

COURSE OUTLINE
POLM 5015: Public Policy for Political Advisors
Fall 2024

Course description

From the calendar: An introduction to policy analysis and policy process for political advisors. Topics include agenda setting, instrument choice, policy arguments, and communicating policy ideas and decisions.

This course lies at the intersection of policy and politics. It aims to engage foundational theories and ideas about public policy while also taking seriously the political factors that can influence policy decisions and their implementation. One might think of it as applied public policy.

The course is organized around one of Canada’s most important annual policy documents: the federal budget. The budget provides a useful case study to analyse the different factors and players that can influence public policy. In particular, we will look at the roles of public servants, political staff, ministers, MPs, lobbyists, and other stakeholders in the context of the federal budget and their different perspectives and contributions. The goal is to rely on these different vantage points to engage the conceptual and practical underpinnings of budget policymaking.

Students can anticipate topics such as agenda setting, the role of government, federalism, political institutions, the interrelationship between policy narratives and public policy, and so on.

By the end of the course, students will have the opportunity to gain tools for for analysing policy files, to get a sense of the machinery and procedural issues in the federal policy process, engage with politicians, former political advisers and public servants with direct experience in the budget development process, and prepare a simplified version of a realistic budget letter item for Budget 2025.

Instructor’s note

There is a tendency in some circles to think uncritically about politics—to assume that “evidence-based policy” is good and “politics” is inherently bad. As the course will aim to demonstrate, these different concepts are not completely distinct. Evidence-based policy must account for politics. And politics has to account for evidence-based policy.

For students, whether one’s career is ultimately as a political advisor, public servant, corporate or non-profit stakeholder, lobbyist, or think-tank scholar, it is useful to be able think about and debate public policy with political acuity.

Learning outcomes

- 1) To have an introductory exposure to theory and practice in the field of policy studies
- 2) To have basic set of analytical tools such as key concepts, key questions and basic processes that can be applied when learning any of a wide range of current and future policy topics
- 3) To become competent at the craft of applying a political lens to policy information and advice

Reading materials

There is no textbook or reading pack that you will need to purchase for this course. All readings will be posted on the Brightspace site in a manner consistent with Fair Dealing.

Weekly routine

12:00-2:30	Office hours: Time for questions about course materials or just a chat
2:35-3:00	Brief roundtable on policy story of the day
3:00-4:00	Presentation (including guest lecturers)
4:15-5:00	Seminar discussion (with breaks)
5:00-5:25	Written reflection (Weeks 3 through 13)

Assignments

Students will be evaluated according to four key assignments or deliverables.

(1) Participation – 10 percent

Students are encouraged to attend each session and participate. It makes the course more interesting for individual students and the group as a whole.

(2) Policy story of the week – 10 percent

During weeks 3 through 13, students will work in pairs to lead a brief discussion about a policy story for the week. In the assigned week, your team will lead the group in a discussion about a policy choice facing one or more orders of government in Canada. You may decide to focus on one or more (but not all) of the following questions in leading the discussion:

- Why is this policy issue on the public agenda?
- What is the nature of the problem to be resolved?
- Is this a problem for government? Is there consensus on this definition of the problem and the evidence used?
- Who are the relevant stakeholders outside of the responsible government and what influence do they have?
- What options and instruments are being considered and/or pursued to address the issue? Is there good evidence in favor or against these?
- Are there jurisdictional, machinery or procedural questions involved?

- What are the relevant risks of policy and political failure? How might a government try to mitigate these?

(3) Written reflections (weeks 3 through 11) – 30 percent

During weeks 3 through 13, students will write a critical reflection on the topic for the week that draws on a combination of assigned readings, the in-class presentation, and seminar discussion. These assignments will be short—500 words maximum.

The purpose is to provide a critical (not just descriptive) summary of the key points as students see them. It aims to put them in the shoes of different players in the budget development process including political advisers, public servants, stakeholders, etc. Think about your future self—when dealing with a policy question, what ideas or perspective should one bear in mind or as use as a point reference? What are the universal takeaways from the budget process?

You will select three from over the course of term—one in in September, October and November—for me to read and evaluate.

(4) Policy memo and budget letter – 50 percent

Drawing on the readings, discussion and case studies over the whole term, you will prepare a letter to the Finance Minister, on behalf of a federal minister in Cabinet. You'll be making a persuasive case for Budget 2025 to include one of your policy priorities.

A budget letter generally has two parts.

The first is letter between Ministers that briefly describes priorities, how they will fit with the Finance Minister's stated aims for fiscal policy and why they are important – in both policy and political terms. Note that budget letters are generally drafted with the help of public servants and, as such, will generally make their political case in less overtly partisan ways. For example, you may argue that something is important to demonstrate that the government is supporting a given region. But you would not argue that the government ought to do something to win an upcoming by-election in that region. Your task is to find a way to deftly make your political case.

Your policy case needs to be robust and is detailed in the second part of the letter – a memo attached to the ministerial letter. A template for your memo will be distributed at least 3 weeks before this assignment is due, but you are strongly encouraged to start work on this well in advance.

Your memo will:

- Describe the policy challenge or opportunity to be addressed.
- Describe the desired outcomes or aims.
- Describe the design of the policy proposal (instrument choice and design-thinking, timelines, governance, including shared governance) and demonstrate how you have considered equity (horizontal and/or vertical), efficiency and effectiveness.
- Describe the implementation costs and any other requirements of the policy proposal. (I am looking for a broadly reasonable effort and evidence that you have tried to account for various costs rather than airtight costing).

Your cover letter should not exceed 1,000 words (roughly 2 pages single spaced). Your memo in addendum should be approximately 2,000-3,000 words (roughly 4 to 5 pages single spaced). The letter and memo are due on December 5.

Here is the guidance issued by the Treasury Board of Canada for submissions to the Board: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100013913/1565372219460>. It may have questions that help prompt your thinking and analysis, even if the memo has a different template and level of detail.

Here are some resources that can help you with figuring out the cost of your idea:

- Treasury Board of Canada, Guide to Cost Estimating, is available online at: <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=32600>. (This includes helpful information on costing methods and the difference between capital costs and operating costs.)
- For initiatives that can be costed relative to current spending or using an existing program as a comparison, you may find it very helpful to look at detailed information on current federal spending using:
- Departmental Performances Reports: <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/departmental-performance-reports.html>.
- Searchable information from the Public Accounts of Canada in GCInfoBase: <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ems-sgd/edb-bdd/indexeng.html#orgs/gov/gov/infograph/results>.

For initiatives that require hiring and paying new public servants, costing must include salaries for full-time-equivalents (FTEs) as well as 27% per year for employer-paid benefits (this includes both current and future pension and extended medical benefit costs). A table with job titles and salary ranges is available online at: <https://www.sacisc.gc.ca/eng/1100100013913/1565372219460>. (Conversely, cases involving layoffs should account for job savings.)

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has a free online tool to examine changes to the costs of federal personnel over time and comparing various departments and agencies of government. This may be helpful in estimating costs that include new hiring or savings from layoffs: <https://peat-oedp.pbo-dpb.ca/#/en/compare-similarity--comparersimilarites>.

For initiatives that mean a change to taxes or transfers, the Parliamentary Budget Officer provides a free and easy to use tool to estimate the costs of many potential tax changes: <http://www.readyreckoner.ca/?locale=en-CA>.

Evaluation

Evaluation rubric for written assignments

Item	Exceeded (A- to A+)	Standard (B- to B+)	Needs improvement (below B-)
Technical writing	Writing is free of errors and reflects clarity and organization of thought of experienced professionals	Writing is generally free of errors and reflects the clarity of thought and	Writing has errors and lacks clarity. The presentation of ideas requires reorganization

		organization of early-career professionals.	for logic and coherence.
Performance of assigned task	The assigned follows all directions provided and demonstrates a high degree of understanding and facility with the task assigned.	The assignments follows directions provided and demonstrates understanding of task assigned.	The assignment does not follow all directions and demonstrates a misunderstanding of task assigned.
Application of key concepts and critical thinking	The assignment applies key concepts from the course materials, clearly demonstrates strong critical thinking, and expands on course materials through independent research and analysis.	The assignment applies key concepts from course materials and provides some evidence of critical thinking.	The assignment only weakly applies key concepts from course materials and provides limited evidence of critical thinking.

Evaluation rubric for in-class assignments

Item	Exceeded (A- to A+)	Standard (B- to B+)	Needs improvement (below B-)
Technical writing	The presentation demonstrates a high degree of planning and careful preparation. Presentation style is authentic but professional.	The presentation demonstrates some planning and preparation. Presentation style is authentic and shows some professionalism.	The presentation demonstrates gaps in planning and preparation. Presentation style shows gaps in professionalism.
Performance of assigned task	The assigned follows all directions provided and demonstrates a high degree of understanding and facility with the task assigned.	The assignments follows directions provided and demonstrates understanding of task assigned.	The assignment does not follow all directions and demonstrates a misunderstanding of task assigned.
Application of key concepts and critical thinking	The assignment applies key concepts from the course materials, clearly demonstrates strong critical thinking, and expands on course materials through independent research and analysis.	The assignment applies key concepts from course materials and provides some evidence of critical thinking.	The assignment only weakly applies key concepts from course materials and provides limited evidence of critical thinking.

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.

Seminar sessions

Week number	Date	Topic
1	September 5	We will review the course learning objectives and plan for the semester. Then we turn our attention to basics on the federal budget, including its evolution, its policy importance, and its rhythm and timeframe.
2	September 12	We will cover key public policy concepts, the factors influencing public (e.g. ideas, social context, etc), the role of politics in agenda setting, and how to think about political feasibility.
3	September 19	We will cover the interrelationship between budget narratives and policy development, the internal decision-making process, and the differences between developing a budget in a minority and majority parliament.
4	September 26	We will cover the budget process and experience from a Liberal perspective. Guest lecturer: Robert Asselin (former budget director to Finance Minister Bill Morneau)
5	October 3	We will cover the budget process and experience from the perspective of a former Finance official. Guest lecturer: Paul Rochon (former Finance Deputy Minister)

6	October 10	<p>We will cover the budget process and experience from the perspective of a MP in the governing caucus.</p> <p>(Guest lecturer: MP Dan Albas Central Okanagan-Similkameen-Nicola)</p> <p>Guest lecturer: Michael White former PMO director of strategic communications)</p>
7	October 17	<p>We will cover the budget process and experience from the perspective of a government relations consultant.</p> <p>Guest lecturer: Ginny Roth (National Practice Lead at Crestview Strategy)</p>
8	No class	
9	No class	
10	November 7	<p>We will cover the budget process and experience from the perspective of a key stakeholder.</p> <p>(Guest lecturer: Gabe Miller president Universities Canada)</p>
11	November 14	<p>We will cover the budget process and experience from a communications/messaging perspective and how it interacts with policy.</p> <p>Guest lecturer: Michael White former PMO director of strategic communications)</p>
12	November 21	<p>We will cover the budget process and experience from a Conservative perspective.</p> <p>Guest lecturer: Sam VanderVeer (former budget director to Finance Minister Jim Flaherty)</p>

13	November 28	We will aim to pull together these different experiences and perspectives to establish a comprehensive picture of the federal budget.
14	December 5	Drop-in session for final budget letter. Via Zoom

Academic accommodations

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

Pregnancy obligation: 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. For more details about the accommodation policy, [click here](#).

Religious obligation: 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. 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, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first assignment requiring accommodation.

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 where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For 9 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 must 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. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-forStudent-Activities-1.pdf>.

Statement on 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. You can find various resources [here](#).

Plagiarism

Carleton University defines plagiarism as follows: “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one’s own; and
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

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.

Please consult the full policy at: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity>.