

## Democracy and Dissent:

### An Introduction to Politics (POLS-1000/3)

Fall 2025, MW 4-5:15, F244 // Exam: Dec 3, 4 PM

## Course Syllabus

**Instructor:** James Magnus-Johnston, PhD ABD, McGill University; MPhil, Cambridge University  
Double BA Hons in Political Studies, Theatre, and Rhetoric & Communications, University of Winnipeg

**Contact:** [jmagnus-johnston@cmu.ca](mailto:jmagnus-johnston@cmu.ca) // Office hours: MW 11-3 PM; TTh 3-5PM in D290

**Description:** An introductory study of democratic politics and institutions, political ideas, electoral systems and political culture. The lens of dissent is used to trace the emergence of democracy and its liberal development. Issues to be explored include: the roles of opposition, questions of accountability, the meaning and practice of justice, the evolving implications of citizenship, the crisis of the state under globalization, and the contemporary idea of democracy without dissent.

**Objective:** This course aims to equip students with the basic conceptual and analytical tools required to understand “politics.” The student is expected to gain an appreciation of how citizenship is conditioned not only through state institutions, but also through the vehicles of political socialization, including culture and economics.

**Deadline for withdrawal** without academic penalty: November 18, 2025

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## Reading List

### REQUIRED TEXT – ONLINE, SEE WEBSITE

Rom et al. *Introduction to Political Science*, Openstax, 2022. (see link on course website)

### COMMONLY REFERENCED

Johnston, Larry. *Politics: An Introduction to the Modern Democratic State*, Broadview 2013.

### SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

*The following are **optional readings**. Some excerpts may be assigned and will be provided for you as necessary.*

Fukuyama, Francis. *The Origins of Political Order*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.

Haidt, Jonathan. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. New York: Vintage Books, 2013.

Spencer, Martin. “Weber on Legitimate Norms and Authority” *British Journal of Sociology*, 21:2 (June 1970) pp. 123-34.

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## Assignments and Grades

Letter	Percentage	GPA	Descriptor
A+	90-100	4.5	Exceptional
A	85-89	4.25	Excellent
A-	80-84	4	Great
B+	77-79	3.5	Very Good
B	73-76	3.25	Good
B-	70-72	3	Satisfactory
C+	67-69	2.5	Competent
C	63-66	2	Acceptable
C-	60-62	2	Adequate
D	50-59	1	Marginal
F	0-49	0	Failure

<b>Class participation</b> (Input on Oct 31 / Dec 7)	10%
<b>Engagement with current events</b> (Oct 31 / Dec 3)	20%
<b>Open-book test</b> on core concepts (Oct 8)	20%
<b>Letter draft</b> (review in class Nov 16)	10%
<b>Letter</b> (Dec 1)	20%
<b>Final Test</b> (Dec 3)	20%

### An “excellent” assignment (A) would display:

1. Original thinking and a superior grasp of the subject matter
2. A highly developed capacity for critical evaluation, synthesis, and creativity
3. Appropriate descriptions and quotations
4. Organizing and subordinating information well; writing and/or speaking clearly
5. The use of research sources using *any* recognized style format. For reference, see: Hacker, Diana. *A Pocket Style Manual*. Eighth edition. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2018

**Class participation:** Your participation grades will be posted at the middle and the end of the semester. You will be graded on the quality and quantity of interaction – that is, not only the volume of interaction, but quality and consistency as well.

**Discussion about current events:** Each class, students will be required to share their response to a current event in the news and relate it to the course material (e.g., elections; a matter of public policy). Please state your article(s) or news sources. Please note that current event engagement will be graded separately from participation and engagement with other course material. A record will be kept through an online prompt.

**Open-book test:** You will be given a series of short-answer questions related to the core introductory concepts. The test requires one (or two) paragraph responses and will be conducted in class.

**Letter writing campaign (1000+ words):** Consistent with our theme “democracy and dissent,” students will be encouraged to (politely) dissent by writing a letter to a public official and requesting a policy change. The letter must be well-researched and fully cited. Students will exchange letter drafts in class; the evaluation will then be handed to the author at the end of class. Revised drafts will be returned to students so they can

be revised one final time in accordance with the recommendations offered. Your portfolio, which includes your first draft, evaluation, and final draft, is due on the last day of class. Make sure your **edited draft have the editors name on it or the editor may receive a zero for their edits**. The mark breakdown is as follows:

Draft: 10%

Evaluation of others' drafts ("feedback"): inc. in your participation grade

Final Draft: 20%

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## Policies, Guidelines, and Support

**Final grades:** Grades submitted by instructors become final only after they are vetted by the Dean's Council. That process occurs early in January for fall semester grades and early in May for winter semester grades.

**Academic integrity:** ALL sources in ALL student writing must be appropriately referenced. Plagiarism is a serious matter. Students should be aware of CMU Academic Policies, particularly those regarding academic misconduct (plagiarism and cheating), which apply to all University courses. These are detailed on [CMU's website](#) and in the [CMU Calendar](#). Please note that CMU has adopted the following style guide for all academic writing: Hacker, Diana. *A Pocket Style Manual*. Ninth edition. Macmillan Learning, 2021.

For more information on CMU policies regarding grades, academic misconduct, appeals, and other matters, please see [CMU's Academic Calendar](#).

**Accessibility:** CMU strives to provide a fair and supportive learning environment for academically qualified students with disabilities. If you are eligible for these services or have questions about becoming eligible, please contact Sandra Loeppky, Coordinator of Accessibility Programs at [sloepky@cmu.ca](mailto:sloepky@cmu.ca) or 204.487.3300 x.340.

In recognition of individuals with asthma, allergies and severe environmental/chemical sensitivities, CMU is striving to become a scent-free campus. Students, staff and guests are asked to refrain from wearing fragrances and scented personal care products at CMU. This includes perfumes, colognes, aftershave and scented hair products. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated by those affected.

**Counselling:** University students face many challenges and at times may benefit from having a trained professional to talk to. There are qualified counsellors at CMU who volunteer their services free of charge to students on the CMU campus. Students wishing to book an appointment with a counsellor are asked to contact the North Side Receptionist at 204.487.3300 or [info@cmu.ca](mailto:info@cmu.ca). Confidentiality is maintained at all times. The counselling office is located at C365 (north side) and is free for CMU students.

**Continuity plan:** Faculty and students should plan to stay home when ill. If students can't come to class, please notify the instructor and undertake to collect notes from the class note-taker. If the instructor is ill, arrangements will be made to conduct the class asynchronously or live online.

**AI Use.** Use only with citation. Students are permitted to use artificial intelligence tools on assignments in this course if every use of AI-generated material incorporated into the assignment is properly cited. Citation should look like this: "This paper benefited from the use of [tool], created by [company] for [purpose: drafting, clarifying concepts, etc.]

**Elder in Residence.** CMU's Indigenous Elder in Residence is available to meet with any student who would like to have a conversation. If you'd like to meet with him one-on-one, you can reach out to him directly to set

up a time. Follow [this link to the Student Hub](#) for more details on when the Elder is available and how to book an appointment.

## Course Schedule:

see also [agoraacademy.io](https://agoraacademy.io)

		<i>Mondays</i>	<i>Ch.</i>		<i>Wednesdays</i>
	<b>Sept</b>				
<i>Intro</i>				3	Intro to course; Terms
<i>Discipline, Behaviour</i>	8	Terms cont'd	1	10	Human Behaviour
<i>History, Ideology, Democracy</i>	15	History (Johnston); Ideology	3	17	Democracy / Liberties + Participation
<i>Groups, Elections</i>	22	Group Politics / Rights	6-7	24	Elections and electoral systems
<i>Legislatures</i>	29	Legislatures and Gov't formation	9		
	<b>Oct</b>				
				1	Cabinets and Coalitions
<i>Courts, Media</i>	6	Courts and the Law	11	8	<b>Test</b> / The Media
<i>Federalism</i>	13	No class		15	Federalism in Canada
<i>Cleavages, Ideologies</i>	20	Federalism in Canada	8/J	22	Cleavages in Canada
<i>Elections</i>	27	Ideological expression in Canada	9/J	29	Westminster Electoral System
	<b>Nov</b>				
<i>Policy</i>	3	Policy-making	12/J	5	Canadian Parties vs. Presidentialism
<i>Governance</i>	10	NO CLASS - READING WEEK		12	NO CLASS - READING WEEK
<i>Internationalism</i>	17	Governing Regimes; letter review	13	19	International Relations / Law
<i>Governing today</i>	24	Capitalism, the Market	14/J	26	International Political Economy
	<b>Dec</b>				
<i>Conclusion</i>	1	Review/conclusion; Letter due		3	<b>Final Test</b>