

PLS352

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

Spring 2023

MWF 4:00 to 4:50 PM, 8.307

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Office hours: Wednesday 3 to 4 PM and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course consists of learning the logic of six popular IR theories (realism, liberalism, constructivism, gender theory, neo-Marxism, and development theory) and the application of their logic to the non-academic context such as cinema (the original author of such approach is Dr. Cynthia Weber). This is a highly interactive course (meaning students have to speak as often or even more than the instructor) that has zero home assignments but several in-class tasks that will make up your final grade. I have an idealistic view of higher education as a place where you can and should challenge yourselves and your peers by opening up to new and controversial ideas, engaging in discussions and debates, and learning something new about yourself and the world. When I started learning about IR theories at Helsinki University, I was often frustrated by the wildness of some authors and ideas. Only years later I came to love their intellectual challenge and the effect it had on my development as a scholar. I did not become a neo-Marxist but every now and then it is hard to argue with Robert Cox and the input of the critical theory. In the end, IR theories have very little practical value (see Barnett's reading in Week 1). They do, however, provide fascinating stories about invisible forces that operate the world and power relations that structure our perceptions of reality (see Cynthia Enloe's book, for example).

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this course is to learn the logic and narrative foundations of the most popular IR theories and to be able to use them in different analytical and

explanatory frameworks. Since IR theories use foundational social science concepts like power, articulation of interests, and rational actor paradigm, we will embark on the journey to identify and discuss these ubiquitous ideas in a non-conventional setting such as cinema.

ASSESSMENT

IN-CLASS QUIZZES: 10 POINTS

In weeks 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, and 14 you will write six quizzes covering realism, liberalism, constructivism, globalization, NeoMarxism, and development theories. Each quiz takes place on Friday and consists of one critical essay-like question based on lectures and readings. For example, I can ask you to implement the realist theory to the Russian war in Ukraine and identify potential weaknesses of this theory in explaining this particular event. As we learn more theories, questions about earlier theories might also appear. The benefit of studying IR theories is that you either learn to understand their logic or not: it is nearly impossible to cheat on the analytical questions or just memorize the theories.

8-10 points – a solid critical answer with the use of examples in support of the arguments.

6-7 points – a substantial answer, might lack examples or coherency.

4-5 points – the answer is provided, however, it either needs to be more accurate or contains essential mistakes.

1-3 points – a feeble understanding of the material.

The class absences are justified only by medical certificates. No re-writings are allowed. If you miss a quiz, you miss ten points.

FIVE-MINUTE PRESENTATIONS: 10 POINTS

The five-minute presentation will be done by each student and will take place on weeks 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, and 13. There will be one question posted for each week's presentations, and students are expected to provide their answers based on the lectures, readings, or external research within five-minutes slots. Using slides or any other graphic/video material is your choice.

8-10 points – a solid critical presentation with the use of examples in support of the arguments.

6-7 points – a strong presentation, might need more examples or coherency.

4-5 points – a sub-optimal presentation, needs to have a more transparent and coherent message, and might contain errors.

1-3 points – a feeble presentation with little relevance to the question.

The class absences are justified only by medical certificates. No extra/alternative assignments are allowed. If you miss your presentation, you miss ten points.

MOVIE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: 20 POINTS

A significant part of our course is dedicated to analyzing movies using IR tools. Each student will be paired with another student to provide a 20-minutes discussion of one film and its relation to the IR theory:

Week 3 – *Lord of the Rings; Dr. Strangelove*

Week 5 – *The Whistleblower; Food, Inc.*

Week 7 – *Wag the Dog; Paradise Now*

Week 10 – *Truman Show; American Factory*

Week 12 – *Syriana; Memento*

Week 14 – *East is East; Aladdin*

8-10 points – a robust critical discussion, high relevance to the theory, use of examples supporting the arguments.

6-7 points – a robust discussion with a weaker relevance to the idea, examples might be lacking.

4-5 points – discussion of the movie has overall little relevance to the theory, or its connection needs to be clarified.

1-3 points – a feeble understanding of the material.

The class absences are justified only by medical certificates. No extra/alternative assignments are allowed. If you miss your day, you miss ten points.

PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE: 10 POINTS

You fill in your participation using Moodle. However, remember that your participation grade is based on actual participation in seminars' discussions and

presentations. Therefore, it will be adjusted at the end of the semester depending on your in-class activity. In other words, just attending is not enough to get ten points.

GRADING SCALE

A: 95-100

A-: 90-94

B+: 85-89

B: 80-84

B-: 75-79

C+: 70-74

C: 65-69

C-: 60-64

D: 55-59

D-: 50-54

F: 0-49

PLAGIARISM AND ABSENCES

I expect zero plagiarism and cheating in this class (it is your responsibility to know and abide by the Student Code of Conduct for Nazarbayev University). Everyone should use references and in-text citations where appropriate (everywhere).

According to the NU policy, a missing class without a valid medical excuse results in an 'F' grade. Students must submit a good medical note to SHSS within three business days of missing any class.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (JANUARY 9) INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS IR THEORY GOOD FOR?

Weber, pp. 1-13

Bleiker, R. (2001). Forget IR theory. In *The Zen of International Relations* (pp. 37-66). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Barnett, M. N. (2018). What is international relations theory good for?. In Jervis, R., et al. (eds.), *Chaos in the Liberal Order* (pp. 8-21). Columbia University Press.

Monday: Introduction

Wednesday: Weber, pp. 1-13

Friday: Bleiker & Barnett

WEEK 2 (JANUARY 16) REALISM

Weber, pp. 14-23, 31-33

Mearsheimer, J. (2019). Bound to fail: The rise and fall of the liberal international order. *International Security*, 43(4), 7-50.

Monday: Lecture

Wednesday: Mearsheimer

Friday: 5 min presentations

WEEK 3 (JANUARY 23) DISCUSSING REALISM IN CINEMA

Monday: Discussing *Lord of the Flies*

Wednesday: Discussing *Dr. Strangelove*

Friday: Quiz #1

WEEK 4 (JANUARY 30) LIBERALISM

Weber, pp. 38-46

Ikenberry, G. J. (2009). Liberal internationalism 3.0: America and the dilemmas of liberal world order. *Perspectives on Politics*, 7(1), 71-87.

Monday: Lecture

Wednesday: Ikenberry

Friday: 5 min presentations

WEEK 5 (FEBRUARY 6) DISCUSSING LIBERALISM IN CINEMA

Monday: Discussing *The Whistleblower (2010)*

Wednesday: Discussing *Food, Inc.*

Friday: Quiz #2

WEEK 6 (FEBRUARY 13) CONSTRUCTIVISM

Weber, pp. 60-68

Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics. *International Organization*, 46(2), 391-425.

Monday: Lecture

Wednesday: Wendt

Friday: 5 min presentations

WEEK 7 (FEBRUARY 20) DISCUSSING CONSTRUCTIVISM

Monday: Discussing *Wag the Dog*

Wednesday: Discussing *Paradise Now*

Friday: Quiz #3

WEEK 8 (FEBRUARY 27) GENDER

Weber, pp. 82-90

Enloe, C. (2014). *Bananas, beaches and bases: Making feminist sense of international politics*. Univ of California Press.

Monday: Lecture

Wednesday: Enloe, pp. 1-37, 83-125

Friday: 5 min presentations

WEEK 9 (MARCH 6) GLOBALISATION

Weber, pp. 104-113, 119-121

Hay, C., & Marsh, D. (2000). *Demystifying globalization*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Monday: Lecture

Wednesday: Hay & Marsh, pp. 21-49

Friday: 5 min presentations

WEEK 10 (MARCH 13) DISCUSSING GLOBALISATION

Monday: Discussing *The Truman Show*

Wednesday: Discussing *American Factory*

Friday: Quiz #4

Spring Break (March 20-24)

WEEK 11 (MARCH 27) NEOMARXISM

Weber, pp. 124-134

Barkawi, T., & Laffey, M. (2002). Retrieving the imperial: Empire and international relations. *Millennium*, 31(1), 109-127.

Monday: Lecture

Wednesday: Barkawi & Laffey

Friday: 5 min presentations

WEEK 12 (APRIL 3) DISCUSSING NEOMARXISM

Monday: Discussing *Syriana*

Wednesday: Discussing *Memento*

Friday: Quiz #5

WEEK 13 (APRIL 10) DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Weber, pp. 152-163

Banerjee, A., Banerjee, A. V., & Duflo, E. (2011). *Poor economics: A radical rethinking of the way to fight global poverty*. Public Affairs.

Monday: Lecture

Wednesday: Banerjee et al., Introduction, Chapter 1, & Chapter 10

Friday: 5 min presentations

WEEK 14 (APRIL 17) DISCUSSING DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Monday: Discussing *East is East*

Wednesday: Discussing *Aladdin*

Friday: Quiz #6