POSC 2800 – Introduction to Canadian Government and Politics

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 10:15am-12:15pm.

This course introduces students to concepts in, theory about, and research approaches to the study of Canada’s political environment and institutions. Students will receive a general overview of Canada’s political structure and culture, informal and formal institutions, and will engage in some of the key debates about how Canada has gotten to where it is, and where it might be going. Upon completing the course, students will have learned how to accumulate and assess information on a range of topics in Canadian politics.

THE CLASS & EMAIL:
Information will be conveyed in the class that is helpful and important on exams. You should make some friends and then contact them to get this information if you miss class, but more importantly, don’t miss class. Any requests for my own recap on a missed class with necessarily be brief.
I normally respond to emails by the next business day. Email requests for information already in this document may accidentally go unnoticed.

REQUIRED TEXT:
Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches (7th Ed), by Rand Dyck & Christopher Cochrane

Additional readings, such as news or opinion articles, may be circulated during the course. All assigned readings are expected to be completed and will be tested in examinations.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING:

In-class participation – 10%:
In order to encourage students to complete course readings, engage in media, and attend class throughout the semester, in-class participation will be graded. Attendance is obviously necessary to participate, but is of no value otherwise in the grade given. Participation is considered to be relevant oral contribution (not questions for clarification, not irrelevant). Most days, an opportunity for such contributions will be provided before or after the lecture segment.

In-class midterm examination – 20% (in class October 15):
There will be a midterm examination held on Thursday, October 15. Content will include both lectures and readings. The format of the exam will be provided in class in advance of this date. Anyone who is unable to attend the mid-term will simply have the final exam count for an additional 20% of the course grade.
Media/Election Journal – 15% (Due October 26):
Students must keep a media journal during the federal election campaign that will focus on one of the following topics (students can choose a more specific focus within these topics):

- A major Canadian Political Party (BQ, Conservative, Green, Liberal, NDP, or ask)
- Canadian environmental politics
- The Canadian economy
- Trust/ability/preparedness of political leaders

The media journal will document at least 3 stories of direct relevance to the chosen topic for each week beginning Monday September 14, and will include the election itself and coverage following. It is due the Monday (October 26) after the election. Students must provide the full bibliographic source and a brief summary (about 3 sentences) for each story. Students should also note if the coverage appears to present any characters or policy options in a positive or negative manner – is it straight news, or an opinionated piece? If the nature of coverage appears to have changed since the previous weeks then this should be also be noted (i.e. has the tone of coverage changed, has there been a key development/event, has a new “important” actor entered the picture, etc.?). Every week should have approximately 10-12 sentences in total, as well as bibliographic information of sources used (pick an official style).

Students must include at least 2 different sources from each of the following types of media over the course of the journal period, and list how this requirement is met on the last page:

- *Daily newspaper (yes, all of these can come from the internet)*
- *News magazine or weekly newspaper*
- *Television*
- *Radio*
- **Weblog/podcast/webcast, etc.*

*Must be a well-recognized news organization*

**Must be a specialized, non-major media individual or organization (i.e. not CBC/CTV/etc., but not you or your friend either).***

Grading will be based upon the relevance, accuracy and completeness of the journal.

Research Paper – 25% (Due November 20):
Research papers must be written focusing on one of the assigned topics (listed at end of syllabus). Papers must make a balanced argument, be approximately 2,000 words in length, and include at least 6 academic sources, not including media sources or the textbook. The paper must make detailed use of at least one chapter from the textbook. Papers must:

- Highlight which topic question is being addressed in the paper in the first line of the paper, and indicate the argument the paper will make in opening paragraph.
- Use and cite sources directly in the paper itself using in-text citation with page number, and include a properly formatted bibliography of those sources (any official style will do) on the final page.

Final Examination – 30%:
Content will include both lectures and readings. The format of the exam will be provided in class in advance of this date.
Assignment submission: All assignments must be submitted in the appropriate dropbox on D2L (online.mun.ca). Only PDF (Adobe) and WORD (Microsoft) files may be submitted. If you use a different program, you must convert it using an on-campus computer before submission. Assignments will be considered submitted according to the D2L date of submission of the specified file.

All written assignments must:

- Include the student’s last name, first initial and course name as the filename. (Example BlidookK-Posc2800.pdf)
- Include page numbers.
- Be typed using text that is double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, with margins of approximately 3 centimetres (1.25 inches).

Late Penalty/End Point: The date of submission will be recorded for all assignments, so I will have a record of punctuality in case a reference letter is requested in the future. However, no late penalties will be given on any assignment. No assignments are accepted after 11:59pm, November 25.

Students must inform immediately in case of medical circumstances, provide sufficient documentation, and determine a new end date with the professor, at which point a penalty of -5% per day will be used beyond that date.

Plagiarism: Memorial University values academic integrity. All students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences. If you are unsure when writing, give the source and indicate clearly all the text that it applies to. See http://www.mun.ca/regoff/calendar/sectionNo=REGS-0748.

Copyright of class content: All class presentations/lectures are owned by the instructor. Anyone engaging in unauthorized audio or visual recording or copying can be legally prosecuted.

SCHEDULE:
(Schedule is approximate for topics covered – it is subject to change based on missed classes, guest speakers, or some topics taking longer/shorter than expected to adequately cover.)

Week 1. Introduction (Sep. 10)

Week 2. Ch. 1, 2, 3 (Sep. 15)

Week 3. Ch. 4, 5 (Sep. 22)

Week 4. Ch. 6, 7 (Sep. 29)
Week 5. Ch. 8, 9, 10 (Oct. 6)

Week 6. Midterm (Oct. 15, no class Oct. 13)

Week 7. Fed Election redux, Ch. 11 (Oct. 20)

Week 8. Ch. 12, 13, 14 (Oct. 27)

Week 9. Ch. 15, 16 (Nov. 3)

Week 10. 17, 18, 19 (Nov. 10)

Week 11. Ch. 21, 22 (Nov. 17)

Week 12. Ch. 23, 24 (Nov. 24)

Week 13. Ch 20, catch up, exam prep (Dec. 1)

RESEARCH PAPER TOPICS:
Students should respond positively or negatively to the questions posed, and provide a balanced and well-researched argument. There is no such thing as a wrong answer, but there is such a thing as poor evidence.

1. Should the Canadian electoral system change, and if so, what system would best fit? If not, how is the current system optimal compared to alternatives?
2. Is the Canadian parliamentary system generally well balanced between executive and legislature to provide effective and democratic government?
3. Focusing on either (1) institutions, or (2) rights, does Canada’s constitution provide an effective balance of stability and change? Are the amending formulae and/or the notwithstanding clause the right tools for elected governments to address shortfalls in the constitution?
4. Is the role of females in Canadian politics generally equal to that of males? Whether yes or no, explain how and why.
5. Do Canadian political parties focus heavily on social class? If so, which parties focus on which classes, and in what ways? If not, what factors primarily overshadow class?
6. Do courts in Canada go too far in striking down legislation passed by democratically elected legislatures? Explain why or why not, and how.