POSC 6000
Political Science Concepts

Department of Political Science, Memorial University
Fall 2010
Meeting Time/Location: Fridays 10 am - 1 pm, SN-2033

Instructor: Dr. Amanda Bittner
Instructor's email address: abittner@mun.ca
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12-2 pm (SN-2040) or by appointment

Background:

This seminar provides an overview of important theoretical and methodological issues in political analysis based on readings in the philosophy of science, political behaviour, rational choice, feminism, qualitative analysis, and post-modernism, among other things. The subject matter of this seminar is applicable to all sub-fields of the discipline.

The course is meant to give you a taste of some of the various debates, controversies, and issues in political analysis, as well as providing a general sense of the plurality of approaches that exist in our field as a whole. No two political scientists are the same, and the ways in which they choose to approach research questions are often very different. At the end of this course you should have a basic understanding of some (not all) of the different kinds of things that political scientists “do,” and you should be able to situate yourself to some degree within the field. We all have preferences of our own, and all approaches have tradeoffs. When we consider a research question, it is important to think about the methodological and ontological tradeoffs involved with approaching the question from different angles. The tools gained in this course should be applicable to all future research in political analysis.

Required Readings:

There is no textbook for this course.

We will be reading selected articles and chapters over the course of the term, as listed below. The readings will be made available on Desire2Learn. You can login to access all of the readings (and even talk about them) at https://online.mun.ca/

Students are responsible for the material in the assigned readings. These readings will form the basis of class discussion.
Assignments and Grading:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of a Week’s Topic</td>
<td>Chosen by students</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Review Papers (5 x 1000 words)</td>
<td>Submit throughout course</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper (7000-8000 words: journal article length)</td>
<td>Initial paper due (by email) Sunday November 14th by midnight</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Paper review</td>
<td>Final paper due Dec 3 (in class)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Due Thurs November 18th by midnight (via email)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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Assignment Details:

This course is a graduate level class (therefore advanced) in which the focus is on reading, thinking critically, and communication (both written and oral). You will be assessed primarily on your ability and effort to do those three things.

**Participation (15%)**

The class will be conducted in a seminar format, and participation is crucial—students are expected to have come to class prepared, having done all of the readings and ready to discuss them. Throughout the course, I want you to do your own thinking. I want you to think about the readings, where there are strengths and weaknesses, and where you think the dialogue is missing something. Everything is contentious, nothing is set in stone. I don’t expect anybody to agree with everything, and I’d like to encourage you to discuss your thoughts, in an environment where we are all open-minded and considerate of one another. Your participation in discussions throughout the course will be assessed through a participation grade of 15%. The focus is on quality, not quantity, but you will be expected to have done the prep for each class, and act as an active participant throughout the course. You will be assessed for the quality of your oral contributions to the seminar and evidence that you have read and understood the reading material.

**Critical Review Papers (5 x 5% = 25%)**

There are eleven (11) weeks of readings in the course. You must submit a minimum of 5 critical review papers, for whichever 5 weeks you like. Whatever works for your schedule is fine. I don’t need to know in advance when you plan to submit them. Just come to class and hand one in. If you submit more than 5, the marks from your best 5 will count towards your final grade. Papers are due every week at the start of class (not later than that, and late submissions will not be accepted and do not count as submissions... since you choose when you submit and when you don’t, there really isn’t any valid excuse for handing in something late).

Papers must be 1000 words in length, single-spaced and typed in a 12-point font (this is approximately two single-spaced pages). Review papers are NOT summaries of the readings. You are required to make links between readings, as well as providing a critical assessment of those readings.
Every critical review paper must include an argument (thesis) that must be supported with reference to the week’s readings. More information about expectations and requirements will be provided in class.

*Presentations of Week’s Topic (15%)*

In the spirit of the importance of communication, each student is responsible for presenting and leading the discussion on a given week’s topic (e.g. Rational Choice or Postmodernism). Students will choose the topic/date at our first class, and will be responsible for making a short presentation on the topic, and then for leading the discussion during the class. It is NOT the responsibility of the presenter to summarize all of the readings. This is where the presentations and the critical review papers have commonalities. Rather, the point of this assignment is to provide an overview of the issues raised in the readings, and then to prepare a series of questions that will help to stimulate discussion. All of the students will have read the readings, and presenters will proceed on that basis—raising interesting things for discussion, in order to promote critical thinking and assessment of the week’s academic literature.

The idea here is that you are taking the class the next step forward, like you’re the instructor of the course, and you’re trying to raise issues for the benefit of all students...what things do you want them to glean from the readings that they may not have noticed on their own? What issues emerged for you that were particularly problematic that you think are important to discuss? All of the things that you might raise in your presentation are things that you think others may not have caught on their own, and that you feel needs highlighting.

Presenters must provide a list of discussion questions (between 10 and 20) and circulate them to the group. You do not necessarily need to discuss all 20 questions in class, but you must come prepared.

Projection equipment will be made available for presenters. The presentation of the week’s topic will provide an excellent opportunity to practice our presentation skills and become familiar with technologies used to present academic work.

You will be assessed based on both the content and delivery of the presentation as well as your ability to lead the discussion.

*Note: Your review paper cannot be submitted in the same week as your class presentation. They are separate assignments, and must be done on topics related to distinct weeks.*

*A basis for scheduling presentations among students will be discussed during the first seminar.*

*Research Paper (35%)*

Each of you is responsible for writing a longer paper on a topic with particular application to the your major sub-field of interest that draws upon and synthesizes material covered in the seminar as well as in additional reading. The topic is up to you, but you must discuss it with me before October 30th.

An initial draft of your paper will be due on Sunday November 14, via email, by midnight. I will then send your paper to one other student to be peer-reviewed. All students will receive their peer-review
comments by Thursday November 18th, and will then have the opportunity to revise their papers in light of the comments received. Final drafts of the papers will be due December 3 in class.

Papers must be journal article-length (between 7000-8000 words), double-spaced and typed in a 12-point font. You are also required to cite a minimum of 20 sources in this paper, following the Mapping Politics styleguide (we will discuss this in class) as well as including a bibliography with your paper when you hand it in.

The grade for this assignment will consider the quality of the initial draft, the final product, and the author’s response to the peer review received. The final paper will therefore need to include a one-page (single-spaced) author’s response to the peer review. This should include what the author did based on the suggestions received – what changes were made, what changes were not made, and why. How does the final draft differ from the first draft? It should be clear to the instructor how the review process improved (or didn’t improve) the final draft of the paper.

Research Paper Review (10%)

This exercise will take place in the days following the submission of the initial draft of your research paper. You will submit your research paper by email on November 14 (by midnight), and you will also be assigned the paper of another student to review. Review of the work of others is a key component of academic life, and we will practice the art of written review. This process will mirror the process of academic peer review of journal articles, and we will discuss how this process works in class.

You are each required to review another student’s initial draft of a research paper, and provide detailed commentary. Your commentary comes from the point of view of an “expert” in political science. When the time to peer-review comes around, we will already have had nine classes, which comes out to about 45-50 articles or chapters that you will have already read about approaches to political science and the state of the discipline... so you really are sort of an expert by then.

The peer-review task is based largely on the following key activities:
   1. Reading the paper
   2. Thinking critically about the paper in the context of the other literature we have read in class
   3. Evaluating the paper based on a number of basic criteria for written research, including development of the argument, research conducted, clarity, structure, and style
   4. Providing detailed feedback for the author, including observations about parts of the paper that were well done or particularly interesting, as well as suggestions about how the paper might be improved for the final draft

The peer review that you submit should be approximately 2-3 pages in length (single-spaced, so about 1000-1500 words), and should focus primarily on substantive (conceptual) issues in the paper, but as a courtesy, can also incorporate smaller issues such as spelling and grammar. No need to ignore spelling problems that you happen to notice as a reviewer, some are hard to notice on your own as a writer, but this is NOT the main focus of this exercise. Spell-checkers exist in word processing software, and it’s your primary job as a reviewer to think about the concepts in the paper, and provide feedback on this (more substantive level), not fix the paper’s grammar and spelling.
You will email your review (in either Microsoft Word or pdf format, no other format is acceptable) to both the instructor and the author of the paper by midnight on Thursday November 18th. This gives each author just over two weeks to revise their paper with the reviewer's comments in mind for final submission on the 3rd of December.

**Brief course outline and reading schedule:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic to be Covered</th>
<th>Assignments Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-Sep</td>
<td>Introduction and Overview</td>
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<tr>
<td>17-Sep</td>
<td>Competing Perspectives on Research Design and Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>24-Sep</td>
<td>Sociological Study of the Bases of Politics</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-Oct</td>
<td>The Scientific Study of Politics</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8-Oct</td>
<td>Rational Choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>22-Oct</td>
<td>Feminism (Class to be Rescheduled)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>29-Oct</td>
<td>Postmodernism</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5-Nov</td>
<td>Institutionalism</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Normative Theory: The Place of Normative Concerns in</td>
<td>Nov 14: initial draft of paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>12-Nov</td>
<td>Political Science and International Relations</td>
<td>Nov 18: peer review</td>
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<tr>
<td>19-Nov</td>
<td>Quantitative/Qualitative Analysis, I</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>26-Nov</td>
<td>Quantitative/Qualitative Analysis, II</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3-Dec</td>
<td>The Future of the Discipline</td>
<td>Dec 3: Final draft of paper due</td>
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**Detailed course outline and reading schedule:**

**Week 1: September 10**

*Introduction and overview*

**Week 2: September 17**

*Competing perspectives on research design and analysis*


**Week 3: September 24**

*Sociological Study of the Bases of Politics*


**Week 4: October 1**

The scientific study of politics


**Week 5: October 8**

Rational choice


**Week 6: October 22 *Class to be Rescheduled***

Feminism

Week 7: October 29
Postmodernism

Week 8: November 5
Institutionalism
Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol, ‘Historical Institutionalism in Contemporary Political Science’, in Ira Katznelson and Helen Milner, Political Science State of the Discipline, JC11 POL, pp. 693-721

Week 9: November 12
Normative Theory: The Place of Normative Concerns in Political Science and International Relations

Week 10: November 19
Quantitative/qualitative analysis, I

**Week 11: November 26**

**Quantitative/qualitative analysis, II**


**Week 12: December 3**

**The future of the discipline**

**Research Papers due**


Notes on Grading, Missed Tests, and Late Penalties

The final draft of the research essay is due Friday December 3, in class. The penalty for submitting this assignment late is 10% per day, including each weekend day. So, for example, if you submit your paper on the Monday after it is due, 30% will be automatically deducted. Wait until the following Friday, and 70% will be automatically deducted.

Late papers are not acceptable for the short critical review assignments. Because you get to choose when you submit them, deciding not to submit a paper is also your choice.

Finally, on the initial draft of your paper and the peer review exercise, late assignments are also not acceptable. This exercise involves working in a group/team environment, and by either a) not submitting an initial draft of your paper on time; or b) not submitting your peer review on time, you are seriously inconveniencing your colleagues. Students who do not submit their initial drafts on time forfeit the opportunity to either receive a peer review, or do one themselves. This is a kind of quid pro quo exercise, and given that it’s done over email, there’s no excuse for missing out. You can do it from home, you can do it from your bed if you like. If you become seriously ill or something in advance of this assignment, it is important that you take steps to notify the instructor (me) about your situation so we can work something out.

Finally, cheating, in addition to being unfortunate in any class, is especially unfortunate in a class where the main goal is to read, think, and discuss your ideas. It is simply not acceptable. Cheating on assignments includes (but is not limited to) allowing another student to copy from your own work and presenting someone else’s work as your own. Information about procedures and penalties for academic dishonesty is outlined in the University Calendar and is available through the Department of Political Science.
Department of Political Science

Policy on Plagiarism

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 honesty. 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.

Notes on Proper Documentation

A good political science paper contains a logical argument built on solid evidence. While the evidence may be that of first-hand observation and study, evidence for most student papers will come from books, journals, newspapers, and government documents. Documentation in the form of footnotes, endnotes, or in-text references (with page numbers) must be provided for all facts, ideas, or interpretations which are not considered to be common knowledge. An acceptable rule of thumb for determining whether an item is one of common knowledge would be if the information is readily available in a number of different sources. An example may help.

It is common knowledge that Martin Luther King, Jr. was a black civil rights activist who was jailed in Alabama for leading a march against segregation in the early 1960s. No footnote would be required for such a fact.
A footnote would, however, be required for a statement such as: *Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed disappointment that southern religious leaders urged people to comply with desegregation not because it was morally right but because it was the law.*

In the latter case, the reader might want to check that Rev. King actually did express those views. A good guideline to follow is to ask yourself where your understanding of the thoughts, beliefs, or ideas of an individual or a group came from. If you don't know, are you sure that your understanding is accurate? If it isn't, then don't use it. If you do know, then state the source.

A common misperception is that footnotes only have to be given for direct quotations. This is not correct: footnotes must be provided in all cases where an idea, belief, action, or thought is attributed to an individual or group.

A footnote would be required for the following quotation from page 14 of the province's Strategic Economic Plan. "The private sector must be the engine of growth. While it is the role of government to create an economic and social environment that promotes competitiveness, it is the enterprising spirit of the private sector that will stimulate lasting economic growth."

A footnote would also be required for the following statement. The Strategic Economic Plan argues that the private sector must be the basis of economic growth in the province.

Similarly, a footnote must be provided whenever you "borrow" a particular idea, interpretation, or argument from a known source.