Concepts and Theories of World Politics, MA (4 credits)

Fall term

M/W 13.30-15.10

Course provider: Xymena Kurowska kurowskax@ceu.edu

Office: FT 305

SHORT DESCRIPTION

International Relations theory has been the subject of intense academic, intellectual and political debates. The aim of this course is to introduce students to the main theoretical trajectories and contending positions that have shaped the discipline over the past several decades and the principal theoretical strands that define it today. It revisits major theoretical trajectories and the frameworks that have informed scholarship in these traditions, with particular focus on different logics of action in international politics and how to theorise them. In order to introduce students to the most cutting edge innovations in the discipline, the course engages more closely critical IR and interpretive policy analysis. In this respect, three interrelated themes will inform our discussions throughout the course: (1) different modalities of the relationship between knowledge production and the social order that reveal distinct assumptions underpinning both action in world politics and research practice in the academia; (2) the theory-practice nexus to gain a better understanding of the social aspect of the discipline and its scope for political analysis; (3) different roles of the researcher/analyst/policy advisor.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course students will:
- have developed a sound understanding of different logics behind major debates in the discipline;
- be able to identify explicit and implicit premises behind different theoretical strands and their potential for facilitating empirical research;
- start applying this knowledge in their own MA projects;
- be able to reflect on their own theoretical position and how it affects research;
- become able to interpret events in world politics with greater theoretical, social, and political sensitivity.

SEMINAR STRUCTURE AND TEACHING METHOD

There are no lectures for this course but the instructor will offer background presentations systematising the material, explicating the major arguments of the seminar, and soliciting students’ perspective on the issues under discussion. Part of the seminar will be a student presentation prepared according to the guidelines in this course programme. The seminar aims to develop students’ ability to formulate their arguments critically yet coherently and acquire the necessary confidence to voice their standpoints. It thus relies on students’ thorough preparation and engagement with the ideas discussed. It requires the willingness to get involved in a discussion that appreciates alternative positions without necessarily accepting them, or seeing your own as the ultimate one.
METHOD OF EVALUATION

The evaluation will be made based on a combination of various forms of seminar contribution and written work.

(1) Active and regular participation in class discussion (10%), including contribution to group presentation (5%)

(2) Presentation of up to 20 minutes. Texts for presentation are marked PR on the syllabus 15%

Please make sure that you address the following issues in your presentation:
- What is the author’s purpose in writing this piece? E.g. what debates s/he engages, is the purpose to critique existing arguments, extend them, refine them, reject them, or to build on them to propose a new one, etc.
- What are the author's guiding questions?
- What concepts does the author emphasise? How are these concepts defined? How are they related to each other?
- What is the author’s overall argument? Does it seem sustainable given the evidence provided? Would you draw different conclusions based on the discussion and evidence offered? Is there any obvious error in the logic of the presented argument?
- What questions remain ignored or unanswered although the author promises to deal with them?
- How might the argument be framed differently conceptually/theoretically and substantively?

(3) Review essay of around 3000 words 40%

Please choose either a) a specific author or b) a specific concept.

a) The purpose of this essay is to critically engage the work of one theory-inspired author that has worked in modern IR, European studies, political geography, political economy, political/social theory, comparative politics, etc. and deals in their work with questions of international/transnational politics broadly conceived.

Choose at least three representative pieces of a journal article length by the author to discuss:
- what conceptual tradition/generation/trajectory s/he belongs to, if any, e.g. does the author work across different schools of thought, has introduced one, was ahead of times with their theoretical work, has been important but remained on the margins of mainstream theorising, etc.;
- what are the major arguments articulated in their work and if they evolved over time, e.g. whether you observe development of a particular framework/concept as a response to critique or greater engagement in the refinement of the internal logic of the argument, etc.;
- provide a critical engagement with the author’s arguments, relying both on critiques available in the literature and your own assessment;
- in the conclusion, try to evaluate the contribution to and reception of the author in the discipline, e.g. whether it changed certain conceptual trajectories, approaches to defining certain concepts, enriched/systematised empirical research in any area, etc.
- what kind of research question has their work inspired?
As the guidelines indicate, successfully completing this essay may require familiarity with more than three pieces of the scholarship by the author of your choice and it may also call for independent research on the role of their writing in the discipline they belong to. The word limit calls for concise delivery, a proof that much thinking and analysis has been conducted in the research phase. The final essay should be a well thought-out piece that articulates the result of the research process rather than narrate it.

b) The purpose of this assignment is to offer an extended discussion on a variety of conceptualisations of any term present in theory-inspired scholarship. Please include:

- an overview that maps out how the concept has been approached within different literatures in the discipline. The result should be a typology, not a list of descriptions. This is, instead of recounting what different authors wrote on the concept, it should group them within particular representative strands, each around a discernible conceptual core. This calls for research which does not end up following a textbook presentation of the basic existing theoretical frameworks. Try to figure out the logics of/assumptions behind different conceptualisations rather than too hastily place them within specific theories;
- a critical evaluation of the insights and blind spots of different conceptualisations;
- an analysis of how these different conceptualisations affect empirical findings of research projects that apply them, i.e. what the research applying a particular conceptualisation of the term is likely to look for/see in empirical data;
- a proposition about further conceptual refinement.

If possible, try to choose an author/concept which helps with your MA project.

Please send the assignments in an electronic version in Word to the Teaching Assistant. Please name the file YOUR SURNAME_AUTHOR or CONCEPT.

No extension can be granted unless we are provided with written proof of emergency. Late submissions result in lowering the grade by 1/3 for each 24 hours.

(4) Take home 48 hour final exam: 3/5 questions, each to be discussed in around 500 words

30%

PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Plagiarism and various forms of academic dishonesty consist of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and will invariably result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

In the pre-session students are advised on the issue but it is your responsibility to understand what constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty. For information on their various kinds please refer to: Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism, CEU Policy Document and the MA Handbook.
SEMINAR BREAKDOWN

1. Introduction

2. Reading session

3. (IR) theory and theory development

Required:
- Interview with Nicholas Onuf on e-IR: [http://www.e-ir.info/2014/05/09/interview-nicholas-onuf/](http://www.e-ir.info/2014/05/09/interview-nicholas-onuf/)
- Interview with Patrick T Jackson on e-IR: [http://www.e-ir.info/2014/03/03/interview-patrick-thaddeus-jackson/](http://www.e-ir.info/2014/03/03/interview-patrick-thaddeus-jackson/)

Additional:

4. Interpreting international politics

Required:

Additional:

5. Constructivist meta-theory

**Required:**

**Additional:**

6. Constructivism – engagements (group presentation)

7. Gender

**Required:**
- Interview with Cynthia Enloe on e-IR: [http://www.e-ir.info/2013/03/13/interview-cynthia-enloe/](http://www.e-ir.info/2013/03/13/interview-cynthia-enloe/)

**Additional:**

8. Classical realism

**Required:**

**Additional:**
• Steele, B (2007) ‘Eavesdropping on honoured ghosts’: from classical to reflexive realism’, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 10: 272–300. PR

9. Structural realism
Required:

Additional:

10. Liberalism
Required:

Additional:

11. Logics of action: consequences, appropriateness, argumentation
Required:

Additional:

12. Critical theory
Required:

Additional:

13. Marxism
Required:

Additional:
• Davis, M (2015) ‘Marx’s Lost Theory’, *New Left Review* 93 PR

14. The English School
Required:
• Interview with Barry Buzan on e-IR: [http://www.e-ir.info/2013/03/27/interview-barry-buzan-2/](http://www.e-ir.info/2013/03/27/interview-barry-buzan-2/)

Additional:

15. Poststructuralism
Required:


**Additional:**


**16. Governmentality**

**Required:**


**Additional:**


17. Subjectivity

Required:
• Kurowska, X (2014) ‘Practicality by judgement: Transnational interpreters of local ownership in the Polish-Ukrainian border reform encounter’, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 17: 545–565

Additional
• Jabri, V (2011) ‘Cosmopolitan politics, security, political subjectivity’, *European Journal of International Relations* 18(4) 625–644 PR

18. Logic of practice

Required:

Additional:

19. Postcolonialism

Required:

Additional:


20. Norms

Required:


Additional:


21. Theory in use (1)

Required:

• Malksoo, M (2010) *The politics of becoming European*, Routledge, Chapters 1, 2, 5.

22. Theory in use (2)

Required:


23. Summary and preparation of exam questions

24. Take home exam