



Carleton University

Political Management

POLM 5015 Public Policy for Political Advisors Fall 2025

Land Acknowledgement

Carleton University acknowledges the location of its campus on the unceded and unsurrendered territories of the Algonquin Anishinabeg people.

Brief 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 is for people who are interested in what a government should do (or not do) for the people they govern. We'll look at (and debate) questions about what makes "good" public policy. While all policy-making is political, there are foundational ideas and knowledge about public policy that are common and shared, regardless of partisanship. By the end of the course, you'll have had an opportunity to gain some tools for analyzing policy files, to get a sense of the machinery and procedural issues in the federal policy process, participated in mini-case studies of some current policy issues in Canadian politics. You will have participated in an asynchronous scenario exercise with colleagues in the MPA program and you'll have prepared a memo providing advice to a federal minister in anticipation of a 2026 federal budget.

Learning Objectives

- 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.

Instructor's Note:

During the course, even in a single meeting, you will need to be able to move back and forth between thinking in a non-partisan (but still political) way and thinking about policy in a politically strategic way. Sometimes, you will have to think as though you are a member of a party you don't support and maybe even dislike. Sometimes, you will have to be able to think critically and see the weaknesses or downsides of policies that you like from a party you actively support. No one party in Canada has the monopoly on good or stupid policy ideas. But, for better or worse, those who win elections get to implement the policies they ran on – and the [evidence](#) suggests [parties](#), especially those in [Westminster](#) systems, actually work to implement what they ran on. So, whether you end up as a political advisor, a non-partisan analyst/advisor, a private or third sector stakeholder, a government lobbyist or advocate, it's useful to be able to think about and debate "good" public policy with political acuity.

Texts

This course has no required textbooks. All required readings and resources are available through the Carleton University library or online. In addition to the assigned weekly readings/resources, students may benefit by subscribing to one or more of the following resources:

- *The Functionary newsletter*: <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/functionary-newsletter/>
- *Politico Canada Playbook*: <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/canada-playbook>
- *CBC's Power and Politics podcast*: <https://www.cbc.ca/listen/cbc-podcasts/123-power-and-politics>
- *TorStar It's Political podcast*: <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/its-political-with-althia-raj/id1621425319>
- *The Bridge/Good Talk podcast*: <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/the-bridge-with-peter-mansbridge/id1478036186>

Other general current events podcasts:

- *The Globe and Mail podcast The Decibel*: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/podcasts/>
- *CBC's Frontburner podcast* <https://www.cbc.ca/listen/cbc-podcasts/209-front-burner>
- *NYT The Daily*: <https://www.nytimes.com/column/the-daily>
- *RDI Le radio journal*: <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/ohdio/premiere/emissions/33/le-radiojournal>

The weekly routine

This is a graduate seminar. This means you are expected to arrive on-time, prepared to discuss the readings and participate actively in the discussion. Unless there's an extenuating event, we'll start promptly in our designated meeting room.

- We'll begin with a 5-10 minute *tour-de-table* that is an opportunity to raise general questions, concerns, reflections or other constructive interventions about the course, your studies, etc.. Odds are good, if you are wondering, someone else is too, so speak up!
- An interactive presentation/discussion with the Professor will follow in most weeks, with 2 health breaks. This is a seminar class so your constructive involvement is an expected part of the course and is an essential part of your own learning.

Evaluation

Please see also the general evaluation rubric later in this syllabus. Specific rubrics for assignments are available on Brightspace.

Element	Value	Notes
Quizzes (2 x 15%)	30%	Individual, in class.
Ripped from the Headlines (5 x 2%)	10%	Individual, in class.
Asynchronous Exercise	30%	Individual (10%) and Group (20%), online
Final Presentation	30%	Group, in class

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.

Participation and professionalism: I don't assign a grade for participation and professionalism in this course. I take it as a given that you'll come to class ready to work together. You'll get more out of this course if you do. Please take a few minutes to set your own personal learning goals and make a plan for how you'll reach them.

Ripped from the Headlines: Seminar discussion (2% * 5 = 10 % of total)

In Weeks 2,4,5, 8 and 9, you will be asked to come to class prepared to present a new story from the mainstream media within the last 14 days that relates to the topic assigned for the week. All students present will be asked to very briefly name their suggested story headline in a quick roundtable. With input from students, the Professor will select one for discussion in that week. Students will be awarded 1 point towards their final grade for each of these weeks that they appear in class and name a relevant media story to suggest for class discussion. Students will be assessed on the basis of their participation in suggesting a media story for discussion.

The discussion portion will ask students to consider the following questions:

- What do we know?
- How do we know that?
- What do we not know?
- How could we find out more?
- If a decision-maker (Party Critic/Minister/PM) wanted a response from us on this story, thinking as a political policy advisor, what would we say? How might this contrast with perspectives from a non-partisan and professional public service and non-government stakeholders?

In class quizzes (15% * 2 = 30% of total)

Students will complete 2 written pen/pencil paper quizzes in class in Weeks 3 and 7. This will consist of a mix multiple choice and short answer questions. Students will have 60 minutes in class to complete this assignment, unless formal accommodations have been arranged in advance. The use of electronic devices will not be required or permitted. Students will be assessed on the number of correct answers to questions that cover assigned readings in weeks 1-3 inclusive (for test 1) and weeks 4-8 (for test 2).

Asynchronous scenario exercise (10% + 20% = 30% of total)

Working in teams of 2 or 3, you will complete an online asynchronous assignment alongside a group of students in the Masters of Public Administration (MPA). You will form a group of political staff in your assigned portfolio. Using a designated Brightspace online workspace, you will work as a group and interact with the MPA students who are serving as “public servants” in this exercise. You both have the shared aim of understanding the Minister’s request and ensuring an adequate response before the deadline. The shared virtual workspace will open in Week 7 of the term and your group’s assigned ministerial request will be made available at the same time. Any work or interaction that takes place outside of the designated virtual workspace will not be counted towards the assignment. All interactions are expected to comply with the [Carleton University Policy on Student Rights and Responsibilities](#).

Your task is to 1) liaise with “public servants” as they prepare a departmental briefing note to respond to the Minister’s request; and 2) to prepare an accompanying cover note from your team, providing the MINO’s additional input. The note from MPA students will be available to you as of 11:59PM on November 18. You then have 48 hours to prepare and submit your group response addressed to the “Minister”. This note cannot exceed 1 page single spaced. Your performance will be evaluated both for evidence of contribution to the final product (as evidenced in user data to the Brightspace workspace, up to 10 points toward the assignment grade) and in the grade for group on the final assignment product (up to 20 points toward the assignment grade). The deadline to complete this exercise and submit your group’s final political note is 11:59PM on November 20. This must be submitted on Brightspace using the Assignment box.

The use of generative artificial intelligence is discouraged but not prohibited for the political note when it is used for background research or to suggest edits to student-written material. No text prepared by generative AI should be submitted in the final version and will be treated according to the Carleton University Policy on Academic Integrity. Any permissible use of generative AI must be documented using the gen-AI validation tool posted on Brightspace. If the gen-AI validation tool is not submitted with the

work and AI is suspected to have been used, this will be addressed via the Carleton University Policy on Academic Integrity.

Teams formed for this assignment will remain in place for the final in-class presentations.

Final presentation (30%):

Working in the same small group, you will deliver a final presentation of approximately 30 minutes plus Q&A. A slide deck of no more than 15 slides for the presentation is due by 2:34PM on November 27, no matter which week your group is presenting. This must be submitted on Brightspace using the Assignment box.

The presentation must cover 2 intersecting questions:

- 1) From your interaction with “public servants” in the asynchronous exercise, what did your “MINO” conclude about what can and cannot be expected of policy advice from its “Department”? What did you learn about how the roles of public servant and political staff intersect and diverge when it comes to delivering policy advice to a Minister of the Crown?
- 2) Thinking ahead to a budget in 2026, identify one file in your “Minister’s” portfolio for priority to develop a submission to the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister. Explain the policy and political significance of the file, including its relationship to the government-wide [mandate letter](#) issued by the Prime Minister in May, 2025. Explain the specific direction you would suggest the Minister provide to the Department to guide their analysis and generate advice. Explain the key considerations you adopted in suggesting that direction. Make reference both to the readings and lecture discussion in this course, as well as observations you made in Part 1 of this same presentation. Name and describe 2 external stakeholders (outside of the federal government) that you would intend to contact, what input you would expect to solicit, and why their input would be important to getting the best advice for the Minister. Finally, describe your proposal for the intended positive outcome – what is the improvement for Canadians that you envision and how do you know it would be better?

A note on citations in all written assignments, including slides used for final presentations: It is good professional practice to have the habit of keeping full and accurate citations of facts as well as direct or indirect quotes. You should expect that colleagues and competitors will ask you “how do you know that?”. With a source citation, you’re ready to answer that question. In an academic environment, citations are essential. I encourage you to use numbered footnotes or endnotes. However, you **MUST** provide complete bibliographic information for each source using a recognized citation style such as APA, Chicago or MLA. For direct quotes, this also includes references to page numbers. See the course reading list on Brightspace for complete APA bibliographic entries of each assigned reading. This will make your own citations easier later on.

A note on the use of generative AI tools: Current generations of LLM AI and related generative tools can be useful and time-saving instruments to support learning and analysis. However, students are expected to produce their own written work. Written work that contains content produced by AI will be considered as a violation of academic integrity standards. Furthermore, generative AI tools make mistakes. Even when you use them for tasks that support your own original work, you should be exercising caution in relying on the output without verifying it. Please refer to the assignment instructions for specific details on acceptable use of AI in this course.

Evaluation rubric for written assignments outside of quizzes

Item	Exceeded (A- to A+)	Standard (B- to B+)	Needs improvement (below B-)
Technical writing	Writing is free of errors and reflects the clarity and organization of thought of experienced professionals.	Writing is generally free of errors. It reflects the clarity of thought and organization of early-career professionals	Writing has errors and lacks clarity. The presentation of ideas requires reorganization 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 assignment follows directions provided and demonstrates understanding of the task assigned.	The assignment does not follow all directions and demonstrates a misunderstanding of the 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/or 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 for in-class assignments outside of quizzes

Item	Exceeded (A- to A+)	Standard (B- to B+)	Needs improvement (below B-)
Technical presentation	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 assignment follows all directions provided and demonstrates a high degree of understanding and facility with the task assigned.	The assignment follows directions provided and demonstrates understanding of the task assigned.	The assignment does not follow all directions and demonstrates a misunderstanding of the 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/or 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.

Readings:

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. Students are expected to be ready to comment on any of the readings, whether as a willing or reluctant volunteer. It is never wrong to use class time to say there was content in the reading you didn't understand. You'll be doing your peers (and me as the instructor) a favour if you do.

Seminar schedule:

Module	Week	Readings	Topic and <i>Activities</i>
1	1	CSPS (2022) Theodoulou (2013)	This week we review the course learning objectives and plan for the semester. Then we turn our attention to understanding the work of policy analysis and advice. What is this work, who does it and where does this function sit within government decision-making? <i>Assigning groups for the asynchronous exercise</i>

	2	Office of the Prime Minister (2015) Wernick (2021) Craft (2016) Clarke (2018) Hamilton (2019)	We complete our discussion of the work of policy analysis and advice, as well as the nature, location and functions of those engaged in it. This includes attention to the role of the public service, provinces/territories, Indigenous governments and non-government stakeholders. <i>Ripped from the Headlines 1</i>
2	3	Baumgartner & Jones (2013) Kingdon (2013) Lawlor (2018)	We think about what governments do (or can't do), why they focus on the issues they do (and not others), and how the (federal) policy process works (or doesn't). We start with attention to agenda-setting. Do governments set their own agendas or are they agenda-takers? <i>In class quiz 1</i>
	4	Aucoin, Smith & Dinsdale (2004) Intergovernmental Affairs Canada (2021) Tardi (2002) Smith (2015)	We discuss head of power, government machinery, and the cabinet. <i>Ripped from the Headlines 2</i>
	5	Tellier (2019) Pu (2021) Olivier (2023) Deraspe (2021)	We discuss the budget process, supply, and fiscal management. <i>Ripped from the Headlines 3</i>
	6	Bardach & Patashnik (2016) Howlett (2019) Treasury Board of Canada (2007)	We consider the different ways that the same policy goal can be reached and ask where government preferences on policy instruments come from. with attention to partisan differences, Public Service institutional effects, cyclical trends, and international transmission of policy ideas.
3	7	Cairney (2022) DeGagne (2008)	We take a look at some key concepts that policy analysts and advisors uses when doing their work. As policy advisors, what evidence counts in decision-making? <i>In class quiz 2</i>
Reading Week. No meeting. No assignments.			
3	8	Rawls (2001) Sen (1979) Tedds (2022) Diehl (2021)	What do we mean by "fairness"? What assumptions do we bring to the table when thinking about the people we are trying to help and what biases are hardcoded into institutions and markets? <i>Ripped from the Headlines 4</i>
	9	LeGrand (1990) Cameron et al (2023) Ball & Menzies (2023)	What is "efficiency" and are there always trade-offs between "efficient" and "equitable"?

			<i>Ripped from the Headlines 5</i>
4	10	Hashemi et al (2021) CFIA (2025) CFIA (2021) Health Canada (2022)	We apply the concepts we've been studying to two different policy files. These are files that present big challenges to one or more orders of government (they are complex) and will be files that are likely to face governments for several years to come, regardless of political stripe. Topic 1: How closely should Canada continue to cooperate with the United States on food and drug regulation?
	11	CIRNA (2021) Yellowhead Institute (2019) UNDRIP (2018) King (2025)	Topic 2: Can governments reconcile the Duty to Consult, UNDRIP and the call to "build baby build"? <i>Deadline to complete the online asynchronous scenario assignment by 11:59PM</i>
	12	No readings assigned	<i>Final Presentations</i> <i>Deadline to submit slide deck for the final presentations 2:34PM</i>
	13	No readings assigned	<i>Final Presentations continue</i>

Miscellaneous:

- All final course marks will be submitted using E-Grades. 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. All assignment marks will be available to students on Brightspace.
- Please check the Brightspace site regularly for additional resources related to the course material, changes to the lecture schedule, etc... Information, documents or other items posted to Brightspace will have been deemed to be distributed to all students within 24 of posting.
- The Faculty of Public Affairs encourages students to sign up for a campus email account. Important course and University information will be distributed via the Connect email system. See <http://connect.carleton.ca> for instructions on how to set up your account. Please use your Carleton email for correspondence related to this course.
- Office hours and class time are the students' opportunity to raise any questions or concerns regarding any of the assignments and they are expected to use these opportunities to meet their individual needs for advice and assistance.