International Relations - A Global Discipline!?

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The class will consist of four 90-minutes sessions taking place between the 15th and 26th of September. Exact timetable will be announced ASAP. Please send an e-mail to the instructor before September 10th in case you want to participate. The number of participants is restricted to 15. The class is worth one credit point and can be finished with either a letter grade or a pass/fail.

I. DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

In recent years voices calling International Relations a Western-centric discipline have become louder. For instance, it is claimed that instead of explaining how the world in a truly global sense works, IR theories - unconsciously or not - often only look at how powerful, mostly Western states, behave amongst each other. They thereby label other (forms of) states as irrelevant or marginalize them as passive antagonists. But not only its theories lack truly international characteristics, the discipline of IR understood as a social group, does as well. While the discipline as we know it has its roots in Western Europe and North America, IR has become an increasingly popular subject at universities all over the world. Particularly rising powers like China are showing increasing interest in the study of and theorizing about international relations. Nevertheless, contributions from outside its Western core hardly ever make it to the discipline’s major journals, university presses and syllabi. This class asks why this is so, how different (or similar) IR teaching and theorizing are in different places, and what would change if the discipline would open up to new voices. At the end of the course, students should be able to see beyond the written versions of IR theories and take into account the complex social, geographical, and intellectual divides they imply and often enough reinforce.

II. READING ASSIGNMENTS AND STRUCTURE OF THE SESSIONS

All four sessions will be structured around some key readings. All students are expected to have read this obligatory literature for each session. The preparation and presentation of additional readings for all four weeks will be divided amongst students - so that students will have to prepare two to three texts for each session. In class, students act as „guardians“ for one of the text that have chose in advance from the additional reading list: Whenever they feel that the discussion is in need of insights from their additional literature, they should speak up and share their texts’ position with the rest of the group. Who will be in charge for which text, will be decided one class in advance.
All of the required and additional readings for this course will be posted on the course Blackboard site. Students should bring copies of the obligatory articles and/or book chapters and copies of their additional readings to our class meetings. Whether you prefer to print your materials or read them on-screen is your choice. But whatever you prefer, you will need to bring your highlighted and annotated - digital or paper - copies to class in order to refer back to them or follow the contributions of fellow students.

III. WRITING ASSIGNMENT AND GRADING

As their final assignment, students will prepare a paper of 3-5 pages (1500-2500 words). The assignment is to select a theoretical approach to international relations that is either written by an author, who is not employed at a university in the transatlantic core; that is explicitly phrased as an alternative to Western IR theorizing; and/or directly addresses the international realm from a non-core, local perspective. I will suggest some possible texts to you, but, based on your language skills and individual interests, you might choose some other text as well, as long as it fulfills the criteria stated above. The paper should be a critical analysis based upon all the factors we have identified and discussed in class, not just a summary of the discussed approach.

Grades will be split as follows:

- Class Participation (50%)
- Final Assignment (3-5 page paper) (50%)

No student can pass this course without completing the final assignment. Assignments must be send to the instructor via e-mail (wwemheuervogel@wm.edu). The paper is due two weeks after the last session. Students are responsible for retaining a hard copy of their papers until they have received a grade from the instructor.

IV. OTHER POLICIES

Absence
Students are required to attend all classes. To reschedule a test or receive a paper extension because of an absence requires notice from the Health Center or the Dean of Students, preferably prior to the due date. Late paper assignments will be penalized one third of a letter grade (i.e., from an A- to a B+) for each day or fraction of a day late, unless an excuse is provided from the Health Center or the Dean’s office. If you will miss class or require an extension because of a religious holiday or school sanctioned activity, you must notify the instructor in writing during the first two weeks of classes.

Disability Services
Persons with documented disabilities requiring accommodations to meet the expectations of this course should contact the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office must notify the instructor during the first two weeks of classes if you are to receive any accommodation.
Blackboard
All assignments will be posted on our Blackboard site. Occasionally, announcements to the class will be posted and/or sent out as e-mails (please be sure you check your wm.edu account daily, as Blackboard-generated messages go only to wm.edu accounts). Students should check this site regularly for announcements and details on course assignments. In addition, our substantive conversations from class will occasionally spill over onto the class discussion board.

III. CLASS SCHEDULE

Session 1 (date TBA)

International Relations - A Global Discipline!? An Introduction

This session will introduce to the notion of IR as a geographically shaped and divided discipline. Stanley Hoffmann’s article from 1977 was the first – and still is the most famous – to problematize the inherently American character of IR. He discusses some core factors that shaped IR in its early stage after World War II. This text will provide us with a base for any further analysis. Ole Wæver complemented and criticized Hoffmann’s approach with European experiences in 1998. Along the line of these two texts we want to get a first grip on the geographical dimension and national characteristics of a supposedly global discipline.

Central questions:

- What are we talking about when referring to the “geographical dividing lines” in the discipline of IR?
- What internal and external factors shape IR as a discipline?
- What arguments can you bring up to challenge Hoffmann’s and Wæver’s ideas of a nationally-shaped discipline?

Obligatory readings:


Additional readings:


**Session 2 (date TBA)**

**Westerncentrism in IR: Identification of Intellectual and Structural Gatekeepers**

This session’s aim is to get a feeling for how the criticism of a geographically divided discipline shifted from a discussion of power centers within the transatlantic (or Western) core, i.e. the North America and Western Europe, to a clash between this core as one unit and a perceived “non-Western” periphery. We will discuss central nodes and characteristics of the discipline and how these lead to imbalances and discrimination within the discipline. First of all, this implies the discussion of what makes IR “westerncentric” and what this word implies. More concretely, we will identify and discuss the role of potential intellectual gatekeepers - for example the centrality of different epistemologies and historical perspectives in IR theories - and structural gatekeepers - for example the publishing process and English as the lingua franca of global IR.

**Central questions:**

- What does the concept „Westerncentric“ imply in the context of IR?
- What could be meant by “intellectual gatekeepers”, and how are they affecting IR scholarship?
- What could be meant by “structural gatekeepers”, and how are they affecting IR scholarship?
- How are the two interacting?

**Obligatory readings:**


**Additional readings:**

Session 3 (date TBA)
IR Around the World: Studying (the Discipline of) IR in Different Places

The third session focuses on the question of how IR is understood and taught in different parts of the world. If we follow Hoffmann, Wæver, and many other authors, then IR must to be different in different places. But is it really? And if yes, in how far? Why or why not? The aim is to get a grip on the factors that influence IR in a disciplinary sense, for example politics, national and regional history, the geographical position of a country, and its relationship between policy-making and academia. This way we will identify the major commonalities of what makes IR IR, and apply as well as question the theoretical dividing lines and gatekeepers discussed in session 2 to some concrete examples.

Central questions:

- What national/regional/global circumstances and institutions seem to shape IR the most?
- Which specific gatekeepers can you identify in your country/region example?*
- Which coping strategies do(es) your author(s) suggest?

Obligatory readings:


Additional readings:

Chapters in International Relations Scholarship Around the World. Worlding Beyond the West Series, Book 1, edited by A. Tickner and O. Waever. New York: Routledge:


There are more, and more recent, articles on some countries/regions, but not on all of them. If you are interested in a specific country/region and want to read more about it, ask me and I might have additional literature for you.

Session 4 (date TBA)
Constructing non-Western IR Theories: Prospects and Obstacles

After discussing geographical variations in research set-ups and teaching, in this session we want to discuss how these variations affect the process and outcomes of theorizing. Which topics might be discussed in non-Western theories? When are they “truly non-Western”? In how far do they challenge, complement, and reject mainstream IRT? Do they have to? Based on the readings for this week and our knowledge from the previous sessions we will construct a set of questions and indicators which will help you to analyze individual non-Western contributions in your final paper.

Central questions:

- What drives the need for non-Western theorizing in IR?
- What form(s) might those theories take on?
- Is there room for and should there be new ‘national schools’ of IR?

Obligatory reading:


Additional readings:
Final assignment: Paper on IR Theorizing from Beyond the West  
Due: October 15th, 2014

The final assignment will be a synthesis of everything we will have learned in the past days. Students will prepare and present individual analyses of IR theorizing from different parts of the world - preferably from beyond the transatlantic core. The aim of assignment is to explore how alternative theories on international relations could look like, what new concepts are introduced, how old ones are challenged, and in how far these alternative theories/concepts in turn are products of their own specific political, geographical, and academic environment.

Central questions that should be addressed in the paper:

- What are your text’s central questions, problems and objects of inquiry?
- What criticisms does your author(s) formulate in the context of Westerncentrism?
- Based on Acharya and Buzan (2007:428), which of the four sources/types of texts does yours build upon or represent?: „classical ideas [e.g. religious or philosophical]; the thinking of modern leaders and elites; attempts by IR scholars to apply Western theory to the local context (looking outside-in), and/or similar attempts by scholars to generalize from the local experience for an wider audience, but on its own terms (looking inside-out)” Or if none of the above, how would you describe your text’s nature?

Suggested texts for your analysis:

The following list of texts is by no means exhaustive. However, the selection of texts should give you an idea of works appropriate for your final papers. Based on your language skills and individual interests you might choose something entirely else as well, but please check this choice with me before you get started! The text you choose does not necessarily have to include a full-fledged IR theory. It is enough that it discusses problems central to the international or transnational domain. Mind that in order to write a good paper, you will need to identify and include secondary sources into your analysis. In your search for supplementary
and/or additional literature, you may start with scanning those journals we will have discussed in session two.


Also possible: most contributions in *Thinking International Relations Differently*, edited by A. Tickner and D. Blaney, London and New York: Routledge.

• Hasan, W. and Momani, B. (2012). Arab scholars’ take on globalization, 228-249.