

POLM 5002
THE CORE EXECUTIVE IN CANADA
FALL SEMESTER, 2025

Course Description

POLM 5002 (0.5 credit): The Core Executive in Canada: An examination of how public policy originates and how its development is managed within the executive branch, with particular emphasis on the Cabinet process and the relationship between political actors and the public service.

Learning Outcomes

Through readings and discussion, work-integrated assignments, tests, role-play, and presentations, students will:

- Understand the principles of responsible government;
- Understand cabinet process, including its committee structure and relationship to Parliament;
- Analyze the role and powers of key actors such as: the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office; the Minister of Finance; the Clerk of the Privy Council and PCO; the Department of Justice; Treasury Board and Treasury Board Secretariat;
- Analyze the role of the public service and its relationship with ministers and their offices;
- Critically assess academic theories about executive centralization;
- Develop practical political management skills through drafting and presenting a Memorandum to Cabinet and supporting documents;
- Use artificial intelligence tools responsibly for political writing with transparency and documentation.

Required Books and Other Readings:

Significant parts of the following books will be used in the course. It is strongly recommended that each student purchase a copy for their personal use. These books have been ordered from the [Carleton Campus Store](#), and are also available from online book sellers. Costs, listed below, are as of August 14, 2025 and are subject to change. Amazon.ca prices are provided to illustrate an online option. All except for the Goldenberg book are also available electronically through the Carleton Library, though licensing agreements sometimes limit simultaneous access.

- Ian Brodie, *At the Centre of Government: The Prime Minister and the Limits on Political Power*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018. (Available electronically through MacOdrum Library). Paperback price: \$32.95 at Carleton Campus Store and on Amazon.ca.

- Eddie Goldenberg, *The Way It Works: Inside Ottawa*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2006. Paperback price: \$24 at Carleton Campus Store and on Amazon.ca.
- Donald Savoie. *Governing from the Centre: The Concentration of Power in Canadian Politics*. University of Toronto Press, 1999. (Available electronically through MacOdrum Library). Paperback price: \$58 at Campus Store, \$52.64 on Amazon.ca.

Other assigned readings will be posted on Brightspace or will be available through various means, such as on the web, online via the Carleton Library site or through Library Reserves (Ares). The instructor has tried to provide links to documents and has confirmed that links are working as of the time of writing. It is the responsibility of each student, however, to access the readings. If a link does not work, do your best to find it through other means (e.g. Google...).

Class Schedule

The schedule below provides relevant information for the class sessions of POLM 5002, including date, topic and reading assignments.

The instructor may propose from time to time to adjust the schedule or content in order, for example, to take advantage of current affairs or to accommodate the availability of guest speakers. The instructor commits to consult with the class with respect to possible adjustments but maintains final discretion to make amendments.

Week1: Introduction

An introduction to the course, including review of the course outline and expectations.

Readings:

- Privy Council Office. 2015. *Open and Accountable Government*. Ottawa: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada. Please read annexes E, F and G.
https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/backgrounders/2015/11/27/open-and-accountable-government#Federal_Government_Institutions
- Privy Council Office, *Guide to Making Federal Acts and Regulations* (2nd edition, 2001). This decades-old work contains all sorts of dry but important inside detail about how the federal policy-making system works in practice. The Guide includes a very useful schematic map of the federal law-making process and associated support activities. For today's class, simply review this schematic and take note of how much activity happens prior to the first reading introduction of a bill in the House of Commons (that is, before anything becomes public).

The full publication is available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/publications/guide-making-federal-acts-regulations.html>

You may find the schematic in JPG format at <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pco-bcp/images/pco2/misc/fed-eng.jpg>

Or you may find the schematic as a series of 5 PDF pages at
<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pco-bcp/documents/pdfs/fed5-eng.pdf>

Week 2: Cabinet and "The Centre"

A theoretical perspective on the Cabinet, the Prime Minister and the locus of power in the Canadian federal system.

Readings:

- Ian Brodie, *At the Centre of Government*, pages 1-52.
- Donald Savoie, *Governing from the Centre*, pp. 1-67.

Recommended:

- Graham White, *Cabinets and First Ministers*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005, pp. 1-63. (An accessible summary of executive government in Canada. Available electronically through MacOdrum Library).
- MacGregor Dawson, "The Cabinet: Position and Personnel." *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol. 12 (3), August 1946, pp. 261-281. In 2011, a Deputy Secretary at PCO pointed out to me this old article, observing "*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*"

Week 3: Privy Council Office and the Public Service

The relationship of the Public Service with the political executive with particular emphasis on the Privy Council office as a central agency and the Prime Minister's Department

Readings:

- Ian Brodie, *At the Centre of Government*, pp 156-171, 179.
- Donald Savoie, *Governing from the Centre*, pp. 109-55.
- Organizational Structure of the Privy Council Office, August 7, 2025.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/corporate/organizational-structure.html>
- John Tait. 1996. *A Strong Foundation: Report of the Task Force on Public Service Values and Ethics*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Management Development. Pages 7-18, 53-64. <http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/SC94-72-1996E.pdf>

Recommended:

- Gordon Robertson (1971). "The Changing Role of the Privy Council Office." *Canadian Public Administration* 14 (4):487-508.
- Privy Council Office Code on Values and Ethics (2021). <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/publications/code-value-ethics-2021.html>

- Deputy Minister's Task Team on Values and Ethics Report to the Clerk of the Privy Council (2023). <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/publications/deputy-ministers-task-team-values-ethics-report-clerk-privy-council.html>

Week 4: The Prime Minister and PMO

This week we will look at the role and prerogatives of the Prime Minister, including cabinet formation and the political roots of government policy direction (platform, mandate letters, Speech from the Throne). We will also consider the role and structure of the Prime Minister's Office.

Guest speaker: Ian Brodie, Professor at the University of Calgary and Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, 2006-2008 (via Zoom).

Readings:

- Ian Brodie, *At the Centre of Government*, pp. 53-70
- Eddie Goldenberg, *The Way It Works*, pp. 57-96
- Donald Savoie, *Governing from the Centre*, pp. 71-108.
- Marc Lalonde. "The Changing Role of the Prime Minister's Office." *Canadian Public Administration* 14 (4) 1971: 509-537. (The first detailed account of a Canadian PMO, written by the chief of staff to PM Pierre E. Trudeau. It was published in tandem with an article on PCO written by the Clerk of the Privy Council—see PCO recommended readings).
- Kenny William Ie, (2023). "Ministerial Mandate Letters and Co-ordination in the Canadian Executive." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 56 (4), 811-831. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/canadian-journal-of-political-science-revue-canadienne-de-science-politique/article/ministerial-mandate-letters-and-coordination-in-the-canadian-executive/5153A4B4F22B0B82B8DB8BDB3094F5E0>

Recommended:

- Graham White, *Cabinets and First Ministers*, pp. 64-101 (Valuable and accessible reflection on "the first minister as autocrat").
- Eddie Goldenberg, *The Way It Works*, pp. 1-56 (Goldenberg's personal back story as well as context of opposition as preparation for governing).

Week 5: Ministers and the Cabinet Process

The federal Cabinet and its subcommittees, including composition, powers, process and paperwork, and its relationship to the House of Commons.

Readings:

- Ian Brodie, *At the Centre of Government*, pp. 75-101, 109-129
- Eddie Goldenberg. 2006. *The Way It Works: Inside Ottawa*. pp. 97-130.
- Gordon Osbaldeston, "Dear Minister: A Letter to an Old Friend on Being a Successful Minister." Notes for remarks to the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada, Ottawa, January 22, 1988. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/reports/briefing-binder-2019/book-1/dear-minister.html>
- Cabinet Committee Mandate and Membership as of May 13, 2025 at <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/cabinet-committee-mandate-and-membership#priorities> . <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/cabinet-committee-mandate-and-membership>
- Prime Minister Mark Carney's mandate letter to ministers, dated May 21, 2025 at <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2025/05/21/mandate-letter>.
- Privy Council Office, "Guidance for the Drafting of Memoranda to Cabinet," October 2017, and Memorandum to Cabinet template (Obtained under ATI and uploaded to Brightspace).

Recommended:

- Graham White, *Cabinets and First Ministers*, pp. 102-169

Week 6: Finance and Budget Process

The federal budget process and the fiscal framework, including the role of the Minister of Finance, the Department of Finance, and other participants including the Prime Minister, other Ministers, PCO, Treasury Board Secretariat, and outside stakeholders.

Guest speaker: Hon. Bill Morneau, former Minister of Finance (via Zoom).

Readings:

- Ian Brodie, *At the Centre of Government*, pp. 101-107, 171-177.
- Donald Savoie, *Governing from the Centre*, pp. 156-192.
- Goldenberg, pp. 131-153
- Bill Morneau, *Where To From Here: A Path to Canadian Prosperity*." Toronto: ECW Press, 2023. Chapters 5, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15. (Available electronically through Carleton Library).
- Budget/Off-Cycle Proposal Template Guidance, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/services/publications/federal-budget/proposals/proposal-template-guidance.html> (Read this over at a high level to get a sense of the questions that Department of Finance officials want answered when other departments are submitting proposals for consideration in the budget (or for "off-cycle" funding outside of the budget).

Recommended:

- David Good. *The Politics of Public Money: Spenders, Guardians, Priority Setters, and Financial Watchdogs Inside the Canadian Government*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. pp. 93-117. (Brightspace)

Week 7: Caretakers and Transition

Examination of the principles and evolution of the Caretaker Convention which governs ministers, ministerial staff and public servants during an election campaign, and consideration of the process of transition after a general election.

Readings:

- Peter E. Larson, ed. *Changing the Guard: Effective Management of Transitions in Government*. Public Policy Forum, 2021. (For some reason this is available in its entirety on the Nunavut Legislative Assembly website at <https://assembly.nu.ca/library/Edocs/2001/000762-e.pdf>)
- Privy Council Office. 2021. Guidelines on the Conduct of Ministers, Ministers of State, Exempt Staff and Public Servants During an Election. <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/publications/guidelines-conduct-ministers-state-exempt-staff-public-servants-election.html>
- Paul Wilson and Michael McNair, "Political Staff," in *Inside the Campaign: Managing Elections in Canada*, edited by Alex Marland and Thierry Giasson. UBC Press, 2020. https://www.ubcpress.ca/media/MarlandGiasson_Chapter-2_bio_OA.pdf
- David M. Brock and J.W.J. Bowden, "Beyond the Writ: The Expansion of the Caretaker Convention in the Twenty-First Century," *Saskatchewan Law Review* 87 (1), 2024: pp. 1-50 (available via Carleton Library).

Week 8: Break Week--NO CLASS

Week 9: Minister of Justice, Attorney General and Department of Justice

The role of the Minister of Justice/Attorney General as a cabinet minister and chief legal advisor to the government, as supported by the federal Department of Justice.

Guest Speaker: Shalene Curtis-Micallef, Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General of Canada.

Readings:

- Justice Canada, 2025-26 Departmental Plan https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cp-pm/rpp/2025_2026/rep-rap/index.html. (Read through it at a high level to gain familiarity with the workings of the department—or ask AI to provide a summary of key points such as departmental mandate and core activities, budget over the past few years (actual and planned) and personnel (FTEs).

- Grant Huscroft, "Reconciling Duty and Discretion: The Attorney General in the *Charter* Era." *Queen's Law Journal*, 34 (2009): 773-811. Available online via Carleton Library.
- Andrew Petter. 2009. "Legalize This: The *Chartering* of Canadian Politics." in *Contested Constitutionalism*, edited by James B. Kelly and Christopher P. Manfredi. Vancouver: UBC Press. Pages 33-49.
- Federal Court, *Edgar Schmidt versus Attorney General of Canada*. Please read the following documents posted on Brightspace:
 - Edgar Schmidt Statement of Claim;
 - Attorney General of Canada, Statement of Defence; and
 - Affidavit of William Pentney, Deputy Minister and Deputy Attorney General

Week 10: Treasury Board and Expenditure Management

A closer look at the role and process of the Treasury Board cabinet committee (Part A) and the Treasury Board Secretariat

Readings:

- Donald Savoie, *Governing From the Centre*, pp. 193-223, 232-238.
- Donald Savoie, 2025. "Shaving department budgets won't be enough to rein in federal spending." *The Globe and Mail*, July 22nd.
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-carney-federal-government-spending-cuts/>
- Robert Shepherd and Evert Lindquist. 2024. "Institutionalizing Spending and Strategic Reviews: Supporting Effective Public Management." *Canadian Public Administration* 67 (4): 470-480. <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/doi/epdf/10.1111/capa.12599>
- Treasury Board Secretariat, "A Guide to Preparing Treasury Board Submissions." http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs_pol/oepubs/TBM_162/gptbs-gppct-eng.asp
 Please read pp. 1-50 as well as the sample (fictitious) submission from the Canadian Tourism Commission/Golf Course Canada. This fictitious submission may be found at the end of the document after annex G in the print and PDF versions, and at this link in the HTML version: https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pubs_pol/oepubs/TBM_162/gptbs-gppct14-eng.asp .
- "About the Treasury Board" <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/tbs-sct/abu-ans/tb-ct/abu-ans-eng.asp>
- "Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat Mandate" <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/tbs-sct/abu-ans/tbs-sct/abu-ans-eng.asp>
- "Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat Organization" <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/tbs-sct/organization-organisation/organization-organisation-eng.asp>

Week 11: Treasury Board and the Regulatory Process

Examination of Treasury Board in its role as cabinet committee responsible for most orders in council and regulations (Part B).

Readings:

- Please review the Canada Gazette website at <https://www.gazette.gc.ca/accueil-home-eng.html>. Note the difference between Part I and Part II. Find a recent regulation (either pre-published or final) and review it.
- Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. 2018. Cabinet Directive on Regulation <https://www.canada.ca/en/government/system/laws/developing-improving-federal-regulations/requirements-developing-managing-reviewing-regulations/guidelines-tools/cabinet-directive-regulation.html>.
- "Making Regulations" in PCO, Guide to Making Federal Acts and Regulations, 2nd edition, 2001. (Follow the HTML link or see pp. 175-188 in the PDF version). <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/publications/guide-making-federal-acts-regulations.html#pt3>
- Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. 2023. "What We Heard: Report on Regulatory Modernization." <https://www.canada.ca/en/government/system/laws/developing-improving-federal-regulations/regulatory-evaluation-results/what-we-heard-report-regulatory-modernization.html#toc08>

Week 12: Cabinet Simulation

Presentation of student "memoranda to cabinet" to the class as part of a simulated cabinet meeting.

Week 13: Cabinet Simulation 2

Further presentation of student "memoranda to cabinet" to the class as part of a simulated cabinet meeting.

Week 14: Cabinet Simulation 3

Further presentation of student "memoranda to cabinet" to the class as part of a simulated cabinet meeting.

Evaluation

Students will be evaluated on the following elements:

Assignment	% Weight
Class Participation: the instructor will assess each student's participation with a view to substantive and consistent contribution to class discussion as well as attendance.	15%
Ministerial Staff and Lobbyists	10%

First in class quiz (1 hour)	15%
Second in class quiz (1 hour)	15%
Memorandum to Cabinet and deck	35%
Oral presentation and talking points	10%

Please see annex 1 for a description of the assignments.

Standing in the 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.

Assignment Deadlines and Penalties

Assignments are due at the day and time indicated in the syllabus. Please format as either a Word document or PDF and email directly to the instructor using your Carleton email account.

Late submissions will be accepted for most assignments. However, the instructor will apply a penalty of one grade step (e.g. from A minus to B+) for each day or partial day that an assignment is late, including the original due date and also including weekends and holidays, until it is received.

Because the nature of the assignment is to present before the class at a particular time, students who fail to make their MC oral presentation as assigned (unless the instructor has agreed to other arrangements) will receive a zero on the class presentation portion of the exercise. The MC itself and associated deck will be accepted, subject to the usual penalty.

Expectations for Written Assignments

Professional Presentation

All assignments will be marked not only for content but for presentation. Of course, a paper must address the specific assignment and demonstrate command of the facts and sources as well as present analysis and advance an argument which shows an understanding of political management.

However, good ideas are not sufficient. Ideas and arguments must be conveyed through writing which is direct, unambiguous, and free from errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and syntax. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau is reported to have returned carelessly written memos from his staff with the scrawled notation "'Not English I won't read it.'"¹ And I assure you that having the prime minister correct typographical errors in one's work is an unwelcome experience.

¹ Former Trudeau press assistant Patrick Gossage quoted in Allan Levine (1993). *Scrum Wars: the Prime Ministers and the Media*. Toronto: Dundurn Press. p. 265.

Your professional colleagues will take your written work seriously, and so does the instructor. If you struggle to tell a comma splice from a conjunctive adverb, then consult a good grammar book, or by all means ask the instructor to explain his annotations.

Resubmission of Work

It is no longer an academic integrity offence at Carleton for a student to resubmit their own previous work from one course in another course. For the purposes of this course, however, I stipulate that work submitted for credit must be new, previously unsubmitted work unless I have granted permission otherwise ahead of time.

References and Citation

Proper use of references and citations is the cornerstone of academic work, and essential to avoid pitfalls such as plagiarism (see below). On the other hand, full academic apparatus is seldom if ever used when writing within government or in a political office. This creates a dilemma within the political management program since we strive for authenticity yet need to respect academic norms.

The foundation of the short memo assignment is the Government Electronic Directory (GEDS) and the Lobbying Registry. You need not provide references when you are using information derived from these. However, if you use information from any other source, this must be indicated using either a footnote or an in-text citation, with full references provided in a bibliography/list of works cited.

Because the MC assignment involves significant research, I require that students adhere to a formal documentation style. You may choose the style so long as you follow that style rigorously and consistently. (I prefer to see footnotes since they are easiest for the user and, in my opinion, the most transparent; but you may use endnotes or even in-text citations if you wish). Regardless of the citation style chosen, **page references must be included for all citations given in the MC** (not just for direct quotations). If in doubt, always err on the side of giving too much information rather than too little. And please do not hesitate to consult the instructor for guidance.

In all cases, if you use exact words from a source, you must use quotation marks and provide a reference with an exact page reference.