Course Information

Course Description

This course is designed to prepare PhD students, who have chosen Canadian politics as their major or minor field, to write the Major Field Examination (MFE; aka ‘comp’) in Canadian Politics. It is also available to other doctoral level candidates simply interested in Canadian politics as it provides an opportunity to review and reflect on key issues and themes in the literature of Canadian Political Science.

Context

There was a time when the study of Canadian politics was almost entirely about the study of existing political institutions. The texts and research articles of the past were almost exclusively about institutional arrangements. It was thought that all one needed to know in order to understand politics was a knowledge of political history and biography, the rules and practices by which institutions like parliament or political parties are constituted, and the background laws which frame the exercise of power. From this perspective, description was tantamount to explanation; in other words, to describe accurately the constitutive rules and conventions of political and legal institutions was deemed to be sufficient as an explanation of the political world. There was of course a strong normative dimension associated with this view: liberal democracy, and in particular, its parliamentary variant, was the political form ideally suited to a proper civic life, a life in which the public and private were assigned to different spheres of action. Such a normative outlook permitted competing interpretations of the precise institutional mix most conducive to the broad ideals of liberalism, and, at the margins, of the appropriate relationship between the public and private. Hence tory and liberal might offer rival political histories, policy prescriptions, different
views of institutions and even occasionally engage socialists in political debate, but always within the terms of a discourse defined largely by a commitment to liberal individualism and by the institutions of a parliamentary democracy.

The contemporary study of politics in Canada no longer proceeds with such narrow methodological or ideological constraints. This reflects both the variety of theoretical and methodological currents that came to contend in the study of political science in the latter half of twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first, and the emergence of a more critical or skeptical political culture in which the maxims of Anglo-American liberalism no longer routinely function as the basic elements of political common sense.

The pedagogic history of Canadian political science reveals much about these changes in theoretical orientations and ideological predispositions. For instance, early institutionalism was supplemented with an indigenous political economy approach associated with Innis and Easterbrook, and with sociological perspectives offered by scholars like Clark and Porter. The late 1950s and 1960s witnessed the incursion of behaviouralism into political science, the effort to make the study of politics scientific on the model of the natural sciences. The 1960s and 1970s also saw a revival of political economy, most notably, of the nationalist and Marxist schools. A counter-tendency to the society-centred theories represented by political sociology and political economy was also discernable by the 1970s and came to be known as neo-institutionalism. Sharing a conviction that “institutions matter,” neo-institutionalists are themselves a highly diverse lot. Together with public choice theorists, the contemporary iteration of post-war behaviourists, the assorted schools of neo-institutionalism have tended to dominate the academic literature in mainstream political science in recent years.

These different theoretical approaches not only operate to frame the way one apprehends the political world, but are themselves implicated in the very political developments they purport to explain. For example, the uneven economic development experienced in Canada has meant that criticisms of political orthodoxies historically have tended to be expressed in the form of regional protest, a fact that has been reflected in both Innsian and much of contemporary nationalist and Marxist political economy. More recently, the active engagement of Canadian political elites in the project of global free trade has been reflected in a pronounced shift amongst students of Canadian political economy to questions of international and comparative political economy.

Required Texts:
All readings can be found in the Department of Political Science, Grad Lounge, POLS 6110 drawer of the filing cabinet. They are available for you to copy for your own personal use. Alternatively, each of the journal articles and texts listed can be accessed through the York University library system or found via the internet.

Course Requirements (1st term only)
Participation: 20%
First Short Paper 15% 24 October
Second Short Paper 15% 28 November
Total: 50%

Course Assignments and Evaluation

Seminars
A seminar-style format, attendance and participation are a required expectation of successful performance in the course. To facilitate discussion, one student will be responsible for preparing a short, oral presentation of the readings each week to the class (10-12 minutes max) [this presentation and facilitation constitutes 10% of the 20% participation mark]. The presentations are not summaries of the readings but rather reflect on them, make connections where possible and raise analytic questions for discussion. For the seminar to be effective, all participants must have to read all of the week’s readings though they may focus on the readings for which they have prime responsibility [weekly active participation and contributions constitutes the other 10% of the participation grade].

Essays
Students must complete two survey essays each worth 15% of the final grade. Each essay will cover the readings for one of the term’s topics. Each essay should be 10-15 pages and critically review, compare and contrast the different readings for that topic. The essays should not go outside the set readings unless you can make a compelling case and they are not research essays. You are free to choose the two topics that interest you most. The best essays will follow a theme or idea or approach through the readings.

All papers must be handed in in class. Any papers handed in after class will be considered late. (Please see late penalty policy listed in class policies below).

Lecture Schedule
WK 1 5-Sept Course Introduction
WK 2 12-Sept Approaches to the Study of Canadian Politics
WK 3 19-Sept Political Culture
WK 4 26-Sept Political Economy
WK 5 3-Oct Law and Politics
WK 6 10-Oct Gender and Public Policy
WK 7 17-Oct Media and Culture
WK 8 24-Oct Nationalism
WK 9 31-Oct NO CLASS – Co Curricular Week
WK 10 7-Nov Regionalism
WK 11 14-Nov Immigration and Multiculturalism
WK 12 21-Nov Indigenous Politics
WK 13 28-Nov End of Term Wrap Up – Identifying key/common themes
Course Policies

Academic Integrity
The university takes very seriously infractions of academic integrity, including plagiarism, impersonation and cheating on exams. York’s policies on plagiarism can be found at: http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic_integrity. Students who are in doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism in a particular instance should consult with their TA or professor. For additional insight on the issue, see Margaret Proctor’s “How Not To Plagiarize,” available at http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/plagsep.html.

Late penalty
There is a 0 tolerance for late submissions. However, if work is submitted late, there will be a late penalty of 5% per day on all late papers (including weekends). All late papers must be dropped off in the drop box for the course located opposite the departmental office (South Ross, 6th floor). Papers will not be accepted via email or fax. Under no circumstances should papers ever be slid under office doors.

If a student falls ill, they MUST contact the instructor as soon as possible to avoid incurring late penalties. Papers simply submitted after the due date with a medical certificate attached are NOT acceptable. Consideration for late submission must be obtained from the course instructor.

Grading
Only the Graduate Program Director (GPD) is able to approve incompletes for coursework. Substantive documentation will be required for the approval of an incomplete and the circumstances must be demonstrably beyond the student’s control. Incompletes that do not receive approval will rover over into Fails, and students will have to petition to have these removed from their transcripts.

Special Needs
Students who encounter extenuating circumstances during the term that may interfere with their successful completion of exams or other course assignments should discuss the matter with their tutorial leader or course instructor as soon as possible. Students with physical, psychiatric or learning disabilities may request reasonable accommodations in teaching style or evaluation methods, as outlined in Appendix A the Senate Policy on Students with Special Needs. They should advise the director at the earliest opportunity, so that appropriate arrangements may be with the assistance of the Office for Persons with Disabilities, the Counseling Development Centre or the Learning Disabilities Program.
Lecture/Readings Schedule - FALL Term

WK 1  5-Sept  Course Introduction

WK 2  12-Sept  Studying Canadian Politics: Fields and Methods


Further Reading:
WK 3 19-Sept  Canadian Political Culture


Week 4: 26-Sept  Political Economy - Bruce Smardon


5) W. Clement

6) H. Innis

Week 5: 3-Oct  Law and Politics- Jacqueline Krikorian


**Week 6: 10-Oct**  Gender and Public Policy – Barb Cameron

TBA

**Week 7: 17-Oct**  Media and Culture – Scott Forsyth

TBA

Potential Reading List includes:

Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,”
Noam Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent,
Harold Innis, Empire and Communication,
Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man,
Michael Dorland, (ed.) The Cultural Industries in Canada,
Leslie Regan Shade, (ed.) Mediascapes: new patterns in Canadian Communication,
Chris Gittings, Canadian National Cinema,
Ted Magder, Canada’s Hollywood: The Canadian State and Feature Films,
James Doyle, Progressive Heritage: Evolution of a Politically Radical Literary Tradition in Canada,
Malek Khouri, Filming Politics: Communism and the portrayal of the working class at the NFB, 1939-1946,
D. Varga and M. Khouri, (eds.), Working on Screen: Representation of the Working Class in Canadian Cinema

**Week 8: 24-Oct Nationalism**


Simeon, Richard, Limits to Partnership: Canada-Quebec Relations in a Postsecession Era (Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute, 1998)


Week 9: 31-Oct NO CLASS: York Co-Curricular Week

Week 10: 7-Nov Regions and Regionalism

TBA

Week 10: 14-Nov Immigration and Multiculturalism


Week 11: 21-Nov Indigenous Politics

TBA
Summarizing and discussing the readings

What is the book or reading about? A deceptively simple question that probably has several answers. While there is an obvious answer there is a more complicated answer that needs to explicated by looking closely at what the author writes about and excludes and how they do it, what evidence they rely on and the underlying assumptions that accompany the doing.

What is the intellectual heritage of the reading? What body of work or ideas does it connect to or flow from? Who are the guiding sources? How do they direct the work? What ideas come from those sources? How are those ideas varied or built upon?

What authors is it in opposition to? Who is specifically mentioned as taking opposite positions to the work? What is lacking or misleading in the positions that other authors take on the same or a similar subject?

What is the theoretical approach?

What causes or explains the actions or inactions or choices of people? Are institutions of government or the structures and forms of accumulation or class or culture or religion or the prevailing narrative or a universal moral position, the sources of the causes of action?

Evidence
Not all research is equally obsessed with empirical verification. Research that is styled theory, still employs evidence though often of a rather casual, selective and non-systematic sort partly because the method is not explained according to accepted rules.
What evidence is provided to support the argument?
Where does the evidence come from?
How is the evidence selected?
Is the evidence really proof of the point?
Is there readily recallable counter-evidence?
What people or voices or authorities or actions are the sources of evidence?
What people or voices are excluded from the argument? What would they add if they were included? Why are certain voices excluded?