

The Design and Evolution of Public Institutions

PSCI 4404A

- Instructor:** Scott Edward Bennett
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- Class Times:** 11:35 to 14:25 on Thursdays beginning on September 10 and ending on December 10. Check the location of the course online just before the week of the first class.
- Office Hours:** There are no fixed office hours, but you can communicate with the instructor by email at any time. He will usually get back to you within 48 hours.

Read this syllabus carefully. This syllabus stipulates class and university policies. Exemptions from these policies are almost never granted.

Note: In so far as possible, you should try to communicate with the instructor in class or through electronic mail. There are no in person office hours. There are very few matters that cannot be dealt with in class or by email.

Course Description

This course is an examination of the emergence and development of institutional collective action in a broad historical context with attention to probable future scenarios for change. The broad historical backdrop to the evolution of public institutions will be examined using the works of various anthropologists, evolutionary economists, historians and political theorists. For example, aspects of the work of Niall Ferguson, Daniel Friedman, Francis Fukuyama, Ian Morris, Elinor Ostrom and Joseph Tainter will be considered as they relate to the design, development and design of major institutions of control/coordination in human communities

Apart from mastering the substantive knowledge involved in the course, it is hoped that students will also develop some intellectual habits that may not have been central to some of their other academic experiences. For example, you may find that the work in this course involves a greater degree of counterintuitive and speculative thinking compared to other courses you have taken. Such thinking does not always lead in the direction of some happy view of the future based on a simplistic view of change and progress.

In looking back over recent examples of this class, the instructor concludes that there are differences between a good class and an excellent class. At the practical level, in an excellent class, all students take their presentation responsibilities seriously. At the conceptual level, in an excellent class there is a willingness to consider the possibility that conventional government institutions are not necessarily more effective and important in meeting public needs than market institutions, community cooperative institutions or markedly different forms of government institutions.

Class Format

This is a seminar in which, by definition, the students must have the primary responsibility for using course time effectively. You must be prepared to do your part in covering course material and participating. Also note that the way students are evaluated in a seminar is different from evaluation in large lecture classes. Therefore, do not expect to have a precise knowledge of the number of “points” you have earned in the grading system on any given day in the term. The seminar experience requires a greater degree of maturity than that, but it is also more forgiving in terms of typical grade distributions.

Grade Components

Major Seminar Paper 65% of course grade

Participation 35% of course Grade

More details on the paper will be provided in class. It is due in digital form (email attachment in WORD format) by the end of December 10. In order for the student to have a chance at a reasonable grade, the paper must be at least 6250 words long at a bare minimum. Typically, many papers will likely be considerably longer than this. The instructor may suggest paper topics later in the course. However, the amount of work for an instructor defined paper topic is the same as the amount of work for any other kind of paper topic.

Class participation will probably be judged primarily in terms of presentations of one's own work and presentations of readings for which one is responsible. There may be other elements to participation (such as attendance), and these will be clearly determined and defined later. Generally, it is expected that a student will be principally involved in at least 2 presentations on readings. In addition, students will also do a brief mid-course presentation on their proposed major paper. If time permits, there will also be a presentation of final papers. **We will not finalize the exact details of presentation procedures until we know more about the people enrolled in the seminar.**

This term we are also requiring that you must attend at least one of the first two meetings of the course if you wish to pass the course. This is essential for the continuity of the course under current circumstances. In addition, you must do your presentations if you wish to pass the course.

If you are principally responsible for a particular part of the readings in a given week, you should prepare an electronic/typed summary of that part and provide copies of that summary to the class. Copies of slide files may also be appropriate.

Useful Books

Why Nations Fail, Acemoglu & Robinson, published by Crown, 2012
(\$29.99 on Amazon)

Civilization: The West and the Rest, Ferguson, published by Penguin, 2011
(\$22.41 on Amazon)

The Great Degeneration: How Institutions Decay and Economies Die, Ferguson, published by Penguin, 2013
(\$23. On Amazon)

Morals and Markets: The Dangerous Balance (2nd ed.), Friedman and McNeil, published by Palgrave Macmillan, 2013
(\$46.26 on Amazon)

The Origins of Political Order, Fukuyama, published by Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2011
(\$29. On Amazon)

Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy, Fukuyama, published by Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2014
(\$27. On Amazon)

Why The West Rules – For Now: The Patterns of History, and What They Reveal about The Future, Morris, published by McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2010
(\$32.81 on Amazon)

Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions of Collective Action, Ostrom, published by Cambridge University Press, 1990
(\$22.72 on Amazon)

Understanding Institutional Diversity, Ostrom, Princeton University Press, 2005
(\$64. On Amazon)

The Collapse of Complex Societies, Tainter, published by Cambridge University Press, initially published in 1988 with many subsequent reprints
(\$57.95 on Amazon)

Note: Do not purchase texts until you have been to the first class. You are not expected to purchase all of the texts. You might find it useful to purchase one or two of them depending on your presentations.

A New and Pointless Administrative Burden

In their infinite wisdom and their never-ending quest to solve the problems of the world through performative policy making, check box bureaucracy and pandering to the most uninformed desires of the legislature, the great minds in the Ministry of Colleges and Universities have decreed that every course outline in an Ontario post-secondary institution must contain the costs of the text books and related material required for a course.

That is why prices are provided in the above listing. Of course, they may be inaccurate because there is a range of prices for almost any book depending on the supplier. Yet, we must not question the guidance and profoundly helpful wisdom of Ontario's guardians of higher education:

Course Topics & Readings

It is possible that the readings will be modified. Perhaps they will be extended in some areas and reduced in others. It may even turn out to be the case that certain secondary topics cannot be covered at all due to lack of time. Some patience is required in this regard.

Note that the instructor considers it to be bad pedagogy and probably bad administration to assign in advance specific dates to the coverage of specific topics. In general, we hope to reach topic 5 (preliminary proposals) no later than the beginning of week 5 or 6 of the course. However, this is an expectation that can be altered in light of student background, interests and progress. We will cover as many of the topics as is appropriate and possible in the order listed below.

1. Introduction to the Course

2. The Broad Contours of Institutions and their Interrelations

Acemoglu and Robinson, Chapters 1 to 3

Ferguson (2013), Introduction

3. History of Governing Institutions and Related Institutions

a. Emergence

Fukuyama (2011), Chapters 1 to 5

Tainter, Chapter 2

Morris, Chapters 1 and 3 are useful background reading here.

b. Development

Fukuyama (2011), Chapters 29 and 30

Fukuyama (2014) Chapter 1 to 3

Tainter, Chapter 4

Morris, Chapters 9 and 10 are useful background reading here

c. Collapse or Continuation

Fukuyama (2014), Chapters 31 to 36

Tainter, Chapters 5 and 6

Morris, Chapters 11 and 12 are useful background reading here

d. Current Context and Problems

Ferguson, Chapter 1 and 3 (2013)

4. History of Market Institutions

a. Emergence

Friedman and McNeil, chapters 1 and 2

Morris, again, Chapters 1 to 3 are useful background reading here.

b. Development

Friedman and McNeil, Chapter 3

Morris, chapters 9 and 10 are useful background reading here.

c. Collapse or Continuation

Friedman and McNeil, Chapter 11

Morris, Chapters 11 and 12 are useful background reading here.

d. Current Context and Problems

Ferguson (2013) Chapter 2

5. Preliminary Proposals

6. The Middle Ground Between the Government and the Market: Common Pool Resource Institutions and the Work of Ostrom

a. Basic Foundations and Frameworks

Ostrom, Governing the Commons, Chapters 1 and 2

b. Stability, Change and Collapse in Commons Institutions

Ostrom, Governing the Commons, Chapters 3 to 5 (6 may also be of some use.)

c. A Methodology to Understand and Design Commons Institutions

Ostrom, Understanding Institutional Diversity, Part III (particularly Chapter 9)

d. Current Context and Problems Scaled up to the Societal Level

Ferguson, 2013 Chapter 4

7. Concluding Overviews of the Current Status and Likely Future of Related Institutions

Ferguson, 2013 Conclusion

Acemoglu and Robinson, Chapters 11 to 15

8. Concluding Presentations (if time permits)

You will note that we put Morris in as a background reading for both market and governing institutions, and this is because he writes about social development more broadly and sees everything as part of the same materialistic web of relations. Some of the work of Jared Diamond is also relevant to both market and public institution collapses, and that can be brought forward if desired. Niall Ferguson's larger work, Civilization: The West and The Rest, is mentioned in our list of texts, and it too can provide useful background. However, all of these must be viewed as secondary in what is already a heavy reading list.

Finally, if one is interested in seeing how some thought on democracy, governance, markets, society and institutions have developed more recently, just for interest, keep in mind:

Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order: Why Nations Succeed and Fail, Dalio, The Avid Reader Press, 2021

Doom: The Politics of Catastrophe, Ferguson, published by Penguin Press, 2021

Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment, Fukuyama, published by Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2018

Liberalism and Its Discontents, Fukuyama, published by Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2022

I think the very recent work by Bricker and Ibbitson (Breaking Point: The New Big Shifts Putting Canada at Risk) is also worth exploring depending on your interests. Bricker is a graduate of our PhD program and was Public Affairs CEO of the one of the largest research firms in the world, IPSOS.

Instructor's Other Important Guidelines and Rules

First of all, it is extremely important to note that this is a seminar. A significant part of a seminar necessarily involves students making presentations and discussing material. If you are absolutely unable to do this, no matter what the reasons, you cannot succeed in a seminar. In such a case, you should seek a special exemption from any programme requirement for seminar credits or make other adjustments in your programme.

From the instructor's point of view other important rules in a seminar are:

1. Do your work on time as described in this outline and in class.
2. Do not engage in plagiarism.
3. Do not disrupt the class.
4. Keep an open mind with respect to value systems and approaches to inquiry.
5. The instructor does not object to students using AI software to do research. However, it is expected that the final version of a paper will not be purely a product of AI. You can also use AI to generate presentation material, and this may often be very helpful. Just ensure that you document the AI usage.

With respect to point one above, the final copy of the course paper should be submitted by the end of December 10, 2026. It must be in electronic form as a WORD attachment to an email. Be sure you keep copies of what you submit, and wait for the instructor's return message that he has received and can open the attachment. If you do not turn in the paper on time, you will initially get an F in the course. However, a failing grade can be changed at some later date if the paper is finally submitted. Nevertheless, the student should keep in mind that there are elements of grade change policy not within the instructor's control, and authorities in the university hierarchy may not accept a submitted grade change.

Presentations must be done on time as assigned. Failure to observe this will lead to a loss of all marks associated with a presentation.

Other rules of general interest from a departmental or university perspective are contained in the insertion that follows. The instructor only takes responsibility for the essence of the material above.

Standard Departmental Attachment Follows in Official Version

Political Science Course Outline

Appendix

REQUESTS FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Student Mental Health

As a university student, you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. Here is a list that may be helpful:

Emergency Resources (on and off campus):

<https://carleton.ca/safety/resources/>

Carleton Resources:

Mental Health and Wellbeing:

<https://carleton.ca/wellness/>

Health & Counselling Services:

<https://carleton.ca/health/>

Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>

Academic Advising Centre (AAC):

<https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>

Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS):

<https://carleton.ca/csas/>

Equity & Inclusivity Communities:

<https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Off Campus Resources:

Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>

Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>

Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>

The Walk-In Counselling Clinic:

<https://walkincounselling.com>

Academic consideration for medical or other

extenuating circumstances: Students must contact the instructor(s) of their absence or inability to complete the academic deliverable within the predetermined timeframe due to medical or other extenuating circumstances. For a range of medical or other extenuating circumstances, students may use the online self-declaration form and where appropriate, the use of medical documentation. This policy regards the accommodation of extenuating circumstances for both short-term and long-term periods and extends to all students enrolled at Carleton University.

Students should also consult the [Course Outline Information on Academic Accommodations](#) for more

information. Detailed information about the procedure for requesting academic consideration can be found [here](#).

Pregnancy: Contact your Instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, please contact Equity and Inclusive Communities (EIC) at equity@carleton.ca or by calling (613) 520-5622 to speak to an Equity Advisor.

Religious obligation: Contact your Instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details [click here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with

Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, please request your accommodations for this course through the [Ventus Student Portal](#) at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*). Requests made within two weeks will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. For final exams, the deadlines to request accommodations are published in the [University Academic Calendars](#). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally scheduled exam (if applicable).

Survivors of Sexual Violence: As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and its survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>.

Accommodation for Student Activities: Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

PETITIONS TO DEFER

Students unable to write a final examination because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control may apply within **three working days** to the Registrar's Office for permission to write a deferred examination. The request must be fully supported by the appropriate documentation. Only deferral petitions submitted to the Registrar's Office will be considered. [See Undergraduate Calendar, Article 4.3](#)

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s). Permissibility of submitting substantially the same piece of work more than once for academic credit. If group or collaborative work is expected or allowed, provide a clear and specific description of how and to what extent you consider collaboration to be acceptable or appropriate, especially in the completion of written assignments.

WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT ACADEMIC PENALTY

Please reference the [Academic Calendar](#) for each term's official withdrawal dates

OFFICIAL FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD

Please reference the [Academic Calendar](#) for each term's Official Exam Period (may include evenings & Saturdays or Sundays)

For more information on the important dates and deadlines of the academic year, consult the [Carleton Calendar](#).

GRADING SYSTEM

The grading system is described in the Undergraduate Calendar section [5.4](#).

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is an essential element of a productive and successful career as a student. Students are required to familiarize themselves with the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as *"presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own."* This can include:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT);
- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in *"substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs."*

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course.

RESOURCES (613-520-2600, phone ext.)

Department of Political Science (2777)	
B640 Loeb	
Registrar's Office (3500)	300
Tory	
Centre for Student Academic Success (3822)	4 th
floor Library	
Academic Advising Centre (7850)	302
Tory	
Paul Menton Centre (6608)	501
Nideyinàn	
Career Services (6611)	401
Tory	

