Welcome to Political Science 309: Canadian Government and Politics. The course is designed to provide a general introduction to the subject of Canadian government and politics. It includes concepts that are relevant to the study of political science and a general overview of the key institutions, issues, processes, and people that demand and produce decisions on behalf of the Canadian state. As you work through the course, you will acquire critical, analytical, and practical skills that will serve you well in this and other courses.

Course Objectives

After completing POLI 309, you should be able to describe how the Canadian political system (i.e., government) relates to the broader societal environment.

- Discuss how conflict is generated in Canadian society, and describe the role of the political system in alleviating this conflict.
- Describe how Canadians differ from Americans and from one another in their basic political values and beliefs.
- Describe how the Canadian political system is organized to make decisions, and specify the key players in the process.
- Discuss various ways in which Canadians may participate in the political process.

Course Materials (note: these were revised in 2016).

Course Outline

Part 1 Introduction

Unit 1  Studying Canadian Government and Politics

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 1 you should be able to:

1. Discuss the role of politics and government in modern societies.
2. Describe what is meant by the Canadian political system.
3. Define the concept of the nation state.
4. Describe what is meant by the Canadian political system.
5. List the different approaches to the study of Canadian politics.
6. Describe the fundamental features of the Canadian constitution, and how they differ from those of Great Britain and the United States.
7. Describe the Westminster model of parliamentary government.

Readings:

1.1  Unit 1 Commentary


Unit 2  Studying Canadian Government and Politics

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 2 you should be able to:

1. Identify and discuss the reasons why Canada enjoys a close relationship with the United States.
2. Identify the economic and cultural conflicts that have arisen out of Canada–US trade relations and the policies promoted by Canada in these fields.

3. Identify the international organizations to which Canada belongs, and assess their influence on Canada.

4. Assess the argument that the Canadian nation–state is in a state of decline.

5. Articulate what you think to be the significance of “globalization” for Canada.

6. Assess the extent to which Canada’s institutions are able to meet the needs of its citizens in this era of global governance.

Readings:

2.1 Unit 2 Commentary


Part 2 The Societal Context

Unit 3 Political Culture, Political Socialization, and Canadian Political Identity

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 3 you should be able to:

1. Define political culture, and identify how it differs from political ideology.

2. Identify those values that distinguish Canadian political culture from American political culture.

3. Identify and discuss the significance of the Hartz–Horowitz thesis.
4. Assess the extent to which Canadian political culture is in danger of becoming Americanized.

5. Define political socialization, and identify the main agents of political socialization in Canadian society.

6. Identify the main political sub-cultures within Canada, and the different processes of political socialization that help to shape and sustain them.

7. Define the “conservative nationalism” associated with John Diefenbaker and the Conservative Party prior to 1965, and discuss what factors limit the viability of such nationalism today.

Readings:

3.1 Unit 3 Commentary
3.3 Introduction by Andrew Potter to Lament for a Nation, by George Grant, 40th anniversary edition (2005), pp. ix-xxvii.

Unit 4 Regional, Economic and Class Cleavages

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 4 you should be able to:

1. Identify the ways in which Canada’s geography and population distribution have affected the structure and operation of its central institutions.

2. Identify the main regional divisions in Canada.

3. Identify the key economic factors that distinguish regions.

4. Evaluate the significance of Canada’s historical development on the politics of regionalism.

5. Identify the main arguments that express the central grievances of the different regions in Canada.

6. Discuss the impact of regionalism on the operation and function of Canada’s political system.
7. Discuss the relationship between regionalism and federalism.

Readings:

4.1 Unit 4 Commentary

Unit 5 Aboriginal Peoples

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 5 you should be able to:

1. Define “Aboriginal” with respect to the Canadian context.
2. Trace the evolution of Aboriginal–Canadian relations.
3. Discuss the effects of development on Canada’s Aboriginal peoples.
4. Identify the major policies that have been instituted or initiated by the federal government concerning Canada’s Aboriginal peoples, and discuss their effects on these groups.
5. Discuss the meaning and significance of the Calder case and of Aboriginal title.
6. Identify the different types of land claims.
7. Identify the significance of the inherent right to self-government.
8. Compare the views of Roger Townshend and Thomas Flanagan in Issue 2 of Charlton & Barker’s Crosscurrents. Do they share any premises? How do they differ?

Readings:

5.1 Unit 5 Commentary
Unit 6  French Canada and the Quebec Question

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 6 you should be able to:

1. Discuss the historical evolution of French–English relations and its effect on the development of Canada’s central institutions.

2. Identify and describe the major points of crisis in the history of French–English relations.

3. Discuss what is meant by the term “Quiet Revolution.”

4. Compare and contrast the values and attitudes of Quebec before and following the Quiet Revolution.

5. Identify the reasons for Quebec’s dissent from the 1982 amendment to the Canadian constitution, and discuss the related components of the Meech Lake Accord and the Charlottetown Accord.

6. Discuss the significance of the Clarity Act.

7. Account for the appeal, or lack thereof, of secession to Quebeckers.

Readings:

6.1 Unit 6 Commentary

Unit 7  Gender, Multiculturalism and Representation

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 7 you should be able to:

1. Identify the historical obstacles to women’s participation in politics.

2. Identify the milestones in women’s political participation.
3. Discuss the emergence of the women’s movement, its goals, and its accomplishments.


5. Discuss the extent to which Canada's pluralism is reflected in its institutions.

6. Articulate the current needs and concerns of women and minority ethnic groups.

Readings:


Part 3 Governing

Unit 8 The Constitutional Context

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 8 you should be able to:

1. Identify the importance of a constitution and its function in the political system.

2. Discuss the historical events that led to Confederation.

3. Identify and discuss the three principles or “pillars” upon which the Canadian constitution is based.

4. Identify the main reasons why the four original provinces agreed to Confederation.

5. Identify the main principles of the Canadian Constitution, 1867.

7. Differentiate between the Canadian Bill of Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

8. Discuss the political context of the Meech Lake Accord, the Charlottetown Accord, and the Calgary Declaration.

9. Discuss how the Secession Reference and the Delgamuukw decision have affected Canada’s constitutional context.

10. Evaluate the arguments in support of and in opposition to future constitutional renewal.

Readings:

8.1 Unit 8 Commentary


Unit 9 The Parliamentary System

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 9 you should be able to:

1. Discuss parliamentary supremacy in Canada.

2. Identify what is meant by the “Westminster model” of government.


4. Identify and discuss the functions of the House of Commons.

5. Identify the different stages and types of legislation.

6. Differentiate between majority government and minority government.

7. Contrast the intended functions of the Senate with those functions it actually performs.
8. Outline the composition of, and the process for appointment to, the Senate.

9. Identify and discuss proposals for parliamentary reform (e.g., Triple–E Senate).

10. Differentiate between arguments in support of and against party discipline in the Canadian political system.

Readings:

9.1 Unit 9 Commentary


Unit 10 The Executive

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 10 you should be able to:

1. Identify the ways in which the monarchy is entrenched in the Canadian political system.

2. List the powers and functions of the Crown.

3. Distinguish between the formal executive and the political executive.

4. Identify and discuss the powers (their sources and limitations) for the prime minister and the cabinet.

5. Debate the merits of ‘the Cabinet government’ versus ‘prime ministerial government’.

6. Identify and discuss the functions of the four main central agencies.

7. Identify the factors that influence the composition of Cabinet.

8. Discuss how the views of Mellon and Barker shape your perception of the role of the prime minister.
9. Identify ethical problems associated with the Chrétien and Harper governments.

Readings:

10.1 Unit 10 Commentary.


Unit 11 The Parliamentary System

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 11 you should be able to:

1. Discuss the functions of the bureaucracy in the policy-making process.

2. Identify the structure of a government department, distinguishing between the roles of the minister and the deputy minister.

3. Assess the effectiveness of the bureaucracy in managing public interests.

4. Provide a critical appraisal of the relationship between the bureaucracy and the political executive.

5. Identify the ways in which bureaucratic power is, or can be, controlled.

Readings:

11.1 Unit 11 Commentary.


Unit 12 The Judiciary

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 12 you should be able to:
1. Identify and discuss the function of adjudication and how the courts operate.

2. Discuss what is meant by judicial review.

3. Outline the judicial structure.

4. Discuss the appointment process.

5. Discuss the ways in which the entrenchment of the Charter of Rights has affected the function of the judiciary in the policy-making process.

6. Define “judicial independence.”

Readings:

12.1 Unit 12 Commentary.


Part 4 Linking People to Government

Unit 13 Civil Society: Interest Groups, Social Movements, and the Voluntary Sector

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 13 you should be able to:

1. Identify the different categories and types of interest groups.

2. Define lobbying, and discuss its impact on policy making.

3. Identify how interest groups have led to the decline of political parties.
4. Evaluate the extent to which parties and interest and advocacy groups enhance the practice of Canadian government.

5. Understand what “New Social Movements” are, why they have come into being, and what impacts they are understood as having on Canadian democracy.

Readings:

13.1  Unit 13 Commentary.


**Unit 14  Political Parties**

**Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 14 you should be able to:**

1. Describe the functions and roles that political parties play, and discuss the extent to which they organize political life.

2. Distinguish among one-party, two-party, and multi-party systems, and discuss their differences.

3. Compare and contrast the political parties in terms of membership, leadership selection, and ideologies.

4. Characterize Canada’s current party system.

5. What are the current methods of leadership selection for the main political parties, and what are the principal arguments for and against them?

6. What do critics and commentators see as the weaknesses of contemporary Canadian political parties?

7. Assess the leadership, structure, ideology and organization of the new Conservative Party of Canada and how they differ from both the Progressive Conservative and Reform/Alliance parties that preceded it.

Readings:
Unit 15  Elections and the Electoral System

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 15 you should be able to:

15.1 Compare and contrast the utility of a First Past the Post (FPP) system versus a proportional representation (PR) system.

15.2 Assess how and why elections are important to Canadian democracy.

15.3 Discuss whether Canada should pursue electoral reform.

Readings:

15.1 Unit 15 Commentary.


