

Senior Seminar in Politics, Philosophy and Economics
PPE 4100E

University of Western Ontario

Al Slivinski

September, 2020

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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"
- L Kaplow and S Shavell, 1999, "The conflict between notions of fairness and the Pareto principle" *American Law and Economics Review*, Volume 1, Issue 1, Pages 63–77
- Douglass, B, 1980, "The Common Good and the Public Interest," *Political Theory* 8 (1980), 103-17.

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:

- Maskivker, J, 2016, “An epistemic justification for the obligation to vote”, *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society*, Volume 28, Issue 2
- Brennan, J. 2009, ‘Polluting The Polls: When Citizens Should Not Vote’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 87:4, 535-549
- 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
- Fowler, A, 2013, “Electoral and Policy Consequences of Voter Turnout: Evidence from Compulsory Voting in Australia,” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 8: 159–182
- Birch, S., 2009, ‘The case for compulsory voting’, *Public Policy Research*, March-May: 21-27
- Goodman, N and L Stokes, 2018, “Reducing the Cost of Voting: An Evaluation of Internet Voting’s Effect on Turnout”, *British Journal of Political Science*
- Bechtel, M, D Hangartner and L Schmid, 2016, ‘Does Compulsory Voting Increase Support for Leftist Policy?’ *American Journal of Political Science*, 60, 752–767
- 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*.
- Guzman, R and M Munger, 2014, “Evoluntariness and just market exchange: moral dilemmas from Locke’s *Venditio*”, *Public Choice*, 158:39–49
- Giberson, M., 2011, “The Problem with Price Gouging Laws: Is optimal pricing during an emergency unethical?” *Regulation*, 34(1), 48-53.
- Matthew K. Wynia (2006) “Ethics and Public Health Emergencies: Rationing Vaccines”, *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 6:6, 4-7
- Zwolinski, M. 2008, “The Ethics of Price Gouging” *Business Ethics Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Jul., 2008), pp. 347-378
- Greene, J and W Padula, 2017, “Targeting Unconscionable Prescription-Drug Prices — Maryland’s Anti-Price-Gouging Law”, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 377:101-103

- 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*
- Kahnemann, D, J Knetsch, R Thaler, 1986, “Fairness as a Constraint on Profit Seeking: Entitlements in the Market” *The American Economic Review* 76:4 728-741
- Courty, P. 2019, “Ticket resale, bots, and the fair price ticketing curse”, *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 43:345–363
- Happel, S. K., & Jennings, M. M. (1995). The folly of anti-scalping laws. *Cato Journal*, 15, 65
- Williams, A T, 1994, “Do Anti-Ticket Scalping Laws Make a Difference?” *Managerial and Decision Economics* , Sep. - Oct.,Vol. 15, No. 5,

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

- Zutlevics, T.L., 2001, “Markets and the Needy: Organ Sales or Aid?” *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 18, pp. 297-302
- Hansmann, H, 1989, “The economics and ethics of markets for human organs” *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law*, Vol. 14, No. 1
- Roth, A. E. (2007). “Repugnance as a constraint on markets” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 21(3), 37–58.
- Radcliffe-Richards, J. et al. [for the International Forum for Transplant Ethics]. 1998. “The Case for Allowing Kidney Sales.” *Lancet*, 351(9120): 1950–52.
- N Lacetera, M Macis, R Slonim, 2013, “Economic rewards to motivate blood donations”, *Science*,
- 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
- Sonmez, T, U Unver, M Yenmez, 2020, “Incentivized Kidney Exchange”, *American Economic Review* 2020, 110(7): 2198–2224

Paternalism

- Dworkin, G, 1972, “Paternalism”, *The Monist*, 56: 64-84
- Mill, J S, 1859, *On Liberty*
- CR Sunstein, RH Thaler, 2003, “Libertarian paternalism is not an oxymoron”, *The University of Chicago Law Review*
- Conly, S, 2013, “Coercive Paternalism in Health Care: Against Freedom of Choice” *Public Health Ethics*, 6: 241–245
- Gruber, J and B Koszegi, 2001, “Is addiction rational? Theory and evidence”, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*
- Silverstein, R., 2020, “The Law of Obscenity in Comic Books” *Touro Law Review*
- Fletcher, J. M., Frisvold, D. E., & Tefft, N., 2011, “Are soft drink taxes an effective mechanism for reducing obesity?” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 30, 655–662.
- Sheets, A. N., 2020, “Paternalism as a Justification for Federally Regulating Advertising e-Cigarettes to Children”, *Washington University Jurisprudence Review*, 12: 2
- C Garbacz, 1992, “More evidence on the effectiveness of seat belt laws”, *Applied Economics*
- Copp, A, 2011, “The Ethics and Efficacy of a Fat Tax in the Form of an Insurance Surcharge on Obese State Employees”, *Quinnipac Health Law Journal*, 15: 1-32

Inequality and Poverty

- Arneson, R.J. 1989, “Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare”, *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 1, pp. 77-93
- Anderson, E, 1999, ‘What is the Point of Equality?’, *Ethics*
- Paine, T., 1797, *Agrarian Justice*
- Shaw, B. 1988, “Poverty: absolute or relative?”, *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 5, No. 1
- Jonathan Wolff, Edward Lamb and Eliana Zur-Szpiro, 2015, “A philosophical review of poverty”, *Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report*
- Sen, A, 1983, “Poor, Relatively Speaking”, *Oxford Economic Papers*, Jul., New Series, Vol. 35, No. 2 pp. 153-169
- Frankfurt, H, 1987, 'Equality as a Moral Ideal', *Ethics*, 98: 21-43
- Hoynes, H and J Rothstein, 2019, “Universal Basic Income in the United States and Advanced Countries”, *Annual Review of Economics*, 11:929–58
- Atkinson, A, 2015, “Can we reduce income inequality in OECD countries?” *Empirica* 42:211–223
- Atkinson, A, 2015, “Inequality – what can be done?” *LSE International Inequalities Institute Working paper 2*
- Hankins, S, M Hoekstra and P M Skiba, 2011, “The ticket to easy street? The financial consequences of winning the lottery” *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 93(3): 961–969
- Simpson, W, G Mason, R Godwin, 2017, “The Manitoba Basic Annual Income Experiment: Lessons Learned 40 Years Later” *Canadian Public Policy*, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 85-104
- Micalopoulou, C, Robins, P, Card, D, 2005, “When financial work incentives pay for themselves: evidence from a randomized social experiment for welfare recipients” *Journal of*

Public Economics Volume 89, Issue 1, January 2005, Pages 5-29

- Hum, G and W Simpson, 1993, "Economic Response to a Guaranteed Annual Income: Experience from Canada and the United States." *Journal of Labor Economics*, vol. 11, no. 1, pt. 2
- Anderson, G and W Block, 1993, "Comment on Hum and Simpson", *Journal of Labor Economics*, vol. 11, no. 1, pt. 2
- Boadway, R, K Cuff and K Koebel, 2018, Section 2 of "Implementing a Basic Income Guarantee in Canada: Prospects and Problems", unpublished manuscript
- Zewde, N., 2020, "Universal Baby Bonds Reduce Black-White Wealth Inequality, Progressively Raise Net Worth of All Young Adults", *The Review of Black Political Economy*, Vol. 47(1) 3–19
- Kearney, M and M Mogstad, 2019, "Universal Basic Income (UBI) as a Policy Response to Current Challenges", Aspen Institute Economic Strategy Group Working Paper

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*
- Mansbridge, J., 2009, "A "Selection Model" of Political Representation", *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 17, pp. 369–398
- Healy, A and N. Malhotra, 2013, "Retrospective Voting Reconsidered", *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 16:285-306
- Walker, J. 1966, "A Critique of the Elitist Theory of Democracy" *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 60, No. 2 pp. 285-295
- Timothy Besley, 2005, "Political Selection", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Volume 19, Number 3, Pages 43–60
- Laporta, R, L de Silanes, A Shleifer and R Vishny, 1999, "The quality of government", *Journal of Law, Economics and Organization*, 222-279
- Seung-Hyun Lee, Mine Ozer, Yoon-Suk Baik, 2018, "The impact of political connections on government bailout: the 2008 credit crunch in the United States" *Economics of Governance*, 19:299–315
- Lintott, A, 1990, "Electoral Bribery in the Roman Republic" *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 80, pp. 1-16
- Lowenstein, D H, 1984, "Political Bribery and the Intermediate Theory of Politics" *UCLA Law Review* 32
- Chang, E, M Golden and Seth Hill, 2010, "Legislative Malfeasance and Political Accountability", *World Politics* 62, no. 2, 177–220

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.

Dates	Event	Comments
Wed Sep 9	Introduction to the course and opening comments on Topic O: The public interest	
Mon Sep 14 – Wed Oct 7	Slivinski-led seminars on Topics 0,I,II	Readings for each week will be announced in advance
Wed Oct 7	SQS 1 due to all	
Wed Oct 14	Presentation of SQS 1 and class discussion	
Mon Oct 19	SQS 2 due. No class	
Wed Oct 21	SQS 2 presentation & discussion. DC for SQS 1 due	
Mon Oct 26	SQS 3 due. No class.	
Wed Oct 28	SQS 3 presentation & discussion. DC for SQS 2 due	
Mon Nov 9	SQS 4 due. No class	
Wed Nov 11	SQS 4 presentation and discussion. DC for SQS 3 due	
Mon Nov 16	SQS 5 due. No class.	
Wed Nov 18	SQS 5 presentation and discussion. DC for SQS 4 due	
Mon Nov 23	SQS 6 due. No class.	
Wed Nov 25	SQS 6 presentation and discussion. DC for SQS 5 due	
Mon Nov 30	SQS 7 due. No class.	
Wed Dec 2	SQS 7 presentation and discussion. DC for SQS 6 due	
Mon Dec 7	SQS 8 due. No class	
Wed Dec 9	SQS 8 presentation and discussion. DC for SQS 7 due.	
Wed Dec 16	DC for SQS 8 due.	

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

Evaluation	Weight in Final Mark (in %)
SQS and presentation	10
Designated Commentary on SQS	10
RPP	10
IPR and presentation	20
Designated Commentary on IPR	10
Participation*	10
Final Paper	30

*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.