

**POL 1030A: A Beginner's Guide to Canada
Fall 2026**

Draft Date : 6 July 2026

The final version of the syllabus will be posted on OWL by September 5, 2026.

Course Instructor: Dr. Christopher Alcantara
Office: Contact Instructor
Course Questions: **Please post your questions on the Brightspace Discussions page first.**
Email: For questions specific to your situation, contact calcanta@uwo.ca
Course Venue/Time: Online – Asynchronous on Brightspace; **Final Exam IN PERSON.**
Course Structure:

- Students must complete the assigned readings BEFORE watching the recorded lectures on Brightspace.
- Each week's lectures will be released on Sunday at 6am, starting on Sunday Sept. 6 for week 1, Sunday Sept. 13 for week 2, etc. Please view the lectures sometime during that week before the next set of lectures is released.
- Students will complete two one-hour tests on Brightspace with the first one occurring during Week 4 (Friday Oct. 2). The test can be completed anytime between 6am and 10pm on that day. Details are below. You are expected to complete the test with no aids, human, AI or otherwise.
- To pass this course, students must complete ALL tests and the final exam and achieve the minimum course grade to pass, as per university regulations. Failure to meet these requirements will result in an automatic failure in the course.

Please Note: This is a rigorous first year political science course. To be successful in it will require diligent studying and note taking. **Last year's course averages were 74% for test 1 and 72% for test 2. The final exam this year will be written IN PERSON,** not online. If you choose to enroll in this course, be prepared to fully engage with all the required materials.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course provides international students, recent immigrants, and others with a comprehensive overview of Canada. Its purpose is to help mainly newcomers gain a better understanding of what it means to live, study, and work in Canada, with a focus on describing Canada's political and legal system, its key policy debates, and its social and economic bases. Specific topics may include Indigenous rights and decolonization, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, capitalism, climate change, education policy, federalism, foreign policy, health care policy, housing policy, the legal system, immigration, Quebec, multiculturalism, and value change. Students will learn about the key characteristics of Canada through lectures, guest speakers, readings, videos, and other materials.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the term, students should be able to:

- Describe the nature and evolution of Canada's political, economic and legal systems;
- Explain the historical and on-going importance of Quebec and Indigenous peoples to Canada and Canadian identity;
- Assess the relationship between Canadian policies and the unique and complex makeup of Canadian society;
- Synthesize information on Canada from a variety of sources.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS AND READINGS:

- Donald Wright, 2020. *Canada: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search?campus=UWO&term=W2026A&courses%5B0%5D=650_UW/POL1030A
- Other readings are available through Brightspace, in the library, and/or online.

LIST OF ASSIGNMENTS

1) Two Tests on OWL Brightspace: 60%

- Week 4, Friday Oct. 2, anytime between 6am and 10pm: 25%
- Week 8, Friday Oct. 30, anytime between 6am and 10pm: 35%

2) Final Exam on OWL Brightspace: 40%

- To be scheduled by the Registrar's Office and written in-person.

Total: 100% of Course Grade

ASSIGNMENT DETAILS

****** To pass this course, students must complete ALL tests and the final exam and achieve the minimum course grade to pass, as per university regulations. Failure to meet these requirements will result in an automatic failure in the course. ******

1) Two One-Hour Tests

60%

Students will write a test on OWL Brightspace on the Fridays of Weeks 4 and 8 (Oct. 2 and Oct. 30). Each test will be based on all course materials (e.g. lectures and readings) since the beginning of the term (for Test 1) or the last test written (for Test 2). The tests are NOT cumulative. Question formats will include multiple choice, true/false, and multi-select. **For multi-select questions, students must select all correct answers to receive full marks; no part marks will be awarded for partially correct responses.**

Students will have ONE hour to complete the test and may access the test at any time between 6am and 10pm on the day that the test is scheduled to occur. The test is **linear**, which means you cannot go back to a question once you have answered it. Students are

expected to complete the tests alone and with **no aids**, human, AI (e.g. ChatGPT) or otherwise.

Once you submit your test, you will not be able to view the questions and your answers nor will you receive any feedback at the end of each test beyond your grade. This is to discourage cheating and the sharing of information about the tests.

2) Final Exam

40%

Students will write a 2-hour final exam IN-PERSON during the exam period as scheduled by the Registrar's Office. The exam is cumulative, meaning it covers the entire course, but with a heavy emphasis on the materials (weeks 9-13) covered in class after test 2.

A NOTE ON MISSED TESTS AND EXTENSIONS

Test 1 is scheduled for October 2 and Test 2 for October 30. Both tests must be completed on Brightspace between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. on the scheduled dates. If illness or other circumstances prevent you from writing on these dates, you will automatically receive a 7-day extension—**no need to contact the instructor or Academic Counselling, and no documentation is required**. Just log into Brightspace and write Test 1 before October 9 and Test 2 before November 6. This automatic extension applies to all students.

No further extensions will be granted beyond October 9 for Test 1 or November 6 for Test 2. If you are experiencing serious extenuating circumstances, contact your Academic Counselling Office to discuss additional options.

CLASS AND READING SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Sept. 7): Course Details and an Overview of Canada

READ:

- Wright Introduction.
- Wright Chapter 1: Beginnings.

Week 2 (Sept. 14): Canadian Values and Value Change

READ:

- Jennifer Ditchburn. 2016. "Our constantly evolving Canadian values." *Policy Options* <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/september-2016/our-constantly-evolving-canadian-values/>

Week 3 (Sept. 21): Canada's Political System

READ:

- Alex Marland and Jared Wesley. 2020. "Chapter 1: Overview of Canadian Politics." *Inside Canadian Politics* 2nd Edition, Oxford University Press.

Week 4 (Sept. 28): Canadian Political Economy

READ:

- Heather Whiteside. 2020. "Introduction: Changes, Crises, and Conflicts in Canadian Political Economy." *Canadian Political Economy*. Edited by Heather Whiteside. University of Toronto Press. Read only pp. 3-17.

Week 5 (Oct. 5): Indigenous-Settler Relations

READ:

- Wright Chapter 2: Disposessions.
- Arthur Manuel. 2017. "In Canada, white supremacy is the law of the land." *Now Toronto*. October 26. Available at: <https://nowtoronto.com/news/in-canada-white-supremacy-is-the-law-of-the-land/>

Week 6 (Oct. 12): Reading Week

Week 7 (Oct. 19) Quebec and the West

READ:

- Wright Chapter 3: Nationalisms.
- Lisa Young and Loleen Berdahl. 2022. "Standing up to Ottawa: Western alienation shifts into Prairie constitutional challenges." *Policy Options* December 14. Available at: <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/december-2022/western-alienation-constitutional-challenges/>

Week 8 (Oct. 26): Multiculturalism and Immigration

READ:

- Tina J. Park. 2021. "Tackling racism against Asian-Canadians as multiculturalism turns 50." *Policy Options*. <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/march-2021/tackling-racism-against-asian-canadians-as-multiculturalism-turns-50/>
- Mireille Paquet. "Canada's merit-based immigration system is no magic bullet." *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/canadas-merit-based-immigration-system-is-no-magic-bullet-90923>
- Optional Reading – Skim The Canadian Citizenship guide (which newcomers use to prepare for the [citizenship test](#)): <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/discover-canada.html>

Week 9 (Nov. 2): The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

READ:

- Wright Chapter 4: Rights.
- Jonathan Rudin. 2018. "The (in)justice system and Indigenous people." *Policy Options* <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/april-2018/the-injustice-system-and-indigenous-people/>
- Optional Reading - Peruse this website on the Charter: <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccd/>

Week 10 (Nov. 9): Research in Political Science

READ:

- Complete the module on the OWL Brightspace page.

Week 11 (Nov. 16): Social Movements

READ:

- Alex Marland and Jared Wesley. 2020. "Chapter 12: Interest Groups and Social Movements." *Inside Canadian Politics* 2nd Edition, Oxford University Press.

Week 12 (Nov. 23): Public Policy and Racial Inequality

READ:

- Keith Banting and Debra Thompson. 2021. "The Puzzling Persistence of Racial Inequality in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 54 (4): 870–891. Doi: 10.1017/S0008423921000585.

Week 13 (Nov. 30): Canadian Social Policy: The Education and Health Care Systems

READ:

- Jane Jenson. 2010. "Chapter 23: Continuities and Change in the Design of Canada's Social Architecture." *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Politics*. Oxford University Press: 417-433. Available for free here:
<https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/28243/chapter/213350177>

COURSE POLICIES

See here for Department Policies:

<https://politicalscience.uwo.ca/undergraduate/docs/outlines/2025-26/APPENDIX%20TO%20UNDERGRADUATE%20COURSE%20OUTLINES1.pdf>

Extensions and Academic Consideration for Student Absence:

Extensions are not generally given. When there are genuine and unavoidable family or medical circumstances, you may seek academic accommodation.

“University policy on academic considerations are described [here](#). This policy requires that all requests for academic considerations must be accompanied by a self-attestation. Further information about academic considerations, and information about submitting this self-attestation with your academic consideration request may be found [here](#).

Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline.

“If you fail to hand in an assignment, but are pursuing academic accommodation, **please advise your professor immediately**.

A Note Regarding Computer Problems:

Students are expected to back up their written work and lecture/tutorial notes. Furthermore, students will be responsible for finding replacement lecture/tutorial notes where they fail to back-up their files.

Religious Accommodation

When a course requirement conflicts with a religious holiday that requires an absence from the University or prohibits certain activities, students should request accommodation for their absence in writing at least two weeks prior to the holiday to the course instructor and/or the Academic Counselling office of their Faculty of Registration. Please consult University's list of recognized religious holidays (updated annually) at

<https://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Accessible Education, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities can be found at:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic Accommodation_disabilities.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic_Accommodation_disabilities.pdf).

Lecture Copyright:

The course instructors claim material and image copyright so please ask for permission if you want to audio record or video record any part of the course.

Statement on Contact

Please expect at least a 48-hour delay in receiving a response to emails, although at our discretion responses may occur sooner.

Western University is committed to a thriving campus as we deliver our courses in the mixed model of both virtual and face-to-face formats. We encourage you to check out the Digital Student Experience website to manage your academics and well-being:

<https://www.uwo.ca/se/digital/>.

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC,

<https://westernusc.ca/services/>.