

PSC 457: SEMINAR IN 21st CENTURY POLITICAL THOUGHT Spring 2022

Prof. John McMahon

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Office: Hawkins 149G

Class meeting: MW 2-3:15, Hawkins 137

Student Hours (Please make an appointment through the link on Moodle)

Mondays 3:30-4:30pm, in person

Wednesdays 1-1:45pm, in person

Thursdays 3-4:45pm, Zoom

(email me for other days/times if those listed do not work for you!)

What is this Course About?

How does political thought respond to the most pressing political issues of our time? This seminar evaluates how political theorists analyze significant contemporary political issues, while students will develop a substantial independent research paper as part of the course.

More specifically, we are focusing on political thought in three areas: indigenous political life, sovereignty, and citizenship across the borders of settler states; Black Lives Matter as a democratic social movement; and the pasts and futures of environmental politics in the US in the context of climate change and the “Anthropocene.” In all of these, we will examine how political thought, as a field/mode of political science, enables us to provide critical accounts and responses to core problems of political life today.

Additionally, as an Advanced Writing Requirement course, this is a writing-intensive course. Students will complete writing every week, in different genres and forms. Most importantly, students will work on a substantial research paper throughout the semester, building from a research question all the way to a 6000-8000 word paper. This will be guided with reading about the research process in political science, a series of interim development assignments, frequent instructor feedback and consultation, peer review, and set-aside writing time throughout the semester. You are welcome to develop a question connected to class material, but you may write about anything in the ambit of political science, with a research approach that is qualitative, quantitative, and/or theoretical.

What is the Format of this Course?

The structure of the class is consistent on a weekly basis.

- Mondays are Political Thought class days: we have a class meeting, for which you will do reading and write discussion questions.
- Wednesdays are research days: except for the first week, we will not have a required group meeting on Wednesdays. Instead, I will have one-on-one research meetings with people on Wednesdays, on a rotating schedule, to check in about how the research is going. For Wednesdays, everyone will be reading about the research process and working on dimensions of your research project. You are welcome to come into the classroom on Wednesdays and work there if it would be useful to have that structure and space. The purpose of structuring Wednesdays in this way is for you to dedicate time, work, and energy to your research, and to the weekly and semesterly writing. I encourage but will not require you to come to class on Wednesdays to facilitate that work.
- Writing: You also have writing to complete every week – it will involve course material, your research process, or parts of your research project – to be turned in no later than noon every Friday (although I very strongly encourage you to use research day Wednesdays to work on the writing).

What will you be able to do by the end of this course?

Course Learning Outcomes: By the end the semester, students should be able to successfully:

1. Demonstrate understanding of substantive areas of contemporary political thought.
2. Assess contending theoretical and political approaches to important contemporary political issues.
3. Analyze the way that political thought reflects and responds to concrete problems and inequalities in society.
4. Communicate effectively about politics and political science, to multiple audiences.

Advanced Writing Learning Outcomes: Following a course of this kind, students will successfully:

1. Demonstrate the ability to synthesize ideas in writing.
2. Clearly articulate concepts relevant to a particular discipline in their writing.
3. Use writing to communicate ideas to someone outside their particular discipline.
4. Demonstrate their writing mastery of the basic rules of English or the language of instruction.

How are you graded?

Here is an overview of your grade in this course:

1. Class Citizenship (20%)
2. Final research paper (35%)
3. Research paper development (30%): project development; reverse research design; research logs
4. Public writing/blog assignment (10%)
5. Reading check/discussion questions (5%)

Grades will be assigned in accordance with the SUNY Plattsburgh College Catalog: *Superior:* A (92.5-100), A- (90-92.4); *Above Average:* B+ (87.5-89.9), B (82.5-87.4), B- (80-82.4); *Average:* C+ (77.5-79.9), C (72.5-77.4), C- (70-72.4); *Passing but unsatisfactory:* D+ (67.5-69.9), D (60-67.4); *Failing:* E (0-59.9)

1. Class citizenship (20% of grade): I care about whether you come to class and the role you play in it; our class will be most rewarding if you attend regularly, and if you are an active citizen. *This is a 400-level senior semester, designed as a capstone experience for your time here, and thus I expect this class to be a priority for you this term.*

Attendance: I've rewritten this section several times, and must accept that there is no conventional attendance policy that will be feasible this year: a formal attendance policy seems impossible with the uncertainties of COVID this semester. Generally, attendance is mandatory in my courses, but it's a little more complex this semester. In short, my policy is this: you are expected to come to class if you can, and not come to class if you are sick or have to isolate or caring for someone with COVID. If a guideline number would be helpful, you should aim to miss no more than one Monday session, and zero Wednesday meetings, although contracting COVID or having care responsibilities might take you beyond that, I understand.

This is a challenging class, and you need to be present and engaged, so I do expect you to be here if you are able. That said, I will work with people who must miss class. When you miss class, you should 1) reach out to a classmate to get notes and updates about what you missed and then 2) email me and/or come to student hours with questions or follow-ups or concerns. I strongly suggest you team up with one or two people in the class to cover each on notes, and if you'd like me to facilitate that with another student, let me know. We will all just do our best to help one another out. The attendance parts of the class citizenship self-assessment will reflect this all.

Class citizenship: Class citizenship, however, entails more than just showing up, it also means participating in class. *Doing the reading is part of your classroom citizenship!* (and remember that Moodle shows me who is and is not doing the reading). Participation can take many different forms: asking questions about unclear concepts or materials, raising ideas we as a class or the author may have

overlooked, respectfully sharing opinions, volunteering to read passages aloud, visiting student hours, contributing to class discussions in large and small groups without monopolizing conversations, paying attention to me and to your classmates, and taking risks when there are questions asked that have no clear answers. Participation does not only mean talking—it also means working to be aware of the space you inhabit and how you can best contribute to an atmosphere of supportive learning. Engaging with your peers when you are working/talking in small groups is part of class citizenship. I understand that speaking in class can be challenging. Last but not least, class citizenship means being receptive of and interested in others' political and philosophical perspectives, respectful of experiences different than your own, and open to having others disagree with you. And, in COVID times, class citizenship means keeping your mask on and over your nose and mouth.

GRADING: We will jointly evaluate your class citizenship grade, based on the rubric posted to Moodle. About halfway through the semester, you will fill out a self-evaluation to see where you think you are at, and to help you determine what you want to change (and what to continue!) going forward. During the last week of the semester, you will fill out the final self-evaluation, and write a paragraph about your class citizenship to turn into me. I will also fill out an evaluation for you. If your self-evaluation grade is more than 4 points higher than mine, you receive my lower grade; if your self-evaluation grade is more than 4 points lower than mine, you receive my higher grade. Otherwise, the average between the two will be your citizenship grade, pending any adjustment for absences. My goal with this is for you to have a stake in your evaluation, and to have the opportunity to reflect on your role in the classroom.

2. Final research paper (35%): You will cultivate and write, throughout the semester, a substantial research paper on a topic you develop, with consultation and feedback along the way. You are welcome to develop a question connected to class material, but you may write about anything in the ambit of political science, with a research approach that is qualitative, quantitative, and/or theoretical. If you have taken PSC 311 and would like to use the dataset you developed there in your research project here, that will work, but talk to me first. Because we will work intentionally on these papers throughout the semester, the expectations are high; this should be the best paper you write during your time at Plattsburgh.
 - Papers are to be approximately 7000 words in length, *not* including notes or bibliography
 - You will use American Political Science Association (APSA) in-text parenthetical citations for your paper. I will provide guidelines and links about this; I also suggest you use this course as an opportunity to familiarize yourself with a citation management system (I recommend Zotero).
 - You have many intermediate assignments that are designed to “scaffold” the development of your topic, research, ideas, and plan, and to ensure you are working on your paper throughout the semester.
3. Research paper development (30%): Three kinds of assignments make up this part of the course. Each will be graded on a completion basis: if you meet all the requirements and demonstrate work/thought on the task, you get 100%. Twice during the semester, you can take a 48-hour extension on the week's assignment (*cannot* be used on peer review), by emailing JM.
 - a. *Reverse research design:* After we read Audra Simpson's book on Indigenous political life, you will complete a “reverse research design” where you will examine *how* she does her research to arrive at her claims. This is designed for you to reflect on a professional example of scholarly writing that can inform your own research. Completion grade = 20 points
 - b. *Project development:* You will submit the following writing assignments throughout the course of your own research development: Research Question; Annotated Bibliography; Literature Review; Research Design; Draft; Peer Review; Final Presentation. Completion grade = 10 points each
 - c. *Research logs:* You will keep a reflective research log throughout the semester, responding to specific prompts about your research process, writing about 250 words for each log. Completion grade = 5 points each

4. Public writing assignment (10%): After we read Deva Woodly's book on BLM, you will complete a 1000-word public writing assignment, writing a hypothetical post for the [Monkey Cage Blog](#), which has a mission for "political scientists to draw on their expertise and the discipline's research to provide in-depth analysis, illuminate the news, and inform civic discussion." You will receive detailed instructions about one week in advance of the due date.
5. Reading check/discussion questions (5%): You will write 2-3 discussion questions each week, which will work both as a check that you are doing the reading and as questions for us to use as a foundation for conversation in-class.
 - Questions are due at 9am every Monday, after having completed all of the reading
 - Questions should: be about a substantive issue, concept, or idea that you see as connected to the course; require much more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer; require reading most or all of the reading to answer (that is, they should engage more than just the first couple pages of the reading)
 - This is a good guide to writing thoughtful discussion questions: <http://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Some-Notes-On-How-To-Ask-A-Good-Question-About-Theory-That-Will-Provoke-Conversation-And-Further-Discussion-From-Your-Colleagues-2-2.pdf>

How are you doing the reading?

There are three books to acquire for the course; please get the versions specified below. You can get them through the campus bookstore, or they are easily available online (hint: search by ISBN number). All other readings are available in PDF or online form through Moodle. The Simpson and Purdy books are also available on reserve at the library. We will read them in the listed order, and you need the Simpson book to read for class the second Monday of the semester.

- Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*, 2014 (ISBN 978-0822356554)
- Deva R. Woodley, *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements*, 2021 (ISBN 978-0197603956)
- Jedidiah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*, 2018 (ISBN 978-0674979864)

Inclusivity and Classroom Environment

The diversity of this classroom and campus is a strength, and I intend to cultivate a classroom environment that is attentive to and respectful of diversity in its many forms, including but not limited to the intersections of race, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class/socioeconomic background, ability, age, culture, national origin, religion, and political and philosophical opinion. I strive for inclusivity in education, understood as a demonstration of equity through awareness, understanding, and respect for the ways that the differences, identity, culture, background, and experience, and socialization impact how we live and learn. Please let me know if something said or done in the classroom, by myself or a fellow student, is particularly troubling.

I believe that the best way to learn and engage with the course material is adopting a critical perspective. This class is an open floor for ideas as long as we acknowledge that there might be fundamental differences in our opinions and political positions, cultivate respect for each other, and avoid discriminatory language. Further, disagreement (including, and perhaps especially, with me) is inevitable in a politics class, and can be generative for everyone in the room, so long as it proceeds equitably. A variety of opinions and experiences can be a source of learning for us all.

Gender pronouns: All people deserve to be addressed in accordance with their identity, including their gender pronouns. Students are encouraged to notify me of their gender pronouns (she/her/hers, he/him/his,

they/them/theirs, ze/zir/zir, etc.) if they wish to do so, so that I can address you correctly. My pronouns are he/him/his. You can also now set your pronouns in Banner/MyPlattsburgh.

Technology

Numerous studies (for example [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#); for an overview see [here](#)) demonstrate that, on aggregate, students taking notes by hand learn information more effectively and receive higher grades than those taking notes electronically, even when those on devices are exclusively focused on class tasks (which is hard to do!). Moreover, many of us (myself certainly included) find it difficult to pull ourselves away from social media, news, etc. when we have screens in front of us. Finally, in a class that will involve lots of discussion with one another, screens, alerts, and notifications can distract you and your classmates, and can impede the conversations that will be essential to our experience in the course this semester.

Nevertheless, many of our readings for the course are in PDF/electronic form, and I recognize that laptops/tablets are essential to the learning of many students. So, while I encourage you to print out course materials and take written notes, you may use devices for referencing readings and taking notes in class. Any in-class use of devices for other activity that is disruptive to your fellow students or to me will result, without warning, in your citizenship grade going down. If you have concerns or want advice on technology use, please come talk to me.

Things to know about the class and campus

COVID

We will follow all college-wide policies and procedures, and we should expect these to potentially change throughout the semester. We are all required to be masked (over nose and mouth), and failing to wear your mask correctly will result in points off of your grade. We will be changeable and adaptable as we need to, and if classes move online for any period of time, we will adjust accordingly, and I will consult you all about how to best make that adjustment. If you have to miss class for being sick, isolation/quarantine, family care, etc., let me know and we will adjust as necessary.

Accessibility and Student Support Services

It is the policy of the College that any student requiring accommodations of any kind to fully access this course must be registered for accommodations with the Student Support Services office located in the Angell College Center. If you need any accommodations for this course, please contact Student Support Services at 518–564–2810. Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If there are ways I can assist you in reaching your full potential in class, please talk to me or email me.

Learning Center

The Learning Center (101-103 Feinberg) offers many resources that may be useful for this course, including free tutoring, academic peer mentoring, “academic personal trainers,” and more. Visit the [Learning center website](#), contact them, or ask me for a referral. I am also available to answer any questions, to help with readings, to brainstorm, to assist on assignments, to offer advice, and more – email me or drop-in during office hours.

Academic Honesty

It is expected that all students enrolled in this class support the letter and the spirit of the Academic Honesty Policy as stated in the College Catalog. Academic misconduct and dishonesty—such as cheating, plagiarism, submitting someone else’s work as your own, submitting work from other classes without permission, etc.—are serious offenses. Such acts violate the trust that forms the foundation of the student-teacher relationship, they take away opportunities to learn, and they discount the work of others, including peers, faculty, and scholars. Any acts of suspected academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will be addressed through the [Suspected Academic Dishonesty Procedure](#).

Other course policies

- Check your email regularly – I will do the same for you. During the week, you will usually receive an email response from me within 24 hours; on the weekends, it might be longer.
 - If a student has a desired name that is not listed on my course roster, please let me know.
 - I strongly encourage you to come visit my student hours, even if only to chat; if the times listed don't work, email me so we can figure out another time to meet.
 - If you are struggling with any aspect of the course, talk to me sooner rather than later so we can work on the ways to best help you. Please also consider visiting the Learning Center.
 - For some extra credit to demonstrate you read through the syllabus, email me a cute animal picture by 1pm on Wednesday, February 2.
 - If a religious holiday that you observe conflicts with assigned work, please let me know in advance so that we may discuss alternate options.
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COURSE SCHEDULE

The schedule is subject to change; when there are multiple readings, please read them in the listed order. I expect you to do the reading (yes, all the reading!) before coming to class each, even though some of it will be challenging in multiple ways. Not doing the reading will negatively impact your learning and the experience in the classroom.

See the final page of the document for a chart/table version of the schedule.

Week of January 31 (Week 1)

Monday January 31: Welcome, Introduction, Setting the semester

- (in-class): discussion of short excerpt from Wendy Brown, "At the Edge: The Future of Political Theory" (2002)

Wednesday February 2: How (and why) do you write a research thesis in political science?

- *ALL READ*: Lisa Baglione, *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure, and Methods*, 3rd ed. (2016), chap. 1-2

Research Log #1 due, Friday at noon

Week of February 7 (Week 2)

Monday February 7: Political Life, Settler States

- Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (2014), chapters 1-2

Wednesday February 9

- *ALL READ*: Re-read Baglione, chap. 2 (I mean it!) and complete Tables 2.3 and Tables 2.4
- Group A one-on-one meetings

Research Question prep + question, due Friday at noon

Week of February 14 (Week 3)

Monday February 14: Histories, Ethnography, Political Thought

- Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, chapters 3-4

Wednesday February 16

- Group B one-on-one meetings
- *ALL READ*: Baglione, chapter 3; watch Google Scholar demo

Research Log #2 (including revised RQ) due, Friday at noon

Week of February 21 (Week 4)

Monday February 21: Sovereignty, Citizenship, and Gender

- Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, chaps. 5-6
- Kim TallBear and Linda Geddes, “There is no DNA test to prove you're Native American”, *New Scientist* (2014)
- Chuck Hoskin, Jr., “Tribal citizenship,” *Cherokee Phoenix* (2019)

Wednesday February 23

- Group C one-on-one meeting
- *ALL READ*: Raul Pacheco-Vega, “Forward citation tracing and backwards citation tracing in literature reviews”; re-read Baglione chapter 3 and complete Tables 3.1 and 3.3

Annotated Bibliography prep + bibliography, due Friday at noon

Week of February 28 (Week 5)

Monday February 28: Indigenous Political Resistance

- Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, conclusion
- *Literature review workshop with Prof. Regan Levitte, Assistant Director of The Learning Center*

Wednesday March 2: Annotated Bibliography

- Group A one-on-one meetings
- *ALL READ*: Baglione, chapter 4

Reverse Research Design Assignment due, Friday at noon

Week of March 7 (Week 6)

Monday March 7: Black Lives Matter, Social Movements, and Democracy

- Deva R. Woodly, *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements*, Preface, Introduction, Chapter 1

Wednesday March 9: Preparing for the literature review

- Group B one-on-one meetings
- *ALL READ*: Re-read Baglione chapter 4

Research Log #3 due, Friday at noon

SPRING BREAK!

Week of March 21 (Week 7)

Monday March 21: BLM and Democratic Practice

- Woodly, *Reckoning*, Chapters 2 and 4 (chapter 3 optional)

Wednesday March 23

- Group C one-on-one meetings

Literature review, due Friday at noon

Week of March 28 (Week 8)

Monday March 28: BLM and Democratic Possibility

- Woodly, *Reckoning*, Chapter 5 and Conclusion

Wednesday March 30

- Group A one-on-one meetings

Public Writing/Blog Assignment due, Friday at noon

Week of April 4 (Week 9): Research week

Monday April 4:

- *ALL READ*: Baglione, chapter 5
- Workday (no class meeting)

Wednesday April 6

- *ALL READ*: Baglione, chapter 7
 - Group B one-on-one meetings
- Research design + Model, due Friday at noon**

Week of April 11 (Week 10)

Monday April 11: Environmental Imagination, Politics, and the Anthropocene

- Jedidiah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (2015), Prologue, Introduction, chapter 1
- Wednesday April 13

- Group C one-on-one meetings
- *ALL READ*: Baglione, chapter 8

Research Log #4 due, Friday at noon

Week of April 18 (Week 11)

Monday April 18: Nature and American Political History

- Purdy, *After Nature*, chaps. 2, 4 (chap. 3 optional)

Wednesday April 20

- Group A one-on-one meetings
- *ALL READ*: Baglione, chapter 9

Research Log #5 due, Friday at noon

Week of April 25 (Week 12): Writing week

Monday April 25: Writing!

- Workday (no class meeting)

Wednesday April 27: Writing!

- Group B one-on-one meeting

DRAFT (minimum 4000 words), due Friday at noon

Week of May 2 (Week 13)

Monday May 2: Politics of Conservation and Wilderness

- Purdy, *After Nature*, chaps. 5-6

PEER REVIEW RESPONSE DUE to classmate by the start of class on Wednesday

Wednesday May 4

- Group C one-on-one meeting
- *ALL READ*: Baglione, chapter 6

Research Log #6 due, Friday at noon

Week of May 9 (Week 14)

Monday May 9: Nature, Law, Democracy?

- Purdy, *After Nature*, chaps. 7-8

Wednesday May 11: Writing!

- Paper advising by appointment

Finals week: week of May 16 (Week 15)

- **FINAL PAPER due by start of scheduled final exam time**; Everyone will give a 5-minute informal talk on their project during our scheduled final exam time (for a completion grade)

Week	Monday political thought day	Wednesday research day	Friday writing (due at noon)
1: Week of 1/31	None (in-class reading)	Baglione chapters 1-2 <u>Full class meeting</u>	Research Log #1
2: Week of 2/7	Simpson, chapters 1-2	Re-read Baglione chapter 2; complete Table 2.3 and 2.4 <u>Group A</u> meetings	Research Question prep + question
3: Week of 2/14	Simpson, chapters 3-4	Baglione chapter 3 <u>Group B</u> meetings	Research Log #2 (including revised RQ)
4: Week of 2/21	Simpson, chapters 5-6; TallBear and Geddes; Hoskin	Pacheco-Vega, "Citation Tracing"; re-read Baglione chapter 3; complete Table 3.1 and 3.3 <u>Group C</u> meetings	Annotated Bibliography prep + bibliography
5: Week of 2/28	Simpson, conclusion Workshop with Prof. Regan Levitte	Baglione, chapter 4 <u>Group A</u> meetings	Reverse Research Design Assignment
6: Week of 3/7	Woodly, Preface, Introduction, and Chapter 1	Re-read Baglione chapter 4 <u>Group B</u> meetings	Research Log #3
<i>Spring Break</i>			
7: Week of 3/21	Woodly, chapters 2 and 4 (chapter 3 optional)	Work on Literature Review <u>Group C</u> meetings	Literature review
8: Week of 3/28	Woodly, chapter 5 and conclusion	Work on assignment <u>Group A</u> meetings	Public Writing/Blog Assignment
9: Week of 4/4	<u>Baglione chapter 5:</u> <u>No class meeting</u>	Baglione, chapter 7 <u>Group B</u> meetings	Research design + Model
10: Week of 4/11	Purdy, Prologue, Introduction, and chapter 1	Baglione, chapter 8 <u>Group C</u> meetings	Research Log #4
11: Week of 4/18	Purdy, chapters 2 and 4 (chapter 3 optional)	Baglione, chapter 9 <u>Group A</u> meetings	Research Log #5
12: Week of 4/25	<u>Workday; no class meeting</u>	<u>Group B</u> meetings	DRAFT (minimum 3500 words)
13: Week of 5/2	Purdy, chapters 5 and 6	Baglione chapter 6 <u>Group C</u> meetings PEER REVIEW RESPONSE DUE to classmate	Research Log #6
14: Week of 5/9	Purdy, chapters 7 and 8	Research meeting by appointment	Work on your final paper!
15: Finals week: final version of paper due at start of scheduled final exam time; 5-minute informal presentation during scheduled final exam time			