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Syllabus: Theoretical and methodological issues of International Relations research

OTH Regensburg, Faculty of Applied Natural Sciences and Cultural Studies

Specialized Elective Module (English) 4 SWS - Summer Semester 2021;
Block Seminar in electronic format,
August 2 – August 14, 2021

Preparatory week Monday, August 2 – Friday, August 6:

Seminar session: 15.00 – 16.30
Tea break
Seminar session: 17.00 - 18.30

Full Block week Monday, August 9 – Friday, August 13:

Seminar session: 11.00 – 13.15
Lunch Break
Seminar session: 15.00 – 16.30
Tea Break
Seminar session: 17.00 – 18.30

Role Game Saturday, August 14, 11.00 – open end

Content:

The block seminar focuses on the roles of theories and research methods in International Relations. Students are introduced to basic ontological and methodological concepts and major contending epistemological perspectives on theories and approaches in the field. Furthermore, students will be acquainted with the background debates in the philosophy of the social sciences that undergird different methodological approaches.

The primary aim of the block seminar is to provide an up-to-date overview of the main contemporary debates in the field of international relations theory and methodology against the background of a number of paradigmatic examples. We will contrast the traditional perspectives of Idealism and Realism and their underlying methodological orientations of understanding and explaining with more recent (and more critical) perspectives of Constructivism, Postmodernism, Critical Theory, and Feminism. We will then open a vista on two subjects not generally dealt with in the context of an IR theory seminar: Theories of European Integration (with their emphasis on transnational and supranational politics, functional interlocking, and multilevel governance), and theories of Development, with an emphasis on non-Western, centre-periphery, unequal exchange, dependency, and neo-imperialism critical, and postcolonial orientations.

The secondary aim of the block seminar is to assist students in the choice of the appropriate theoretical and methodological approach for their research project, not to train them in a multitude of research

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techniques as such. At the end of the preparatory week the block seminar will contain, therefore, a session on how to construct a research proposal for a Bachelor and/or Master thesis.

The theoretical and methodological knowledge acquired during the seminar week will form the basis for a praxis-orientated conflict management/resolution role game on the last day of the block, started off by a short overview of principal conflict resolution approaches during the preparatory week and assisted by some introductory reading for self-study. On that basis, the format, roots, and history of a fictitious conflict situation will be set up. Following this, at least two, perhaps also three competing groups of students will be asked to formulate, on the basis of different ontological views of the world introduced during the preceding seminar week itself, a number of proposals covering the aims, objects, actors, and processes of the management/resolution of that conflict situation. The premises and assumptions of the attempted conflict resolution proposals will have to reflect different theories; the definition and choice of agendas, outcome options, and implementation tools will also have to take into account different methodologies; and the provision of resources as well as the generation of political support will be an outcome of a genuine political debate. At the end of the game, the different proposals should be presented by one or more group speakers to the auditorium total of the seminar, who will then vote on the best proposal.

Competencies to be acquired:

- Acquaint yourself with and understand the research field of International Relations (I.R.)
- Formulate an ontological/epistemological framework to sort and order I.R. theories
- Learn how to apply different theories and models of I.R.
- Identify the scope and limits of different I.R. theories and models
- Learn how to analyze the actors, structures, and processes of international politics with the help of different I.R. theories
- Learn how to develop a project in a team, how to structure the development process, and how to present its results to an auditorium
- Last but certainly not least: improve your English conversation, reading, and writing skills

Assignments & grading:

General electronic participation in class – 20%

Seminar paper on the premises, assumptions, characteristics, performance, achievements, and consequences of a particular theory/approach/method for I.R. analysis – 80% OR

Outline/disposition/research proposal for a Bachelor or Master thesis on a subject of your choice based on an assessment of the relevant secondary literature and a discussion of the research methods to be used – 80% OR

Critical analysis of your and your groups behavior in the role game (with reference to premisses & assumptions, definition of aims, agenda setting, negotiation, competition, game outcome, implementation of game results, achievements of game, feedback for a possible round II)

Please hand in your written contribution – either in paper form or as a commentable PDF file – to my address above at the latest two to three weeks before you need your seminar grade

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Introductory literature:

- For a very brief, classical overview: Stephen van Evera: Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science. Ithaca: Cornell U.P.1997
- More extensive, deeper-going analyses in Vivien Lowndes/David Marsh/Gerry Stoker (eds.): Theory and Methods in Political Science. 4th ed., Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2018.
- First Aid Conceptual Toolbox: Robert L. Miller/John D. Brewer (eds.): The A – Z of Social Research. A Dictionary of Key Social Science Research Concepts. London: Sage 2003

Perspectives on and Theories of International Relations:

- Robert Jackson/Georg Sorensen: Introduction to International Relations. Theories and Approaches. 7th ed. Oxford: Oxford UP 2019.
- Tim Dunne/Milja Kurki/Steve Smith: International Relations Theories. Discipline and Diversity. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford UP 2016. [5th ed. announced for December 2020]
- Knud Erik Jorgensen: International Relations Theory. A New Introduction. 2. Aufl. London: Palgrave Macmillan 2018.
- Additional material to cover the individual syllabus sections mentioned above will be presented to participants in electronic form in the cloud or on the seminar stick.

And for German Speakers:

- Gert Krell/Peter Schlotter: Weltbilder und Weltordnung. Einführung in die Theorie der Internationalen Beziehungen. 5.Aufl. Baden-Baden: Nomos 2018.

Cf. also

- Nicole Deitelhoff/Michael Zürn: Lehrbuch der Internationalen Beziehungen. Per Anhalter durch die IB-Galaxis. München: C.H.Beck 2016.
- Frank Sauer/Carlo Masala (Hrsg.): Handbuch Internationale Beziehungen. 2. Auflage Wiesbaden: Springer VS 2017 [Springer Reference Sozialwissenschaften, 1172 S. !!]

Conflict Management/Conflict Resolution:

- Oliver Ramsbotham/Tom Woodhouse/Hugh Miall: Contemporary Conflict Resolution. The prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts. 4th ed. Cambridge: Polity Press 2016
- Hugh Miall/Tom Woodhouse/Oliver Ramsbotham/Christopher Mitchell (eds.): The Contemporary Conflict Resolution Reader. Cambridge: Polity Press 2015
- Jacob Bercovitch/Richard Jackson: Conflict Resolution in the Twenty-first Century. Principles, Methods, and Approaches. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2009