

STRUCTURAL THEORIES
CONF 803
Spring 2011
Tuesdays, 7:20 pm – 10:00 pm
Founders Hall, Room 320
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Office Hours by Appointment

Welcome to the course. This seminar explores theories on the nature of social conflict and cooperation, processes of social change, and how structures and institutions (both formal and informal) shape the dynamics of social interactions. We will critically assess a range of theories from a variety of disciplines that speak to these issues. One main representative text will be discussed and examined critically each week with the goal of understanding and assessing the theory on its own terms as well as in comparison to other theories.

The course will be run as a seminar with an emphasis on in-depth discussion. It is therefore imperative that students read the assigned books prior to class. Active participation in class discussions will be expected and will be an important part of your final grade. The purpose of the required short papers (see details below) is in part to encourage you to develop your thoughts regarding the readings prior to class and to be prepared to engage in the discussion. Even for those weeks when you do not write a paper, a thoughtful reading of the text is necessary so that you can contribute to the discussion.

I encourage you to e-mail me with questions you may have about the readings and our in-class discussions. Although I do not have set office hours, I also encourage you to set up meetings with me during the semester. I will be communicating with you via your GMU e-mail account. If you are using a different account, please make sure that your GMU e-mail is forwarded to this other account so that you do not miss any important information.

Requirements:

Participation: 20%
Short Papers: 40%
Final Paper: 40%

Participation

This is a doctoral seminar, not a lecture course. My role is to facilitate and guide discussion. Your active participation is essential to the success of the course and you will

benefit from the discussion to the extent that you have completed the readings and come to class prepared to discuss them.

In recognition of the importance placed on participation in classroom discussions, 20 percent of the total grade will reflect your participation. Participation grades will be based on the frequency and quality of your involvement in each week's class, with an emphasis on the latter. You are not encouraged to speak on every topic simply for the sake of participating but rather are strongly encouraged to find opportunities to contribute in ways that advance and deepen the discussion.

In evaluating participation, I will look for evidence that you have done the readings with sufficient attention that you can contribute to the discussion. An ability to succinctly summarize what you have read is regarded as a given. In order to further the discussion you should be prepared to offer your opinions on an author's argument: What are the author's main concerns? What are the main arguments the author is making? Do you find them convincing? If so why? If not, why not? Are they clearly presented? Are they logical? Do you find the use of evidence compelling? How would you further test the arguments to confirm their validity? Do you think that the arguments works better for some cases than others? How might the author's arguments help us to better understand particular conflicts?

There are only 15 meetings during the semester. Therefore, missing more than one meeting is going to have a negative impact on your participation grade.

Short Papers

To promote informed discussion, eight short papers (three, double-spaced pages, 12 point font) are required. These papers should analyze the assigned books, place them in the context of the literature on the topic, and assess both their contributions to the field and their weaknesses. The goal of the exercise is to assess and critique the theory from within its own perspective. In other words, rather than saying that rational choice theory or realism is wrong or right, seek to understand the theory from its own perspective and think through its assumptions, logic and claims. Then you can specify where you find the logic convincing or faulty, rigorous or incomplete, compelling or circular, strong or generally unintelligible. This exercise should occupy most of your essay. You may well wish to use a final paragraph or two to explain some implications of the theory for research or practice but that is not the primary goal of the exercise. You may also want to "step outside" of the given theory's structure and argue that entire exercise of trying to explain social conflict from this perspective is flawed and that some other theory is better. Illustrating with a case about which you are familiar may be a useful means to demonstrate either the value or weakness of a given concept or causal connection but the point of these brief essays is to analyze the theory as theory.

Each paper is worth 5 percent of your grade and the eight papers therefore total 40 percent of your final grade. You may write these papers for all twelve books and have the lowest four grades dropped or may skip writing a paper on four books. If you hand in

fewer than eight papers, the missing essays will receive a failing grade. The papers *must* be handed in before the class in which the topic is discussed. They should be submitted *electronically via e-mail*. If you cannot attend a class, the paper can still be submitted electronically. It is your responsibility to make sure the paper arrives. The three page limit is designed to compel you to focus on one or two core points. Longer papers will be viewed as evidence that you have difficulties distinguishing critical points from minor points.

Final Paper

A final paper of 20-30 is required and will account for 40 percent of your final grade. In consultation with me, you will choose your own topic. In your paper, you will draw on the theories we read and discuss in class as well as on other relevant sources. Topics may include a theoretical question/issue that compels you or a case study of a particular conflict or conflicts. We will discuss details and possibilities for this assignment in much greater detail in class. You should start thinking about your topic as soon as possible. On **March 8th** (our seventh meeting) a one-page proposal for your paper is due. As with all other written work, you should send this proposal to me electronically. I will return it to you with my comments/suggestions and I will schedule a meeting with each of you to further discuss your paper ideas. During our final class meeting on May 3rd I will ask each of you to briefly discuss your paper topic in class so that we can all learn what everyone is working on and offer thoughts and suggestions before the papers will be completed. The final paper will be due on **May 17th**. You should e-mail it to me by 7pm that day.

Course Policies:

Late assignments or “incomplete” grades will be given only in exceptional cases of personal or immediate family crisis. You **MUST** discuss the possibility of such an arrangement beforehand rather than waiting until an assignment is due. Failure to complete an assignment on time without prior discussion with me, will result in a failing grade for that assignment. Remember that even if you will be absent from class you should e-mail me your short papers and the final paper proposal. If you must miss a class, please let me know beforehand by e-mail.

Honor Code and Plagiarism:

All George Mason University students have agreed to abide by the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code. You can find a copy of the Honor Code at academicintegrity.gmu.edu. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review. With specific regards to plagiarism, three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. If you have questions about when the contributions of others to your work must be acknowledged and appropriate ways to cite those contributions, please talk with

the professor.

ICAR requires that all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit a student's work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. ICAR's policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace or substitute for it.

English Language Institute:

The English Language Institute offers free English language tutoring to non-native English speaking students who are referred by members of the GMU faculty or staff. For more information contact 703-993-3642 or malle2@gmu.edu

The Writing Center:

The Writing Center is a free writing resource that offers individual, group, and online tutoring. For general questions and comments please contact 703-993-4491 or wcenter@gmu.edu.

Readings:

The following books have been ordered through the university bookstore. They are also available at the Burton library and most will be available at any university library. We will be reading all of each.

Miguel Angel Centeno. *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America*. Penn State University Press 2002

Dennis Chong. *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement*. University of Chicago Press 1991

Ellen Lust-Okar. *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions*. Cambridge University Press 2007

Mahmood Mamdani. *Citizen and Subject*. Princeton University 1996

John Mearsheimer. *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Norton 2001

Barrington Moore. *Social Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Beacon Press; Reprint edition 1993

Elinor Ostrom. *Governing the Commons: the Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge University Press 1990

Daniel N. Posner. *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*. Cambridge University Press 2005

James C. Scott. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press 1985

Theda Skocpol. *States and Social Revolution: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*. Cambridge University Press 1979

Sidney Tarrow. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (2nd edition). Cambridge University Press 1998

Charles Tilly. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, Ad 990-1992*. Blackwell 1990

Schedule of Meetings:

Week One (January 25): Introduction

Week Two (February 1): Power and Realism

John Mearsheimer. *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Norton 2001

Week Three (February 8): War and State-Making I

Charles Tilly. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, Ad 990-1992*. Blackwell 1990

Week Four (February 15): War and State-Making II

Miguel Angel Centeno. *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America*. Penn State University Press 2002

Week Five (February 22): Social Structures and Political Pathways

Barrington Moore. *Social Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Beacon Press; Reprint edition 1993

Week Six (March 1): Social Revolution

Theda Skocpol. *States and Social Revolution: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*. Cambridge University Press 1979

Week Seven (March 8): Contentious Politics and Social Movements

One-Page Paper Proposal Due

Sidney Tarrow. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (2nd edition). Cambridge University Press 1998

Week Eight (March 15) – Spring Break

Week Nine (March 22) – Rational Choice and Collective Action

Dennis Chong. *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement*. University of Chicago Press 1991

Week Ten (March 29) - Cooperation without Leviathan

Elinor Ostrom. *Governing the Commons: the Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge University Press 1990

Week Eleven (April 5): Institutions, Conflict and Cooperation

Ellen Lust-Okar. *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions*. Cambridge University Press 2007

Week Twelve (April 12): Institutions and Identity Formation

Daniel N. Posner. *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*. Cambridge University Press 2005

Week Thirteen (April 19): Power and Resistance

James C. Scott. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press 1985

Week Fourteen (April 26): Post-Colonial Studies

Mahmood Mamdani. *Citizen and Subject*. Princeton University 1996

Week Fifteen (May 3): Integration