

Local Government Certificate Programs Dalhousie University

Local Government

1. Description of the course

This course introduces students to the general elements of local government and governance. It explains how municipalities fit into the constitutional framework, discusses the various reforms that have occurred throughout the years, discusses the processes and institutions of local government, and explains the context in which the governments exist.

2. Learning objectives

- Describe the constitutional status of municipal government and the associated consequences
- Differentiate among direct, representative, and grassroots democracy
- Explain the varied and often conflicting views of government and of government's major purposes
- Distinguish between municipalities and other types of local government (agencies, boards, and commissions)
- Describe the main roles of local government
- Evaluate the link between municipal government and democracy
- Offer a preliminary assessment of the future prospects for municipal government.
- Describe the way that municipal governments were introduced in the various provinces and the key features of these original systems
- Explain the key features of the turn of the century reform era and its contribution to the current forms of municipal government
- Describe the pressures of growth and change, especially those associated with urbanization, and the impact of these pressures on traditional municipal systems
- Describe and compare the approaches taken to municipal restructuring in the various provinces
- Evaluate the reasons given to justify municipal restructuring, especially the round of amalgamations in recent years.
- Describe and analyze the basic machinery of municipal government: council, head of council, staff, and standing committees
- Understand the challenge of reconciling political and professional perspectives on the public interest and how these are reflected in the various government structures used by municipalities
- Describe and evaluate the various structural reforms put in place to create executive committees of council
- Describe and evaluate the structural reforms put in place to create variations of the post of chief administrative officer
- Explain the shift from municipal government structures to municipal governance processes and the changes underlying this shift.

- Describe the various players at the local level with whom municipalities interact (or should interact)
- Assess with examples the contributions made by local groups and local political parties to the operations of municipal government
- Analyze the nature of the provincial–local relationship and its strengths and shortcomings
- Examine the nature of the federal–local relationship and its future prospects
- Explain how municipalities are affected by globalization and international trade agreements and organizations.
- Describe the main challenges facing local governments in the 21st century
- Assess and illustrate with examples how well you anticipate local governments will respond to these challenges and why
- Use this general perspective for your municipality and other municipalities in your province and determine how their futures compare.

3. Text and/or readings used

Textbook

C. Richard Tindal and Susan Nobes Tindal, *Local Government in Canada*, 9th ed.; Toronto, ON: Nelson, 2004.

Additional Required Readings

Masson, Jack and Edward LeSage Jr., *Alberta's Local Governments: Politics and Democracy*, Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 1994, Chapter 1.

Quesnel, Louise, *Public Consultation: A Tool for Local Democracy*, Toronto, ON: ICURR Publications, August 2000, Chapter 1.

4. Overview of course

Module 1 “What are Local Governments?” describes the constitutional status of municipalities in Canada and outlines the main roles and functions of municipal governments. It also differentiates among direct, representative and grassroots democracy, explains the various views of government, and evaluates the link between municipal government and democracy. Finally, it distinguishes between municipalities and other types of local government agencies, boards and commissions, and offers an assessment of the future prospects for municipal government.

In Module 2 “The Evolution of the Local Government System” the history of the local government system in Canada is described. The module explains the reforms and changes that have occurred over time to municipalities, in particular noting the pressures associated with growth and urbanization. It also examines the approaches to municipal restructuring taken in the various provinces in Canada, and evaluates the reasons for undertaking municipal restructuring and amalgamation.

Module 3 “Local Government and Governance” describes and analyses the basic machinery of

municipal government, including council, head of council, staff and standing committees. It also discusses the challenge of reconciling political and professional perspectives on the public interest and how these differences of perspective are reflected in the various government structures used by the municipalities. It describes and evaluates the structural reforms put in place to create executive committees and the post of chief administrative officer.

Module 4 “Municipalities in a Wider World” sets local governments in their broader context. It describes the various players at the local level with whom municipalities interact, and assesses the contributions made by local groups and local political parties to the operations of municipal government. It also examines the relationships provincial and federal governments have with municipalities, and explains how municipalities are affected by international forces.

In Module 5 “Future Prospects for Canadian Local Government” students learn about the major challenges facing local governments in the twenty-first century. The module describes how local governments will respond to these challenges, and asks students to apply general perspectives to their own municipalities.