

## Leiden University's Masters of Arts in International Relations

Understanding the complexities of world affairs requires an ability to think critically and to draw insights from a variety of perspectives, sources, and analytic frames. Leiden University's Masters of Arts in International Relations (MAIR) addresses these needs through distinctive humanities-based training in international relations that draws on the University's internationally-recognised strengths. Combining rigorous explorations of ideas in world politics, research methods, history, culture, and area studies, the programme imparts knowledge and transferable skills that will bring value to a range of scholarly and professional pursuits across a variety of international settings.

### Humanities-Based International Relations at Leiden University

Humanities-based international relations (HBIR) entails a humanistic and transdisciplinary approach to the study of international relations that draws on insights from diverse bodies of scholarship and explores relations between global and local processes and their implications across time and place. HBIR transcends any single disciplinary or theoretical lens within the humanities and draws insights from the social sciences and cognate fields with cognisance of those fields' strengths and limits. Our approach is critical in its examination of claims and evidence, political in its recognition that *what* is studied and *how* it is studied has normative implications, and driven to appreciate the variety, nuances, and indeterminacy of world affairs.

Within Leiden University, our program is unique in its embrace of a humanities-based approach to international relations. Internationally, the programme is distinguished by the way it blends rigorous engagements of ideas in world politics with world-leading historiographical, cultural, and area studies teaching and research in ways that connect global and local processes and dynamics.

- Through its focus on *history* our programme aims to understand the human record across time and place, highlighting the unique and contingent nature of phenomena in some instances and regularity and continuity in others. To understand the history of international relations entails analysis of the role of ideas in the world and in the field of international relations itself. It includes attention to the varied ways in which ideas, events, and processes crisscross and are understood across time and place and an appreciation of the relevance of historical memory and narrative in influencing international relations, from past to present.
- The MAIR's attention to *culture* brings to light the myriad ways in which the realm of the international is understood, lived, and experienced. As culture bears meaning, analysis of culture sheds light on how people encounter, understand, and behave in international relations and how understandings of the international impinge on day-to-day life in a variety of settings. A focus on culture also highlights how culture is produced and can be used as a political instrument, and how human expressive activities and practices intersect with relations of power to affect and sometimes transform social life within and across countries.

- The MAIR's strengths in *area studies* permit in-depth explorations of international relations across and within world regions and, in so doing, cultivates an appreciation of the world's diversity and interdependence. In teaching and research, MAIR area studies scholars address a variety of historical and contemporary themes, exploring social, political, economic, and cultural features of world regions and generating insights not only into how global processes, actors, and institutions register across regions, but into the ways actors, processes, and social dynamics within regions respond to and shape global processes, institutions, and effects.

The MAIR draws on the strengths and expertise of an international staff— all prominent scholars in their fields. The programme's staff is intellectually diverse, with backgrounds in history, political science, political economy, sociology, economics, law, anthropology, and linguistics. Many combine disciplinary approaches in both their teaching and research.

The programme's emphases and strengths are further reflected in its suite of core courses on theory and methods, in each of its five designated degree specialisations – including *Culture and Politics*, *European Union Studies*, *Global Conflict in the Modern Era*, *Global Order in Historical Perspective*, and *Global Political Economy* – and across its variety of elective course offerings.

### **The MAIR programme's core values and aims**

Our approach to humanities-based international relations promotes human understanding, trans-disciplinary perspectives, critical reasoning, independent research, and public engagement – all of which informs our teaching and each of which we consider to be indispensable transferable skills. Our approach promotes *human understanding* in its attention to how humankind in all its variety makes sense of the world and how international relations shapes social conditions and systems of meaning across and within countries; here the cultivation of empathy and an appreciation of how understandings of self, other, and the world are generated, sustained or transformed are essential.

Our humanities-based approach embraces *trans-disciplinarity* by bringing a diversity of perspectives and scholarly approaches to bear on the study of international relations themes. Such an approach advises methodological and theoretical pluralism and reflexivity in teaching and research. It promotes intellectual diversity by rejecting the false notion that international relations is subordinate to political science or any single disciplinary field or intellectual tradition.

HBIR promotes critical thinking by questioning what is taken for granted. It calls attention to the positionality of researchers and to the social construction of knowledge. MAIR graduates exit with a penchant for critical thinking and with research skills and abilities for combining ideas, evidence, and interpretive judgement in the analysis of a wide variety of international themes.

Finally, a humanities-based approach promotes engagement and accessibility, raising fundamental questions about how we act in the world, and about what constitutes responsible agency and sound judgment in the international sphere and how they can be promoted. Research, teaching, and public engagement on international themes that is sophisticated and accessible is seen to have both intrinsic worth and practical value for diverse communities and publics worldwide.

For further information visit the MAIR's official website, [here](#)