IDEV*6800: THEORIES AND DEBATES IN DEVELOPMENT

Course Outline
International Development Studies
University of Guelph

Fall 2021
Ryan Briggs

Classes: Thursday, 11:30–2:20 in MacKinnon 800C
Email: rbriggs@uoguelph.ca
Office hours: Thursday, 2:30 to 4 in MacKinnon 904, or by appointment on Zoom.

“Being cultivated is a matter of not having read any book in particular, but of being able to find your bearings within books as a system, which requires you to know that they form a system and to be able to locate each element in relation to the others.”
—Pierre Bayard, How to Talk about Books You Haven’t Read (Bloomsbury, 2007).

Course Objectives
IDEV*6800 offers a doctoral seminar in development theory. Its central aim is to develop theoretical insights about the contributions of social, political, and economic theory to the study of international development through individual reading and class discussion. The goal is to train researchers rather than to try to answer specific international development-related questions. Students are expected to play a leading role in the seminar. The required readings will serve as a central focus for discussion and debate.

Course Description
This course was developed by Ryan Briggs, based in part on past versions of the course offered by Craig Johnson and Adam Sneyd. After briefly surveying the philosophical foundations of international development, the course begins with five classes on macro-structural theories. In this section we cover major social theorists, dependency theory, the state, and we lightly touch on growth theory. The next section focuses on micro or agentic theory. We cover political economy and the micro-foundations of institutions. We then move closer to the present and cover situated knowledge, post-development, and the recent empirical turn in development research. While the content of the course familiarizes you with some main themes in international development, the ultimate goal is to prepare you to create knowledge in this area.

You will note that the course eschews “topics” like climate change, gender, or conflict. This is intentional and I did this because: 1. I really dislike how such major issues get siloed off into
their own little spaces, and 2. The point of the course is to cover theories and introduce you to different ways of creating knowledge in international development. Thus, I have tried to weave theoretically-relevant material on gender, scarcity, or conflict into the syllabus where appropriate. Consider this an instance of gender (and environmental, and conflict, etc) mainstreaming.

Readings
You don’t have to buy any books for this course. All readings will be posted electronically in the Ares course reserve system or will be posted directly to Courselink.

Assessments
1. **Class participation.** It is expected that each student will arrive at the weekly seminar having read all of the week’s readings. There is no grade for participation, but it is expected that students will engage with the readings and with each other during the weekly seminar. Students should be prepared to introduce the weekly readings, highlighting questions and critical comments for class discussion. It is therefore essential that you attend all of the seminars. Students who are unable to attend the seminar must inform the instructor, providing a complete summary of the week’s readings, in advance of the class they are going to miss.

2. **Book reviews.** Students will submit one analytical paper (7-8 pages in length) that reviews one book. A central aim here is to identify the book’s core objectives, evidence and contributions, making theoretical, methodological and empirical connections to other perspectives being considered in the course. The value of this assignment is 30 per cent and the papers are due by 15 October at the latest.

3. **Term papers.** Students will hand in an opinionated, focused literature review where they review research from their discipline using some of the lenses or perspectives covered in class. For example, if you are a geographer interested in conflict related to water scarcity, then you could critically review recent and foundational research on this topic from your discipline and (as appropriate) frame it as agentic research. Alternatively, maybe you think the literature on institutions and path dependence offers a better frame. The papers will be evaluated on the basis of their ability to accurately represent the research material and to subject it to critical scrutiny. I want you to show me in the writing that you have learned enough about these general perspectives that you can: 1. notice specific instances of these general perspectives, 2. critically evaluate discipline-specific work using the tools from the course. I am very happy to discuss your ideas for this paper and to read outlines in advance. **This assignment is worth 70 percent of your grade and is due both via dropbox on courselink and via email to the group no later than 21 November.**
Weekly Schedule

Sept 9. Historical and philosophical foundations: How good is our present place and time? How should one even go about answer a question like that? What is development? Can or should we disentangle political and economic development? Why do we—people in wealthy countries—study development? Should “we” study development?


Development & macro structures

Sept 16. Social Theory 1: Here we can see early social theory being worked out. Be mindful that the first two readings are early and seminal (seminal in that they help to produce so much further work). This class has more of a focus on power and the state. While reading, think about the following questions: What is the glue that holds society together? What are the conditions that make social order possible? How does structural economic change relate to social order? How does politics respond to changing economic orders.


Sept 23. Social Theory 2: This class has more of a focus on identity. What is the glue that holds society together? What are the conditions that make social order possible? What are the sources of solidarity? How does structural economic change relate to social order?


**Sept 30. Dependency and world systems:** How does Frank’s or Rodney’s theory build on earlier social theory? What is the ontology and epistemology of the theories?

**Oct 7. The State:** Ontologically, what are states in these approaches (aggregators of preferences, actors that do things, sites of contestation, something else)? What do we gain or lose when we understand states in these different ways?

**Oct 14. Growth theory, geographic determinants of long-run growth, multiple equilibria:** Why do economies get “stuck”? Note the ontology of the explanations. What are the main parts of the explanation and how do they interact? What do such explanations leave out and why?
Development & micro-agents

Oct 21. Agentic political economy: Apply the methodological discussion in Levi to the work of Popkin and Bates. How do these explanations differ from those of the prior section?


Oct 28. Institutions, comparative development, and path dependence: How do agentic theories explain macro phenomena? What is doing the work in these explanations, the agents or the structures? Consider the epistemology of the three readings. Does any specific kinds of “confrontation with data” appeal more to you? Why?


Contemporary Approaches, epistemology

Nov 4. Situated Knowledge: What is the goal of this research? What is the ontology and epistemology? (How) can we situate knowledge without essentializing identities? (How) can we aggregate knowledge across positions?

Nov 11. **Post-modern approaches:** What is the goal of this research? What is the ontology and epistemology? Where is power located in these approaches (and how does that differ from the research we read in other weeks)?


Nov 18. **The empirical (technocratic?) turn:** What is the goal of this research? What is the ontology and epistemology? Consider the ethical issues in (not) running policy experiments.


Nov 25. **Final Class: Term paper presentations**

- Students must ensure that their term papers are distributed in advance of the seminar.

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**Policy Statements**

**Accommodating tiny children**
Tiny children are great. If you are breastfeeding or simply can’t find childcare, feel free to bring your baby to class. We’ll make it work.

**Trying our best during a global pandemic**
You are trying to learn—and I am trying to teach—during a global pandemic. If we’re lucky, all that will mean for us is that the semester will be more stressful than usual. I’m usually pretty strict with basically everything related to my courses, and I usually hold myself to the same high standard that I hold my students. For example, I expect things turned in on time and in return I grade material and get it back to students quickly. But seriously, there is a global pandemic going on. So let’s just agree...
that we will all try our best. I will cut you some slack, and I expect you to cut me some slack, provided that we communicate with each other about our needs and constraints.

**COVID-19 Disclaimer**
Please note that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may necessitate a revision of the format of course offerings and academic schedules. Any such changes will be announced via CourseLink and/or class email. All University-wide decisions will be posted on the [COVID-19 website](#) and circulated by email.

**Late penalties**
Late submissions will receive a penalty of five (5) per cent per day (weekends and holidays included). To avoid this, come talk to me well in advance or missing a deadline so that we can adjust your deadlines.

**Student Rights and Responsibilities**
Each student at the University of Guelph has rights which carry commensurate responsibilities that involve, broadly, being a civil and respectful member of the University community. The Rights and Responsibilities are detailed in the Graduate Calendar: [https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/](https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/)

**Academic Misconduct**
The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection. Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor. The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Graduate Calendar: [https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/](https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/)

**Recording of Materials**
Presentations that are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded in any electronic media without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate, or guest lecturer.