Syllabus

Constructivist Theories of International Institutions

Spring 2017

Instructor: Dr. Alejandro Esguerra, esguerra@uni-potsdam.de
Time/place: Thursday, 2pm – 4pm. University of Potsdam, Campus Griebnitzsee, room 3.06.S22
Office Hours: Thursday, 4pm – 6pm, and by appointment, room 2.07

This is an advanced BA course on the study of international institutions from a constructivist perspective. By now constructivism has been well established as meta-theoretical paradigm that is particularly good in explaining how institutions emerge, why they reproduce themselves, and how they change.

Researching institutions is crucial since our present political landscape teaches us that institutions cannot be taken for granted. The Brexit or the rise of populism in established democracies are examples which challenge supra-national institutions such as the European Union as well as the institution of democracy itself. At same time, international institutions such as NATO which have been as some argue less important in recent years are now back on the agenda of intergovernmental negotiations.

We will discuss key theoretical concepts such as legitimacy, knowledge, norms, discourse and practice teasing out how constructivist scholars research international institutions as well as how constructivists view the role of institutions in world politics. While we will focus on theoretical concepts students will also learn how these concepts are operationalized to study international institutions empirically. We engage with international institutions in the in the policy fields of global environmental governance, human rights, international economy as well as security politics.

The aim of the seminar is to familiarize students with various strands of constructivist thinking in the discipline of International Relations. At the end of the course students should be able to formulate research questions and carry out research that adheres to a constructivist paradigm.

Organization of sessions

From May 4 til July 13 each session will be split in two: In the first part of the session we will engage with the main theoretical narrative. Student have to prepare a paragraph for each session in which s/he states a question or a problematization of the text. Please send this paragraph to me via email until Thursday 11am.
The second part of the session, however, will be organized by a group of students. Their task is to illustrate the theoretical themes of the session empirically. The empirical cases are “best-fit” examples for the theoretical approach of the session. However, as a student group please do not lecture for 45 minutes. The idea is to give an empirical input as well as to provoke and facilitate a discussion.

To organize this as productive as possible the group of students who is responsible for a session has to come to my office ideally two weeks in advance for a discussion on the topic. I am asking you to have read the required and the student input readings before you come to my office hours.

Readings

All students have to thoroughly engage with the required readings to be able to participate productively in the session. The readings of student input are selected for the empirical part of the session. While all students are welcomed to also have a look at this text, it is mainly chosen to provide a basis for the student groups. The additional readings are also carefully selected and give students the opportunity to further study the session’s topic. All required readings are available on moodle.

Moodle: Students should be able to register with the moodle course by entering the code CTII.

Course requirements and grading

(a) Readings and paragraph (10%)
(b) Group presentation and participation in class (30%)
(c) Term paper (60%)

Term paper

The length of the term paper should be around 3000 words. The paper should focus on one or two theoretical approaches we discussed in the seminar and apply them to an empirical case. Further information will follow in the session of July 20. In this session we will also talk about issues of plagiarism. Please see the guidelines of the University of Potsdam http://www.uni-potsdam.de/am-up/2011/ambek-2011-01-037-039.pdf.
20 April  Introduction to the Course: What is theory? What is constructivism? What are institutions?

Additional readings

27 April  The Social Construction of Reality

Required Reading

Additional readings

4 May  The Social Construction of Reality II – Institutions and Legitimation

Required Reading

Student input
- **Defining international institutions**
  **ONLY THE INTRO AND THE PART ON DEFINITION**
Additional readings

11 May Logic of Appropriateness and the Politics of Legitimation

Required reading

Student input
- International Monetary Fund – IMF

Additional readings

18 May Logic of Arguing: Changing preferences in Discourse

Required Reading

Student input
- The International Criminal Court – ICC

Additional Readings

25 May  
No Class – Public Holiday

1 June  
**Epistemic Communities: Speaking Truth to Power**

*Required Reading*


*Student input*

- **The Ozone Regime**

*Additional Readings*


8 June  
No class

15 June  
**Organizing Science: Knowledge and Representation**

*Required Reading*


*Student input*

- **Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services – IPBES**

**Additional Readings**


**22 June**

**The Power of International Norms and Non-State Actors**

**Required Reading**


**Student input**

- **Banning Landmines (Ottawa Treaty)**

**Additional Readings**


**29 June**

**Doing Norm Translation**

**Required Reading**

Student input

- **Village Courts in Bangladesh**

Additional Readings


6 July  **The Power of Discourse**

**Required Reading**


**Student input**

- **Terrorism and the United Nations**

**Additional Readings**

13 July  **The World of Practices**

*Required Reading*


*Student input*

- **Doing Diplomacy**

*Additional Readings*


20 July  **Doing constructivist research**

*Additional Readings*


27 July  **Conclusion and presentation of students’ term papers (abstracts).**