

POLM 5001 Parliament and Parties in Canada

This is the first of two courses that examine political institutions in Canada from a political-management perspective. This course concentrates on Parliament and political parties; the sister course (POLM 5002) focuses on Cabinet and the bureaucracy. Both courses are designed to help students become strategic thinkers by gaining a thorough and critical understanding of the complexities of the Canadian political process.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to explain and think critically about:

- the place of Parliament and political parties in the Canadian constitutional framework;
- the role of Parliament's key officers;
- the basics of the legislative process;
- the functioning of parliamentary committees;
- the purpose of and the rules governing members' statements and oral questions in the House of Commons;
- the functions of Canadian political parties, including policy development, fundraising, candidate nomination and election, and leadership selection; and
- the similarities and differences between Canada's main parties.

Evaluation

In-Class Contribution	25%
Member's Statement	15%
Test	30%
Group Presentation	25%
Peer Review	5%

To pass the course, you must receive a passing grade in each of the areas above.

In-Class Contribution

Students should treat the classroom as a professional work environment. For example:

- Attendance – You should show up on time for all classes except on the rare occasions when you are ill or there are other extenuating circumstances. As a guideline, please consider that employees in the federal public service may take 6 per cent of their

workdays as sick leave. This translates to less than 1 in 12 workdays (or, in our case, classes). Keep in mind that political offices generally have higher expectations than the public service. If you absolutely must miss class, please inform me beforehand.

- Participation – You should participate actively in class discussions, addressing the substance of the issue at hand, engaging guest speakers with intelligent and relevant questions, demonstrating that you have read and reflected upon the required readings. You should neither dominate the discussion nor remain mute. Your tone should foster an open and cooperative group environment.
- Monotasking – While in class, your attention should be devoted entirely to the class discussion or lecture. Telephones should be turned off. Laptops should be closed. If you need a laptop to take notes, turn off your Wi-Fi connection so that you will not be tempted to read your e-mail, scroll through your Twitter feed, or engage on other social media platforms. Better yet, take notes with a pen and paper—research shows that students are much more likely to remember information that they have written down. You will be considered absent if you are engaging in social media, reading e-mail, or using an electronic device for anything other than taking notes.
- Confidentiality – Class operates according to the Chatham House Rule: “participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.”

Member’s Statement

You will write a member’s statement and will deliver it orally in class, as though you are a member of Parliament speaking in the House of Commons. The statement should be timely and well-written and should show an understanding of the purpose of and the rules governing member’s statements. Your party and riding will be assigned to you.

The statement should be formatted to make it easy for an MP to read aloud (e.g., in an easy-to-read 16-point typeface with 1.5 line spacing). Please give me a hardcopy at the beginning of class.

Test

A test will be held in class. You will be permitted to bring notes but no electronic devices to the exam room. The test will consist of multiple-choice and short-answer questions.

Group Presentation

Students will be divided into groups to assess one aspect of Canada’s parliamentary system and possible reforms to it. The groups will present their findings to the rest of the class in the final two classes of term.

You need not accompany your presentation with PowerPoint slides, but if you decide to use them, you should follow the course guidelines on the best practices for PowerPoint (posted on Brightspace)

The purpose of the assignment is to encourage students to think critically about both the institutions and common proposals for reform. The presentation should:

- show an understanding of why the institution exists in its current form (e.g., *why* is there strict party discipline in Westminster systems?);
- explain clearly how the reform will be accomplished (e.g., it is easy to say that there should be more free votes in the Commons; you would need to explain how you would ensure that MPs will actually be free to break ranks); and
- include an appreciation for all the consequences of the reform, if the students are proposing changes to the status quo (e.g., what will happen to the government if free voting leads to deadlock between the executive and the legislature?).

Peer Review

You will be asked (confidentially) to assess the contribution of each of your fellow group members to your presentation within one week of your presentation. Instructions will be provided by email.