UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

International Trade Law

2627-2-F5603M011

Learning objectives

The aim of this course is to provide students with a solid foundation in international trade rules and the critical thinking skills needed to evaluate the trade policies of key global actors. Upon completing the course, students will be able to apply core WTO principles of non-discrimination and market access to real-world scenarios, alongside the derogations permitted to safeguard key economic and societal interests. Furthermore, they will be equipped to competently analyze and debate current trade tensions and geopolitical conflicts through the lens of an evolving rules-based international system.

Contents

The course focuses on the multilateral trading system administered by the World Trade Organization (WTO), examining its evolution, core principles, and rules. Particular attention will be paid to analyzing the relationship between trade liberalization and the policy space reserved for WTO Members to pursue non-trade values, such as human rights, environmental protection, public health, and development aid.
The course will also explore topics at the forefront of academic debate, including trade measures targeting climate change, the supply of critical raw materials, and the regulation of digital trade. The rationale and effectiveness of these rules will be evaluated through the jurisprudence of WTO dispute settlement bodies and the status of WTO agreements within EU law.
Throughout the course, students will examine the future of the WTO as it faces growing challenges, notably Members' increasing tendency to disregard rules, revive protectionist policies, and prioritize regional and preferential agreements.

Detailed program

Origin and structure of the World Trade Organization - Analysis of the basic rules of the multilateral trading system and of its main exceptions - Special rules for developing countries - Protection of non trade values such as public health and the environment in the case law of the Panels and of the Appellate Body -The EU trade policy and climate measures (CBAM and Deforestation Free Products Regulation) - Trade defence measures (anti-dumping, subsidies and safeguard measures) - Trade liberalization and the exception for national security reasons - Critical issues in the liberalization of services - Structure and contents of the Agreement on the trade related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPs) - First attempts to regulate digital trade - The tension between multilateralism and regionalism in international trade - The (now challenged) disputes settlement mechanism - The crisis of the multilateral trading system and the prospects for its reform.

Prerequisites

None

Teaching methods

Each session will begin with an introductory lecture on a core topic, followed by student group presentations and a guided discussion to deepen understanding. To address current issues, select seminars may be conducted by field experts.
Interactive Teaching & Learning Methods. Learning is primarily driven by interactive lectures, case study analyses, and active class debates. Each week, a student panel will volunteer to prepare and present assignments for the following session, fostering soft skills such as public speaking, concise synthesis, and teamwork, alongside legal research capabilities.
Self-Directed Study. Throughout the course, students will be introduced to tools for continuous self-learning, including digital platforms, specialized journals, podcasts, and official WTO and EU institutional resources.

Assessment methods

No Intermediate Exams: There are no mid-term examinations.
Final Exam: The course concludes with an oral examination comprising open-ended questions. It evaluates students' knowledge of the syllabus and their ability to critically reflect on the topics covered. On a voluntary basis, students may take a final written exam in the third week of December, featuring open-ended questions and case-solving exercises based on the principles covered in class.
Group Project. Designed to enhance analytical and presentation skills, this optional project allows students to earn up to 2 bonus points toward their final grade.
Evaluation Criteria. The examination board will assess students based on their mastery of the course material, correct use of legal terminology, and capacity for critical thinking and clear exposition.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

C.L. LIM, J. TRACHTMAN (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to World Trade Law, Cambridge, 2026 (selected chapters).
Reading materials shall be made available on the course e-learning page.

The text of WTO Agreements is available at: http://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/legal_e.htm. Panels and Appellate Body reports are available at: https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/dispu_status_e.htm

Semester

First semester

Teaching language

English

Sustainable Development Goals

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH | INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION | CLIMATE ACTION