, *NATO Transformed: The Alliance's New Roles in International Security* (1999), esp. ch. 2, 4 [UA646.3.YOS]
 - Ted G. Carpenter (ed.), *NATO Enters the 21st Century* (2001), esp. introduction, ch. 1, 2, 4, 7, 8 [UA646.3.NAT]
 - Stephen Walt, 'Why Alliances Endure or Collapse', in *Survival* 39:1 (1997) [SSL]
 - Emmanuel Adler & Michael Barnett (eds.) *Security Communities* (1998), esp. ch. 1, 3 [JZ1305.SEC]
 - Zaki Laïdi, *A World Without Meaning: The Crisis of Meaning in International Politics* (1998), esp. introduction, ch. 1-4, 8 [BOD; on order at SSL; borrow copy from me]

Week 5: Security

Question: What is the appropriate focus of 'security': states, human beings, or something else?

- Texts:**
- Barry Buzan, Ole Waever & Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998), esp. pp. 1-45 [KZ5588.BUZ]
 - Emma Rothschild, 'What is Security?', *Daedalus* 124:3 (1995), 53-98 [BOD]
 - Lawrence Freedman, 'International Security: Changing Targets', *Foreign Policy* issue 110 (Spring 1998) <http://tinyurl.com/2kdcye>
 - Mohammed Ayoob, 'The Security Problematic of the Third World', *World Politics* 43 (January 1991) <http://tinyurl.com/3dndnj>

- Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Security and Development* (2001), esp. ch. 1, 2 [HC59.72.D44.DUF]
- Tara McCormack, 'From State of War to State of Nature: Human Security and Sovereignty', in Christopher Bickerton, Philip Cunliffe & Alexander Gourevitch (eds.) *Politics without Sovereignty: A Critique of Contemporary International Relations* (2006) [SSL]

Week 6: Globalization

Question: Has 'globalization' strengthened 'Northern' states at the expense of those in the 'global South'?

- Texts:**
- Jan Art Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (2000), esp. ch. 5, 6, 10 [JZ1318.SCH] or David Held et al., *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (1999), esp. ch. 1, 3, 4, 5
 - Melvyn Westlake, 'The Third World (1950-1990) RIP', *Marxism Today* (August 1991), pp. 14-16 <http://tinyurl.com/3xs5gd>
 - Anthony Payne, *The Global Politics of Unequal Development* (2005), esp. ch. 2-9 [HD75.PAY]
 - Ankie Hoogvelt, *Globalisation and the PostColonial World: The New Political Economy of Development* (1997), esp. ch. 8 on Africa [HF1413.HOO]
 - Peter Evans, 'The Eclipse of the State? Reflections on Stateness in an Era of Globalization', *World Politics* 50:1 (1997), 62-87 <http://tinyurl.com/2lwq76> or Linda Weiss, 'Globalization and the Myth of the Powerless State', in *New Left Review* 1/225 (Sept-Oct 1997) <http://newleftreview.org/?view=1906>, particularly useful on East Asia
 - Andrew Hurrell & Amrita Narlikar, 'A New Politics of Confrontation? Brazil and India in Multilateral Trade Negotiations', *Global Society* 20:4 (2006), 415-33 <http://tinyurl.com/ytgw38>

Week 7: Human Rights and State Sovereignty

Question: What are the major problems associated with humanitarian intervention?

- Texts:**
- Jennifer Welsh (ed.), *Humanitarian Intervention and International Relations*, esp. ch. 2-4 [JZ6369.HUM or <http://tinyurl.com/2mek5v>]
 - Richard K Betts, 'The Delusion of Impartial Intervention', in *Foreign Affairs* 73:6 (1994), pp. 20-33 [<http://tinyurl.com/2wnjxp>]
 - Philip Cunliffe, 'Sovereignty and the Politics of Responsibility', in Christopher Bickerton, Philip Cunliffe & Alexander Gourevitch (eds.) *Politics without Sovereignty: A Critique of Contemporary International Relations* (2006) [SSL]

- Nicholas Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (2000), esp. introduction, ch. 1, 5-8 [JZ6369.WHE, or <http://tinyurl.com/37f3s6>]
- Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (2002), esp. introduction, ch. 1, 5, conclusion [BOD; Philosophy Library Gf.BAD.A2; copy on order at SSL; or borrow from me]
- On Rwanda, see Barrie Collins, 'The International Dynamics Behind the Rwandan Tragedy', Report for the International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda, January 2006 <http://tinyurl.com/353trm>
- On Darfur, see Brendan O'Neill: 'Darfur: Damned by Pity', *spiked-online*, 21 September 2006 <http://tinyurl.com/2uafra> and his refs to Jonathan Steel articles; Alex De Waal, 'I Will Not Sign', *London Review of Books*, 30.11.06 <http://tinyurl.com/25vq6e>; Mahmood Mamdani, 'Blue-Hatting Darfur', *London Review of Books*, 6.9.07 <http://tinyurl.com/2nkryl>; on Iraq's relation to humanitarian intervention see Tony Judt, 'The New World Order', *New York Review of Books* 14.7.05 <http://tinyurl.com/2pm4d7>

Week 8: Power in International Relations

Question: Referring to the practice and experiences of at least one state to illustrate your argument, is power in the international system today 'hard', 'soft', or something else?

- Texts:**
- E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (2001 [1939]), ch. 8 [JZ1305.CAR]
 - Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Allen Lane, 1969), esp. pp. 3-21, 35-56 [HM886.ARE]
 - Thomas Franck, *The Power of Legitimacy Among Nations* (1990), esp. ch. 1 [KZ4041.FRA]
 - Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Succeed in World Politics* (2004), esp. ch. 1 [JZ1480.NYE]
 - Zaki Laidi, *Power and Purpose after the Cold War* (1994), esp. introduction, ch. 1 [D860.POW]
 - Robert W. Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method', *Millennium* 12:2 (1983) <http://tinyurl.com/372xa8>
 - See reading list for texts on specific states. On the USA, see Foot et al. (2003) or Ikenberry (2002), Posen (2003), Wohlforth (1999); on Germany, Bulmer & Patterson (1996), Katzenstein (1997); on China, Brown et al. (2000), Ross (1997), and see also Bates Gill & Yangzhong Huang, 'Sources and Limits of Chinese "Soft Power"', *Survival* 48:2 (2006) <http://tinyurl.com/2spwjk>

Lee Jones
Nuffield College, Oxford
October 2007

Appendix III: Essay Coversheet

ESSAY COVER SHEET

Please fill in the gaps and circle the appropriate boxes.

Essay title:

Content:

Please rephrase the set question, according to your understanding of what it is asking you to do. (Some of the terms you might use to rephrase are: describe / define / explain / outline / compare / contrast / illustrate / trace / interpret / analyse / evaluate / discuss / criticise / demonstrate / conclude)

Have you answered the specific question set? YES / NO
Have you avoided the inclusion of irrelevant materials? YES / NO
Have you included evidence to support your arguments? YES / NO

Structure

Have you written an introductory paragraph? YES / NO
Does your argument flow logically from one paragraph to the next? YES / NO
Have you written a conclusion? YES / NO

Presentation

Have you cited all your sources? YES / NO
Have you given references for all quotations? YES / NO
Have you included a bibliography? YES / NO
Have you checked spelling and punctuation? YES / NO

Overall

Was the reading set for this essay useful? If not, please explain.

Did you encounter any difficulties in producing this essay?

Would you like specific feedback on any particular aspect of your work?

What do you think would be a fair mark for this essay? Please give your reasons. (For grade descriptors see <http://tinyurl.com/28kwq9>)

Appendix IV: Mid-Term Review Form

Department of Politics and International Relations Mid-Term Review

This feedback form is intended to give you an opportunity to provide feedback about the course, my teaching, and your learning. Your responses will in no way affect my assessment of your work. You may submit it anonymously via my pigeonhole, or hand it to me at a tutorial. If you feel there are any particular problems you would like to discuss about your individual progress it might be helpful to do the latter. We can schedule a meeting if you would prefer to discuss any issues outside of tutorials.

Overall

please tick the appropriate box

<i>Question</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No idea / response
Essay questions provide an opportunity to demonstrate my grasp of the material					
Tutorials enrich my understanding of the course					
I feel comfortable sharing my opinions, questions, and ideas in tutorials					
The tutor's feedback helps me understand how to improve my future papers					
The texts and materials are useful in answering the assigned questions					
I find this course challenging					

Essays

What do you think the purpose of writing essays is?

What have been the strengths and weaknesses of your essays so far?

Has feedback provided on your essays been useful? Do you feel it has helped you to improve?
How might the feedback be made more helpful?

Tutorials

What do you think is the purpose of our tutorials?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the tutorials?

How could tutorials be made more helpful for your progress?

Remainder of Term

In which areas do you wish to improve by the end of term?

Are there any areas from the first half of term you would like to review before the end of term?

Please use the space below to write any additional comments, suggestions or concerns you may have. Use additional sheets if necessary.

Appendix V: End of Term Feedback Form

Department of Politics and International Relations

International Relations Feedback Form

Course Code: 21_

It would be very helpful to me if you could take the time to fill out the following feedback form anonymously and deliver it to my pigeonhole by the end of 9th week (internal mail is fine). I very much appreciate your comments and they will be used to help improve your teaching environment and that of other students. Please circle numbers or write comments as appropriate. All feedback will be treated in the strictest confidence. Many thanks.

Lee Jones, Nuffield College

	Very useful	Fairly useful	OK	Not very useful	Not at all useful
How useful did you find the reading list?	1	2	3	4	5
How useful were the recommended readings?	1	2	3	4	5
How easy did you find it to get hold of the readings?	1	2	3	4	5
	Very well	Fairly well	Reasonably	Fairly poorly	Very poorly
To what extent were you able to engage with the reading on IR theory?	1	2	3	4	5
To what extent were you able to engage with the reading on themes and problems in IR?	1	2	3	4	5
	A great deal	Quite a lot	A bit	Not very much	Very little
How much did you get out of writing tutorial essays?	1	2	3	4	5

What would you say is the most important single thing you got out writing tutorial essays? If you feel you got nothing at all from it, say why you found it so unproductive.

	A great deal	Quite a lot	A bit	Not very much	Very little
How much did you get out of tutorials?	1	2	3	4	5

What would you say the aims of the tutorials were?

	Very well	Fairly well	Reasonably	Fairly poorly	Very poorly
	1	2	3	4	5

How well would you say these aims were met?

	Very useful	Fairly useful	OK	Not very useful	Not at all useful
	1	2	3	4	5

Overall, how useful was the class in helping you understand what IR is all about?

What has been helpful for your learning during this course?

What, if anything, has impeded your learning during this course?

What is the one question that is now uppermost in your mind in relation to the material discussed during the course?

What further comments do you have in relation to any of the questions above or any other aspects of the course? (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.)

Appendix VI: Example of Student Coversheet and Essay Feedback

The following pages show one student's coversheets, followed by the written essay feedback I gave for that week.

ESSAY COVER SHEET 2

Essay title:

Using empirical evidence to illustrate your argument, which IR theory gives you the best account of post Cold War international order?

Content:

Please rephrase the set question, according to your understanding of what it is asking you to do. (Some of the terms you might use to rephrase are: describe / define / explain / outline / compare / contrast / illustrate / trace / interpret / analyze / evaluate / discuss / criticize / demonstrate / conclude)

First of all, we have to define and describe what the post Cold War international order is. Then we should analyze this order according to the different theories that we have in IR. Try to compare, discuss and criticize each theory and its conception of the world order. See which one gives a best account of the world order and illustrate how.

Have you answered the specific question set? YES
Have you avoided the inclusion of irrelevant materials? YES
Have you included evidence to support your arguments? YES

Structure

Have you written an introductory paragraph? YES
Does your argument flow logically from one paragraph to the next? YES
Have you written a conclusion? YES

Presentation

Have you cited all your sources? YES
Have you given references for all quotations? YES
Have you included a bibliography? YES
Have you checked spelling and punctuation? YES

Overall

Was the reading set for this essay useful? If not, please explain.

Yes, very useful.

Did you encounter any difficulties in producing this essay?

Not really apart the way of constructing the argument.

Would you like specific feedback on any particular aspect of your work?

My English, the structure of the paper, and the structure of the argument.

What do you think would be a fair mark for this essay? Please give your reasons.

I have problems with answering that; I would need to see first your feedback on this paper in order to know what mark I shall get. With your feedback I will answer that question for the next essay!

[Student's name]

Using empirical evidence to illustrate your argument, with IR theory provides the best account of post-Cold War international order?

WK 2 MT 07

This is a real improvement over last week's essay since this is a more substantial piece of work. You try to outline all the different theories and give each its due, and it's clear that you have attempted to advance an argument throughout (in favour of neorealism), while you also draw on multiple examples to make your case. So your work contains all the fundamental elements you would need to produce a good essay - the main issue here is about structure.

You say on the coversheet that the point was to outline post-CW order, and then to analyse it with IR theories in order to assess the theories. Reading the essay, what you have actually done is to move through the different IR theories, highlighting in each case a different aspect of post-CW order: you begin with neorealism and Iran/North Korea, then Liberalism and the spread of market democracy, then back to Neorealism and the War on Terror, then NLI and back to Neorealism, then to Liberalism vs. Neorealism in the UN and then back to Liberalism again with the EU, and so on. By the end, when you bring in International Society and Constructivism, you don't use any examples and comment only briefly upon them.

A clearer argument would have isolated the two bits of the question, either in the way you said originally (outline post-CW order, test the theories) or vice versa (outline the theories, use post-CW order examples to make an argument about which is the most appropriate). It would then have traced an argument through these sections which went from step to step, with each paragraph adding logically to the chain of thought. With your current structure the argument jumps around a lot, leaping from one theory/ example to another, which makes a sustained argument very difficult to create.

You also asked for feedback on your English - which although imperfect, is entirely possible to follow without any difficulty, so I would not worry too much.

-
1. But Mearsheimer expected the return of great-power conflict (specifically, within Europe); the emergence of minor states as threats to order was not really foreseen, and in fact Waltz explicitly dismisses the importance of small states (saying something like, "I am not interested in explaining the foreign policy of Malaysia") for international order. Apparently "ethnic" conflicts do seem to have re-emerged, e.g. Balkans, Chechnya - but these are *intra*-state rather than inter-state conflicts, and since neorealism takes states as unitary actors they don't even allow for this possibility.
 2. My questions would be: can neorealism account for (a) the continued existence of NATO in a unilateral world where the opponent of the military alliance has long since departed; (b) the choice of wars against such minor nations as Afghanistan and Iraq, the idea that these states pose a 'threat' to the sole remaining superpower despite their clear absence of power in a classic 'balance of power' analysis?
 3. Was the survival of the US state ever in doubt?
 4. There is no real connection between these two paragraphs.
 5. Rather than skipping between different examples, to prove the worth of neorealism you could have shown how it offers a better explanation of the EU than liberalism.
 6. Arguably the theory has many other shortcomings.
 7. First, it would be better to consider these arguments when actually discussing 9/11 the first time around. Second, are these counter-arguments convincing? Neorealists seem to offer no counter to the non-state-actor charge, and positing a clash of *civilizations* is a world away from positing a clash between self-interested *states* pursuing security in a situation of anarchy.

ESSAY COVER SHEET 3

Essay title:

How should we explain the role and limitations of the UN in global security since the Cold War?

Content:

Please rephrase the set question, according to your understanding of what it is asking you to do. (Some of the terms you might use to rephrase are: describe / define / explain / outline / compare / contrast / illustrate / trace / interpret / analyse / evaluate / discuss / criticise / demonstrate / conclude)

What I understood about the question is that there are three main elements to define and describe: Role of UN - Limitations of UN and Global Security. We had to explain the role and limitations in global security now and compare it with the role during the cold war. It was important to analyse and illustrate the new role of the UN, but at the same time to criticize this role and to evaluate its success. Hence to demonstrate that this new role faces some important limitations. I think it was important to conclude on the reforms of the UN system, because I really think that they have a role to play in this world of insecurity but first it has to pass through the step of reform.

Have you answered the specific question set? YES

Have you avoided the inclusion of irrelevant materials? YES

Have you included evidence to support your arguments? YES

Structure

Have you written an introductory paragraph? YES

Does your argument flow logically from one paragraph to the next? YES

Have you written a conclusion? YES

Presentation

Have you cited all your sources? YES

Have you given references for all quotations? YES

Have you included a bibliography? YES

Have you checked spelling and punctuation? YES

Overall

Was the reading set for this essay useful? If not, please explain.

Unfortunately I could not find every book that was on the reading list, so I just focused on one from the reading list and others that I found.

Did you encounter any difficulties in producing this essay?

Yes, because there are so many things to say about this, that I really had a problem with selecting the data.

Would you like specific feedback on any particular aspect of your work?

The Structure of this essay, and the structure of the argumentation.

What do you think would be a fair mark for this essay? Please give your reasons.

I spent quite some time on this essay, especially on the readings. I think I mentioned the most important things about this question. However I know that it is not perfect.

I do think that this essay should be more than average.

[Student's name]

How should we explain the role & limitations of the UN in global security since the Cold War?

WK 3 MT 07

Your essays continue to show encouraging improvement. Your introduction is good in laying out the basic aspects of your argument and showing how it will proceed, and the overall argument is clearly structured and follows from point to point. Your concluding paragraph seems rather vague, but apart from that you have grasped how to deploy the basic components of the 'Oxford essay'.

The next step from here is really to sharpen up your analytical clarity and try to achieve greater analytical depth. On the first point, your understanding of the question is rather too broad - you introduce terms like 'compare' (CW/ post-CW), which are not really implied by the question, and 'demonstrate' limitations, which falls somewhat short of the crucial 'buzz-word' in the question, which is *explain*. The bulk of your analysis should have honed in on explaining the limitations of the UN. As it stands, you devote only a few paragraphs on pp. 4-5 to doing this, when at least two thirds of the essay should have been given over to it.

In terms of depth, you correctly identify some of the UN's limitations (complexity of missions, difficulty in crafting mandates, great power UNSC vetoes), but you don't take the argument to the next stage by asking whether these problems are amenable to reform or are a relatively unalterable fact of international life. You mention that reforms have been proposed, but you only briefly allude to the difficulties their implementation is facing. Why does the veto exist in the first place? Is Security Council reform likely? What would happen if great-power vetoes were removed? What do the answers to these questions tell us about the nature of international order?

-
1. This is too strong. There were UNSC resolutions that carried, e.g., over Suez, East Timor, peacekeeping interventions, etc.
 2. China recently supported a UNSC resolution to deploy a UN-led peacekeeping force to Darfur to supplant the existing African Union force.
 3. What does this mean?
 4. This paragraph is not really clear.

ESSAY COVER SHEET 4

Please fill in the gaps and circle the appropriate boxes.

Essay title:

Why NATO has not been disbanded?

Content:

Please rephrase the set question, according to your understanding of what it is asking you to do. (Some of the terms you might use to rephrase are: describe / define / explain / outline / compare / contrast / illustrate / trace / interpret / analyse / evaluate / discuss / criticise / demonstrate / conclude)

First of all we have to define NATO, its role and mission. Why it was created, against whom. We have to analyze and explain its new role; outline its expansion since the Cold War. Criticize its relevance nowadays.

Have you answered the specific question set? YES
Have you avoided the inclusion of irrelevant materials? YES
Have you included evidence to support your arguments? YES

Structure

Have you written an introductory paragraph? YES
Does your argument flow logically from one paragraph to the next? YES
Have you written a conclusion? YES

Presentation

Have you cited all your sources? YES
Have you given references for all quotations? YES
Have you included a bibliography? YES
Have you checked spelling and punctuation? YES

Overall

Was the reading set for this essay useful? If not, please explain.

Yes it was!

Did you encounter any difficulties in producing this essay?

No, apart from the fact that it is not always easy to make my argument clear.

Would you like specific feedback on any particular aspect of your work?

Just an overall feedback of this work

What do you think would be a fair mark for this essay? Please give your reasons.

I tried to work hard on this essay, with lots of readings and research; I really tried to have a clear structure and argument in my essay. I have the answer clear in my head but I had some

problems to put it on the paper. I think that my essay is not so bad, it has strong arguments and empirical evidence.

[Student's name]

Why has NATO not been disbanded?

WK 4 MT 07

This is a strong piece of work and continues to show excellent progress this term. The tripartite structure is very clear and you argue many points well. There are points where you could have tightened up the argument. For instance, at the end of the first section (on Russia) you don't really defeat that hypothesis. Your basic sense for how to proceed (deal with each argument in turn, argue against the ones you disagree with and move towards a more satisfactory explanation that avoids the weaknesses you identify in your earlier critiques) is right, but at times it's not fully implemented.

More substantively, you could have deepened your analysis in two main ways. The first is that many of the factors you highlight (e.g., the return of Russian assertiveness, the rise of a new mission) come a decade or more after the Cold War, so the question is why NATO survived until then. The second point follows from this: implicit in the essay title is the assumption that NATO *should* have been disbanded - according to what? Realist theory, presumably. You could have brought this in to critique IR theory, e.g. in the section on Russia: disappearing enemies should lead to the dissolution of the alliances ranged against it and a new balance of power (recall Mearsheimer's article from Wk 2). Conversely, your use of IR theory to suggest that realism can still explain NATO (attempt to retain US hegemony) seems somewhat odd. You might also have pondered whether IR theory has any particular insights on other points you make, e.g., realist theory predicts alliances will collapse, but you suggest that institutions, once established, may seek new roles.

-
1. It seems odd to conclude this section on this note, since the introduction made me expect a refutation of this argument. Moreover, this raises a fundamental issue: Russia looks somewhat threatening today, but this is a very recent development. Ten years ago, Russia was crippled. So how do we explain the persistence of NATO in the years between the Soviet Union's collapse, and the revival of Russian assertiveness?
 2. This paragraph does not flow very neatly from the preceding one. When starting a new section of your argument, use 'signposts' in the text to indicate the shift.
 3. These are v interesting points and could have usefully been developed further. The 50th anniversary reorganisation not until 1999, around the time of Kosovo, so again the question becomes why NATO survived from 1991 until then. Further, there's this interesting idea of organisations actively seeking out new roles or facing extinction. How would we explain this?
 4. How valid do you think this claim is?
 5. I do not understand what you mean here.
 6. Well, maybe. But why are states rushing to join NATO if it's all a sinister plan for US domination? Why are the Europeans so acquiescent? Surely this is difficult to explain in realist terms - likewise your invocation of the promotion of values.

Appendix VII: Example of Student's Mid-Term Review

Department of Politics and International Relations Mid-Term Review

This feedback form is intended to give you an opportunity to provide feedback about the course, my teaching, and your learning. Your responses will in no way affect my assessment of your work. You may submit it anonymously via my pigeonhole, or hand it to me at a tutorial. If you feel there are any particular problems you would like to discuss about your individual progress it might be helpful to do the latter. We can schedule a meeting if you would prefer to discuss any issues outside of tutorials.

Overall
please tick the appropriate box

	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No idea / response
	Essay questions provide an opportunity to demonstrate my grasp of the material		x			
	Tutorials enrich my understanding of the course		x			
	I feel comfortable sharing my opinions, questions, and ideas in tutorials			x		
	The tutor's feedback helps me understand how to improve my future papers		x			
	The texts and materials are useful in answering the assigned questions		x			
	I find this course challenging		x			

Essays

What do you think the purpose of writing essays is?

I believe essays give students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the topic by presenting their own arguments in a well structured manner.

What have been the strengths and weaknesses of your essays so far?

I have demonstrated some knowledge and understanding of the topics I have been addressing in the past few weeks. However, I feel the structure, analysis and argumentative power of my essays have been really weak and in need of much improvement. I also feel my essays could do much more in tying together historical events with IR theories.

Has feedback provided on your essays been useful? Do you feel it has helped you to improve? How might the feedback be made more helpful?

The feedback I have received has been helpful in helping me identify areas that are in need of improvement. I feel the feedback has helped me improve the approach I take to organizing my ideas for subsequent essays, but this has yet to materialise within my essays

themselves. I think the tutorial feedbacks could be improved if suggestions are made on further (or essential) material that students can read in order to fill in any gaps they may have in their knowledge of topic.

Tutorials

What do you think is the purpose of our tutorials?

I believe tutorials aim to expand the knowledge and understanding of students beyond the confines of the essay question. The essay submitted by students should form the starting point of the discussions that take place, but students should be able to take away much more than what they have read for the week, or written within the essay. Tutorials should give students the opportunity to test their arguments against historical events and to defend their arguments against counterarguments from their tutorial partners or tutor.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the tutorials?

The tutorials have helped me identify, and fill, in some gaps in my knowledge. They have also given me an insight into how I need to be thinking about the topics that are being addressed, most particularly, how to achieve the balance between theory and practice. On the contrary, I feel as though the tutorials often take the form of an interview; this often makes it difficult for me to exhibit my knowledge or understanding of a topic.

How could tutorials be made more helpful for your progress?

I feel as though the tutorials could be more helpful if they were structured to initiate more discussions as opposed to being more in the form of a Q&A session.

Remainder of Term

In which areas do you wish to improve by the end of term?

I would really like to gain a firm grasp of how to apply IR theories to historical examples, as opposed to just testing different theories at random. I also hope to arrive at a stage where I am able to deliver well structured essays without a great deal of difficulty. I believe this will assist me in articulating my ideas during the tutorials.

I would also like some advice on how to communicate my ideas effectively in my essays, i.e. how to present my ideas in an eloquent manner without my main points being suffocated by my attempt to use 'academic' words.

One of the reoccurring problems I have identified, but find hard to avoid, has been the length of time (or words) it takes me to tackle the main argument I wish to support in my essays. Thus, I would like some advice on how to tackle the main crux of the topics without being too descriptive.

Are there any areas from the first half of term you would like to review before the end of term?

Theoretical approaches to IR

Please use the space below to write any additional comments, suggestions or concerns you may have. Use additional sheets if necessary.

My major concern will be the length of time it takes me to get through the reading material for each week; I currently find it difficult to know what to make notes on when reading for an essay. I find myself stuck between focusing on the essay title and trying to take notes

Appendix VIII: Examples of Students' End of Term Feedback

Department of Politics and International Relations International Relations Feedback Form

Course Code: 214

It would be very helpful to me if you could take the time to fill out the following feedback form anonymously and deliver it to my pigeonhole by the end of 9th week (internal mail is fine). I very much appreciate your comments and they will be used to help improve your teaching environment and that of other students. Please circle numbers or write comments as appropriate. All feedback will be treated in the strictest confidence. Many thanks.

Lee Jones, Nuffield College

	Very useful	Fairly useful	OK	Not very useful	Not at all useful
How useful did you find the reading list?	(1)	2	3	4	5
How useful were the recommended readings?	1	(2)	3	4	5
How easy did you find it to get hold of the readings?	(1)	2	3	4	5
	Very well	Fairly well	Reasonably	Fairly poorly	Very poorly
To what extent were you able to engage with the reading on IR theory?	(1)	2	3	4	5
To what extent were you able to engage with the reading on themes and problems in IR?	1	(2)	3	4	5
	A great deal	Quite a lot	A bit	Not very much	Very little
How much did you get out of writing tutorial essays?	(1)	2	3	4	5

What would you say is the most important single thing you got out writing tutorial essays? If you feel you got nothing at all from it, say why you found it so unproductive.

The usefulness of making a single argument and all that goes with it: structuring it, defending it, understanding it etc. That was very helpful and I take this back home as the main thing I learned here at Oxford. Apart from that, essay writing was very helpful also from a strictly language-point of view. Your inputs and comments were quite useful in that respect and by far the most detailed I got...

	A great deal	Quite a lot	A bit	Not very much	Very little
How much did you get out of tutorials?	1	(2)	3	4	5

What would you say the aims of the tutorials were?

Try to make us think about facts we take for granted from a different perspective. Also, to assert an opinion and to defend it or to recognise its limitedness. And finally, as in any discussion, exchanging points of view in order to advance in and broaden our personal perception of the world.

	Very well	Fairly well	Reasonably	Fairly poorly	Very poorly
How well would you say these aims were met?	1	2	3	4	5
Overall, how useful was the class in helping you understand what IR is all about?	Very useful	Fairly useful	OK	Not very useful	Not at all useful
What has been helpful for your learning during this course?	1	2	3	4	5
<p>It was fascinating to see how little agreement there was at times between the three of us. This observation was very helpful to understand to what extent international relations really is not a science but very dependent on the perspective one takes.</p>					
<p>What, if anything, has impeded your learning during this course?</p> <p>Other tutorials ;-), and possibly the rhythm...</p>					
<p>What is the one question that is now uppermost in your mind in relation to the material discussed during the course?</p> <p>Why is the study of international relations so often limited to the last 20 years? Aren't there constants in international relations that can and should also be sought in former times, in former centuries and may possibly even better illustrate what we are talking about, or give us some ideas in what directions the international system may develop?</p> <p>And: are there reasons to believe that the international order currently apolar?</p>					
<p>What further comments do you have in relation to any of the questions above or any other aspects of the course? (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.)</p> <p>Thank you much for "re-organising" the tutorial groups; it was great to work with Ula and I won a real friend through that experience.</p>					

Department of Politics and International Relations
International Relations Feedback Form
Course Code: 214

It would be very helpful to me if you could take the time to fill out the following feedback form anonymously and deliver it to my pigeonhole by the end of 9th week (internal mail is fine). I very much appreciate your comments and they will be used to help improve your teaching environment and that of other students. Please circle numbers or write comments as appropriate. All feedback will be treated in the strictest confidence. Many thanks.

Lee Jones, Nuffield College

	Very useful	Fairly useful	OK	Not very useful	Not at all useful
How useful did you find the reading list?	1	2	3	4	5

How useful were the recommended readings?	1	2	3	4	5
How easy did you find it to get hold of the readings?	1	2	3	4	5

	Very well	Fairly well	Reasonably	Fairly poorly	Very poorly
To what extent were you able to engage with the reading on IR theory?	1	2	3	4	5
To what extent were you able to engage with the reading on themes and problems in IR?	1	2	3	4	5

	A great deal	Quite a lot	A bit	Not very much	Very little
How much did you get out of writing tutorial essays?	1	2	3	4	5

What would you say is the most important single thing you got out writing tutorial essays? If you feel you got nothing at all from it, say why you found it so unproductive.

The tutorial essays were very useful for bringing together the main concepts that were introduced in the reading. They really forced me to organise my ideas in a coherent manner, which aided my overall understanding of the topics covered. For the same reason, the essays were also really useful in helping me to identify areas where I had gaps in my knowledge and understanding, which will be very useful when I return to revise the various topics.

	A great deal	Quite a lot	A bit	Not very much	Very little
How much did you get out of tutorials?	1	2	3	4	5

What would you say the aims of the tutorials were?

Tutorials should help the students share and expand the ideas they have developed whilst covering each topic. Each student should be able to express their main arguments to the tutor and tutorial their partner, and be adequately prepared to have these views challenged. In doing so, the tutorial session should enable students to consider other ideas (or empirical examples) that may support or cause them to reconsider the stance they take in their essay or in the tutorial session.

How well would you say these aims were met?	Very well 1	Fairly well 2	Reason- ably 3	Fairly poorly 4	Very poorly 5
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Overall, how useful was the class in helping you understand what IR is all about?	Very useful 1	Fairly useful 2	OK 3	Not very useful 4	Not at all useful 5
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What has been helpful for your learning during this course?

The short, but detailed reading lists have been extremely useful, because they ensured that I did not waste time deciding which books to read or finding the relevant chapters within each respective text.

What, if anything, has impeded your learning during this course?

I believe I was hindered by my note taking techniques in the first half of the term as this meant that I was unable to cover a sufficient amount of the set reading, or that the reading I had done was not as comprehensive as it should have been.

Moreover, a lack of a firm grasp on the main IR theories also proved to be a hindrance when covering some topics or seeking to analyse certain issues.

What is the one question that is now uppermost in your mind in relation to the material discussed during the course?

The one issue that I would like to look into further is what it would take for the United States to be displaced from its current super power status within the international system. I'm particularly interested in learning more about the role that international institutions play in allowing the United States to maintain its current position and if it would be possible in the foreseeable future for any other state (or Union of states) to use the same channel to achieve a similar status.

What further comments do you have in relation to any of the questions above or any other aspects of the course? (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.)

Overall, the course has been thoroughly enjoyable. I particularly appreciated the way in which the reading materials were focused and utilised both texts and journals. However, I would suggest that it may be more useful to spend the first two weeks of the term dealing explicitly with the main IR theories.

Department of Politics and International Relations
International Relations Feedback Form
 Course Code: 214

It would be very helpful to me if you could take the time to fill out the following feedback form anonymously and deliver it to my pigeonhole by the end of 9th week (internal mail is fine). I very much appreciate your comments and they will be used to help improve your teaching environment and that of other students. Please circle numbers or write comments as appropriate. All feedback will be treated in the strictest confidence. Many thanks.

Lee Jones, Nuffield College

	Very useful	Fairly useful	OK	Not very useful	Not at all useful
How useful did you find the ^{DEPARTMENT} reading list?	5	2	3	4	5
How useful were the recommended readings?	1	2	3	4	5
How easy did you find it to get hold of the readings?	1	2	3	4	5
	Very well	Fairly well	Reasonably	Fairly poorly	Very poorly
To what extent were you able to engage with the reading on IR theory?	1	2	3	4	5
To what extent were you able to engage with the reading on themes and problems in IR?	1	2	3	4	5
	A great deal	Quite a lot	A bit	Not very much	Very little
How much did you get out of writing tutorial essays?	1	2	3	4	5

What would you say is the most important single thing you got out writing tutorial essays? If you feel you got nothing at all from it, say why you found it so unproductive.

ORGANISE THOUGHTS IN A CLEAR
AND CONCISE WAY

	A great deal	Quite a lot	A bit	Not very much	Very little
How much did you get out of tutorials?	1	2	3	4	5

What would you say the aims of the tutorials were?

DISCUSS THE READING AND THE ESSAY
 DEEPEN THE SUBJECT
 BROADEN THE APPROACH, ALSO BY REFERENCE
 TO FURTHER INFORMATION (EG. HISTORICAL
 EXAMPLES, TECHNICAL DATA)
 * PUT THE INDIVIDUAL WORK INTO PERSPECTIVE
 PRACTICE ORAL SKILLS

How well would you say these aims were met?

Very well	Fairly well	Reasonably	Fairly poorly	Very poorly
1	2	3	4	5

Overall, how useful was the class in helping you understand what IR is all about?

Very useful	Fairly useful	OK	Not very useful	Not at all useful
1	2	3	4	5

What has been helpful for your learning during this course?

- CLEAR FEEDBACK BOTH ABOUT CONTENT AND STYLE
- CAREFULLY CHOSEN READING LIST

What, if anything, has impeded your learning during this course?

- LACK OF TIME

What is the one question that is now uppermost in your mind in relation to the material discussed during the course?

- WHY DOES THEORY COMPETE AND NOT COOPERATE IN EXPLAINING THE REALITY OF IR?

↓
VARIOUS THEORIES - REALISM, LIBERALISM...

What further comments do you have in relation to any of the questions above or any other aspects of the course? (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.)

- HOW DOES TUTORIAL WORK TRANSLATE INTO EXAM PREPARATION?
- CAREFULLY CHOSEN READING LIST

What, if anything, has impeded your learning during this course?

- LACK OF TIME

What is the one question that is now uppermost in your mind in relation to the material discussed during the course?

- WHY DOES THEORY COMPETE AND NOT COOPERATE IN EXPLAINING THE REALITY OF IR?

↓
VARIOUS THEORIES - REALISM, LIBERALISM...

What further comments do you have in relation to any of the questions above or any other aspects of the course? (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.)

- HOW DOES TUTORIAL WORK TRANSLATE INTO EXAM PREPARATION?