

PSCI 494 – Current Issues in Political Science

Winter 2023

Mariam Mufti

Class size: 5

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PSCI 494: CURRENT ISSUES IN POLITICAL SCIENCE Winter 2023

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Course Description:

In PSCI 494 Current Issues in Political Science students are required to select a current issue/topic in political science to examine by attending talks, monitoring print and online media, and doing independent research. Typically, the topic needs to have contemporary relevance and something that cannot be researched adequately using only library print sources.

PSCI 494 is designed as a SLICC course (student-led, independently-created course). Students are required to plan, propose, carry out, reflect on and evaluate on their learning experience as they conduct research on their chosen current issue/topic. Throughout the course you will develop a range of skills and attributes (academic, professional and/or personal) which will help you to engage effectively with your experience. You will be encouraged to evaluate and critically reflect upon your approach, learning and development.

Course Expectations:

Once you have selected your current issue, the first assignment is the submission of a proposal that will identify and define the current issue selected. The work in this course is self-guided. Therefore, students are expected to demonstrate independent learning and gain the experience-based skills needed to investigate how a concept/issue in political science plays out in contemporary politics, policy and governance.

Students will present their research in the form of a final project that must not be a standard written report. Instead we encourage students to work on a creative final output such as a blog, website, video, podcast, poster board etc.

In parallel, students will also be reflecting on their research approach, learning and development throughout the course. These reflections will be compiled in the form of a mid-term report (due in Week 8) and a final reflective report (due at the end of the semester).

The timeline below provides an overview of course assignments and when they are due.

- Check-in with Dr. Mufti: January 16 to 18 on MS Teams. Duration of meeting is 30-45 minutes.
- Proposal: January 27, 2023, at 12 pm
- Mid-term Report: March 10, 2023, at 12 pm.
- Check-in with Dr. Mufti: March 13 to 16 on MS Teams. Duration of meeting is 30 minutes
- Final Reflective Report +Self-Assessment: April 6, 2023, at 12 pm
- Final Project: April 17, 2023, at 12 pm

Week 1-3	<p>Define your project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attend workshops to familiarize yourself with the course and how to write your course proposal. - Meet online with the instructor to discuss your proposal. - Complete the course proposal and submit by end of week 3.
Week 4-8	<p>Research and Reflection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attend the reflection writing workshop. - Work towards completing your project as outlined in your proposal. - Document your progress through weekly reflections in your e-portfolio on Pebblepad.
Week 8	<p>Interim Report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submit and receive feedback from the course instructor on a mid-term report of your progress. - Reflect on your progress.
Week 12	<p>Final Reflective Report and Final Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submit a final reflective report (1000 words) that reflects on your learning experience, incorporating any feedback you have received. - Complete a self-assessment of your learning experience by evaluating your performance. - Submit your final project as specified in the proposal.

Grading and Assessment:

Grading in this course is a combination of student self-assessment and instructor assessment.

Students are responsible for assessing their progress towards the learning outcomes defined in their proposal. To do this, students will review and assess their weekly reflections, the interim report and the final reflective report. Students must justify the numerical grade they assign to themselves based on a self-assessment rubric (provided). This will be 30% of the total grade in the course.

The remaining 70% of the grade will be assessed by the course instructor and will comprise of the course proposal (20%) and the final project (50%).

In summary:

- Proposal 20%
- Final Project 50%
- Self-assessment (including reflections, interim report and final reflective report) 30%

Assignments:

Course Proposal (20%, DUE January 27, 2023):

Before you start working on the course proposal:

- Watch a slide presentation on how to write your course proposal.
- Set an appointment on either January 16 to 18 to share your ideas with Dr. Mufti. It would be useful if you review the course website on LEARN, read the course outline, peruse the course workbook on PebblePad, and review the resource pack on Pebble Pad
- For inspiration and ideas refer to the Resource Pack.

The course proposal must answer the following questions:

Q1) What is the title of your course proposal?

Your title should contain enough 'at a glance' information on your selected current issue. Try to make it informative, clear and concise.

Q2) Describe and Define the project you are working on.

Use this space to define what current issue you have selected and what you want to do as your final project this term:

- Provide details on the focus of your current issue and final project.
- Outline what structure you will be using to work on this project
- Outline your current thoughts about your role in this project, who you will be interacting with and what avenues of research you will be pursuing.

Q3) What are your goals for your project? How will completing the project contribute to your own development as a political science major?

Describe the main aims you have behind wanting to learn about the current issue you have chosen to work on.

- What prior experience, if any, has shaped your choice of current issue?
- Highlight the new challenges you will potentially face and how these could lead to your personal development.
- Try to relate the experience of completing this course to your future career goals.
- How do you intend to demonstrate you have achieved each of the five learning outcomes?

(Please note this is outlining your 'intentions' for the project. They may change throughout the experience and may, for example, need to be adapted.)

Q4.) How do you intend to demonstrate you have achieved each of the five Learning Outcomes?

- Learning Outcome 1: Analysis I am able to demonstrate how I have actively developed my understanding of (insert current issue selected) and how it has played out in contemporary politics, policy and governance.
- Learning Outcome 2: Application I am able to draw on and apply a range of relevant skills and attributes (academic, professional and/or personal) in order to engage effectively with the project, I am working on.
- Learning Outcome 3: Recognizing and Developing Skills
I am able to demonstrate how I have used experiences during my SLICC to actively develop my skills in the focused area of (select one skill set from the list below, the list is available in your PebblePad workbook)
- Learning Outcome 4: Recognizing and Developing a Mindset.
I am able to demonstrate how I have used the learning experience in PSCI 494 to actively explore my mindset towards (choose one or select a mindset that applies to your case. The list of mindsets is available in your PebblePad workbook)

- Learning Outcome 5: Evaluation I am able to evaluate and critically reflect upon my approach, my learning and my development throughout PSCI 494.

Reflections:

From weeks 4 to 8 you are expected to reflect on your progress towards the learning outcomes that you specified in the course proposal. These reflections should document any opportunities or challenges that presented themselves as you researched your current issue and how you dealt with them. In addition, you should be able to track how your learning experience has contributed towards your development as a PSCI major.

One way that you can document your reflections is to maintain a reflections blog on Pebble Pad. These reflective essays will not only serve as evidence for your interim and final reflective report but will also track any transformations that occurred as you went through your learning experience and worked towards your final project.

Reflective writing is different from traditional academic writing. Therefore, before you attempt to write these reflections watch the slide presentation on reflective writing (available on LEARN).

Further guidance on reflective writing is provided in the Resource Pack.

Interim or Mid Term Reflective Report: (Due March 10, 2023)

The interim report will not be formally assessed; however, it is a key opportunity to receive feedback from your instructor to help inform your final reflective report. Be sure to highlight areas you are unsure about and acknowledge all 5 Learning Outcomes, as each of these will be assessed in your Final Reflective Report.

The mid-term (interim) reflective report should not be more than 750-1000 words.

Guidance on your Interim Reflective Report can be found in the Resource Pack.

The interim report should contain a learning abstract of 250 words (**this is not included in the wordcount for the final report**). It should include:

- A brief outline of why you initially chose your current issue
- What you wanted to learn about through studying this current issue
- A short overview of your learning journey—what you have learnt along the way, including what you may have anticipated, and what was unexpected.

The main body of your 'Interim Reflective Report' should address how you are progressing through Learning outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Remember to refer to the Learning Proposal for questions you should answer at this stage. Throughout the main body include frequent references to evidence in your reflective blog.

Your conclusion should briefly summarise your main points, outline the progress you have made, the challenges you have encountered and your strategies to address them, and your future directions ahead of the Final Reflective Report. This section should be used to address how you are meeting and plan to continue to meet learning outcome 5.

Final Reflective Report: (30%, Due April 6, 2023)

You are required to write a self-reflective, critical, Final Reflective Report documenting your progress on all 5 learning outcomes stated in your course proposal. The final reflective report should be no more than 1000 words. It should be structured similar to the Interim Reflective Report. Include a learning abstract, main body referring to the learning outcomes with evidence and conclusion.

Further guidance on your Final Reflective Report can be found in the Resource Pack.

Self-Assessment: (30%, Due April 6, 2023)

You will be responsible for doing a self-assessment of your reflections worth 30% of your grade.

Consider the reflections, the interim reflective report and final reflective report and apply the self-assessment rubric to give yourself a grade out of 30 points. You should self-assess your course by grading each Learning Outcome separately against the assessment criteria provided in the course proposal and self-assessment rubric.

In addition, you must provide an explanation, justifying why you gave yourself these particular grades, for each of the specific Learning Outcomes. You should also indicate where in your collection of evidence you believe you have demonstrated this level of achievement for each Learning Outcome. You should expect to see noticeable evolution in structure, content and reflections from your Interim to Final report, incorporating the feedback you have received.

This ability to grade yourself is a challenging but important task. You need to separate yourself away from 'your' Final Reflective Report and the specific evidence you select, and put yourself in the position of the grader, who will only view and assess your 'Final Reflective Report' and how well you have responded to the learning outcomes you have defined at the start, using the specific marking scheme and criteria. This will really help you reflect on your learning experience.

Your instructor will not look at your self-assessment until they have completed their marking of the final project—this will make sure they are not influenced by how you assess your own work.

Grade	Descriptor
90-100% 27 to 30 points	<p>Exceptional evidence of the Learning Outcome: Consistently exceptional, the work is essentially flawless. It shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Insight/Understanding that is: highly perceptive, thought-provoking, in-depth and/or creative ● Thinking that is: highly critical, analytical, reflective and well considered ● Structure that is: tightly focused and precise with a highly logical, well-reasoned and clearly balanced development of arguments
80-89% 24-26 points	<p>Outstanding evidence of the Learning Outcome: Consistently outstanding, with very few weaknesses. It shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Insight/Understanding that is: highly perceptive, thought-provoking, in-depth and/or creative ● Thinking that is: highly critical, analytical, reflective and well considered ● Structure that is: tightly focused and precise with a highly logical, well-reasoned and clearly balanced development of arguments
70-79% 21-23 points	<p>Excellent evidence of the Learning Outcome: Consistently excellent, with few weaknesses. It shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Insight/Understanding that is: perceptive, thought-provoking, in-depth and/or creative ● Thinking that is: critical, analytical, reflective and well considered ● Structure that is: focused and precise with a very logical, well-reasoned and clearly balanced development of arguments
60-69% 18-20 points	<p>Very good evidence of the Learning Outcome: Very good in most respects, the work displays comprehensive achievement of the relevant learning outcome. It shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Insight/Understanding that is: complete and comprehensive ● Thinking that is: a very good synthesis, critical analysis, reflection and evaluation ● Structure that is: mostly clear, well-structured and logical, with reasoned arguments
50-59% 15-17 points	<p>Good evidence of the Learning Outcome: The work is good and clearly meets requirements for demonstrating the relevant learning outcome. It shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Insight/Understanding that is: average or variable, in some areas complete and comprehensive and in others limited and basic. ● Thinking that is: a limited / partial critical analysis, synthesis, reflection and evaluation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure that is: average or variable in its clarity and logic but provides a partially-reasoned argument
40-49% 12-14 points	<p>Some evidence of the Learning Outcome: The work meets minimum requirements for demonstrating the relevant learning outcome. It shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insight/Understanding that is: basic or limited, lacking detail, elaboration or explanation • Thinking that is: highly descriptive with no real / limited / superficial synthesis, critical analysis or reflection • Structure that is: not logical, is unclear, vague, imprecise, and ambiguous, providing a weak argument based on mostly unsubstantiated statements
30-39% 9-11 points	<p>Limited evidence of the Learning Outcome: work fails to meet minimum requirements for demonstrating the relevant learning outcome. It shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insight/Understanding that is: minimal, cursory or very limited • Thinking that is: almost entirely descriptive rather than analytical or reflective • Structure that is: poor, with poorly developed or incoherent argument, or no argument at all
20-29% 6-8 points	<p>Very limited evidence of the Learning Outcome: The work is very weak or shows a decided lack of effort. It shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insight/Understanding that is that is: negligible, illustrating no knowledge, understanding or coherent discussion of the area in question • Thinking that is: incomplete, muddled, and/or providing irrelevant material • Structure that is: negligible with incomplete or inadequately presented references, if any
10-19% 3-5 points	<p>No evidence of the Learning Outcome: Extremely weak. It does not address the area in question.</p>
0-9% 1-3 points	<p>0 = No submission to evidence the learning outcome. Up to 9 = The work is of very little consequence, if any, to the area in question. It is incomplete in every respect.</p>

Final Project: (50%, Due April 17, 2023)

The final project must investigate how the chosen current issue plays out in contemporary politics, policy, and governance. We expect students to present their research in the form of a creative final output such as a blog, website, video, podcast, poster board etc . Other options, chosen at the student’s discretion, include submitting a blog or daily journal, creating a website, a photo essay, a mock newspaper article or opinion editorials, a poster presentation, a slide deck (created in Power Point or Prezi), a vlog/documentary/video (with accompanying written abstracts or blurbs), or an audio recording of a mock radio interview with written transcript.

Any final project in an audio-visual format must be accompanied by a written transcript.

The final project will be graded by the course instructor. It is worth 50% of your grade.

A detailed grading rubric is given below:

Evaluation Category	Attributes
Organization (30 points)	The pattern of organization is appropriate for the topic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronological • Spatial • Topical • Causal • Pro/Con • Problem/cause/solution
	Information presented is logically coherent
	Presentation is well-researched and referenced appropriately
	Content is creatively articulated and presented
Content (45 points)	Integration of coursework with the experience of doing research
	Demonstrates critical thinking

	Material included is relevant to the overall message/purpose that is it should advance the reader's understanding of the topic
	Appropriate amount of material is prepared, and points made reflect well their relative importance
Presentation (25 points)	Properly formatted. Pay attention to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Margins • Font size • Placement of graphics • Planning and attention to detail
	Properly edited, free of spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors.
	Visual aids are well prepared, informative, effective, and not distracting