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 Materials

Most of our reading materials are posted on Moodle. There may be some reading materials that I will hand out in class. The two book that you must purchase immediately are:


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.

You are expected to visit the Writing and Media Lab (WML) within the first ten days of our class. Familiarize yourself with the resources and the staff there. The staff will prove very helpful in the composition of your papers.

For each assignment you are also expected to be in close contact with the professor. For each assignment you are to come by and discuss your ideas and then to discuss various drafts of your paper.

It is very important that you repeatedly 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.

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.

**Reflective Essay (10 points)**

This course, if it is successful, is likely to challenge many of your beliefs about international politics. This essay assignment asks you to state your beliefs at the beginning of the semester, so that you can chronicle this mini “intellectual journey.”

This essay requires no research, just some serious and honest thinking. You are explain your personal views on questions such as: Is the United States secure or not? Who or what poses a security threat? Why? What can or should be done?

Even though this will be a personal and subjective essay, what you are writing should be comprehensible, plausible and logical. Clear logical writing and reasoning are a must. This essay is to be 3-4 pages long.

**Presentation (15 points)**

Each students is to give a power-point presentation on the topic/reading materials of the day. Students will give these presentations in pairs of two. In the presentation the students will high-light the main
points, insights and questions of our reading materials. The presenters are also to bring a clear, informative and well-structured hand-out for the class.

**Analytical Essays (4 x 10 points)**
You will write four short, analytical essays over the course of the term. These will pertain to the materials in Sections IV-VII in the course schedule below. The first three of these essays must be 3-4 pages long. The last one must be 2-3 pages long.

These analytical essays will show that the student (1) understands the text to be engaged and appreciates its significance; (2) has asked and answered a genuine question or made the case for a contestable yet defensible thesis; (3) has organized his or her essay with an introduction, a conclusion, and a logical sequence of paragraphs that advance an argument from the introduction to the conclusion; (4) has marshaled specific evidence from the text to support his or her argument in a manner that demonstrates independent engagement with the text; (5) has carefully edited and proofread his or her writing to produce a compact and compelling style.

**Thesis Paper (20 points)**
This paper will consist of a formal Introduction, a Main Part and a Conclusion. In the Introduction you will have to identify a topic and illustrate its relevance. Importantly, in the Introduction you will also formulate a thesis statement. In the Main Part of the paper you are to support your thesis. However, you must do so not by simply disregarding arguments and evidence that go contrary your thesis. Instead, you must compelling engage these. In your Conclusion, you will summarize your argument and derive implications. I will give more details about this paper as we go through the semester. This paper is to be 8-10 pages long.

**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 extracurricular 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Scores</th>
</tr>
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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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85-87</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>75-77</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68-69</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-67</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Below 60 = F**

**What Specific Grades Mean:**

**A:** An outstanding essay, marked by unusual clarity of analysis, richness and precision of language and inventiveness. Shows substantial reflection on the theme and makes a compelling and reasoned argument to answer a question or defend a thesis. Carefully organized and well-written, usually as a result of several drafts and extensive polishing. Makes detailed reference to the text in question.

**B:** A good essay that makes a consistent case for a thesis or the answer to a question. The writing is competent, but undistinguished; “B” papers tend to be more informational and descriptive than discursive and analytical. Evidence of substantial specific knowledge of the text.

**C:** A lackluster essay that fails to ask and answer a genuine question or make the case for a contestable yet defensible thesis. Deficient in understanding, textual specificity, or quality of writing.

**D:** Fails to make an argument or makes it in a completely unconvincing way. May contain some relevant points, but they are hard to recognize. Typically lacks understanding, textual specificity, and polish.

**F:** No evidence of serious work.

**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**

I. Setting the Stage – Thinking Critically

9 January (Tuesday): Introduction

11 January (Thursday): The Structure and Purpose of the University

16 January (Tuesday): Challenges and Reflections as path to Ex-ducere

II. Fundamentals of Writing and Scholarship

18 January (Thursday): General Introduction and Matters of Style

23 January (Tuesday): Matters of Style and Source Materials

25 January (Thursday): Source Materials and Citations [Reflective Essay Due]

III. Building Theoretical and Analytical Foundations


1 February (Thursday): Realism cont.


8 February (Thursday): tba.
IV. Engaging in Critical Theory and Application

13 February (Tuesday): Why We Fight

15 February (Thursday): Why we Fight, cont. followed by discussion.


22 February (Thursday): Fear Politics?


1 March (Thursday): David Altheide. 2006. Terrorism and the Politics of Fear. New York: Rowman and Littlefield; read chapters 1 (pp. 1-9) and 2 (pp. 15-24).

V. The Iraq War


15 March (Thursday): Bill Moyers – Buying the War

20 March (Tuesday): Bill Moyers – Buying the War, cont.


27 March (Tuesday): tba.

VI. The War on Terror

29 March (Thursday): Edward Said on Orientalism [Analytical Essay 2 Due]


10 April (Tuesday): Furman Engaged!

12 April (Thursday): tba. [Analytical Essay 3 Due]

VII. Thinking About the Future


24 April (Thursday): Last Day of Class  [Analytical Essay 4 Due]

1 May (Tuesday):  [Thesis Paper Due]