

IMESS DISSERTATION



Note: Please email the completed mark sheet to Year 2 coordinator (cc Chiara Amini chiara.amini@ucl.ac.uk and Lisa Cagnacci l.cagnacci@ucl.ac.uk)

Please note that IMESS students are not required to use a particular set of methods (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, or comparative) in their dissertation.

Student:	Sophia Rigby
Dissertation title:	How a Realist-Constructivist Theory Can Contribute to Understanding the 2014 Ukraine Crisis

	Excellent	Satisfactory	Poor
Knowledge <i>Knowledge of problems involved, e.g. historical and social context, specialist literature on the topic. Evidence of capacity to gather information through a wide and appropriate range of reading, and to digest and process knowledge.</i>	X		
Analysis & Interpretation <i>Demonstrates a clear grasp of concepts. Application of appropriate methodology and understanding; willingness to apply an independent approach or interpretation recognition of alternative interpretations; Use of precise terminology and avoidance of ambiguity; avoidance of excessive generalisations or gross oversimplifications.</i>			X
Structure & Argument <i>Demonstrates ability to structure work with clarity, relevance and coherence. Ability to argue a case; clear evidence of analysis and logical thought; recognition of an arguments limitation or alternative views; Ability to use other evidence to support arguments and structure appropriately.</i>		X	
Presentation & Documentation <i>Accurate and consistently presented footnotes and bibliographic references; accuracy of grammar and spelling; correct and clear presentation of charts/graphs/tables or other data. Appropriate and correct referencing throughout. Correct and contextually correct handling of quotations.</i>	X		

ECTS Mark:	D	UCL Mark:		Marker:	Jan Šír
<i>Deducted for late submission:</i>			Signed:		
<i>Deducted for inadequate referencing:</i>			Date:	June 12, 2018	

MARKING GUIDELINES

A (UCL mark 70+): Note: marks of over 80 are given rarely and only for truly exceptional pieces of work. Distinctively sophisticated and focused analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.

B/C (UCL mark 60-69):

A high level of analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Good understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research. 65 or over equates to a B grade.

D/E (UCL mark 50-59):

Demonstration of a critical use of sources and ability to engage in systematic inquiry. An ability to engage in sustained research work, demonstrating methodological awareness. 55 or over equates to a D grade.

F (UCL mark less than 50):

Demonstrates failure to use sources and an inadequate ability to engage in systematic inquiry. Inadequate evidence of ability to engage in sustained research work and poor understanding of appropriate research techniques.

CONTINUES OVERLEAF

Comments, explaining strengths and weaknesses (at least 300 words):

The thesis is an interpretative study of Russia's behavior leading to and during what has become known as "the Ukraine crisis." It seeks to "review the common arguments given by scholars for the 2014 annexation of Crimea and why Russia acted in such an aggressive and illegal way towards a fellow sovereign state" (p. 8) using realist-constructivist lenses.

The thesis draws on a solid bulk of English language sources consisting of literature dealing with Russia, Ukraine and the recent war events as well as general theoretical writings from IR-theories. This literature seems sufficient and adequate for such conceived thesis.

As for presentation and style, the thesis is written in a very good English and in a very clear manner. No comprehensibility (language) issues have arisen at all.

Given the numerous controversies around possible explanations and interpretations of Russia's foreign policy conduct under Putin, a problem that has in the past few years led to a number of serious international crises, also the thesis' topic is of utmost relevance and importance for the study of contemporary Russia and Ukraine, European security and international relations in the broadest sense. These all are obvious strengths of the thesis.

At the same time, however, the thesis has also its weaknesses, most of which pertain to the obscure overall research design and a rather loose analytical framework.

The thesis is organized into Introduction, Literature Review, Theory, Analysis, and Conclusion.

I do appreciate the theoretical part. In this part the student has succeeded in summarizing some key tenets of Realism, Constructivism, and a novel realist-constructivist paradigm that attempts to integrate somehow the above two approaches. The student assumes that the former two approaches are complementary and their combination could have a stronger explanatory power. That is why she has proposed using realist-constructivist lenses.

On the negative side, I do not always see the logic behind the student's procedure.

The literature review does not seem to follow a clear line or purpose. It's neither a discussion of key terms and concepts nor a structured overview of the main themes, topics or aspects of a studied problem nor a review of how a particular question is reflected in the academic scholarship. Rather, it largely resembles excerpted notes from own readings. As such it barely suffices for highlighting the current state of art.

The core, Analysis, then, provides less of an analysis. Rather, it is a loose discussion of ten often cited explanations or interpretations of Russia's behavior as identified by the student. Moreover, while the student has stressed repeatedly that these "arguments" are in no way meant to justify Russia's actions, some of them obviously could well serve as part of the belligerent's war narrative. It's not entirely clear how the student has come to these ten arguments. It's not entirely clear how they relate to any of the theoretical schools (realism, constructivism, realist-constructivist approach). At least I do not see an explicit link between the theories and these discussed arguments. Nor is it entirely clear what she wanted to demonstrate by presenting and discussing at large these narratives and consequently what would be her findings. Are these arguments plausible and valid? Has she tested them and proven they are correct (or false)? Is the proposed theoretical instrumentarium useful in assessing any of these arguments?

As a supervisor I do not feel comfortable to criticize these things because this is precisely where supervision is needed and what supervision is for. Sophia communicated with me in the process of writing and regularly sought advice and the communication was smooth. I am sorry I haven't been able to communicate these things to her clearly in the process of writing to make the thesis more organized in this respect.

Specific questions you would like addressing at the oral defence (at least 2 questions):

Please explain once again your research intent.

Please answer the question that your thesis seeks to answer, namely, how a realist-constructivist theory can contribute to understanding the 2014 Ukraine crisis.