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**2011 Working Group:  
International Political Sociology**

**"Interrogating the Use of Norms in International Relations"**

**DESCRIPTION**

This working group aims to bring scholars together to critically re-examine a key concept underpinning the theory and practice of global governance -- norms. The emergence of 'norms' was co-extensive with the rise of constructivism in the wake of the reflectivist turn and an increasing attention to the role of ideational factors in enabling and sustaining the operation of global governance. For over two decades now the concept has since gained significant traction, yielding an array of associated concepts, such as 'socialisation', 'internalisation', 'normalisation', 'diffusion', and their array of 'norm entrepreneurs'. Less clear, however, is whether the concept has attracted sufficient critical scrutiny to move it beyond an underlying assumptions that – coarsely put – norms are 'good things'; they are what bring states together to cooperate with another beyond their narrowly conceived national interests, or, better still, they spread cooperative, liberal values throughout the international system, thereby socializing its actors into 'better' behavior.

The purpose of this working group is to open up a space for taking stock of these conceptual developments from a variety of critical perspectives. Focusing on norms has gone some way towards moving beyond the universalist epistemology undergirding rationalist approaches. However, the assumption of rational action in rationalist and some constructivist approaches has largely ruled out the possibility of variations in understandings of political agency or subjectivity around the globe. Moreover the norms dynamics and model of diffusion that fore-grounded in the existing IR literature have tended to be inherently universalising. As such, whether this norms-focus has made room for local differences or situated perspectives remains to interrogation. One key question the workshop asks is to what extent does historical and geographical location bear upon the ways in which we consider the dynamics and contents of norm in the international system, and thus in the possibility of IR developing as a truly global discipline. Put differently, do norms look the same seen from all parts of the globe?

**GROUP COORDINATORS**

**Charlotte Epstein, University of Sydney**

Charlotte Epstein is French, born in Kenya, and centrally interested in the role of language in international politics. On that topic she has authored *The Power of Words in International Relations* (MIT Press, runner up to the 2009 ISA Sprout Award) and several articles (notably in *European Journal of International Relations* and *International Political Sociology*). She read International Relations at the University of Cambridge (PhD, Mphil) after reading Philosophy and Languages at l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne (Maîtrise and two BAs). Before coming to the University of Sydney she was a Georges Lurcy Visiting Scholar at the UC Berkeley Political Science Department. She is currently visiting professor at the Centre d'Etudes et de Relations Internationales (Paris) and serves as chair of the International Political Sociology section.

**Xavier Guillaume, University of Geneva**

Xavier Guillaume is Lecturer at the University of Geneva. His research interests include the social and political theory of the identity/alterity and security/citizenship nexus in IR theory, myths and politics of representations, critical approaches to security and the question of multiculturalism in Japan and Europe. He is the author of *International Relations and Identity: A Dialogical Approach* (Routledge 2010) and has published in journals such as *FQS*, *International Political Sociology*, *Millennium* or *Japanstudien*. He currently serves as vice/program chair of the International Political Sociology section.

**SCHEDULE**

**Tuesday, March 15, 2011**

**Pre-Conference Workshop | 9:00am - 6:00pm**

**9:00 - 9:30am** Welcome and Introductions: Charlotte Epstein

**9:30 - 10:30am** Roundtable 1: "Taking Stock of Norms Research"

Participants in this panel will open the discussion by taking stock of Constructivism's empirical agenda two decades on.

**10:30 - 11:00am** Coffee and Tea Break

**11:00am - 12:30pm** Roundtable 2: "Theoretical Underpinnings"

Participants in this panel seek to return to the concept's theoretical roots and examine these developments against the concept's original understanding in social theory, law, moral philosophy, sociology and any other discipline that has informed IR's wielding of the term.

**12:30 - 1:30pm** Lunch

**1:30 - 3:00pm** Roundtable 3: "Cognate Concepts and Epistemological Alternatives"

Participants in this panel will engage with some of the cognate concepts that norms research has yielded, such as 'diffusion' 'socialization', 'internationalisation' and 'normalization', and explore alternative ways of capturing normative phenomena.

**3:00 - 3:30pm** Coffee and Tea Break

**3:30 - 5:00pm** Roundtable 4: "Empirical Engagements "

The histories of post-colonial states provide extremely rich empirical material for exploring the dynamics of encounters between global and local norms, insofar as the history of colonization is one where a once localized set of norms was spread and imposed from the metropolitan centres to the colonial peripheries. Placing this material on the table serves to return the gaze upon norms, restoring the perspective of the socializee. The presenters in this panel will engage in grounded, bottom-up critiques that serve to draw out persistent blind spots in the examination of norms in IR.

**5:00 - 6:00pm** Roundtable 5: "Summary and Plan of Action for the ISA"

In an open discussion participants, returning to the working group's two focal points, norms and situated perspectives, will seek to assess what we have learned about them so far, about how (or whether) they can work together. From there, we will collectively identify the key themes to look out for during the ISA conference itself and, that way, collectively set the agenda for the subsequent two meetings.

**Thursday, March 17, 2011**

**1:45 - 3:30pm** Follow-up Meeting: Vice Presidential Suite, Guestroom Parlor 3614, Sheraton

**Saturday, March 19, 2011**

**8:15 - 10:00am** Wrap Up Session: Vice Presidential Suite, Guestroom Parlor 3614, Sheraton