

# POSC2010

## Research and Writing in Political Science

C4036  
MWF 09:00-09:50  
Autumn 2009  
Department of Political Science  
Memorial University of Newfoundland

### 1 Contact details

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Office hours: MW: 11:00am-12:00pm or by appointment

### 2 Calendar Description

Research and Writing in Political Science examines the relationship between power and democracy. Focusing on the role of the citizen in politics, it introduces students to research and writing in political science. Questions to be considered: Who counts? Who is in charge? What difference does it make? This course qualifies as a Research/Writing course.

### 3 Course Description

This course serves two functions: students are introduced to the politics of rational choice theory as a tool to explore all three of the topics expressed in the course title: power, democracy and politics; students are also introduced to rational choice theory's core assumptions and the manner in which it can be applied to study and learn about political phenomena in general. POSC2010 is also a research and writing course. Students are required to research, write and revise a formal political science essay. A previous background in political science is not assumed or required for this class, although, exposure to the basic concepts of political science such as those covered in POSC1000: Introduction to Political Science would be helpful.

### 4 Learning Objectives

By the end of this course you should have:

- a solid understanding of the key concepts, applications, debates and critiques of rational choice theory as it is employed by political scientists.
- the ability to think theoretically about real-world political phenomena.

- the necessary tools to write a solid undergraduate political science essay. By extension these tools can be applied with minor modification to other disciplines in the social sciences.

POSC2010 is a Research/Writing course. Students who enroll in this class are expected to write! This class will not teach you how to write a perfect political science essay - that skill can only be developed with experience and through trial and error - but it will teach you how to write a better political science essay. What will you learn? You will learn about why we write essays - sometimes knowing why we have to do something makes the task a little easier to complete. You will learn how political science essays differ from political journalism. At a more practical level, you will learn a number of tips and tricks that will help you write more effectively and efficiently. In the process, you should be able to write a better essay with less effort at the end of this class than you would have at the beginning of the class. Please note that this is not a class on the subject of English grammar and spelling. If you feel that you need to refresh your grammar and syntax skills then I recommend that you seek advice from the university writing centre and/or complete a composition course in the English department before enrolling in this class.

## 5 Required Readings

There is one required text:

Laver, Michael 1997, *Private Desires, Political Action: An Invitation to the Politics of Rational Choice*, Sage Publications, London.

Copies of the text are available at the MUN Bookstore. I have also placed a copy on reserve at the Queen Elizabeth II Library; this is my own personal copy so I respectfully ask that you handle it gently and do not write in it. Academic books are expensive; you may find second hand copies at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com), [alibris.com](http://alibris.com) or elsewhere on the internet.

The required readings are supplemented by additional readings which are available either as a library reserve or as a PDF document on the POSC2010 Desire2Learn course portal. I encourage you to explore the basic terminology of rational choice theory by typing unfamiliar terms into [scholar.google.com](http://scholar.google.com) or [wikipedia.ca](http://wikipedia.ca). I also suggest that students read a local or national daily newspaper. One good way to keep up-to-date on the current news is to set your home page on your browser to a reliable national/international news source. The essay topic selection process will likely be made easier if you identify a local "political" problem in the media and track its evolution over the course of the term. Useful media sources to keep up-to-date include:

- [www.thetelegram.ca](http://www.thetelegram.ca)
- [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca)
- [www.ctv.ca](http://www.ctv.ca)
- [www.globeandmail.com](http://www.globeandmail.com)
- [www.nationalpost.com](http://www.nationalpost.com)
- [www.bbcnews.com](http://www.bbcnews.com)
- [www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com)

There are an infinite number of books on essay writing. Most have their virtues and deficits. Three books that I recommend you acquire at some point in your university career, not only for this class, are:

- Scott, G.M. & Garrison, S.M. 2006, *The political science student writer's manual*, 5th edn, Pearson/Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, N.J.

Table 1: Marking Schemes

|                 | (1)  | (2)  | (3)  | (4)  |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|
| Participation   | 25%  | 25%  | 25%  | 25%  |
| Midterm         | 10%  | 0%   | 10%  | 0%   |
| Essay Version 1 | 15%  | 25%  | 25%  | 20%  |
| Essay Version 2 | 30%  | 50%  | 40%  | 35%  |
| Final Exam      | 20%  | 0%   | 0%   | 20%  |
| Total           | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

- Strunk, W. & Columbia University. Trustees 1995, *The elements of style* [computer file], <http://www.bartleby.com/141/> edn, Trustees of Columbia University, New York, N. Y.
- Van Evera, S. 1997, *Guide to methods for students of political science*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

The materials covered in the Friday writing seminars are based on my own experiences as a lecturer and as a former student. Considerable inspiration has been drawn from Peter Redman, 2001 *Good Essay Writing: A Social Sciences Guide*, 2nd ed., Sage Publications, London. Unfortunately, this book is not available for distribution in North America. However, students who wish to take a look at it are welcome to stop by my office.

## 6 Grade Breakdown

The final grade for this class is made up of five components: a draft essay, a final version of the essay, a midterm exam, final exam and a participation grade. Given that this is a course that focuses on “choice” students have the option not to attend the midterm and/or final exam in which case the values of the exams are folded into the essay marks – see Table 1. *Note that students must submit both the draft and final versions of the essay in order to fulfill the requirements for this course; failure to do so will result in a failing grade overall.*

The participation mark is calculated by attendance at the Friday writing seminars as well as the simulations. The simulations will be followed by a lecture dedicated to discussing the outcome of the simulation. I have made the Friday seminars and simulations “markable” as an incentive to encourage students to attend as the material covered in these lectures is instrumental for getting a good grade on the essay assignments. The midterm exam will cover all of the material (including discussion) addressed in class, the writing seminars and the readings and. The final exam is a cumulative exam for which students are responsible for all of the material in the course, although an emphasis will be placed on material covered in the latter half of the class. Both the midterm and final exams will consist of a series of short answer questions. Attendance/absence at the midterm and/or final exam will automatically determine a student’s marking scheme.

Please note that late essay submissions will be docked 10 percent for each 24 hours that the assignment is submitted late. Extensions are only granted according to the guidelines set out in the Department of Political Science’s Deadlines, Extensions and Exemptions policy. Also note that I reserve the right to revise the grade weighting on an individual basis in the event of extenuating circumstances.

## 7 Communication

I am available to meet students before class, either in the hallway or in my office (SN2032) My office hours are from 11:00-12:00 on Mondays and Wednesdays. I can also be reached by telephone at (709) 737 3093. In the event that you are unavailable to visit during scheduled office hours then let

me know in class, by email or on the telephone and we can try to work out a mutually convenient time to meet.

Memorial University has adopted Desire2Learn (D2L) as a course management software utility. All electronic correspondence and assignment submission will be conducted through the POSC2010 D2L portal. There is a practical reason to communicate through D2L; student email will not get accidentally deleted or mislabeled as spam. Likewise, my email to you is guaranteed to arrive in your D2L email inbox.

I encourage you to ask course related questions to me in person as I can usually give you a direct, succinct and immediate answer. Questions in person also help me to put faces to names which is helpful for me! I am usually available for questions or comments after class and always during office hours. If you have a question, please ask it - chances are someone else has the same question and would like to hear the answer. If you need to discuss a private matter related to the course then you should come and talk to me during office hours.

## 8 House Rules

### 8.1 Class Schedule

We will meet at 9am on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays in room C4036 I respectfully ask that you arrive on time. In the event that you arrive late, please quietly find an empty seat close to the entrance so as to not disturb the class. In the event that you miss a lecture then you are welcome to come by my office during office hours and I will briefly go over the materials covered in class. This opportunity should not be construed as a suitable replacement for attending lectures. Note that four library information sessions have been scheduled. These sessions will take place in the Queen Elizabeth II Library and there is a participation assignment which will contribute to the participation grade. The library sessions are as follows:

1. *Why are Journals Important?*  
Friday October 2, 2009  
Room L2028, QEII Library
2. *How do you actually find scholarly literature?*  
Friday October 9, 2009  
Room L2028, QEII Library
3. *How can you organize information with RefWorks?*  
Friday October 16, 2009  
Room L2028, QEII Library
4. *How was your research experience?*  
Friday October 30, 2009  
Room L2028, QEII Library

In addition to the Library sessions, Virginia Ryan, the director of the MUN Writing Centre will provide two lectures on the subject of "The most common writing errors made in academic writing and how to avoid them!" There is a participation assignment associated with both writing centre sessions which will contribute to your participation grade. These Writing Centre sessions will take place in C4036 on the following dates:

1. *Writing Centre Session 01*  
Wednesday October 7, 2009  
Room C4036

2. *Writing Centre Session 02*  
Wednesday November 4, 2009  
Room C4036

Finally, Students will participate in three political science simulations which demonstrate how theory may be realized in the "real world." The simulations will take place on the following dates:

1. *Simulation 01*  
October 5, 2009
2. *Simulation 02*  
November 2, 2009
3. *Simulation 03*  
November 23, 2009

## 8.2 Mobile phones and wireless technology

Please ensure that all of your wireless technology is turned off while attending the lecture. The lectures are short and will require your full attention. Furthermore, it is disrespectful to your fellow students and the professor not to fully engage, even silently, in the lecture. If you use a laptop or PDA please refrain from writing emails, internet chatting, websurfing etc. during class as it is distracting for both the professor and your fellow students. Lastly, electronic recording of any aspect of this course is not permitted without permission of the professor.

## 8.3 Etiquette

Relevant questions, debates and discussion are encouraged and welcomed. However, demeaning comments or behaviour towards fellow students will not be tolerated. Disruptive behaviour may result in a mark reduction in the participation component of the final grade.

## 8.4 Lecture Materials

Powerpoint slides will be made available via the Desire2Learn portal at the end of each lecture topic.

## 8.5 Eating and drinking

Early morning classes often require coffee or some other legal stimulant. By all means feel free to bring along a beverage, preferably in a reusable container; just be sure to take away any litter that you bring with you. Please leave your breakfast and/or snack at home or in your locker.

## 8.6 Accommodation for students with disabilities

Students affiliated with the Glenn Roy Blundon Centre for Students with Disabilities may wish to identify themselves to me at their convenience so I can ensure that they are properly accommodated.

## 9 Schedule<sup>1</sup>

### Week 1: Welcome and Introduction.

September 9-11, 2009: Syllabus review.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The supplementary reading list maybe adjusted as the course progresses.

<sup>2</sup>Dr. Kerby will be out of town for these first two classes. Dr. Kelly Blidook will deliver the course syllabi to the class on September 9, 2009. There will be no class on September 11, 2009.

Readings: Course syllabus

## **Week 2: The politics of life, the classroom and everything.**

September 14-16, 2009: Anarchy, power, institutions.

*September 18, 2009: What is a social science/political science essay?*

Readings: Start reading Private Desires, Political Action, henceforth PDPA.

## **Week 3: Rational Choice Theory - Core Assumptions and Terminology**

September 21-23, 2009: rationality, preferences, utility, methodological individualism

*September 25, 2009: Getting Ready, Introductions Middles and Conclusions.*

Readings: M. Laver PDPA, pp. 1-28, Shepsle and Bonchek, chapter 2.

## **Week 4: Collective Action**

September 28-30, 2009: Public vs. private goods and the collective action problem.

*October 2, 2009: Library Session 01: Which journals are important?*

Readings: PDPA, pp. 28-65, Ostrom, Elinor and Vincent Ostrom. 1977. Public Goods and Public Choices. In Alternatives for Delivering Public Services: Toward Improved Performance, ed. E.S. Savas. Boulder, CO: Westview Press pp. 7-49. available at <http://polisci.colorado.edu/~mciverj/Ostrom-PG&PC.PDF>

## **Week 5: Simulation #1**

October 5-October 7, 2009: Simulation #1, Writing Centre Session 01

*October 9, 2009: Library Session 02: How do you actually find scholarly literature?*

Readings: N/A

## **Week 6: Thanksgiving and Midterm Break**

October 12-14, 2009: **Thanksgiving and Midterm Break - No Class!**

*October 16, 2009: Library Session 03: Using RefWorks*

Readings: PDPA, pp. 89-109, Dowding, Keith 2005, "Is it rational to vote?" British Journal of Politics and International Relations 7: 442-259, Endersby, James W., Galatas, Steven E. & Rackaway, Chapman B. 2002, "Closeness Counts in Canada: Voter Participation in the 1993 and 1997 Federal Elections", Journal of Politics 64: 610-31.

## **Week 7: The Prisoners' Dilemma**

October 19-21, 2009: Game theory and political science and pop culture applications.

*October 23, 2009: Optional Midterm*

Readings: PDPA, pp. 45-50.

## **Week 8: The Paradox of Voting**

October 26-28, 2009: Is it rational to vote?

*October 30, 2009: Library Session 04: Research Reflection*

Readings: PDPA, pp.110-134, Mavrogordatos, George Th. 1987, "Spatial Models of Party Competition and Left:Right Measurements", International Political Science Review 8: 333-42, Hindmoor, Andrew 2005, "Reading Downs: New Labour and an Economic Theory of Democracy", British Journal of Politics and International Relations 7: 402-17.

## **Week 9: Simulation 2/Writing Centre Session 2**

November 2-4, 2009: Simulation 2 and Writing Centre Session 2  
*November 6, 2009: Referencing - Essay Version 01 Due before 11:59 via D2L*

## **Week 10: Political Party Competition I**

November 3-5, 2009: Anthony Downs, spatial models, median voter theory  
*November 7, 2009: Ethics*  
Readings: PDPA, pp.110-134, Mavrogordatos, George Th. 1987,"Spatial Models of Party Competition and Left:Right Measurements", *International Political Science Review* 8: 333-42, Hindmoor, Andrew 2005,"Reading Downs: New Labour and an Economic Theory of Democracy", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 7: 402-17.

## **Week 11: Political Actors**

November 9-11, 2009: Political entrepreneurs, principal-agent problem. **Remembrance Day - No Class November 11, 2009.**  
*November 13, 2009: Style*  
Readings: PDPA, pp. 68-88.

## **Week 12: Political Party Competition II**

November 16-18, 2009: Solutions to the collective action problem and prisoners' dilemma  
*November 20, 2009: Some common writing concerns*  
Readings: PDPA, pp. 126-134 and chapter 7 for the ambitious!

## **Week 13: Simulation 3**

November 23-25, 2009: Simulation 03 and Simulation 03 discussion  
*November 27, 2009: Last minute Q and A re: essay version 02.*

## **Week 14: Wrap up.**

December 30-December 2,2009: Wrap up any unfinished business, **Essay version 2 due December 2, 2009 before 23:59.59 via D2L.**  
December 4, 2009: Final exam review

## **10 Department of Political Science Plagiarism Policy**

Plagiarism means offering the words or ideas of another person as one's own. The material copied or paraphrased may consist of a few phrases or sentences, or an entire passage or paper. Whatever its form and extent, plagiarism constitutes two kinds of failure: 1) Failure to perform the basic tasks expected in any paper – original mental effort and expression; 2) Potentially, the moral failure of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism may be deliberate (as in the submission of a paper written in whole or part by another student, purchased from an essay bank, or cut and pasted from web sites) or the result of carelessness through failure to provide proper documentation.

All directly copied or quoted material must be enclosed in quotation marks and the source must be clearly identified in a footnote. The source of any paraphrased material or ideas must also be properly documented. Failure to do so is plagiarism.

The procedure for handling cases of suspected plagiarism at Memorial University is set out in the University Calendar. All cases of suspected plagiarism must be reported to the Department Head in accordance with Section 4.11 of the University Calendar General Regulations. Depending on the circumstances and the degree of plagiarism involved, the Department of Political Science

normally handles first offenders in accordance with the Procedures for Informal Resolution (Section 4.11.5). The penalty in such cases is normally a grade of 0 for the work concerned. The Department maintains a list of students who have been found guilty of plagiarism, and in the case of a second offence or in particularly serious cases of plagiarism, the Procedures for Formal Resolution (Section 4.11.6) will be followed. The penalty in these cases may be probation, suspension or expulsion in addition to the grade of 0 for the work concerned.

If in any doubt about what plagiarism consists of, consult with your instructor or refer to any standard work on writing essays and research papers. The Faculty of Arts Writing Centre (SN2053) can also provide relevant information. The notes on proper documentation below may be of assistance.

**Syllabus last revised October 8, 2009**

Example Only