

Department of Political Science

POL 1025F/G: Political Ideas and Institutions: Critical Political Concepts

Fall/Winter 2026-2027

Welcome to Western University!

Course Information

Instructor: Dr. Nandita Biswas Mellamphy

Method of delivery: In person lectures

Credit value: 0.5

Antirequisites: Political Science 1020E, Political Science 1021F/G, and Political Science 1022F/G.

Prerequisites: none

Email: nbiswasm[at]uwo.ca

*Check course Brightspace page for course time/location, and instructor office hour time/location

Assessments at a Glance

Assessment	Weight
Weekly Online Quizzes (8= 1x3%; 7× 1%)	10%
Midterm Test	40%
Final Cumulative Exam	50%

Important Course Dates

Date	Event
September 9, 2026	Fall/Winter term begins; first class
October 28, 2026	Midterm Test (In person)
October 14, 2026	Fall Reading Week; No class or assessment
Final Exam Period	Final Examination (In person; Date TBA)

Land Acknowledgement

Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Attawandaron peoples. In this course, land acknowledgement serves as a foundation for examining the politics of settler colonial societies, and the intersecting power relations through which territory, governance, and political authority are organized.

For many students, a land acknowledgement may be a new practice. It is included not simply as a ceremonial statement, but as an invitation to think critically about the histories and relationships that have shaped the spaces and places where we live, learn, and work.

1. POL 1025: Course Description

POL 1025 introduces students to political science through the study of political theory, international relations, global politics, and war and conflict. The course explores fundamental questions about power, democracy, citizenship, justice, freedom, inequality, and social change while examining how political ideas shape political institutions and everyday life.

Students will engage with both classical and contemporary political thought, including the work of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, alongside feminist, anti-racist, Indigenous, postcolonial, and Marxian critiques. Throughout the course, we examine how social forces such as gender, race, class, colonialism, and economic structures influence political systems and shape opportunities for political change.

Important: Students intending to continue in Political Science at Western must complete both POL 1025 and POL 1026. The courses may be taken in either order, but taking them simultaneously is strongly discouraged.

What Will I Learn?

This course introduces students to some of the most important questions in political and social life:

- What makes a government legitimate?
- What is justice?
- What does freedom mean?
- Who belongs within a political community?
- How should power, rights, opportunities, and resources be distributed?

Students will learn how political ideas have developed historically and how they continue to shape contemporary debates about democracy, citizenship, inequality, conflict, and social change. The course encourages students to look beyond political events themselves and examine the deeper social, historical, and economic forces that shape political life.

Skills You Will Develop

POL 1025 emphasizes the development of transferable analytical and communication skills.

Throughout the course, students will learn to:

- Think critically about political institutions, ideas, and practices
- Analyze and evaluate competing political arguments
- Apply political concepts and theories to contemporary issues
- Understand how power operates through social and political institutions
- Use intersectional approaches to analyze political problems
- Communicate complex ideas clearly in writing

- Exercise political judgment and conceptual reasoning

These skills are valuable in Political Science and many other fields, including law, public policy, journalism, public administration, education, and business.

2. Course Assessments

Student learning is assessed through a combination of quizzes, a midterm examination, and a final examination.

Weekly Online Quizzes

Students complete online quizzes based on the weekly readings and lecture materials. Quizzes are designed to reinforce key concepts and encourage ongoing engagement with course content. Format is readings-based application-type multiple choice questions.

In-person Midterm Examination

The midterm evaluates students' understanding of concepts, theories, and debates covered during the first half of the course. Format is written responses.

In-person Final Examination

The final exam assesses students' ability to explain, analyze, and apply course concepts, theories, and arguments from across the semester. Format is essay-style, long-answer response.

Students are expected to complete weekly readings, engage with online and in-person course materials, and participate consistently throughout the term to prepare for assessments.

3. Course Readings

All required course materials are available through the course Brightspace site.

Students should check Brightspace regularly for weekly readings, lecture materials, announcements, and course updates. Readings are organized by weekly topic and are required preparation for quizzes, discussions, the midterm examination, and the final examination.

Required Textbooks

Atchison, Amy L. (ed.). *Political Science Is for Everybody: An Introduction to Political Science* (2021).

Students do not need to purchase the textbook. All assigned readings are available free of charge through the course website: <https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks6/upress6/2021-04-18/1/9781487532529>

Additional Required Texts:

Brodie, Janine, Sandra Rein, and Malinda S. Smith, eds. *Critical Concepts: An Introduction to Politics*. 5th ed. Toronto: Pearson Canada, 2014.

These additional readings will be posted on the weekly course content page throughout the semester. No additional purchases are required.

4. Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Explain major political concepts and theories.
2. Analyze how power shapes political institutions and social life.
3. Apply intersectional approaches to political issues.
4. Evaluate competing political perspectives and arguments.
5. Connect political ideas to contemporary social and political debates.
6. Think and write critically about power, inequality, citizenship, democracy, and social change.

Why Should I Take This Course?

Politics shapes the societies we live in, the institutions that govern us, and the opportunities available to different groups of people. Understanding politics requires more than learning how governments work; it requires examining the ideas, assumptions, and power relations that shape political life.

POL 1025 provides an introduction to some of the most influential political ideas and debates while helping students develop the critical thinking skills needed to analyze contemporary political issues. The course encourages students to ask not only how political systems operate, but also whether they are just, inclusive, and legitimate.

Whether you are considering further studies in Political Science, planning a career in law, public policy, international affairs, journalism, education, or simply seeking to become a more informed citizen, POL 1025 provides a strong foundation for understanding and engaging with the political world.

5. Use of Technology

Technology plays an important role in POL 1025, both inside and outside the classroom. Students will use Brightspace to access course materials, complete online components of the course, submit quizzes, and stay informed about announcements and course updates. Students are expected to check the course Brightspace site regularly, as it serves as the primary means of communication throughout the semester.

Students are encouraged to bring laptops or tablets to class for note-taking and participation in course activities. Technology can be a valuable learning tool when used responsibly and respectfully. However, electronic devices should always be used in ways that support learning and do not distract other students or interfere with classroom activities. Disruptive or inappropriate use of devices may result in a student being asked to leave the classroom.

Please note that audio or video recording of lectures is not permitted unless recording has been approved through Accessible Education as part of an official accommodation. The course materials, lectures, and discussions are intended for the educational use of students registered in the course and should not be recorded, shared, or distributed without permission. Students caught recording, sharing, or distributing this information without permission may be removed from the course and/or subject to disciplinary action.

Technology Requirements for Quizzes and Online Learning

Because POL 1025 includes online learning components, students are responsible for ensuring they have access to a functional computer and a reliable internet connection. Weekly quizzes and other online activities require students to use Brightspace and related course technologies effectively.

Students should prepare carefully before beginning any online assessment. Technical problems that occur during quizzes, including computer crashes, software issues, internet interruptions, or device malfunctions, do not automatically qualify a student for a make-up opportunity. Unfortunately, instructors and teaching assistants cannot independently verify most technical difficulties and therefore cannot routinely grant rewrites based on technology-related issues.

To reduce the likelihood of technical problems:

- Use a reliable computer and internet connection.
- Close all unnecessary applications before beginning a quiz.
- Avoid having multiple browser windows or tabs open while completing assessments.
- Consider printing or downloading notes in advance rather than switching between multiple windows during a quiz.
- If sharing internet access with roommates or family members, complete quizzes at a time when your connection is likely to be stable.
- When possible, consider using Western University's campus Wi-Fi and computer facilities.

Students experiencing significant technical issues should contact Western Technology Services as soon as possible and notify their Teaching Assistant immediately. However, students should be aware that technical difficulties alone may not result in accommodations or opportunities to retake quizzes.

Success in the course depends on planning ahead and ensuring that technology is functioning properly before assessments begin.

6. Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is essential to scholarship, learning, and intellectual development. Students are expected to complete their own work, acknowledge sources appropriately, and comply with Western University's regulations governing scholastic offences and academic misconduct. Violations of academic integrity, including plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, cheating, or misrepresentation of work, are serious offences and may result in significant academic penalties.

In POL 1025, students are expected to complete all quizzes, examinations, written work, and course activities in accordance with Western University's academic integrity policies. Violations of academic integrity undermine the learning process and disadvantage fellow students who complete their work honestly.

Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with Western University's policies regarding scholastic offences and academic misconduct. These policies explain expectations related to plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsification of information, impersonation, cheating on examinations or quizzes, and other forms of academic dishonesty.

- [Western Scholastic Offences Policy](#)
- [Scholastic Offence Procedures](#)

Academic integrity is about more than simply avoiding misconduct. It is also about developing the habits of critical thinking, intellectual independence, and responsible scholarship. One of the goals of POL 1025 is to help students learn how to evaluate evidence, develop their own arguments, and engage thoughtfully with political ideas. These skills can only be developed through active participation in the learning process.

7. Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Generative Artificial Intelligence tools such as ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, Claude, and similar applications are increasingly common in academic and professional environments. These technologies can be useful when used appropriately, but they must never replace the intellectual work that students are expected to perform themselves.

The central purpose of POL 1025 is to help students learn how to read carefully, think critically, analyze political arguments, and develop their own political judgments. These skills cannot be acquired by relying on automated systems to do the work on a student's behalf.

Students may use generative AI tools in limited ways that support learning, including:

- Brainstorming ideas or questions related to course concepts.
- Exploring different perspectives on a topic.
- Improving grammar, clarity, and organization during proofreading and editing.
- Generating preliminary explanations that help clarify unfamiliar concepts before consulting course materials.

At the same time, students should recognize that AI systems are not reliable academic sources. AI-generated responses can contain factual inaccuracies, biased interpretations, fabricated quotations, invented references, and non-existent citations. Information provided by AI must always be verified through course materials or other credible academic sources.

Students may **not**:

- Submit AI-generated work as their own.
- Use AI-generated writing in place of completing assigned work.
- Rely on AI-generated summaries instead of engaging directly with assigned readings.
- Use AI-generated citations or references that cannot be independently verified.
- Use AI in any manner that violates Western University's academic integrity policies.

Students should think of AI as a tool that may support learning, not as a substitute for learning. Reading, analyzing, discussing, writing, and forming arguments remain essential parts of the educational process. The ability to evaluate claims critically, identify weaknesses in arguments, and assess the reliability of information is particularly important in an era where AI can generate convincing but inaccurate content.

One of the goals of this course is to help students become informed and thoughtful consumers of information. Developing that skill requires active engagement with course readings, lectures, and discussions rather than relying on automated summaries or generated answers. Students who engage directly with the course materials will not only be better prepared for quizzes, the midterm, and the final examination, but will also develop the critical thinking skills that political science seeks to cultivate.

8. Teaching Assistants and Learning Support

The goal of POL 1025 is not to memorize large amounts of information. Rather, the course is designed to help you engage actively with political concepts, theories, and debates and learn how to define, explain, analyze, and apply them to contemporary political issues and events. The weekly readings, online learning modules, lectures, quizzes, and discussions work together to help you develop critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of politics. As emphasized throughout the course, political science is about understanding arguments, identifying concepts, connecting ideas, evaluating evidence, and applying what you learn to real-world situations, not simply recalling facts.

Although POL 1025 does not include tutorials, every student will be assigned a Teaching Assistant (TA). Your TA is an important member of the instructional team and can help clarify concepts, discuss readings, answer questions about lectures, suggest study strategies, and provide guidance on preparing for quizzes, the midterm test, and the final examination.

Students are strongly encouraged to seek help early rather than waiting until major assessments approach. Your TA will hold weekly office hours throughout the semester so that you can ask questions and receive support when you need it.

Additional information regarding your TA, office hours, and contact information will be posted on Brightspace.

Communication Policy

POL 1025 is a large-enrolment course. To ensure that students receive timely assistance and that questions are addressed efficiently, students are expected to follow the communication process outlined below.

- **Contact your TA by email: Your first point of contact should always be your TA.** In most cases, TAs are able to answer questions about course concepts, readings, lectures, quizzes, examinations, study strategies, and general course procedures. After reviewing your question, your TA will advise you regarding any additional steps that may be necessary and will indicate whether the matter should be directed to your instructor or elsewhere.
- **Please do not email the instructor before first contacting your TA.** This policy helps streamline communication and ensures that students receive assistance as quickly as possible. Because POL 1025 is a large course, direct emails to the instructor regarding routine course matters can create significant delays in response times. Routing questions through TAs first allows the instructional team to respond more efficiently and enables the instructor to focus on issues that specifically require instructor attention.

- **Meet the instructor at her weekly in-person office hours.** While you will only contact your instructor after emailing your TA, you can visit your instructor during her weekly office hour to chat, ask questions, and introduce yourself.
- **Before contacting your TA,** students should also consult the course syllabus, Brightspace announcements, assignment instructions, and other posted course materials. Many common questions about deadlines, assessments, policies, accommodations, course procedures, and expectations can be answered by reviewing these resources first. Taking a few minutes to check course materials before sending a message often provides the quickest answer and helps the instructional team devote more time to supporting student learning.
- Your TA will let you know who to contact regarding your issue. **If your TA instructs you to contact the instructor, email the instructor** with your question/concern and please copy your TA on this email.
- **Please be courteous and do not send more than one email at a time and please wait for a response before you send another;** multiple emails about the same topic is highly discouraged and may result in delayed response.

9. WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE

Key Assessment Dates

Online Quiz 1 (3%): Sept. 23

Online Quiz 2 (1%): Oct. 7

Online Quiz 3 (1%): Oct. 21

In-class Midterm Test (40%): Oct. 28

Online Quiz 4 (1%): Nov. 4

Online Quiz 5 (1%): Nov. 11

Online Quiz 6 (1%): Nov. 18

Online Quiz 7 (1%): Nov. 25

Online Quiz 8 (1%): Dec. 2

Final In-class Examination: Scheduled by the Registrar during the exam period.

Week & Date	Topic	Required Readings	Study & Research Skills	Assessment	Weekly Summary
1 Sept 9	Welcome and Introduction to University and the Course	No reading	Brightspace navigation, note-taking, time management	No Quiz	Course orientation, expectations, university success strategies, and an introduction to political science.
2 Sept 16	Politics Is Everywhere: Power,	Atchison, Introduction	Active reading, key concept identification	Practice Quiz (ungraded)	Introduces politics as a part of

	Conflict, and Everyday Life				everyday life and explores how power shapes social relationships and institutions.
3 Sept 23	Power, Knowledge, Sovereignty, and Authority	Atchison, Ch. 1; and Brodie, "Power and Politics." In <i>Critical Concepts: An Introduction to Politics</i> , chapter 1.	Concept mapping, argument analysis	QUIZ 1 (3%)	Examines different forms of power and authority and how knowledge influences political life.
4 Sept 30	Truth and Reconciliation Day	No reading	Reflection and review	NO CLASS	No class. Students are encouraged to reflect on Indigenous histories and reconciliation.
5 Oct 7	Whose Good Life? Building a Political Society Worth Living In	Atchison, Ch. 2	Normative analysis, critical reading	QUIZ 2 (1%)	Explores justice, equality, and competing visions of the good society.
6 Oct 14	Reading Week	No reading	Midterm preparation	NO CLASS	No class. Students review and consolidate key concepts.
7 Oct 21	Social Contract Theories and Their Critics	Brodie book, Epp chapter, pp. 17-30; and Seth chapter, pp. 77-92.	Comparative analysis, theoretical critique	QUIZ 3 (1%)	Explores classical social contract theory and major critiques.
8 Oct 28	Midterm Test	Review course materials	Synthesis and exam writing	MIDTERM (40%)	In-class midterm covering Weeks 1-7.
9 Nov 4	Political Ideologies, Social Media, and the Battle Over Common Sense	Atchison, Ch. 3 and Ch. 4	Comparative theory, critical evaluation	QUIZ 4 (1%)	Examines ideological worldviews and how they shape political debates.

10 Nov 11	Comparative Global Politics and International Relations	Atchison, Ch. 7 and Ch. 12	Comparative analysis, media analysis	QUIZ 5 (1%)	Introduces comparative politics and global political interactions.
11 Nov 18	Global (In)Security, Conflict, and Human Rights	Atchison, Ch. 14 and Ch. 15	Global issue analysis, evidence evaluation	QUIZ 6 (1%)	Explores security, conflict, and human rights in international politics.
12 Nov 25	Coloniality, Indigeneity, and (Self-)Governance	Altamirano- Jiménez; Quijano	Decolonial analysis, interpretation	QUIZ 7 (1%)	Examines colonial power structures and Indigenous self- governance.
13 Dec 2	Course Wrap- Up and Final Exam Preparation	No reading	Synthesis, review, integration	QUIZ 8 (1%)	Brings together major themes and prepares students for the final examination.
14 Dec 9	No Class	Review	Exam preparation	NO CLASS	Study week and preparation for the final exam.

10. Academic Policies, Department Policies, Student Supports, and Resources

This section summarizes the most important academic policies, departmental expectations, and student support services relevant to POL 1025. Students are responsible for becoming familiar with these policies and for consulting the course syllabus and Brightspace regularly throughout the semester

Academic Consideration and Accommodation

Western University recognizes that students may experience medical, compassionate, or other circumstances that affect their academic performance. Students requiring accommodation should follow the University's Academic Consideration procedures and work through the appropriate university channels. Approved accommodations will be implemented in accordance with University, Faculty, and departmental policies. Requests for accommodation should be directed through Academic Counselling rather than through Teaching Assistants.

- [Academic Consideration Information](#)
- [Faculty of Social Science Academic Advising](#)
- [Faculty Makeup Assessment Policy](#)

Departmental Policies

Grade Reviews and Appeals

Assessment in POL 1025 is guided by clearly articulated grading standards. Students who believe an assessment has been graded incorrectly may request a review by identifying specific concerns regarding the application of grading criteria in writing by email to the TA. Only formal appeals in writing will be considered. Students should be aware that a re-evaluation may result in the grade increasing, remaining unchanged, or decreasing.

Appeals Resource

- [Faculty of Social Science Appeals Process](#)

Department of Political Science Grading Policy

The Department of Political Science follows Faculty grading guidelines when calculating final grades. Final percentage grades ending in 0.5 or higher are rounded up to the next whole number, while grades ending below 0.5 are rounded down. The Department may also apply grading guidelines to maintain consistency across courses.

Accessibility and Inclusive Learning

Western University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment. Students who require academic accommodations are encouraged to register with Accessible Education as early as possible so that appropriate supports can be arranged in a timely manner

- [Accessible Education Registration](#)
- [Western Accessibility Services](#)

POL 1025 encourages critical inquiry, intellectual curiosity, and respectful discussion. Students will encounter a variety of perspectives and viewpoints, some of which may challenge existing assumptions. Productive disagreement is an important part of political inquiry, but all classroom interactions must be grounded in mutual respect and consideration for others.

Resources

Student Support Services

Western University provides a range of academic and personal support services to help students succeed throughout their university experience.

Academic Advising

Students seeking guidance regarding degree requirements, program planning, academic regulations, course selection, or university policies should contact Social Science Academic Advising.

- [Social Science Academic Advising](#)

Writing Support

Students who would like assistance with academic writing, essay organization, revision strategies, argumentation, citation practices, and research skills are encouraged to use Western University's Writing Support Centre.

- [Writing Support Centre](#)

Mental Health and Wellness

University life can be demanding, and students experiencing emotional, psychological, or personal challenges are encouraged to seek support early. Western offers a variety of services designed to promote student well-being and mental health.

- [Mental Health and Wellness at Western](#)

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence Support

Western University is committed to supporting individuals affected by gender-based and sexual violence. Students can access confidential support services, information, and community resources through the University's dedicated support network.

- [Gender-Based and Sexual Violence Support](#)
- Email: support@uwo.ca

A Final Word

Successful students are proactive in seeking assistance, consulting course materials, asking questions when necessary, and making use of available supports. Whether you need help navigating academic policies, strengthening your writing, accessing accommodations, or managing personal challenges, Western University offers a wide range of resources to support your success. If you are uncertain where to begin, start by consulting your Teaching Assistant, Academic Advising, or the appropriate support service listed above.

Good luck and I hope you have a wonderful experience in this course!