

# PO381-30 Critical Security Studies

**22/23**

**Department**

Politics & International Studies

**Level**

Undergraduate Level 3

**Module leader**

Christopher Browning

**Credit value**

30

**Module duration**

22 weeks

**Assessment**

50% coursework, 50% exam

**Study location**

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

---

## Description

### Introductory description

Shock, fear, trauma; feelings of being unsafe, unwanted and misplaced; expressions of anger, dismay, and despair; perceptions of assaults on senses of self, identity, and community. In light of phenomena ranging from economic uncertainty to migration crises to terrorist attacks to Brexit to post-truth politics, these descriptors are characteristic of the Zeitgeist in political and public discourse in much of the Western world. They are also at the heart of the Critical Security Studies (CSS) field, which shifts our focus away from statism and traditional security issues. While conventional approaches to the study of security might ask “What are the national security prerogatives of a country, and how do they translate into conduct in the international arena?”, in CSS we pull back the curtain on what security does. As we shall see, life, death, statehood, community, class, race, gender, and individual perspectives are deeply intertwined in any attempt to define of ‘security’.

Zooming in on “What is security?” and equally importantly, “What is critique?”, the module engages with a broad range of ‘critical’ theoretical lenses, methods and techniques of critical analysis. We will discuss how security practices work, what they do, how they shape - and how they are shaped by - discourses, power relations, and different forms of knowledge. To be ‘critical’, first and foremost, means to be open to challenges that disrupt the familiar, and to be willing to explore and experience new perspectives, new ‘truths’, which, while always eye-opening, may not always be comforting and comfortable.

## Module aims

- Provide an advanced level discussion of key contemporary theoretical debates about the meaning of security in international relations.
- Allow students to identify and explore 'new' issues on the global security agenda through a 'critical' lens.
- Encourage critical thinking about the meaning and practice of security.
- Develop student abilities to present a well-made, coherent and logically consistent argument supported by a coherent theoretical framework.
- Enhance student research skills through the collection and analysis of information from a wide range of sources.

## Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1: Introduction: The Evolution of (Critical) Security Studies

Week 2: Critical Theory and Security

Week 3: Security and Emancipation

Week 4: Engendering Conflict

Week 5: (Just) Securitization and Desecuritization

Week 6: Reading Week

Week 7: Speaking Security

Week 8: Terrorism, Security, Liberty

Week 9: Security and Exceptionalism

Week 10: Identity and Borders

Week 11: Biopolitics

Week 12: (Re)Creating International Hierarchy

Week 13: Spaces of (In)Security

Week 14: Algorithms and Artificial Intelligence

Week 15: Popular Culture and the Everyday of Security

Week 16: Reading Week

Week 17: Militarism, Memorialisation, and Remembrance

Week 18: Ontological (In)Security

Week 19: Security and Ethics

Week 20: Revision Lecture

Term 3 Revision Materials

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate an advanced knowledge of the theoretical and conceptual debates associated with 'critical security studies' and their relation to 'traditional' security studies
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of different critical approaches to the study of security

- Locate the critical study of security within broader debates in International Security and International Relations
- Demonstrate familiarity with the range of contemporary issues that could be conceptualised as security threats
- Demonstrate familiarity with contemporary dynamics and politization of security

## Indicative reading list

TBC

[View reading list on Talis Aspire](#)

## Subject specific skills

At the end of the module students should be able to demonstrate knowledge of key issues and conceptual provocations in critical security studies. You should have acquired a hands-on, critical toolkit to analyse and reflect on contemporary security practices and our own involvement in them, such as counter-terrorism, human security, border security, the securitization of migration, or the gendered dynamics of violence and conflict. And you should have gained the ability to reflect on the possibility of change, on how we might think about security differently to transform the status quo of actual security practices and the practice of theorizing.

## Transferable skills

Students should also be able to have acquired transferable skills, in particular the ability to: (a) apply CSS methods and techniques to consolidate, extend, and apply your knowledge and understanding of international security; (b) apply detailed critical analysis and interpretation of a variety of primary and secondary sources to initiate and carry out research projects; (c) process complex material and ideas within the broad field of critical security studies, consider unfamiliar ideas, and challenge your existing ways of thinking; (d) synthesize ideas drawn from different branches of the International Security disciplinary field to understand the emergence, dynamics, and implications of security policy agendas; and (e) communicate clearly key information, ideas, and problems in group discussion, as well as in oral and written presentations.

## Study

### Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	18 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Seminars	18 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Private study	264 hours (88%)
Total	300 hours

## Private study description

TBC

## Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

---

## Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

### Assessment group C1

	Weighting	Study time
3,000 word essay	50%	
Online Examination	50%	
1.5 hour examination		

---

- Online examination: No Answerbook required

## Feedback on assessment

Exams and essays are marked according to criteria set out in the Undergraduate Handbook.

[Past exam papers for PO381](#)

---

## Availability

### Courses

This module is Core optional for:

- UECA-4 Undergraduate Economics 4 Year Variants
  - Year 4 of LM1H Economics, Politics & International Studies with Study Abroad
  - Year 4 of LM1H Economics, Politics & International Studies with Study Abroad
- UECA-LM1D Undergraduate Economics, Politics and International Studies
  - Year 3 of LM1D Economics, Politics and International Studies

- Year 3 of LM1D Economics, Politics and International Studies

This module is Optional for:

- UECA-3 Undergraduate Economics 3 Year Variants
  - Year 3 of L100 Economics
  - Year 3 of L100 Economics
  - Year 3 of L100 Economics
  - Year 3 of L116 Economics and Industrial Organization
  - Year 3 of L116 Economics and Industrial Organization
- UECA-4 Undergraduate Economics 4 Year Variants
  - Year 4 of L103 Economics with Study Abroad
  - Year 4 of LM1H Economics, Politics & International Studies with Study Abroad
  - Year 4 of LM1H Economics, Politics & International Studies with Study Abroad
- UECA-LM1D Undergraduate Economics, Politics and International Studies
  - Year 3 of LM1D Economics, Politics and International Studies
  - Year 3 of LM1D Economics, Politics and International Studies
- UHIA-VM14 Undergraduate History and Politics (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
  - Year 3 of VM14 History and Politics (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
  - Year 4 of VM14 History and Politics (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VM13 Undergraduate History and Politics (with a term in Venice)
- Year 4 of UPHA-V7MM Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics (with Intercalated year)
- Year 3 of UPOA-M100 Undergraduate Politics
- Year 4 of UPOA-M101 Undergraduate Politics (with Intercalated Year)
- Year 4 of UPOA-M168 Undergraduate Politics and International Studies with Chinese
- Year 3 of UPOA-M169 Undergraduate Politics and International Studies with Chinese (3 year)
- Year 4 of UPOA-M165 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and Italian
- Year 3 of UPOA-M162 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and Quantitative Methods
- Year 4 of UPOA-M167 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and Quantitative Methods (with Intercalated Year)

This module is Option list A for:

- UPOA-M16A Undergraduate Politics and International Studies
  - Year 3 of M16A Politics and International Studies
  - Year 3 of M16A Politics and International Studies
  - Year 3 of M16A Politics and International Studies
- Year 4 of UPOA-M16B Undergraduate Politics and International Studies (with Intercalated Year)
- Year 3 of UPOA-ML13 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology
- Year 4 of UPOA-ML14 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology (with Intercalated year)
- Year 4 of UPOA-M163 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and French
- Year 4 of UPOA-M164 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and German
- Year 3 of UPOA-M16D Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and German (3 year)

degree)

- Year 4 of UPOA-M166 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and Hispanic Studies
- Year 3 of UPOA-M16H Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and Hispanic Studies (3 year degree)

This module is Option list C for:

- UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
  - Year 3 of VM11 History and Politics
  - Year 3 of VM11 History and Politics
  - Year 3 of VM11 History and Politics
- Year 4 of UHIA-VM12 Undergraduate History and Politics (with Year Abroad)

This module is Option list D for:

- UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
  - Year 3 of VM11 History and Politics
  - Year 3 of VM11 History and Politics
  - Year 3 of VM11 History and Politics
- Year 4 of UHIA-VM12 Undergraduate History and Politics (with Year Abroad)