INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

As two famous academics once noted, “it is sheer craziness to dare to understand world affairs”. There is simply too much complexity out there, and “world affairs are pervaded with endless details – far more than one can hope to comprehend in their entirety”.

They suggest two related solutions to this predicament. One is adopting “a sense of humility”, acknowledging that we will never be able to explain or understand fully the way the world works. Such sense of humility, however, should be accompanied by a self-conscious use of theory, because it only “through theorizing that we can hope to tease meaningful patterns out of the endless details and inordinate complexities that sustain world politics”.

The main goal of this course is to use international relations theory as a means for uncovering some “meaningful patterns” in international politics and reflect on their relevance and implications. A number of theoretical approaches will be introduced, discussed critically and “self-consciously,” 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.

The course, in its present form, is taught using the “flipped classroom” technique. The theories and approaches mentioned in the course schedule below are first presented through recorded online lectures that students are expected to “attend” at home. The class time will be devoted entirely to seminar activities, focused on reviewing critically the theories themselves and on applying them to case studies drawn from contemporary international affairs.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of the course, you will:

1) be familiar with some important meta-theoretical and methodological issues in IR theory, such as the so-called “four debates” in the development of the discipline or the concept of “levels of analysis”;
2) know and be able to assess critically at least five “rationalist” IR traditions, and be able to compare and contrast their worldviews and predictions;
3) know and be able to assess critically at least five “reflexivist” IR traditions, and be able to compare and contrast their explanations for the origins of theories, knowledge and norms;
4) be able to apply IR theories to explain specific phenomena in world politics, and assess their strengths and limitations in this;
5) be able to articulate clearly and rigorously complex arguments on these themes, both orally and in writing.
6) be able plan and lead seminar activities on these themes.
ASSESSMENT

Important note: Students are expected to check at least weekly the Blackboard site of the course, where any important announcement – especially on assessment and class scheduling - will be posted.

Components:
- Participation: 10%
- Student-led class: 15%
- Two reflection papers: 20% (10% each)
- Mid-term test: 10%
- Research paper: 35% (30% paper + 5% outline)
- Final exam: 10%

Participation: students are expected to come to class being familiar with the introductory lecture on the module (available online via Panopto) and having done the essential reading. They are also expected to take part in class activities and discussions, showing knowledge of – and engagement with – the lecture and essential reading. Students who are physically present in class but are unable or unwilling to contribute to the class discussions, or are busy in other activities (for instance by making repeated use of their mobile devices during the session), will lose 10% of the attendance mark (per session). The instructor may also decide to test the familiarity of the students with the lecture and essential reading with pop quizzes.

Student-led class: three classes in the course will be run by groups of up to 4 students each. These are modules 5 (“The neo-neo debate”), 7 (“Non-Western IR traditions”) and 12 (“Post-colonial theory”). These modules are structured like the other modules (i.e. they have their background lecture and reading list) with the difference that the entire seminar in class will be run by a group of students, who will therefore be expected to prepare a series of activities in advance to be presented to their colleagues. Students are free to structure the seminar in any way they like, provided that it includes at least one activity focused on the theories themselves and one focused on case studies. The modules will be assigned in week 2; by then students are encouraged to coordinate among each other, form their groups and present them to the instructor. These sessions will be assessed by the instructor on the basis of the 1) engagement with the readings and material; 2) clarity and effectiveness of the activities presented in class; 3) originality of the class structure.

Reflection papers: students are expected to submit two reflection papers, whose length should be between 1,000 and 1,500-words each. In these papers they should explain what are, in their view, the two main similarities and the two main differences between two IR theories. In each of these papers they are required to use and reference at least 4 recommended readings. The first reflection paper is due on 15 March and should focus on any two “ontologies” among those presented in modules 3 to 6. The second reflection paper is due on 10 May and should focus on any two theories among those presented in modules 7 to 13.

Mid-term test: a short test will take place at the beginning of module 8 (provisionally 26 March). The test will be based on short open questions covering the essential readings for modules 2 to 7.
Final exam: a final exam will take place in the exam session at the end of the term. It will cover the entire course. The exact format of the exam will be confirmed by the instructor in due course.

Research paper: you will be required to submit a research paper on Sunday 3 May. The paper must focus on a specific issue in world politics and approach it with reference to at least three IR traditions. These may include not more than two among the theories/traditions that you chose in your reflection papers or seminar-led class. The paper must be between 2,500 and 3,000-words long.

You are invited to discuss your theme and ideas with the instructor in advance. You will also be required to deliver a very short presentation on your theme and research question in class in week 9 (provisionally Thursday 2 April).

Also, you MUST submit by Wednesday 15 April an outline of your paper which should briefly introduce: a) the theme/topic of the paper; b) its main research question; c) an indication of the IR traditions that will be used, and the reasons for this choice; d) a provisional bibliography. The outline must be between 500- and 1000-words long. These outlines will count towards the final mark (5%), and the instructor will provide some brief feedback.

The references must include at least 9 academic references (journal articles, chapters in edited books, academic books, etc., including any “recommended reading” listed below). Readings listed as “essential” in the reading list below can be cited and used, but do not count towards the 9 references.

The penalty for the late submission of the paper is 5 per cent per day, including weekends. Late outlines will not be accepted (i.e. students will lose the all the marks assigned for the outline) unless the student provides a valid and written justification for the delay.

The first page of each paper must include the student’s name and ID number, and the essay body must be 12-point font, double-spaced and include page numbers.

The essay must also include a bibliography and acknowledge sources appropriately. Any academic referencing style is acceptable provided that it is used consistently throughout the paper. Useful information on some widely used referencing styles can be found at:

http://libweb.anglia.ac.uk/referencing/harvard.htm
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org

Grade scale:

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ATTENDANCE POLICY AND BEHAVIOR IN CLASS

No attendance mark is assigned in this course. However, the following policies will be STRICTLY adhered to:

- Students unable to attend class for justifiable reasons should contact the instructor ideally before class or at the latest by 8pm of the same day; normally only serious and documented family or health emergencies will be accepted as valid justifications, and the decision of the instructor is final.

- Students who, without a valid justification, arrive to class more than 10’ late, leave more than 10’ early or leave the teaching room repeatedly during the session will be considered as absent.
- Unexcused absence in at least **FOUR** sessions, and absence with or without valid justification in at least **FIVE** sessions, will result in an automatic “F” grade.
- If an attendance sheet is circulated in class, each student is expected to sign only for him/herself. Falsifying signatures is considered by AUC as a breach of academic integrity and the student(s) involved in this practice will be immediately referred to the AUC Academic Integrity Committee.

**BLENDDED LEARNING**

You must register as soon as possible on the Blackboard portal of the course, in which you will find:
- A pdf copy of this syllabus
- Access to the online lectures (via Panopto) and their slides in pdf
- Access to the course readings

Blackboard will also be used to deliver any urgent or non-urgent notice to the class. Even if these notices are normally also forwarded to your email address, it is possible that you do not receive some of these (for instance if they go to your “spam” folder) so you must check the Blackboard portal at least weekly to keep yourself updated.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Teaching is based on a relation of mutual trust between the teacher and the students. As a teacher I take my academic responsibilities very seriously and I expect all my students to do the same. I expect all students to be familiar with the AUC code of practice on academic integrity which is available at:

[http://www.aucegypt.edu/academics/integrity/Students/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.aucegypt.edu/academics/integrity/Students/Pages/default.aspx)

Please pay particular attention to the regulations on plagiarism, collaborative work and falsification of signatures. All papers will be checked through Turnitin; course code and password will be made available to attending students in due course. Students will be allowed to self-check for plagiarism early drafts of their work and only the final submission will be checked by the instructor. All breaches of the code of practice will be acted upon promptly and firmly, resulting at least in zero marks for the relevant piece of assessment and possibly in further action being taken by the instructor, depending on the severity of the offense.

If in doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism, do not hesitate to contact the instructor.

**ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND INTELLECTUAL INTERACTION**

In this course you will deal with a number of topics that are often controversial. You are free to offer the class any disagreement you may have with the readings or lecture. You will **NOT** be penalised for disagreeing with other students, the readings or the instructor, but your perspective must be based on documentable evidence from the course or other readings. Freedom of speech and ideas is a basic principle of academic life (and of universal human rights) and every student will have a chance to express her/his opinion as long as it is voiced in a respectful manner. However, varied points of view must be expressed in a manner that is sensitive to differences in abilities, ethnicity, religion, gender and lifestyle, and should not be expressed so as to be perceived as a personal attack. In short, respect for others’ differences is one of the most important prerequisites for us working together in this course.
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you believe you have a disability that impacts on your study, or have a documented disability that requires modified instructional procedures, please contact the instructor as soon as possible. The instructor is happy to hear from you even if you do not have a formal proof of your disability; however, you may be asked to provide a note from the AUC Disability Services (http://www.aucegypt.edu/studentlife/gethelp/Pages/disabilityserv.aspx) when your condition requires substantial adjustments (e.g. to the structure of the exams etc.).

COURSE SCHEDULE

1. Introduction
2. Terminology and the four debates
3. Classical realism
4. Classical liberalism
5. Structures matter: the “neo-neo debate” (student-led class no. 1)
6. Economic structuralism
7. Non-Western IR traditions (student-led class no. 2)
8. Critical theory
9. Student paper presentations
10. Social constructivism
11. Post-structuralism
12. Post-colonial theory (student-led class no. 3)
13. Gender
14. Conclusion

COURSE READINGS

For each module you find:
- one essential reading that introduces the theory, issue or approach dealt with in the module, normally drawn from an IR manual. EVERYBODY MUST do this reading before the relevant seminar, ideally after having “attended” the online lecture. Students who, during a seminar, do not show familiarity with the essential reading will lose marks in the participation component of their assessment.
- at least four recommended readings, normally academic papers or chapters from academic books written by scholars that belong to a specific tradition. These are not compulsory readings but are required if you choose a topic for the reflection paper, and are a good place to start for your research essay.
Manual chapters used in the course are drawn from the following books:


Students who wish to own an IR theory manual should consider purchasing one of these four books. The editions mentioned above refer to the edition from which the readings below have been selected; if you plan to purchase other editions or already own one, consider that different editions often have different page numbers for the same material but rarely introduce radical changes in the way the material itself is presented.

1 – Introduction

*No essential reading*

*Recommended readings*


2 – Terminology and the four debates

*Essential reading*


*Recommended readings*


3 – Classical realism

**Essential reading**

**Recommended readings**
Carr, E.H. (1939) *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* (any edition), chapter 5 “The Realist Critique.” [see module 2]

4 – Classical liberalism

**Essential reading**

**Recommended readings**

5 – Structures matter: the “neo-neo debate”

**Essential reading**

**Recommended readings**
6 – Economic structuralism

Essential reading

Recommended readings

7 – Non-Western IR traditions

Essential reading

Recommended readings

8 – Critical theory

Essential reading

Other recommended readings

9 – *Student presentations of research questions and themes for the research paper*

No readings

10 – Social constructivism

*Essential reading*


*Recommended readings*


11 – Post-structuralism

*Essential reading*


*Recommended readings*


12 – Post-colonialism

*Essential reading*


*Recommended readings*


13 – Gender

Essential reading


Recommended readings


14 – Conclusion

No readings

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 the course instructor if you require personalized guidance.