POLI 1100 – Introduction to Government and Politics (Fall 2009)

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Office Hours: Thursday 11:00-14:30 & Friday 13:00-14:30
(I will try to respond to voicemail and email within 24hrs Monday through Friday)

Description
This course provides an introduction to the study of government and politics and is designed to promote two interrelated objectives. The first objective is to introduce students to concepts of political science and the distinctions which can be drawn between theoretical and empirical approaches to the subject. The second objective of this course is to develop critical thinking skills by requiring students to analyze opposing viewpoints and reach considered judgments. Topics to be explored include: ideology; political parties and social movements; nationalism and multiculturalism; electoral systems; and political development.

Learning Outcomes
On the successful completion of this course, students should be able to:
- assess the importance and causes of many problems of governance and their solutions;
- describe and critically appraise leading academic theories of politics;
- recognize the principal forces that shape political behaviour in Canada and elsewhere;
- gain an enriched appreciation of the complexity of political life; and
- develop an enhanced ability to think critically about the world in which we live.

Required Reading

Evaluation
Mid-term exam: 25%; Seminars: 15%; Term essay: 25%; Final exam: 35%

Exams
Two exams will be given during the term, a mid-term exam on October 16, and a final exam during the College’s final exam period. Students are responsible on these exams for all of the material covered in lectures, readings, and seminars.

Seminars
Several seminars will be held throughout the term, the object of which is to allow students to debate and discuss selected issues raised in the course. Seminar marks will be awarded for attendance and participation. For the purpose of the seminars, the class will be divided into two groups, one of which will meet on
Thursday and the other on Friday of the seminar week. Other than the compulsory weekly readings, no additional reading is required for seminars (unless announced in class). Please consult the course schedule for seminar dates and topics.

**Term Essay**

You are required to write an academic essay on an issue related to politics and/or the study of government. A list of suggested topics for the essay along with the evaluation criteria is included below. Students wishing to choose an alternative topic must obtain the instructor’s permission no later than November 2. Essay topics that have not been approved will not be accepted. The essay is due November 19. In the absence of a documented medical reason, late essays will be subject to a daily deduction of one mark (4%). Essays not submitted in person to the instructor must bare the signature of a faculty member. The instructor assumes no responsibility for essays otherwise submitted. The objective of this assignment is not for you to undertake original research, but rather that you search out what various authorities have to say on the subject and develop your position based on their research. The length of the essay should be eight double-spaced pages and should include citations and a reference list. A minimum of five sources (not counting the course text) should be used and referenced in the essay. Internet sources, with the exception of online academic journals, non-governmental organizations, and government sites are not to be used for this essay. Failure to meet any of the standards outlined above will result in grade deductions. In the preparation of their essays students must adhere to the following style guide (available on the department website): *Guidelines for Academic Essays*. Department of History / Latin / Political Science: Langara College, 2004.

**Suggested Essay Topics**

- What are the main differences between parliamentary and presidential systems of government? What implications do those differences have for both policy making and democracy itself?

- What problems does federalism as a system of government help accommodate, and what problems does federalism itself pose to a political system?

- Discuss the proposition that there are no longer significant ideological differences among mainstream parties in the industrialized democracies?

- Discuss the impact that the adoption of a mixed-member proportional (MMP) electoral system for choosing members of the Canadian House of Commons might have on the party system in Canada.

- In your opinion, is citizenship better understood as a set of rights that people have as individuals or as a range of responsibilities that people have as members of their community?

- Should the developing world follow the model of political development established in the West, or should it follow an alternative pattern of development?

- Are non-governmental organizations truly influential participants in global politics?

- Is terrorism always morally reprehensible? Or does the justness of the end cause legitimize the use of terrorist means?

**Evaluation Criteria**

All essays will be assessed using the following five criteria: 1) Presentation of the argument (thesis statement); 2) Organization of the essay; 3) Quality of the evidence/appropriateness of research; 4) Sentence structure and clarity; and 5) Format and referencing. Please note that there are no marks attached to each criterion; evaluation is achieved by an overall assessment of the essay. A marking grid outlining the comments will be handed back with the essays.

**Grading Scale**

90–100 (A+); 85–89 (A); 80–84 (A-); 76–79 (B+); 72–75 (B); 68–71 (B-); 64–67 (C+); 60–63 (C); 55–59 (C-); 50–54 (D); 0–49 (F = Fail)
Academic Honesty
Please be reminded that Langara College values academic integrity. It is your responsibility to understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of academic conduct (consult the college website http://www.langara.bc.ca/about-langara/policies/student.html)

Schedule & Readings

Week 1 (Sep. 8 - 11)
The Study of Politics - Studying Politics, Ch. 1

Week 2 (Sep. 14 - 18)
Governments and State Power - Studying Politics, Ch. 2; and Braving the New World, Unit 1 (Item 1)

Week 3 (Sep. 21 - 25)
Nationalism and Diversity - Studying Politics, Ch. 3; & Braving the New World, Unit 2 (Item 10)
Seminar 1: Does multiculturalism help foster or weaken social cohesion and national unity?

Week 4 (Sep. 28 - Oct. 2)
Political Culture - Studying Politics, Ch.4; & Braving the New World, Unit 3 (Item 12)

Week 5 (Oct. 5 - 9)
Ideas and Ideologies - Studying Politics, Ch. 5; & Braving the New World, Unit 2 (Item 9)
Seminar 2: Is feminism still relevant as an ideological position and/or political movement?

Week 6 (Oct. 13 - 16) ► Mid-term exam Oct. 16
Constitutionalism - Studying Politics, Ch. 6

Week 7 (Oct. 19 - 23)
Political Executives and Legislatures - Studying Politics, Ch. 7-8

Week 8 (Oct. 26 - 30)
Judicial Politics - Studying Politics, Ch. 9; & Braving the New World, Unit 4 (Item 19)

Week 9 (Nov. 2 - 6)
Elections and Electoral Systems - Studying Politics, Ch. 10; & Braving the New World, Unit 4 (Item 17)
Seminar 3: Should Canada reform its electoral system?

Week 10 (Nov. 9 - 13)
Political Parties and Party Systems - Studying Politics, Ch. 11; & Braving the New World, Unit 4 (Item 22)

Week 11 (Nov. 16 - 20) ► Term essay due Nov. 19
Interest Groups and Social Movements - Studying Politics, Ch. 12; & Braving the New World, Unit 3 (Item 14)

Week 12 (Nov. 23 - 27)
Political Development - Studying Politics, Ch. 13; & Braving the New World, Unit 5 (Item 27)
Seminar 4: Should the developing world emulate the West?

Week 13 (Nov. 30 - Dec. 4)
International Relations - Studying Politics, Ch. 15-16
Seminar 5: Why do so many groups and individuals oppose globalization?