FIRST YEAR SEMINAR

International Security Threats?

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Catalog Description

Since the end of the cold war and even more so after 9/11, international security threats such as terrorism or rogue states are seemingly ubiquitous. This seminar critically engages phenomena of international security threats. It discusses their dangers, but also the possibility of them being exaggerated or even fabricated and it asks what goals such strategies may serve.

Seminar Description

When the cold war came to an end about two decades ago, people all around the world hoped for a new world order, marked by international cooperation and harmony. Expectations of a peaceful era were then abruptly brought to an end through the horrific events of 11 September 2001. Visions of world politics shifted immediately as a new mood of doom and gloom set in about the prospect that conflict rather than peace would reign in the future. International security threats such as terrorism and rogue states came to appear as ubiquitous. The task in this seminar is to critically engage phenomena of international security threats. It discusses their dangers, but also the possibility of them being exaggerated or even fabricated and it asks what goals such strategies may serve.

The conventional wisdom of articulated security threats views and portrays them as genuinely dangerous. Indeed, often times they may be genuinely dangerous. However, critical citizenry also requires us not to accept too readily the conventional wisdom and the mainstream consensus. Judgments are often made on a rather superficial level without sufficient effort towards questioning claims of security threats and underlying assumptions about them and also without critically asking how security threats came into being in the first place. Too often are labels and slogans substituted for critical engagement, reflection and actual analysis.

Given that presented security threats may lead to bloody and costly wars, it is imperative for students (and any citizen) to question their (assumed) danger. Thinking more deeply and also more differently about international security than is conventionally done is of utmost importance. These are the main contentions in this first year seminar. Throughout our discussions we want to leave the door open for the conventional wisdom, but simultaneously we also want to problematize and question it. The goal of this seminar is to contribute towards critical citizenry.
Course Requirements

Before I introduce the specific course requirements, I want to emphasize that for all writing assignments you will be expected to demonstrate good writing abilities. A clear writing style is an absolute prerequisite for you to be able to communicate your substantive points and arguments effectively. It is also very important that you proofread your papers for grammar and style. Once you have finished, let it sit for a few hours and then revisit it. This way you are more likely to detect errors and correct them in time before the due date.

Here are the course assignments for our class. All writing assignments have to be typed, 1 1/2 spaced, 12 point font New Times Roman with 1 inch margins. The due dates for the assignments are noted in the Course Outline below.

Introspective/Value Essays (10 and 15 points)
This course, if it is successful, is likely to challenge many of your most deeply held beliefs about the world, how it is organized and how it works. This essay assignment asks you to state your values and beliefs at the beginning and the end of the semester, so that you can chronicle this mini “intellectual journey.”

In the first introspective essay, which requires no research at all, just some serious thinking, self-deliberation and self-analysis on your part, explain your personal feelings (values and beliefs) on the issues we will engage in the first few meetings.

For the second introspective essay, you are to engage the materials we covered over the semester and reflect on how they impacted you. “To impact” does not necessarily mean that our reading materials and class discussion led to a change and revision of your previously held beliefs. It can equally mean that now you are even stronger in your previously held beliefs. The task of this class is not to convert you to different beliefs, but to compel continuous (self-)deliberation and critical thinking. It is very important that you make continuous reference to materials covering the particular themes and that you link them in logical and plausible ways to your thinking.

As you are writing these essays you are to get in touch with your heart and soul, but what you are writing should also be comprehensible, plausible and logical. Clear logical writing and reasoning are a must. The first introspective essay is to be 3-4 pages long, the second 4-5 pages long.

Discourse Papers (3 x 20 points).
Good scholars must be able to position themselves and their argument in an ongoing discussion/discourse. The task in writing these discourse papers is not to merely summarize or re-iterate what other authors already said. A discourse paper which does not move beyond a summary can, and will not reach a satisfactory grade. In its ideal form a university is to be considered a marketplace of ideas. Therefore, the task in writing a discourse paper is "sapere aude" – think on your own. You are expected to position yourself within the discourse of relevant materials and to identify your own position vis a vis other authors to the same issue. This means that you show yourself cognizant of previous arguments and THEN launch your own argument. Your argument(s) must be of academic nature. This is to say, you must be able to credibly support them by reference to authoritative material.
You are to write three discourse papers in this seminar. They are to be 4-5 pages long. The first discourse paper is to pertain to the section “The Theory – Conventional”, the second to the section “The Theory – Critical”, and the third to the section “The Practice?”

**Class Attendance and Participation (15 points)**

It is of crucial importance that you attend class and participate actively. You are expected to read all the assigned readings BEFORE the class meeting and you are to be able to discuss them. You cannot achieve a satisfactory score in this category if you merely “sit in.” I expect the following from you:

- **Preparation** — your contributions demonstrate that you carefully read the assignment and engaged in it.

- **Quality of Your Argument** — your contributions are original, accurate and relevant to the subject matter under consideration and you reason by reference to proper evidence. Quality of Your Expression — your contribution is intelligible, concise, and addressed to your peers and the instructor.

- **Contribution to the Process** — knowledge is a cumulative achievement. Therefore, your contributions should demonstrate that you are listening to other students’ comments, take their ideas into consideration when responding, respect them, and criticize their arguments (not them!) constructively.

- **Critical Thought** — your contributions show critical awareness, do not reiterate conventional and/or common wisdom and avoid basic logical fallacies.

- **Academic Openness** — the etymology of the term “education” is latin (ex-ducere) and translates into “leading yourself out of yourself.” Be open for alternative and dissident arguments as this is very important for our intellectual maturation.

Unexcused absences will result in a loss of points towards your final grade (1 point per missed class). Excused absences are those that are accompanied by a written explanation, together with legitimate supporting documentation. For example, if you miss a class due to extra curricular activities, please provide a letter from the faculty member organizing the event; if for medical reasons, a letter from your doctor and so on.

**Grading and Late Papers**

Your final grade is a composition of the items described above. Late papers are generally not tolerated and will lead to a deduction of 2 points per day on that particular assignment. Here is the grading scheme:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95-100</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-94</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>85-87</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>78-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<td>75-77</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>C-</td>
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<tr>
<td>68-69</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-67</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 60</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Any student with a disability or special need should speak with me as soon as possible so that we can make any necessary arrangements or accommodations.
Classroom Courtesy

Computers are not allowed in the classroom. Members of the class will be expected to exhibit appropriate behavior to the instructor and each other. Most importantly, students are required to give to others the respect and consideration they would wish for themselves. At its best, a classroom operates as a marketplace of ideas, where open discussion permits students to digest and evaluate information. Students must realize that while it is permissible to question a competing point of view, it is never appropriate to allow the conversation to degenerate into personal attacks. It is also expected that students will exhibit good manners, listen when others are talking, and generally behave in a professional manner. Students who behave inappropriately may be asked to leave the classroom and will have points deducted from their final grades.

Academic Honesty

Cheating on a test or other assignment will result in an automatic loss of all points for that assignment and possibly an F for the entire course. Cheating includes looking at notes/readings during closed-book tests. Cheating also includes copying any part of a classmate’s work or plagiarism of any kind. If you have any questions concerning what constitutes cheating and/or plagiarism, please consult with me.

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Setting the Stage – Thinking Critically

12 January (Tuesday): Introduction
14 January (Thursday): The Structure of the University
19 January (Tuesday): The Purpose of the University
21 January (Thursday): Introspection
26 January (Tuesday): Writing
28 January (Thursday): tba.

The Theory - Conventional


4 February (Thursday): Realism cont.

11 February (Thursday): Liberalism cont.

The Theory - Critical

16 February (Tuesday): Why We Fight


25 February (Thursday): tba. [First Discourse Paper Due]


3 March (Thursday): Fear Politics?

7 March – 11 March: Spring Break


17 March (Thursday): Professor away at conference.

22 March (Tuesday): Problem-solving Theory and Critical Theory (no reading assignment)

The Practice?


29 March (Tuesday): Manufacturing Consent, cont.

31 March (Thursday): David Altheide. 2006. Terrorism and the Politics of Fear. New York: Rowman and Littlefield (chapters 2 and 4) [Second Discourse Paper Due]

5 April (Tuesday): Edward Said on Orientalism
7 April (Thursday): Discussion (no reading assignment)

Instances for Discussion

12 April (Tuesday): Furman Engaged


19 April (Tuesday): Bill Moyers – Buying the War

21 April (Thursday): Bill Moyers – Buying the War, cont. [Third Discourse Paper Due]

26 April (Tuesday): The University and Society [Second Introspective Essay Due]