

Senior Seminar in Politics, Philosophy and Economics
PPE 4100E

University of Western Ontario

Al Slivinski

September, 2021

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 1-3pm or by appointment

Class Meetings: M, 5:30-6:30, W, 4:30-6:30, SSC 4255 [Note that we will not meet during every one of these class periods throughout the year. A schedule is below.]

Course Description: This course is designed to get you thinking about and – most importantly - writing about public policy issues in ways that use the skills you have acquired in the three disciplines. The ultimate outcome of this course will be a research paper that uses the tools of at least two of those disciplines. As a prelude to that, the first term is set in a seminar format in which we will discuss a number of preliminary issues that relate to analyses of social issues. These include:

1. The evaluation of policy and the 'public interest'.
2. The roles of theory, evidence, data and statistics in public policy
3. Critiquing writing on public policy; your own and others

You will then get a chance to read and comment on a topic that I will lecture and assign readings on, as a sort of 'exhibit 0'. After that you will be turned loose to work on your own research.

Schedule for 2021/22

Note: A * indicates a date on which something is due. All due dates imply that the assignment is due by the start of class on the day indicated. This means you must upload a pdf or Word document into the Owl site, as well as bring a paper copy to class. The latter is what I will mark. If we are not having a class session on the due date, you can bring the paper copy to my office. Assignments turned in late are penalized at the rate of 5 percentage points if it is not in when due, and another 10 percentage points per additional day late.

Fall Term

Wed Sep 8	Intro to class and The Two PIs	
Mon Sep 13	The Two PIs	
Wed Sep 15	The Two PIs	
Mon Sep 20 (Election Day)	Evidence, Data, Theory, Bullshit	
Wed Sep 22	Evidence, Data, Theory, Bullshit II	

Mon Sep 27	Evidence, Data, Theory, Bullshit III	
Wed Sep 29	Applied EDTB: picking research apart	
Mon Oct 4	Slack	
Wed Oct 6*	No class - Commentary on Villegas Thesis Due	
Mon Oct 11	No Class - Holiday	
Wed Oct 13	Seminar on Villegas Thesis	
Mon Oct 18	Slack	
Wed Oct 20	The AI SQS Seminars: Part I	
Mon Oct 25	Part II	
Wed Oct 27	Part III	
Fri, Oct 20*	SQS topic approval Deadline	
Mon Nov 1	Slack Week	
Wed Nov 3	Slack Week	
Mon Nov 8	No class	
Wed Nov 10	No class	
Mon Nov 15	No class	
Wed Nov 17*	SQS papers due - no class	
Mon Nov 22	No class	
Wed Nov 24	SQS presentations (4)	
Mon Nov 29	SQS presentations (2)	
Wed Dec 1	SQS presentation(3)	
Mon Dec 6	SQS presentations (2)	
Wed Dec 8	No class	
Fri, Dec 10*	SQS Designated commentaries due	

Winter Term

No class meetings scheduled except on the dates indicated below

Monday, Jan 17* – no class	Research Project Proposal due	
Monday, February 28* - no class	Interim Project Report due	
Monday, March 7	IPR presentations	
Wednesday, March 9	IPR presentations	
Monday, March 14	IPR presentations	
Wednesday, March 16	IPR presentations	
Monday, March 21* - no class	IPT designated commentaries due	
Monday, April 8*	Final Paper due	

Course Readings:

Section 1 (approximately Sep 8 – Oct 27.)

1. Public Interest and Policy: The Two PIs

- Barry, B, 1964, “Public Interest”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. 38, 1-18
- Methot, J-F, 2003, “How to define the public interest?”
- Slivinski, A, 2021, “The Pareto Principle and the Public Interest”

2. Theory, Evidence, Data and Bullshit

- Slivinski, 2021, “The Fundamentals of Social (and other) Science: Theory, Evidence, Correlation and Causation”
- ASA statement on p-values, ASA News, 2016
- Blakeley B. McShane & David Gal (2017) “Statistical Significance and the Dichotomization of Evidence”, *Journal of the American Statistical Association*
- Morey, R, D., Hoekstra, R., Rouder, J.N. et al, 2016, “The fallacy of placing confidence in confidence intervals”, *Psychonomic Bulletin Reviews* 23, 103–123
- Deaton, A and N Cartwright, 2018, “Understanding and misunderstanding randomized controlled trials”, *Social Science & Medicine*
- Donohue, J and J Wolfers, 2006, “Uses and abuses of empirical evidence in the death penalty debate”, *NBER Working Paper 11982*
- Katz, L, S Levitt and E Shustorovich, 2003, “Prison conditions, capital punishment, and deterrence”, *American Law and Economics Review*, 5:318-43

3. Writing and critiquing

Villegas, A, 2019, “Mitigating inequality at birth: The ethical necessity and economic feasibility of redistributive economic policy” PPE Thesis, Pomona College, CA, USA

4. The Slivinski SQS

Readings TBA

Course Evaluation Scheme

Evaluation	Weight in Final Mark (in %)
Critique of Villegas	10
SQS	10
Designated Commentary on SQS	10
Participation*	10
Paper Proposal	10
Interim Progress Report	15
Designated Commentary on IPR	10
Final Paper	25

*Students can get a maximum of 10 marks for participation. One point will be subtracted from that maximum for each scheduled class session for which you are absent. In addition, during the first part of the course, prior to Nov 1 (Fall Slack Week), each student is required

to send to me, via email, two substantive questions about the assigned reading material being discussed in class. Three marks will be subtracted from your participation mark for each question you fall short of two, for a maximum possible deduction of six marks. Note that by not submitting questions, and missing classes, one can end up with a negative participation mark.

Note finally that the question-submission requirement is not just to impose another task on you. Each question that is approved as *substantive* (by me, of course) will be posted on the Owl site and taken up in class. Your questions will be part of what drives the class sessions.

Please Note
Department & University Policies for Fall 2021

The University expects all students to take responsibility for their own Academic Programs. Students should also check their registration to ensure they are enrolled in the correct courses.

1. **Guidelines, policies, and your academic rights and responsibilities** are posted online in the current Western Academic Calendar at: <http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca>. Claiming that “you didn’t know what to do” is not an acceptable excuse for not following the stated policies and procedures.
2. Students must familiarize themselves with the “**Rules of Conduct for Examinations**” http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/administration.pdf.
3. **Cheating as an academic offence:** Students are responsible for understanding what it means to “cheat.” The Department of Economics treats cheating incidents very seriously and will investigate any suspect behavior. Students found guilty will incur penalties that could include a failing grade or being barred from future registration in other Economics courses or programs. The University may impose further penalties such as suspension or expulsion.
4. **Plagiarism:** Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. When taking an idea/passage from another author, it must be acknowledged with quotation marks where appropriate and referenced with footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is an academic offence (see Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students in the Western Calendar at http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_20).

Western University uses software to check for plagiarism and students may be required to electronically submit their work. Those found guilty will be penalized as noted in point 3.

5. It is a Department of Economics policy that **NO** assignments be dated, stamped or accepted by staff. Students must submit assignments to the instructor.
6. **Appeals:** University policies and procedures for appealing a mark can be found in the Student Academic Appeals section in the current Western Academic Calendar at: http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_14. **Please note the relevant deadlines.**

Department of Economics procedures for appealing a mark can be found here: https://economics.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_counselling/responsibilities_policies.html#appeals. The Department will not consider an appeal unless an attempt has been made to settle the matter with the instructor first. Students who remain dissatisfied with the outcome may proceed to submit an appeal to econugrd@uwo.ca. Please follow the instructions and use the appeal form shown in the above link.

7. **Systematic adjustments of a class grade distribution** (either up or down) can occur in Economics courses. The fact that grades have been adjusted is **not** grounds for an appeal.
8. Note the following **add and drop deadlines**:

Deadline to add a first term half course:
Deadline to drop a first term half course:

Thursday September 16, 2021
Friday November 12, 2021

Policy Regarding Makeup Tests and Final Examinations

Faculty of Social Science policy states that oversleeping or misreading an exam schedule is NOT grounds for a makeup. This rule applies to midterm and final exams in the Department of Economics.

Policies Regarding Academic Accommodation

- The Faculty of Social Science's policies on academic accommodation are found at http://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/procedures/having_problems/index.html.
- **Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities or accessibility challenges should work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD, see http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html), which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).
- **Rewriting Exams and Retroactive Reweighting are NOT Permitted:** Students who proceed to write a test or examination must be prepared to accept the mark. Rewriting tests or examinations, or retroactive reweighting of marks, is **not** permitted. Self-Reported Absences cannot be used once a student has proceeded to start to write a test or exam.
- **Self-Reported Absences:** Students will have two opportunities during the fall and winter terms to receive academic consideration if they self-report a missed assessment using the online self-reported absence portal, provided the following conditions are met: the assessment is missed due to an absence of no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted otherwise on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:
 - for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., final exams)
 - absence of a duration greater than 48 hours
 - assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade
 - if the student has opened or started the test or exam
 - if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the fall/winter terms

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are *not* met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate (SMC) if the absence is medical or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office for more information about the relevant documentation. It is strongly recommended that students notify the instructor as soon as possible, ideally before the assessment, when they become aware of an absence. University policy is that students must communicate with their instructors no later than 24 hours after the end of the period covered by the SMC or immediately upon their return from their documented absence. Failure to follow University policy and procedures may result in denial of academic accommodation and a grade of zero.

- **Documentation for Accommodation:** Individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds or for other reasons. **All required documentation for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.**
- **Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence** is available here: [Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs.](#)
- **Student Medical Certificate (SMC):** This form is available here: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.
- **Religious Accommodation:** Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Policy Regarding Class Attendance and Engagement: If the instructor deems a student's attendance or engagement in the class to be unsatisfactory, that student may be prohibited from writing the final examination. Examples of unsatisfactory class engagement include frequent absences from an in-person or synchronous online class, lack of assignment submissions, and inadequate use of online course materials. Instructors who intend to make use of this policy will notify the student in advance.

Statement on Mental Health and Support Services: Students under emotional/mental distress should visit http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/ for more information and a complete list of resources on how to obtain help.

Statement on Remote Proctoring: While Western intends to hold most classes, mid-terms and finals in-person, the London-Middlesex Health unity may require western to teach in a remote format. If this occurs, all assessments will be done remotely and may involve the use of remote proctoring software (i.e., Proctorio, ProctorTrack). Instructors will provide information on the details should the need arise.