Senior Seminar in Politics, Philosophy and Economics  
PPE 4100E  
University of Western Ontario  

Al Slivinski  

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Office Hours  
Class Times (via Zoom): M, 5:30-6:30ET, W, 4:30-6:30ET [Note that we will not meet during every scheduled class time. A schedule is below, but students must keep these times open for possible unscheduled meetings when necessary.]  

Note Also – all deadlines in this document are for Eastern Time, Daylight or Standard depending on which holds on the date.

Course Description: The description of this course in the UWO Calendar reads as follows:

“Explores selected public policy topics from the standpoints of formal reasoning, normative theory, and political economy, employing the approaches and paradigms of Political Science, Philosophy and Economics. Run in a seminar format. Students will engage in group work and carry out a substantial independent project.”

In this inaugural year of the course, I will add ‘empirical analysis’ to the list that starts with ‘formal reasoning’ and note that no one project needs to employ all four of the ‘standpoints’ listed (nor will I point out that those are tools of analysis rather than standpoints). As to group work, the class is small enough and the rewards great enough that each student will undertake their own project. There will be group work, however. In the first term we will work through analyses from all three disciplines of two public policy issues, and we will do it as a group. Students will then take over and do their own research on other topics, write up what they learn, and present it to the class, where we will jointly critique both the original research and the student’s report on it.

In the second term, as students begin to formulate and refine their own projects, students will again be assigned to critique one another’s preliminary work, and we will gather to discuss it.

All of this is aimed at helping you to augment your skills in research and critical analysis, and then to help you to write up a policy analysis that is as clear and convincing as it can be.

Note: There is a separate document titled ‘Instructions for all Submissions’ that is equally important for this course.
Course Outline:

Fall Term: Seminars and Student SQS’s

Phase I: Weeks 1-5 (Slivinski-led seminars)

In this initial section of the course, I will be leading the discussions on 2.5 issues.

After an initial mini-discussion of the meaning of ‘the public interest’, I have provided below a set of questions about two areas of public policy (broadly defined), followed by a set of readings on issues related to that policy. The readings are from all three of P,P, and E, as are the questions. At the start of each section I will lay out more particular questions I want us all to think about (they may vary from those printed below), and suggest specific readings from the list to the class. We won’t go through every reading in each section.

I will start each section with a lecture on aspects of some of the readings, and then throw things open to the class as a whole. While I have in mind a general outline of what I want to talk about for each topic, it is only an outline. I am more than happy to have the class go off on a different path that catches everyone’s interest. The point of this part of the course is to give you some guidance on doing your own presentations of a policy topic starting in week 6 (see below), which will, in turn, be useful in writing a more extensive policy analysis of your own in the second term.

Issue 0: The Public Interest

Question: What does it mean for a policy to be ‘in the public interest’?

Readings:
- Slivinski, A, 2020, “The Pareto Principle and the Pareto Improvement Prize”

Issue I: Voting and Duty in a Democracy

Questions:
 a. Do citizens of a democracy have a duty to vote, and if so, what is the argument for it?
 b. If so, does any vote discharge that duty, including a spoiled ballot? A ‘strategic’ vote?
 c. Is there any evidence that the type of governmental or electoral system a democracy uses has an impact on citizens’ propensity to vote?
 d. What motivates citizens to vote (or not)?
 e. Does the existence of a duty to vote imply that democracies should make voting compulsory, as they do paying taxes and jury duty?
 f. What are the consequences, if any, for election outcomes and government policy of the fact that not all citizens do vote?
Readings:

- Somin, I., 2004 ‘When Ignorance Isn’t Bliss: How Political Ignorance Threatens Democracy’, *Cato Institute Policy Analysis* No. 525
- Harbaugh, W T, 1996, ‘If People Vote Because They Like to, Then Why do so Many of Them Lie?’, *Public Choice*, Vol. 89, No. 1/2, pp. 63-76
- Smets, K, 2016, “Revisiting the political life-cycle model: later maturation and turnout decline among young adults” *European Political Science Review* 8:2, 225–249

Issue II: Markets and Ethics

Questions:

a. Is it unethical for a seller/producer to raise the price of a good that is in short supply due to a crisis, like a hurricane? Is it unethical to resell concert tickets for a sold-out performance to make a profit (scalping)?

b. Some jurisdictions have laws prohibiting behavior of the sort mentioned in a, but others do not. What explains this difference in legislation? What do we know about the efficacy of such laws when they are enacted? How should we judge the efficacy of such laws?

c. Why do artists and concert promoters not raise the price of event tickets to a level at which scalping would be unprofitable?

Readings:

- Locke, J. 1695, ‘What is a fair price?’ from *Venditio*.
- Davis, M B, 2019, “Wrong Price, Wrong Prescription: Why Maryland's Generic Drug Law Was Not Enough to Effect Change in Rising Prescription Drug Prices: Comment”, *University of Baltimore Law Forum*

**Phase II: Weeks 6 – 12: Student-led Seminars**

Each student will be responsible for writing up a Social Question Synopsis (SQS). Instructions for this are in the Instructions document. Each student will distribute their written SQS to all members of the class, including me, and then also give a presentation on it that leads to a discussion of it on Zoom with the class.

All students will be expected to participate in the discussion of each of their peers’ SQS. In addition, I will designate one student as Designated Commentator for each SQS. The DC will have the additional duty of providing their own written commentary on the SQS they have been assigned. This Commentary is due to me one week after the SQS is presented, and both the SQS and the Commentary will be marked. Instructions for the SQS DC are also in the Instructions document, and the schedule for them is laid out below.

The topic for the SQS is entirely up to the student. One option is to choose something related to one of the topics and readings provided below, but you are free to choose almost any question. Whatever topic you choose, you must run your idea for your SQS by me before doing too much work on it. This is for reasons of quality control, but I might also be able to save you from going down a rabbit hole from which you cannot then escape.

**Other Topics with readings**

**Markets for body bits**
- P Reich, P Roberts, N Laabs, A Chinn, P McEvoy, N Hirschler, and E Murphy, 2006, “A
randomized trial of blood donor recruitment strategies”, *Transfusion*, 46: 1090-96

**Paternalism**
- Dworkin, G, 1972, “Paternalism”, *The Monist*, 56: 64-84

**Inequality and Poverty**
- Anderson, E, 1999, ‘What is the Point of Equality?’, *Ethics*
- Paine, T., 1797, *Agrarian Justice*
- Micalopoulosa, C, Robins, P, Card, D, 2005, “When financial work incentives pay for themselves: evidence from a randomized social experiment for welfare recipients” *Journal of*
Democracy at work, or not

- Locke, J, 1689, *Two Treatises on Government*
- Machiavelli, N, 1532, *The Prince* (Chapters XVIII, XXI)
- Buchanan, J M, 1993, “How can constitutions be designed so that politicians who seek to serve “public interest” can survive and prosper?” *Constitutional Political Economy*
- Timothy Besley, 2005, “Political Selection”, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Volume 19, Number 3,Pages 43–60

Schedule for Fall Term I will put your names in a hat – literally in my hat – and draw them to see which of you does SQS 1, SQS 2, etc. DCs will then be assigned in the reverse order. The student who does the first SQS will be the DC for the last SQS and so on.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wed Sep 9</td>
<td>Introduction to the course and opening comments on Topic O: The public interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon Sep 14 – Wed Oct 7</td>
<td>Slivinski-led seminars on Topics 0, I, II</td>
<td>Readings for each week will be announced in advance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed Oct 7</td>
<td>SQS 1 due to all</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed Oct 14</td>
<td>Presentation of SQS 1 and class discussion</td>
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<td>Mon Oct 19</td>
<td>SQS 2 due. No class</td>
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<td>Wed Oct 21</td>
<td>SQS 2 presentation &amp; discussion. DC for SQS 1 due</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon Oct 26</td>
<td>SQS 3 due. No class</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed Oct 28</td>
<td>SQS 3 presentation &amp; discussion. DC for SQS 2 due</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon Nov 9</td>
<td>SQS 4 due. No class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed Nov 11</td>
<td>SQS 4 presentation and discussion. DC for SQS 3 due</td>
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<td>Mon Nov 16</td>
<td>SQS 5 due. No class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed Nov 18</td>
<td>SQS 5 presentation and discussion. DC for SQS 4 due</td>
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<td>Mon Nov 23</td>
<td>SQS 6 due. No class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed Nov 25</td>
<td>SQS 6 presentation and discussion. DC for SQS 5 due</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon Nov 30</td>
<td>SQS 7 due. No class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed Dec 2</td>
<td>SQS 7 presentation and discussion. DC for SQS 6 due</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon Dec 7</td>
<td>SQS 8 due. No class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed Dec 9</td>
<td>SQS 8 presentation and discussion. DC for SQS 7 due.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed Dec 16</td>
<td>DC for SQS 8 due.</td>
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**Winter Term: Development and Discussion of Student Research Papers**

During this term students will develop and complete a research project on a social question of their choice. Wisdom and convenience both suggest that this can be a continuation and elaboration of the SQS developed in the first term, but that is not a requirement. There will be fewer class meetings this term than in the Fall, under the presumption that your time is best spent researching and writing. However, there will be three milestones throughout the term at which work must be submitted to me, and at Milestone 2 the class will gather for two weeks (approximately) to hear interim research reports from their colleagues and provide them with feedback. Although we will be meeting on Zoom only rarely, I will be available to meet with any student individually or in a group to discuss any issues you are having in moving your project forward. A good time for such meetings is during the regularly scheduled class times.

**Milestone 1 - Research Project Proposal: Due Thursday January 21 at 4pm**

This is a 3-5 page exposition of what you plan to do for your final research project in the course. Detailed instructions are in the Instructions document.

I will provide written comments on your RPP and schedule a Zoom meeting during regular class time with each of you individually to discuss your proposal and where you plan to go with it. You will receive a mark for your RPP.

**Milestone 2 – Interim Project Report and presentation: Weeks of Feb 22 and March 1.**

Each of you will prepare an Interim Project Report of 10-20 pages and then present your research to date to the class on Zoom. The length of your IPR will, naturally, depend on how far along is your research and writing. The focus here should be on clarity of ideas and purpose rather than on pages written. The point of this exercise is for you to put whatever you have done on paper and also present it to the class so that you can get useful feedback. Each student will again be assigned another student in the class as a Designated Commentator, and each DC will again be required to provide a written commentary to the student and to me. Both your IPR and the Commentary you write on a colleague’s IPR will be marked, and instructions for each are in the Instructions document.

**Deadlines:** All IPRs are due on Monday Feb 22 at 4pm. You must email your IPR to me and to the student designated to write the DC. Presentations will start on Wed Feb 24 – I will post a schedule ahead of time. All Commentaries on IPRs are due on Monday, March 15 at 4pm.

**Milestone 3 – The Finish Line: Final Research paper, Due April 6 at 4pm**

Instructions are in the Instructions document.
**Course Evaluation Scheme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Weight in Final Mark (in %)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SQS and presentation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designated Commentary on SQS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPP</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPR and presentation</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designated Commentary on IPR</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation*</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Students can get a maximum of 10 percentage points for participation. One point will be subtracted from that maximum for each Designated Week in which the student does *not* ask a substantive question or is absent from class. The Designated weeks are weeks 2 through 12 of the Fall term and the two weeks in Winter term during which students are presenting their IPRs. Thus, a student who asked a substantive question during only four of those 12 weeks would get 2/10 for their participation mark. In principle then, a student can get a negative participation mark.*

A substantive question can be asked during a Zoom presentation given by me or another student. I will be looking constantly for students wanting to ask questions during my Zoom presentations, and every student presentation will be immediately followed by a Question Period. However, asking questions on Zoom is not ideal for everyone. A substantive question can also be emailed (to me, even if it is about another student’s presentation). I will be laying out the readings for each week in advance of the seminars I lead, so students can email me a question about them before we meet to discuss them, or after we have done so. Similarly, in the first term students must email their written SQS to the entire class on the Monday before they present it to the class, so again, students can email me questions about it in advance (or wait to ask them directly during the Zoom discussion on Wednesday).

My general response to any substantive emailed question will be to read it to the class for us all to consider. If it is a question to me, I may either answer it or ask the class for an answer, but if it is to another student, that student will get the first chance to answer it.