FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS PROGRAMME
POLS 586: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO POLITICAL SCIENCE
30 POINTS

TRIMESTER 1 2016

Key dates

Trimester dates: 29 February to 29 June 2016
Teaching dates: 29 February to 5 June 2016
Easter break: 24–30 March 2016
Mid-trimester break: 25 April to 1 May 2016

Withdrawal dates: Refer to www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/withdrawals-refunds.

If you cannot complete an assignment or sit a test in the last three weeks of teaching, or an examination, it may instead be possible to apply for an aegrotat (refer to www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/aegrotats).

Class times and locations

Seminars: Friday, 12:00 – 15:00
Venue: KK 204

Names and contact details

Course Coordinator: Dr Fiona Barker
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Contributing teaching staff:

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Communication of additional information

This course uses Blackboard and presumes that all enrolled students have valid myvuw.ac.nz addresses. Please check that this account is active and you have organised email forwarding. Additional information and any changes to the timetable or lecture and tutorial programme will be advised by email, announced in lectures, and posted on the course Blackboard site.

Prescription

This course provides a survey of the different methods and perspectives used in the Political Science discipline. Students will gain greater awareness of the philosophical and political implications of different approaches to Political Science. They will explore a variety of theoretical perspectives and research methodologies used in the Political Science discipline and the application of those perspectives and methodologies to empirical questions.

Course learning objectives (CLOs)

Students who pass this course should be able to:
1. demonstrate an advanced understanding of the major philosophical and analytical approaches to the study of Political Science
2. select appropriate methodologies and theoretical approaches for answering particular kinds of questions and pursuing particular kinds of research in Political Science
3. critically evaluate the appropriateness, strengths and weaknesses of the theoretical and methodological approaches used in Political Science scholarship
4. produce written work that is analytically rigorous and logically expressed.

Teaching format

POLS 586 is taught through one 3-hour seminar per week. Seminars will involve a mixture of lecturing, class discussion, group work, and student presentations. Group activities will be designed to encourage students to critically debate the strengths and weaknesses of particular Political Science perspectives and to apply those perspectives to concrete empirical questions. It is critical that students ensure they stay up to date with weekly readings.

Mandatory course requirements

In addition to achieving an overall pass mark of 50%, students must:
1. Submit a credible attempt at Assessment items 3, 4, 5 and 6.
2. Attend at least 9 out of 12 classes.

These requirements are in place as the assessment structure is scaffolded, so completing each assignment is important for attaining the course learning objectives overall. Moreover, as developing critical analysis and discussion skills is a key part of the course learning objectives in this post-graduate course, regular attendance is crucial to success in the course.

Any student who is concerned that they have been (or might be) unable to meet any of the MCRs because of exceptional personal circumstances, should contact the course coordinator as soon as possible.

Workload

In accordance with University Guidelines, course design assumes students will devote 300 hours to the course throughout the trimester. The 300 hour total includes weekly seminar attendance, completion of weekly readings, and research and writing for set assessment tasks.

Please consider the following when planning your time:

- Seminar preparation requires careful reading of set texts for meaning and argument, as well as note-taking and preparation of responses to discussion questions. 'Budget' for at least 1-2 hours per reading, plus additional internet research if you need to further understand the context of the reading. You may find that you need to read some of the more complex theoretical and methodological texts more than once so that you are comfortable with the meaning and argument.
- Essays and other written assignments require time to locate, retrieve, read and interpret a range of sources. Note-taking, planning, drafting and editing the draft are necessary before writing a final version. Begin assignments early. The same is true of preparation for your presentation.
- Revision of readings and your notes from classroom discussions from throughout the trimester will be necessary as you prepare for the in-class test.

Assessment

	Assessment items and workload per item	%	CLO(s)	Due date
1	Analysis and critique of methodology (1500 words)	15%	3, 4	23 March (Wed), 12pm
2	Reflection paper (1-2 pages)	5%	1, 3, 4	18 April (Mon), 12pm
3	Essay (2000 words)	20%	1, 3, 4	9 May (Mon), 12pm
4	Presentation (15-20 minutes)	10%	1, 3	TBA
5	Research design exercise (3000 words)	25%	1, 2, 3, 4	23 May (Mon), 12pm
6	In-class test (2 hours)	25%	1, 2, 3, 4	3 June (Fri), 12-2pm

Each assessment task is designed to assess different aspects of your understanding of theories, methodologies and empirical knowledge of political science. In particular, the assessment aims to test your ability to critique existing research, understand appropriate approaches to political science questions, and apply these to your own research in political science. The assessment is scaffolded so that completing each assignment will assist you with subsequent assessment tasks.

Instructions, guidelines and marking criteria for each piece of assessment will be given in class and placed on Blackboard by Week 3 of the course.

The **analysis and critique of methodology exercise** will require you to critique an existing example of political science research, to be selected from the political science literature. In particular, you will be expected to consider and discuss the question, research design and methodology used by an author in their research. The readings and class discussion from Weeks 1-3 will provide the foundations for you to complete this task.

The **reflection paper** will give you an initial opportunity to practise your critical analysis and writing skills. You will be required to write a 1-2 page reflection on one reading during Weeks 1-6. This will help you to develop your skills as a consumer of academic literature.

The **essay** will comprise an extended analysis on one substantive topic of your choice in the field of Comparative Politics or Political Theory (e.g. the state, ethnic conflict, nationalism, democracy, political participation, power). In this essay you will provide a 'state-of-the-art' review of recent literature on the topic, identify key themes and findings, and critically discuss gaps in the literature and avenues for future research. It will be important to both critique existing literature and contribute your own thoughts and critical analysis. This is an opportunity to demonstrate skills in critical analysis of literature and in clear written expression.

You will use your essay as a springboard for your **presentation.** In the presentation you will present to the class your key findings regarding theories, cumulative knowledge and interesting empirical applications in the substantive topic area you wrote about, and you will also identify your critiques and suggestions. This assessment will test your skills in oral presentation skills and your ability to convey complex ideas and findings in clear, simple (but not simplistic) terms for an audience. Together, the presentations will enable all the students to gain knowledge of different substantive topic areas of political science.

The **research design exercise** asks you to construct a full research design for a research project. It could relate to research you are undertaking for another course or for your MPols extended research paper, or it could be a hypothetical research project. You will be expected to choose a research question, discuss existing literature on the topic, choose a theoretical perspective and methodology for answering the research question, select and justify cases for research.

The **in-class test** will test you on the theoretical, methodological and substantive knowledge you have acquired throughout the course. It will require you to offer a critical discussion of aspects of theoretical and methodological perspectives in political science, as well as to demonstrate understanding of key empirical debates and research covered in the readings and class discussions.

Submission and return of work

All assignments are due by noon on the due date.

Submission: All work submitted for assessment must be dropped off in HARD COPY at the School Office (MY518) in the slots provided with a signed PSIR essay cover sheet.

You must also upload an ELECTRONIC COPY of each piece of assessment to the appropriate folder on the POLS 586 Blackboard website. We reserve the right to check the electronic copy of any of your assignments via Turnitin.com (see www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/wiki/index.php/Turnitin

Graded assignments will be returned to you in class in the first instance, or by email. If you are not in class when assignments are returned, your assignment will subsequently be available upon request at the School Office, MY 518, between the hours of 2.00-3.00 pm, Monday to Friday.

Extensions and penalties

The development of work planning and time management skills is an important part of the education process and it is expected that each student takes responsibility for allocating sufficient time for their studies.

Students will be penalised for late submission of assignments – **a deduction of 5% for the first day late, and 2% per day thereafter, up to a maximum of 8 days**. Work that is more than 8 days late can be accepted for mandatory course requirements but may not be marked. A late assignment may be submitted over a weekend by uploading it to Blackboard, and it will be

recorded as submitted on that day. You must provide the hard copy of the assignment on the next workday.

Penalties may be waived if there are valid grounds (for example, illness [presentation of a medical certificate will be necessary] or similar other contingencies). In such cases, **you must contact the course coordinator prior to the deadline to request an extension**. Extensions on deadlines for written work will only be granted under exceptional circumstances, as outlined in section 3.2.1 of the Assessment Handbook.
(See: www.victoria.ac.nz/documents/policy/staff-policy/assessment-handbook.pdf).

Set texts

Required readings for POLS 586 will be made available on the course Blackboard site.

Recommended reading

A list of recommended reading will be made available via Blackboard and updated throughout the trimester. Recommended reading will help to deepen your knowledge on particular topics and will be useful in completing the assessment and preparing for the final examination.

Class representative

The class representative provides a useful way to communicate feedback to the teaching staff during the course. A class representative will be selected at the first seminar.

Student feedback

Based on student feedback from 2015, some course readings and the ordering of course topic have been amended so as to provide a stronger foundation for assessment tasks and a smoother introduction to the course content for those new to postgraduate studies.

Student feedback on University courses may be found at www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/feedback/feedback_display.php.

Other important information

The information above is specific to this course. There is other important information that students must familiarise themselves with, including:

- Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/integrity-plagiarism
- Academic Progress: www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/progress/academic-progess (including restrictions and non-engagement)
- Dates and deadlines: www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/dates
- FHSS Student and Academic Services Office: www.victoria.ac.nz/fhss/student-admin
- Grades: www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/progress/grades
- Special passes: refer to the *Assessment Handbook*, at www.victoria.ac.nz/documents/policy/staff-policy/assessment-handbook.pdf
- Statutes and policies including the Student Conduct Statute: www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/strategy
- Student support: www.victoria.ac.nz/students/support
- Students with disabilities: www.victoria.ac.nz/st_services/disability
- Student Charter: www.victoria.ac.nz/learning-teaching/learning-partnerships/student-charter
- Subject Librarians: http://library.victoria.ac.nz/library-v2/find-your-subject-librarian
- Terms and conditions: www.victoria.ac.nz/study/apply-enrol/terms-conditions/student-contract
- Turnitin: www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/wiki/index.php/Turnitin
- University structure: www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/structure

- Victoria graduate profile: www.victoria.ac.nz/learning-teaching/learning-partnerships/graduate-profile
- VUWSA: www.vuwsa.org.nz