

POLS 1500 Introduction to Politics

Syllabus

Welcome to POLS 1500 Introduction to Politics. Whether we recognize it or not, politics affects almost every aspect of our lives, from the laws we obey on a daily basis, to our social and economic status in society, and the place of our nation in the world. Canadians tend to be cynical about politics, largely due to the image we have of the political process and politicians which we see on television and in the news. The most damaging outcome from all of this is apathy, where citizens simply decide to not be involved at all, particularly when it comes to voting. This is a growing problem in Canada, but also in other countries, as well.

But politics is optimistic, positive and progressive. It seeks to improve our lives and make us better citizens. As a society, we may often fail to achieve these goals, but that does not diminish what politics sets out to do.

In all aspects of this course, we will critically examine the ability of politics to meet its objectives. This is not a course in civics, or philosophy, or current events. It includes all of these aspects, of course, and many others. But political studies is a broad-based study of many different elements of our day-to-day lives, and the way in which they all are “political.”

Course Description

The *Undergraduate Calendar* of the University of Manitoba describes Political Studies POLS 1500 as a

A survey and appraisal of contemporary ideology, government, and international problems. Students may not hold credit for both POLS 1500 (019.150) and any of: POLS 1503 or POLS 1505 or the former POLS 1501 (019.150).

This course is intended to introduce students to the nature and study of political studies, including the principal concepts, ideas, issues and frameworks used to understand contemporary politics. As such, it offers an introduction to all major areas of political studies offered in our department: Political Theory, Canadian Politics, Public Administration, Comparative Politics, and International Politics. POLS 1500 is a foundation course for anyone seeking a major or minor in political studies, as well as those interested in pursuing an honours programme, or graduate work. Because it is a comprehensive course, it is also a good choice for those who plan to take only one or two courses in political studies.

Course Objectives

Political Studies is an expansive discipline encompassing many different subjects and techniques. It's closely related to other fields of the social sciences, like sociology, economics, and anthropology. Some humanities disciplines, such as history and philosophy, also are connected to political studies. As we move through the course, we'll come to see these connections.

The general objective of this course is to provide a broad overview of the core subjects studied by political scientists. Through the study of politics, you will become acquainted with the persuasiveness of politics in everyday life. The goals of this course are:

to introduce you to the study of politics in all of its dimensions;

to provide the basis for subsequent courses in political studies;

to stimulate interest in various contemporary political systems and their particular institutions and political processes;

to explain and clarify the fundamental concepts, theories, and analytical frameworks used by political scientists; and

to develop and foster your analytical and writing skills.

Course Materials

Online Material

The online course material is intended to provide the support and information that you would have received directly from the instructor if you were to take this course face to face. However, it is not intended to be a substitute for the assigned readings, or the textbooks themselves. The online material aims to introduce the subject material and to provide the groundwork for the readings provided in the textbooks.

If you encounter problems or are unable to find answers to questions that you have about the course or the material, do not hesitate to bring these concerns to our attention, either by contacting the instructor (if it is a question that relates to course material or assignments) or Distance and Online Education Program at The University of Manitoba (if it is a procedural or technical problem).

Required

Bookstore

The following required materials are available for purchase from the University of Manitoba Bookstore. Please order your materials immediately, if you have not already done so. See your *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook* for instructions on how to order your materials

- Textbook

Anderson, Christopher G. and Rank Dyck, eds. *Studying Politics: An Introduction to Political Science*. 5th Ed. Toronto: Thomson Nelson, 2016.

- Textbook companion website

This book includes a detailed companion website available via NELSONbrain.com. There are many resources you might find quite helpful for each chapter, including video links, sample test questions, and a glossary of terms.

Supplementary Reading

A short list of relevant books and articles is provided at the end of each unit. Each of the texts also has a bibliography at the end of each chapter.

While these supplemental books and journal articles are meant as suggested further reading and do not take the place of your required texts, you are strongly advised to use these readings and books ordered from the library for your essay assignments since your papers require additional materials as part of your research. If you have any questions about any of these sources, contact your instructor immediately.

Optional

Bookstore

The following optional materials are available for purchase from the University of Manitoba Bookstore. Please order your materials immediately, if you have not already done so. See your *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook* for instructions on how to order your materials.

Buckley, Joanne. *Fit To Print: The Canadian Student's Guide to Essay Writing*. 8th ed. Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 2013.

Course Overview

Politics is an inevitable product of human sociability. Wherever humans interact in a social environment, debate and conflict over power and authority are unavoidable. Just as this conflict is inescapable, so is the process of deliberation and the attempt to resolve differences. However, harmony in politics is an elusive goal, for politics involves controversy, cooperation, dialogue, and sharp debate over both mundane and perilous questions.

As a means of accounting for “who gets what” in everyday life, politics indeed affects all aspects of our relations with others—whether the “other” is another person or a state. Aristotle, one of the earliest political philosophers (384-322 B.C.), argued that humans are, by nature, political animals. Aristotle’s observation shows how politics is a pervasive component of our day-to-day lives. Studying politics, then, allows us to better understand the manner in which decisions are made that affect our lives, and how we may influence those decisions. The more we understand, the greater our interest will be in the active political life of our country and the world arena.

This course will introduce you to the realm of politics and political discourse. The knowledge you will gain through the study of politics will make you aware of the fact that the vitality of democracy depends on a knowledgeable and active citizenry.

At the end of this course you will be familiar with some of the fundamental concepts and ideologies used by both political analysts and politicians. You will come to see how certain ideals and values are given importance and others downplayed, depending on the ideology that supports a particular political regime. And, you will better understand the various constraints on the use and abuse of political power that occur in every political system.

This course consists of five units. Unit 1 deals with the nature of politics and government, and introduces basic concepts and approaches applied in the discipline. There are two main issues in this unit: first, an overview of the goals and streams of inquiry in political studies itself; second, an account of some of the main concepts used in the course.

Unit 2 introduces the discipline of political theory, including an overview of some of the most significant political philosophers and the importance of contemporary political ideologies. Many of the ideas that are part of contemporary ideologies are rooted in ancient philosophy and theory, and our own political institutions and practices have their foundation or inspiration in the writings of great political thinkers of the past. We will come to understand the continuing importance of these traditional approaches for contemporary political thought and inquiry.

Unit 3 consists of a comparative analysis of basic governmental institutions as a means of classifying significant and competing political systems. In order to provide a sense of how different forms of government present themselves, we will consider the “isms” (such as liberalism, Marxism, conservatism, authoritarianism) that are essential to the ideologies guiding contemporary governments. This unit will also explore, in a comparative manner, the parliamentary and presidential systems of government in

Canada and the United States to show how seemingly similar countries (in this case, both liberal democracies) actually can be quite distinct. This unit also details the roles and responsibilities of primary governmental institutions, such as the executive, legislative, judicial, and bureaucratic branches of authority.

Unit 4 focuses on the participation of individuals and groups in the political process. Why is it that certain groups in society, such as political parties, non-governmental organizations and interest groups, seem to have more influence in the creation of policy and the laws that govern our activities as citizens? To answer this question, this unit explores the complexities surrounding political participation and articulation, assessing the manner in which people's values, attitudes, and beliefs guide and shape political behaviour. Some of the most influential aspects affecting politics in society, including media, political parties, interest groups, and political culture are addressed in this unit. Whether at the ballot box, joining an interest group, or directly dealing with politicians, citizens have many outlets at their disposal to participate in the process of policy making.

Unit 5 provides an introduction into one of the most dynamic areas of political interaction—world politics. This unit will provide an overview of the main subfields of interest in international politics, including international economic relations, conflict and conflict resolution, globalization and international political economy, and the challenges facing less-developed nations of the Third World. As well, this section will provide a summary of significant events that shaped our current international environment after the Second World War. This historical context is particularly important as we plot some of the more crucial challenges facing our current international system. Some of these challenges include the threat of environmental degradation, new centres of trade activity and powerful trading nations, and the rise of globalization, which now frames international relations in the post-Cold War era.

Each of the five units is organized in the following manner:

Introductory comments.

Learning objectives: what you should understand upon completion of the unit.

Assigned reading: relevant text or chapters corresponding to that particular unit. In the first reading you should try to understand the main theme(s) that the author is trying to communicate, rather than all of the ideas presented at one time. This is also the time to request additional books or further readings.

“Study notes” section of the online course material: there is one section for each of the major topics identified in the course outline, containing an overview of the material for that topic, and a self-assessment question.

You will also notice the many hyperlinks in the text. The material contained in these links isn't required reading like the units in the online course material units or textbook chapters. Rather, these links provide some additional details that the texts don't cover. The hyperlinks have more up-to-date information, related stories and ideas, and some enjoyable material. Due to the nature of the World Wide Web, however, some of these links may not work. Though much care was taken to select sites that would provide useful information, neither the content specialist nor Distance and Online Education, take responsibility for the content in these sites.

Evaluation and Grading

General Guidelines

To meet the course requirements, you must complete the following:

Three out of five assignments, each of which is worth 20% of your final grade. Assignment one must be taken from the topic list in either unit 1 or unit 2. Complete this assignment as early as possible if you want to get feedback from the instructor before you work on the next two assignments. Assignment two may be chosen from the topic lists for units 3 or unit 4, and assignment 3 may be chosen from topic lists for unit 5. Your three assignments are worth 60% of your final grade.

There will be a scheduled three-hour exam that will cover the entire year's work. The final exam will be scheduled by the University as indicated in the *Distance Education Guide*. Your final exam is worth 40% of your final grade.

Self-assessment Questions

Self-assessment questions are questions of interpretation that require critical thought. They are intended to develop and sharpen your thinking about the course material, and to help prepare for the final examination. They should also be valuable for you as you consider your response to assignment topics. Reading the study notes and the required texts should provide you with the necessary information to answer the self-assessment questions. Try to answer the self-assessment questions (in one or two paragraphs) prior to reading the sample responses.

Assignments

You will find an assignment section at the end of each of the five units in the material. The essay assignments should be typewritten, double-spaced, and be approximately ten pages (around 2,500 words) in length.

Although you have some choice in the units for which you complete your essay assignments, your final exam will require an understanding of material in all five units. Therefore, good effort on the units will be rewarded on the final exam.

Distribution of Marks

Assignment	Value
1	20%
2	20%
3	20%
Final Exam	40%
Total	100%

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Grade Point Value and Range	
A+	90-100	Exceptional
A	80-89	Excellent
B+	75-79	Very Good
B	70-74	Good
C+	65-69	Satisfactory
C	60-64	Adequate
D	50-59	Pass
F	0-49	Failure

Note: All final grades are subject to departmental review.

A to A+: The work is excellent to exceptional. It missed or misinterpreted no major points and has made insightful comments on your topic. In addition, the comments go well beyond the course material in significant ways. All controversial claims in the answer receive support.

B to B+: The work is good to very good but needs improvement. It may have missed or slightly misrepresented some minor points on your topic. The comments display some misunderstanding of the main issues and tend not to go far beyond commentary on the seminar material. Some controversial claims are made in the assignment that do not receive proper support.

C to C+: While the work is adequate to satisfactory, it misses or misrepresents some (but by no means all) important points on your topic. The answer displays a basic but flawed appreciation of the main positions and lines of argument. The comments are also in need of some re-working and do not go beyond the course material. There is a need to focus more thoroughly on supporting controversial claims in the answer.

D: This work is of marginal quality. It misses the mark on the topic as often as it hits the mark; it requires significant re-thinking. Still, the answer appears to have grasped the central points. It needs to be better at supporting its claims.

F: The work displays a serious misunderstanding of crucial topics. It is not adequate and the student should contact the instructor about individual issues concerning performance on this answer.

Plagiarism, Cheating, and Examination Impersonation

You should acquaint yourself with the University's policy on plagiarism, cheating, and examination impersonation as detailed in the General Academic Regulations and Policy section of the University of Manitoba *Undergraduate Calendar*. Note: These policies are also located in your *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook* or you may refer to Student Affairs at <http://www.umanitoba.ca/student>.

Many students are unsure of what constitutes an "A" or a "B" or another grade. Making matters more confusing, in the Faculty of Arts there may appear to be various conditions that lead to one grade or another, depending on the course, or the instructor. You may have a different instructor in POLS 1500 Introduction to Politics than students in a previous year, or students taking the classroom version of the course at the University of Manitoba. It would be impossible to suggest that your papers will be graded exactly as they would with another instructor, but there are some standards that you can expect.

As the description of grades above shows, there are criteria for each grade. An exceptional paper, one that will receive the highest grade possible, would have to exceed all aspects of grading, including attention to research, literature review, bibliography and citation formatting, clarity of argument, persuasiveness of evidence and substantiation, and consistency of quality writing. An A+ paper is the closest thing to a flawless piece of work that you could submit, and the grade is given only rarely. As the

grade descriptions show, papers that receive a grade lower than A+ (A, B+, B, and so on) are not as strong. On the same criteria – research, argumentation, writing, documentation, etc.–these papers will receive different grades.

This is not to suggest that an A+ is impossible; rather, you should bear in mind that a Political Studies paper is not simply “right” or “wrong” and your grade is contextual. That is, each paper is graded based on its own merits, and your instructor will have to take into account far more than “right” or “wrong” in the assessment of your grade. Your instructor will not necessarily have to agree with your paper’s argument, so you should not be concerned about his or her personal view. If you have any questions about the grade you receive on any of your assignments in this course, you should contact your instructor, who will provide you with more details, and suggestions for improvement.

Assignment Due Dates

Assignment	Jan.-July	Sept.-April
1 - Chosen from assignment list for either unit 1 or unit 2	February 28	October 15
2 - Chosen from assignment list for either unit 3 or unit 4	April 15	January 15
3 - Chosen from assignment list for unit 5	June 3	March 15

Note: If the assignment due date falls during the Mid-term Break in February, it will be due on the Monday following the Mid-term Break. If you are unable to submit an assignment on time, contact your instructor well in advance of the due date, for we cannot guarantee that the instructor will accept late assignments.

Review the guidelines on assignment due dates in the *Student Handbook*.

Final Examination

The final exam will be written at the University of Manitoba (UM), Fort Garry campus or at an approved off-campus location. Students needing to write at an off-campus location must declare a location by the specified deadline date (see off-campus declaration and policy under Student Resources on course homepage). Students writing at the UM Fort Garry campus do not need to declare an exam location.

The Registrar’s Office is responsible for the final exam schedules which is available approximately one month after the start of the course.

The examination will consist of three sections:

Short-answer questions that require about one- or two-sentence answers. These questions are to test your knowledge of specific concepts from the units.

Short-answer questions that require about one- or two-paragraph answers. These questions are similar to the self-assessment questions provided at the end of each unit, but worded in such a way so as to allow you to expand on your response to the specific question posed.

Longer essay questions that require more consideration of the material. These questions are more detailed, and you will be asked to write several pages, double-spaced, for your answer. The additional detail in these questions should assist you in your answer.

You are provided with a choice of questions in both sections, allowing you to prepare answers on those topics with which you feel most comfortable. The primary goal of the examination is to demonstrate what you have learned from the course. The final exam is usually the hardest part of the course for distance education students, so it is in your interest to prepare well for it. Your preparation for the exam should include a review of the online course material and the required texts well before the final exam.

A sample final examination is found in the course website.

General Guidelines for Assignment and Exam Preparation

A Word of Caution about the Assignments and the Final Examination

Some students find that they do very well on the assignments, but they do not do nearly as well on the final examination. While your grades on the assignments will give you some idea of how well you are mastering the material, they may not indicate how well you will do on the examination, because the examination is written under very different circumstances. Because the assignments are open book, they do not require the amount of memorization that a closed-book examination requires nor are they limited to a specific time period. Some students have told us that, based on the high marks they received on the assignments, they were overconfident and underestimated the time and effort needed to prepare for the final examination.

Please keep all this in mind as you prepare for the examination. If your course has a sample exam or practice questions, use them to practice for the examination by setting a time limit and not having any books available. Pay careful attention to the description of the type of questions that will be on your final examination. Preparing for multiple choice questions involves a different type of studying than preparing for essay questions. Do not underestimate the stress involved in writing a time-limited examination.

Distance and Online Education (DE) Student Resources

In your course website there are links for the following:

Contact Distance and Online Education Staff

Distance and Online Student Handbook

Distance and Online Education Website

Acknowledgments

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Dr. George A. MacLean is Professor and Head of Political Studies at the University of Manitoba. He is also a Research Fellow with the Centre for Defence and Security Studies. He holds an honours BA from Dalhousie University, a Masters in Political Science/International Relations from McMaster University, and a PhD in Political Studies/International Politics from Queen's University.

He is the author or co-author of several books including *Politics: An Introduction* (2010), *Ideas, Interests, and Issues*, (2008, 2e and 2006, 1e), *Clinton's Foreign Policy in Russia* (2006), *Canada and the United States: A Relationship at a Crossroads?* (2005), *Introduction to Politics: Power, Participation, and the Distribution of Wealth* (2001), and *Between Actor and Presence: The Future for the Transatlantic Relationship* (2001). His articles have appeared in *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, *Foreign Policy Review*, *Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Canadienses*, *The Australian Journal of International Affairs*, *Policy Options*, *Journal of Conflict Studies*, *Canadian Foreign Policy*, and *Journal of World Affairs and New Technology*.

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