

## **POLS1303 Introduction to Law, Politics, and Government I**

Prof. Andrew Biro

Class meetings: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays 9:30-10:30; BAC 236

Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 2:30-4:30; BAC 216

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For updates and revisions see the course Acorn page – [acorn.acadiau.ca](http://acorn.acadiau.ca)

**Course description:** *This course introduces the student to political and legal theory, to central concepts in political analysis, and to the nature of representative democracies, employing Canada as its focus.*

The Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle described human beings as “political animals.” By this he meant that “politics” is a uniquely human endeavour, and an inescapable part of the human condition. Politics is thus about some of the most fundamental questions of collective human existence: What is the best way to organize a society? Can we plan social organization, or are certain social arrangements dictated by human nature? When is the use of force justified? When is authority legitimate, and when can it be resisted? What obligations do we owe to others in our society and what do others owe to us? How is “our society” defined in the first place?

While in some sense these are abstract and timeless questions, they are also very much of the moment – our answers to these abstract questions shape and are shaped by our opinions about contemporary Canadian political issues, including immigration and language rights, climate change, terrorism and security measures, and provincial “equalization” payments, just to name a few. This course is thus both “theoretical” and “practical”: on the one hand, we will develop concepts and theories that explain how the political world operates in more abstract terms, and explore normative questions about justice and freedom. On the other hand, we will work to map those theories and concepts onto contemporary political institutions and events, and to link ideal solutions with what is practically possible. After all, “politics” is not only an object to be studied, but also a practice in which we are all engaged: the intellectual tools provided by this course will help students both in upper-year political science courses and to become active, engaged citizens.

Throughout the course, our concern will be to understand the operation of power and its effects, both within and outside the formal operations of government. In this course, we will do so focusing primarily on five concepts or categories that are important to understanding politics in contemporary Canada and beyond: citizenship, democracy, negotiation, political economy, and the state.

## Readings

There are five texts for this course. One is available free online. The other four are available for purchase at the Acadia Campus Bookstore (in Wheelock Hall).

1. Plato, *The Apology of Socrates* and *The Crito* (can be downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/13726>)
2. Richard Swift, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Democracy*
3. Jonathan Rose *et al*, *The Art of Negotiation*
4. Jim Stanford, *Economics for Everyone*
5. Dean Neu and Richard Therrien, *Accounting for Genocide*

Unless otherwise indicated, all readings are REQUIRED. Readings should be completed prior to the start of the class noted on the schedule. You may also find it helpful to review course readings we have discussed them in class.

Additionally, students are expected to keep abreast of current events, particularly in Canada. Common starting resources for Canadian political news include: The Globe & Mail ([theglobeandmail.com](http://theglobeandmail.com)), The National Post ([nationalpost.com](http://nationalpost.com)), and the CBC ([cbc.ca](http://cbc.ca)).

## Class meetings

This course will combine a traditional lecture format with open discussion. Powerpoint presentations will be posted on the course Acorn site shortly after class. Please note that downloading and even carefully looking over the slides is NOT a substitute for attending class, listening carefully, and taking notes.

Class sessions will often begin with a discussion of current political events (largely, but not exclusively, focused on Canada). The main focus of discussion will be on understanding what the theoretical concepts being discussed in the course can tell us about current events, and what those events can contribute to our understanding of politics. You may be tempted to view this discussion of current events as a trivial part of the course, and to arrive late to just catch the “real” lecture. This would be a serious mistake. While some of your learning will occur by having me convey information to you, much of it will occur by discussing this information and reaching conclusions (individually and collectively) through dialogue. Our discussion of current events is the time when you (we) will have a chance to test out the theoretical concepts on real-life events as they are unfolding. Ultimately, your capacity to be a responsible citizen (and a successful upper-year student) depends more on your capacity to engage in thoughtful dialogue than on your capacity to absorb and regurgitate information that comes from others (even political science professors!)

Students will also be organized into smaller groups of 15-25 students. Under the guidance of a Teaching Assistant (TA), these groups will meet for three tutorial/discussion sessions

over the course of the term, and will also form the basis for the political negotiation simulation exercise (see below).

In this course you are likely to come into contact with ideas that you disagree with, and possibly some that you find unsettling - perhaps deeply so. Encountering difficult and strange ideas is the essence of education: as much as possible, you should treat these encounters as opportunities, not crises.

- Regardless of whether these ideas come from the instructor (prof or TA), the course texts, or your fellow students, it is important to discuss these ideas, and their authors, respectfully.
- Learning cannot happen if we are not prepared to treat everyone in the discussion as deserving of respect, regardless of their background or beliefs.
- In a classroom discussion, we are here not to “win” arguments or debates, but to learn. Sometimes this requires convincing people that something they think is wrong, but often it also requires listening to why they think what they do.
- Opinions expressed in class should be backed up by reasoning. “That’s just my opinion” is not a reason for believing something.

## **Assignments and Grading**

Students' performance in this course will be assessed through a number of assignments. Please note that students must complete **all** assignments in order to receive a passing grade in the course.

- **Mid-term test:** in class on Wed. Oct. 8<sup>th</sup>. The test may cover any course material covered prior to that date, including the texts by Plato and Richard Swift. The test is worth 15% of the final grade.
- **Two short papers:** responding to public talks on political issues. An updated list of eligible talks will be posted on the course Acorn site. These papers should provide both a concise summary and some analysis of the talk (a critical assessment of its strengths and/or weaknesses, and/or an extension of its argument). Where possible, the analysis should be connected to concepts from the course readings or discussions. Students can choose any two talks during the term, although **papers must be submitted within one week after the talk, and at least one must be completed by Friday October 10<sup>th</sup>**. Each short paper should be 4-500 words, and is worth 5% of the final grade.
- **Negotiation simulation media release:** each delegation (a group of about 4 students) will write a media release at the conclusion of the simulation. The release should highlight, from the delegation’s perspective, the most significant accomplishments (or failures) of the negotiations. The release will be assessed both for its accuracy and for its ability to “spin” the outcomes of the negotiation. It should be no more than one single-spaced page, and is worth 5% of the final grade.

- **Negotiation simulation essay:** Individually-authored essays reflecting on the simulation experience. The essay should be 2000-2500 words, and is worth 20% of the final grade. It should answer all of the following questions:
  1. what you think were the most important successes (or failures) of the negotiations? (These need not be the same ones identified by your group for the media release.)
  2. Why did these particular outcomes occur?
  3. What is (are) the most important lesson(s) about *negotiating* that you learned from this simulation?
  4. What is (are) the most important lessons(s) about *politics* that you learned from this simulation?
- **Final exam:** during the exam period, covering material from the entire course. The exam is worth 35% of the final grade. The exam schedule will be posted later in the term – students are advised not to make holiday travel plans until the schedule has been posted.

Assignment	Due Date	Value
Short Response papers	one week after event; first paper no later than Friday October 10th	2 @ 5% = 10%
Mid-term test	Wed. October 8 <sup>th</sup>	15%
Simulation Media Release	Wed. October 29 <sup>th</sup>	5%
Simulation Reflection Essay	Fri. November 7 <sup>th</sup>	20%
Participation in class discussions	--	15%
Final Exam	TBD	35%

**Bonus:** If there is a Canadian federal election before the end of the term, a bonus mark will be awarded to the student(s) who comes closest to predicting the new distribution of seats by party. Predictions must be submitted no later than the day before election day.

## Detailed Course Schedule

Sept. 3/5 - Introduction to the course (and everything else)

No readings

### 1. Citizenship

Text: Plato, *The Apology of Socrates* and *The Crito* (can be downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/13726>)

Sept. 8-12 – Plato, “The Apology of Socrates”

Sept. 15-17 – Plato, “The Crito”

Sept. 19 – Guest lecture: Dr. Stephen Ahern, Director, Acadia Writing Center

## 2. Democracy

Text: Richard Swift, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Democracy*

Sept. 22-24 – Swift, Ch.1-4

Sept. 26 – tutorial group

Sept. 29-Oct. 1 – Swift, Ch.5-9

Oct. 3 – Guest lecture: Dr. Jim Stanford (note time and location – 10:30 am, BAC241)

Oct. 6 – Swift (cont'd)

Oct. 8 – *Mid-term test*

Oct. 10 – (tbd)

Sign-up for negotiation simulation  
roles: Mon. Oct 6; BAC 216

## 3. Negotiation

Text: Jonathan Rose et al, *The Art of Negotiation*

Oct. 15–24 - Negotiation simulation (in tutorial groups)

Oct. 27 – Simulation wrap-up (full class)

Negotiation assignments:  
Media release due Oct 29;  
Essay due Nov 7

## 4. Political Economy

Text: Jim Stanford, *Economics for Everyone*

Oct. 29-31 – Stanford, Parts 1-3

Nov. 3-5 – Stanford, Parts 4-5

Nov. 7 – Tutorial groups

## 5. The State

Text: Dean Neu and Richard Therrien, *Accounting for Genocide*

Nov. 10-14 – Neu & Therrien, ch.1-4

Nov. 17-21 – Neu & Therrien, ch.5-7

Nov. 24-26 – Neu & Therrien, ch.8-10

Nov. 28 – Tutorial groups

Dec. 1 – Conclusions and exam review

## Course Policies and Procedures

### Plagiarism

The primary function of a university is to produce and disseminate knowledge.

Plagiarism – taking someone else’s intellectual work and presenting it as your own – is thus an extremely serious offense and will not be tolerated. Typical penalties in an introductory course such as this one may include a mark of zero on the assignment in question, or a mark of zero in the course. All violations of academic integrity are reported

to the Registrar, who maintains a list of students who have been penalized for plagiarism. If you are at all unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please consult with me, or use the library's "You Quote It, You Note It" tutorial, available online at <http://library.acadiau.ca/help/tutorials.html>.

### Laptop use

Students are encouraged to bring their laptops to class for note-taking and similar *course-related* activities. During open discussion (as opposed to when I am lecturing) there should be little, if any, need to use your laptop. All laptop use during class should only be for course-related activities. Catching up on email, messaging, updating your Facebook page, gaming, random net surfing, writing papers for other courses, etc. should NOT be done during class time. Attempting to multitask seriously impairs your ability to process new information and to engage in meaningful dialogue (i.e. to learn and do well in this course). And it is rude.

### Contacting me

I strongly encourage you to talk to me about any course-related issue, whether you want to talk further about something we discussed in class or in the readings, you anticipate having problems meeting a deadline, or you found something interesting (article, video, website, etc.) that relates somehow to the course. The best way to do this is to see me during my office hours (Mondays and Wednesdays 2:30-4:30) or make an appointment to see me outside of office hours. You can also contact me by phone or email, although you should generally use email only for points of information or for things like scheduling an appointment. For things that will require detailed responses (e.g. "Who is this Plato guy and why are we still reading stuff he wrote 2500 years ago?") or that will require a back-and-forth conversation (e.g. "I am having trouble with my essay..."), face-to-face conversation is a much more efficient and more effective form of communication. *You should not ask for extensions on assignments via email* unless it is absolutely essential (e.g. you have a highly contagious illness and can't leave your room). I will generally try to respond to emails within 24 hours (not including weekends, and except on Thursdays, which I am keeping email free).