International Relations Theories

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a critical review of major theories and concepts in international relations, and explores the relevance of theory to contemporary world politics. Special attention will be given to the development of theoretical and research skills needed for the conducting of graduate research and the writing of graduate thesis.

DETAILED COURSE DECRIPTION

In a world of nearly 200 countries and more than 8 billion people, how can we begin to make sense of the infinite complexities of global politics? In this course we will cultivate the tools to do just that. By exploring and applying various IR theories, we'll learn how to uncover meaningful patterns in world politics, better understand the past, and make educated predictions for the future. Why do wars start? How do international norms change? What are some of the forces driving global inequality? What is the legacy of Western colonialism? These are some of the questions we will examine through concrete case studies and competing theories.

A number of theoretical approaches will be introduced, discussed critically and then applied to a variety of case studies. Traditional paradigms or "ontologies" of the international will be supplemented with more recent, "reflexivist" approaches, allowing us to think not just about how the world is structured, but also about how theories and knowledge come into being and what forces (political, economical, cultural, etc.) play a role in these processes.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of the course, you will be able to:

1. Critically assess the traditional IR ontologies, and be able to compare and contrast their worldviews and predictions;
2. Engage with "reflexivist" IR traditions, and be able to compare and contrast their explanations for the origins of theories, knowledge, and norms;
3. Explain the evolution of IR theories, address the traditional Western-centrism of the discipline, and engage with more recent scholarship criticizing this Westerncentrism;
4. Apply IR theories to explain specific phenomena in world politics, and assess their strengths and limitations;

5. Articulate clearly and rigorously complex arguments on these themes, both orally and in writing.

COURSE READINGS

READINGS

Thinking about IR theory & Realism (I): Origins and assumptions

- (1) VK, Chapter 1 "Thinking About IR Theory," p. 1-18.
- (2) Rosenau, J. and Durfee "The Need for Theory," p. 1-10.
- (3) VK, Chapter 2 "Realism: The State and Balance of Power", p. 39-54 [through end of section on "Power"]
- (4) *Short excerpts of classics:* Thucydides, "The Melian Dialogue," p. 83-87; Machiavelli, N. "On Princes and the Security of Their States", p. 88-89; Hobbes, T. "Of the Natural Condition of Mankind", p. 90-92.

Realism (II): Theoretical diversity and implications

- (1) VK, Chapter 2 "Realism: The State and Balance of Power", p. 54-82.
- (2) Waltz, K. "Explaining War: The Levels of Analysis", p. 96-108.
- (3) Nye, J.S. "Hard and Soft Power in American Foreign Policy", p. 109-116.

Liberalism (I): Origins and assumptions

- (1) VK, Chapter 3 "Liberalism: Interdependence and Global Governance", p. 129-144 [through end of section on "Interdependence"] + p. 154-156 [section on "Democratic Peace"].
- (2) Brooks, S.G. "Producing Security", 167-175
- (3) Ikenberry, J. "Liberal Democracy and IR" in *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order*, Yale University Press, 2020.

Liberalism (II): Global governance

- (1) VK, Chapter 3 "Liberalism: Interdependence and Global Governance", 144-166 [except for section on "Democratic Peace"].
- (2) Slaughter, A. *A New World Order*. "Introduction." 2004, pp. 1-36.

Economic structuralism

- (1) VK, Chapter 4 "Economic Structuralism: Global Capitalism and Postcolonialism", 189-218.
- (2) Hobson, J.A. 1902. "The Economic Taproot of Imperialism" in *Imperialism: A Study.* pp. 1-13.

Postcolonialism

- (1) Sabaratnam, M. 2023. Chapter 11 in BSO (eds). "Postcolonial and Decolonial Approaches" (pp. 162-177).
- (2) Seth, S. Chapter 5: "International Relations: Empire and Amnesia," *Beyond Reason: Postcolonial Theory and the Social Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

Social constructivism

- (1) VK, Chapter 6 "Constructivist Understandings", 277-301.
- (2) Wendt, A. 1995. "Constructing International Politics", 71-81.

Critical theory and post-modernism

- (1) VK, Chapter 7 "Positivism, Critical Theory, and Postmodern Understandings", 322-338.
- (2) Booth, K. "Critical Explorations and the Highway of Critical Security Theory", 339-347
- (3) Campbell, D. "Writing Security", 348-354

Feminist IR theory

- (1) VK, Chapter 8 "Feminist Understandings of IR Theory", 360-370.
- (2) Young, I.M. 2003. "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State", 371-379

Non-Western IR theories

- (1) Acharya, A and B. Buzan. 2007. "Why is there no non-Western international relations theory?: An introduction" *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*. 287309.
- (2) Acharya, A and B. Buzan. 2007. "Conclusion: On the possibility of a nonWestern International Relations Theory." 221-236.
- (3) Kalpackian, J. (2008). "Ibn Khaldun's influence on current international relations theory", p. 363-375.

Non-Western IR theories II

- (1) Akgül, P. 2022. "Non-Western International Relations Theories" in *Critical Approaches to International Relations Philosophical Foundations and Current Debates*. 217-236.
- (2) Shahi, D. (2019). "Prelude" and "Kautilya Reincarnated" *in Kautilya and NonWestern IR Theory*.

OTHER RESOURCES

The main scholarly journals in the field of international relations theory include the *Review of International Studies, Millennium, International Studies Quarterly, International Organization*, and the *European Journal of International Relations*.

Students are encouraged to become familiar with these journals, especially to understand the characteristics of a "good" academic paper in this discipline, but should by all means extend their bibliographic search to other academic journals listed in the AUC e-journal search engine on the basis of their own personal interests. Feel free to contact me if you require personalized guidance.