POLI 621 Interpreting the Canadian Political Process

Winter 2020

McGill University is on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee Nations and a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst various Indigenous nations.

Logistics

Professor: Christa Scholtz

Class Time: Mondays 8:35 am to 11:25 am.

Class Location: 422 Ferrier

Office: 424 Ferrier

Tel: (514) 398-6144

Email: christa.scholtz@mcgill.ca. Please note I often do not check email when I am out of the office. Please adjust your expectations accordingly.

Class communication: I will use the news feature on mycourses to make any announcements to the class. Please sign up for notifications on mycourses. If you do not do so, you will only receive the announcement when you log into mycourses, and not when I actually send it.

Seminar Rationale

This graduate seminar is designed to address core issues and debates in the study of Canadian politics. Given the 13 week timeframe, it is impossible to cover all of what I would like. I must, alas, make choices. The choices I have made, in terms of substantive content and assessment criteria, are driven by the following goals: 1) to structure student preparation for the PhD Canadian field exam; 2) to highlight areas of study in which Canada is a particularly interesting case, or where it has made a central contribution to a literature; 3) to address issues not covered in depth in other departmental course offerings in Canadian politics. Criteria 3 limits the scope of what criteria 2, operating alone, would lead me to include in this course. As a result, PhD students studying for their comprehensive field exam will need to look further in the department on important issues I will not address here in depth (eg. Québec politics with Prof. Éric Bélanger, voting behaviour and elections with Prof. Elisabeth Gidengil, gender and feminism in Canada with Prof. Kelly Gordon, and starting next year, a course with Prof. Debra Thompson (likely focusing on her research interests – eg. race and ethnic politics).

There is a core tension in this course, which I acknowledge but do not pretend to resolve. Can one separate the study of Canadian politics from a study of the literature on Canada? In other words, how are we to balance analysis of Canadian politics with an analysis of the discipline of
Canadian political science? Arguably, these are not the same. The former would push us to focus on the newest literature; the latter would require us to set out the trajectory of a literature from its starting point. The trade-off is between breadth across issues versus depth across time. Given there are only so many hours in the day and sleep is important, we will do our best.

I acknowledge that I have benefitted tremendously from the syllabi of colleagues across the Canadian politics discipline, either because they were forwarded to me or because they were publicly available on the web. These syllabi show the diversity of approaches and rationales that can structure a course such as this one. It has also confirmed for me how rich the study of Canadian politics has become.

**Academic Integrity**

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l’honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site [http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity).

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

**Seminar Requirements and Assessment**

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives / Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue). (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009)

You may wish to review the university’s policy on student assessment, which you can find here: [https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/policies-and-regulations#S](https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/policies-and-regulations#S).

This course’s modes of assessment are directly related to the seminar rationale. The work of this class is to build proficiency in understanding the Canadian politics literature in a graduate seminar format, with the understanding that many in the class have the comprehensive field examination in their future. The job here is to understand a breadth of arguments about Canadian politics, and then to build an argument about those arguments, both orally (through seminar participation) and in written form (one longer paper, one peer review, and a final exam). Students are not expected to conduct original empirical research.
Seminar participation: 20%

In this class, I will trial a departure from the usual expectation that every student will read every reading and be assessed accordingly. Instead, the default assumption will be that students will not read everything on the syllabus that week. However, no student will be allowed to read nothing. Every student will have clear expectations on what they are responsible for reading each week:

1) The Experts: Every student will be expected to have read two readings to an expert level. The experts will by default lead the discussion on those readings. Experts should be prepared to field questions about the reading from those in the class who have not read the reading at all, including questions on data sources and methodology.

2) The Generalists: Every student will be expected to have read two readings adequately. This means that generalists will be expected to engage with the experts on the reading in question.

3) The Eagle: One student will be expected to have read all of the readings that week. This student will have a bird’s-eye view of the readings, and will be asked to present an overview of the readings, linking them together and setting out reflections on the readings as a whole.

I will be working with the following rubric for each class. Each class is worth 10 points. Students will be graded as Low/Medium/High in their respective roles as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>L (3) / M(4) / H (5)</td>
<td>Demonstration of nuanced methodological knowledge of the readings, plus engagement with peer questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalist</td>
<td>L (1) / M (2) / H (3)</td>
<td>Demonstration of knowledge and contribution to overall discussion on those readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle</td>
<td>L (6) / M(8) / H (10)</td>
<td>Builds a view of the readings as a whole, with key points of similarity and difference, strengths and weaknesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside contributor</td>
<td>L (0) / M (1) / H (2)</td>
<td>Engagement with readings for which the student is designated neither an expert nor a generalist.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that a perfect participation score requires engagement with readings outside of the expert and generalist roles. Note also that the higher scores for the Eagle reflect the significant reading burden for that student.

Formal Peer Review: 15%

Peer review is a very important part of being a scholar. Being a good peer reviewer does more than make you an altruistic scholar-citizen. It also allows you to be a more objective and
effective evaluator of your own work. Effective peer review is a skill, and graduate school is where you should learn that skill. Here are some key considerations for the peer reviewer:

- It is always the author’s prerogative to either accept or reject your advice. Your name isn’t on the paper. But you should understand your role as being the author’s ally.
- Being an ally means the goal is to help the author with the paper that the author wants to write. It is not about pushing the author to write the paper that you would write, if it was yours. Go write your own. Respect the goal that the author has set out for him/her self. If the draft is such that the author’s very goal is unclear, then you need to convey that feedback.
- The peer reviewer should value his/her position as a reader of the work. The author needs to know whether the writing actually conveys what the author thinks she/he has conveyed. “The message I got was not the message you thought you sent” is valuable feedback to the author. “Your use of passive voice obscures the causal process that you want to outline” is specific and helpful advice. “You need to address X’s work because it says the opposite of what you do, so you need to show your readers that you are aware of that counterargument” is also helpful.
- You need to deliver bad news sometimes. In order for that to be a constructive process, the reviewer is responsible for saying what is not working, and offering suggestions to put things on a better path. Writing “this is just bad” and leaving it there is unhelpful, even if it may be completely true.
- You also need to deliver good news sometimes. Be clear about what you think the author does well. This could be structure, grammar, a knowledge of the literature, or other things. Hearing good news means we can spend our time addressing weaknesses without feeling like that is all there is.

I do not have a hard and fast rule on how long a formal review needs to be. I cannot see how one page is long enough, even if the paper one is reviewing is quite strong. However, I think 5 pages is probably too long, even if the paper one is reviewing is quite weak. I would weigh succinctness and clarity over length every time.

Grading Criteria for Peer Review (I’ve adapted this from a source on the web):

A range: The peer review shows evidence of exceptional effort, insight, and detail. It closely analyzes the essay’s argumentation and organization and provides concrete revision recommendations. The review itself is well structured, with an introduction, clear transitions between paragraphs, and a conclusion.

B range: The peer critique is well structured, thoughtful, and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the paper, occasionally providing suggestions for revision.

C range: The assignment was completed. The critique attempts to point out strengths and weaknesses but does so in a general way.

D or F: The peer critique was attempted but not successfully completed. It is either too brief and/or lacks enough content to be helpful to the writer.
Term Paper: 35%

The paper assignment is to write an 18-20 page argumentative review essay. The task is to make an argument about a literature, a set of writings. You are making an original analytical contribution by making a claim about a set of writings that you define, and then supporting your claim through evidence. The evidence/data to support your claim are the work of other authors. Ideally, this would be an article-length piece of publishable quality.

Students who are TAs are granted the automatic 2 week extension.

Final Exam: 30%

The format of this exam is a modified (shortened) Canadian comprehensive field exam. The McGill assessment policy requires that this be scheduled during the formal final exam period. I propose that it be written on the first day of the exam period, April 17. If students have a conflict with another graduate course on this date, please let me know before the add/drop deadline.

Late penalties

Failure to submit the draft paper on mycourses by March 21 at midnight will result in a 5% reduction of your overall course grade. I recognize that this is a significant penalty. It reflects the responsibility that you owe to your peers. Your peers will not be required to review your paper if it is submitted after midnight on March 22.

Failure to submit the formal review on mycourses by midnight on March 29 will receive 0% on the review component.

The term paper will be penalized 5% for each day late.

Unsolicited Advice About Written Assignments

Surprisingly often I find myself dealing with a very stressed out student whose computer has died/was stolen/hijacked by ransomware/run over by a bus, yielding the situation where the paper that is due in hours or minutes is for all intents and purposes non-existent. Expect this to be you some day, maybe even today. You need a backup system.

If you haven’t already developed a backup system for yourself, this is mine. Borrow or modify it at will. I have an automatic backup program set up for a weekly backup to an external hard drive. So, I should at most be one week behind if my computer dies or is stolen. In addition, when I am writing a paper, I email the draft to myself at the end of the day. The email is titled “backup, paper title, date”. This makes it searchable if you have 10000 emails in your inbox.
Note that I have become entirely unsympathetic to student requests for emergency paper extensions due to the foreseeable and preventable occurrence that your digital paper has effectively disappeared. No extensions for that reason will be granted.

**Summary of Important Dates**

Feb. 24: Thesis Speed Date (in class)
Mar. 21 (midnight): Draft paper due on mycourses
Mar. 29 (midnight): Peer Review due on mycourses
Apr. 14 (midnight): Final Paper due on mycourses
Apr. 17 (time and place TBA): Final exam

**Detailed Course Schedule**

Jan. 6: Introduction, Old Institutionalism’s Revenge, plus Cool Maps

The first hour is the class introduction. We will set out reading responsibilities (eg. experts, generalists, eagles).

Royal Proclamation, 1763

*An Act to reunite the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, and for the Government of Canada*, 1840, 3 & 4 Victoria c 35

*British North America Act*, 1867, 30 & 31 Victoria c 3

*The Manitoba Act*, 1870, SC 33 Victoria c3

*Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B to the Canada Act (UK), 1982, c 11

Recommended:

*Quebec Act*, 1774, 14 Geo III, c 83

*Constitution Act* 1791, 31 Geo III, c 31


Jan.13: Constitutional Visions

*the following is actually a suggested reading order


Province of Canada. Legislative Assembly. Debates. 7 February, 1865, pp 53-62 (Speech by Attorney General G.-E. Cartier speech)


Christa Scholtz. “Treaty Failure or Treaty Constitutionalism?: The Problematic Validity of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement”. *University of Toronto Law Journal* (forthcoming). *Focus on the portions of the paper discussing existing and alternative constitutional interpretation of s.35*

Recommended:


Jan. 20: Parliament and the Charter


Aileen Kavanaugh, “The Lure and Limits of Dialogue” (2016) 66 University of Toronto Law Journal 120


Recommended:


James B. Kelly, Governing With the Charter: Legislative and Judicial Activism and Framers’ Intent. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005

Jan. 27: Legislative Behaviour


Recommended:


Feb. 3: Judicial Behaviour


Emmett Macfarlane. *Governing From the Bench: The Supreme Court of Canada and the Judicial Role*. Vancouver: UBC press, 2013 (on course reserve, NO ebook)


Feb. 10: Legal vs Political Activism


Feb. 17: Political Culture


Rocher, Francois and Patrick Fafard, 2013, “Is There a Political Culture of Federalism in Canada?” in Skogstad et al. (eds.) The Global Promise of Federalism. Institute of IGR, Queen’s, and University of Toronto Press.


Recommended:


Feb. 24: Political Economy

The first hour of this class is devoted to a group exercise: the thesis speed date. Please show up with: 1) a pen or pencil that works, 2) two pieces of paper stapled together (unlined, lined, graph, it doesn’t matter). On the front of the first page, type out (or clearly write out) the proposed thesis statement for your paper. In other words, present the argument that you want to make in your paper. In other words, present the argument that you want to make in your paper. This needn’t be long – three sentences could do it. Every student will then have a short period of time to read and react to that statement. The job is to write down your first reaction to the thesis statement: is it clear, or confusing? Is there a reading the student needs to know about? Is there a logical problem that you see? Is there a clear way you think the statement doesn’t hold? Does making this argument require a certain methodological approach? At the end of the exercise, you will have had your peers do an initial figurative kick of the tires. Having a bunch of eyes look at your necessarily half-baked idea at this stage is very valuable. You may decide to jettison that idea as a result, or you may refine it and move forward with it. Both outcomes are completely valid.


Rodney Haddow. *Comparing Quebec and Ontario: Political Economy and Public Policy at the Turn of the Millennium*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015 (on course reserve, ebook available)


Mar. 2: “Spring” Break.

Mar. 9: Parties and Party Systems


Gidengil, Elisabeth, ed. *Dominance and Decline: Making Sense of Recent Canadian Elections*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013 (on course reserve, ebook available)


Recommended:


Mar. 16: Multiculturalism / Liberalism


Recommended:


**Mar. 21 (Sunday) at midnight: Draft Paper due, submitted on mycourses**

The draft is due on this date so that everyone has a solid week to write one peer review. Once it is clear who submitted the draft on time, I will assign peer reviewers to specific papers.

**Mar. 23 Student Choice: Linking to debates and methodologies**

Given your papers were due a few hours before this class, we are doing a “student choice” day. Everyone will introduce one reading to the class (journal article or book). I suspect this reading will be one you have already read as part of your paper project. Each student will do a 15 minute oral presentation on the reading, setting out its thesis, its contribution to a wider literature, its methodology, and how you think it relates to two readings already on this syllabus. Note that choosing a reading does not necessarily mean that you endorse or “love” the reading. It may be something you feel your peers need to be exposed to but that you think is problematic in some way.

No powerpoint, but if you must, a 2 slide maximum, uploaded later to mycourses for everyone’s benefit.

**Mar. 29 (Sunday) at midnight: Formal Peer Review to be submitted on mycourses**

**Mar. 30 Peer Review In Person Session**

Depending on the size of the class, I will divide the class into groups. Prior to the class, each student will be responsible for reading the draft papers of the other students in their respective group. During class, the groups will assemble. Each student will take 5 minutes (max!) to communicate what they most need from the group, and then each student’s paper will be discussed first by their formal reviewer and then by the other students in their group.

This exercise develops a number of skills. The first is to engage with your peers’ work at various stages of polish. Some draft papers will struggle with key problems, and others will be relatively polished. Students need to learn to engage with and provide constructive feedback whatever stage the draft is in. Constructive feedback never demeanes. The point is to engage with the ideas and writing on the page in order to make the work better. And there is no substitute for peer review in person and in a supportive group setting.
The last half hour of the class will be a debrief of the peer review exercise.

**Apr. 6 Studying the Study of Canadian Politics**


**Apr. 14 (note this is a Tuesday).** Papers are due by midnight on mycourses. No class.

**Apr. 17: Final Exam**

This will be a 3 hour final, written either in department or as a take home (student opinions on this are welcome). It will essentially be a modified comprehensive exam (ie somewhat shorter, and limited to material covered in the course, although students will be welcome to incorporate material beyond the syllabus).