



**DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY**

POLI 3401 – Contemporary Political Theory

Instructor: Dr. Larissa Atkison
Schedule: M/W 2:35 – 4:05
Location: Studley LSC-OCEANOGRAPH O3655
Office Hours: T/TH 3-5 p.m. Henry Hicks 354
Email: larissa.atkison@dal.ca
Website: Brightspace

A. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores key debates in contemporary political thought around questions of fairness, freedom and post-colonial justice. We begin the term with influential accounts of liberalism and its overarching conception of justice, liberty and fairness before turning to prominent post-colonial, feminist, egalitarian, environmental, and post-human critics of liberal democracies.

B. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1) Identify and define the key concepts and ideas that shape contemporary political debates;
- 2) Recognize, assess, and evaluate contending positions and their implications for contemporary political practice
- 3) Analyze and critically engage with prominent theoretical arguments;
- 4) Understand and articulate interrelationships and tensions between theories of justice, fairness, and reparation and political practice.

C. REQUIRED READINGS

In recognition of the difficulties – both tangible and financial – of acquiring textbooks during a pandemic, I have dispensed with a textbook in place of readings that are available either online or on our Brightspace page. Most journal articles and news media are available on the library website and most book chapters are available on our Brightspace page.

I will do my best to post all reading materials on Brightspace, however, if a reading has not been posted, this is not an excuse for not consulting it. All materials should be readily available on the Dal library website; knowing how to access scholarly material is an essential element of a university education. The librarians are available if you have trouble sourcing articles.

D. EVALUATION COMPONENTS AND WEIGHTS

Components

The course will be delivered in person. Work will be evaluated on an individual basis. Except for formally volunteering as a note-taker for the course, which is strongly encouraged, students are discouraged from sharing their individual work on online platforms (i.e., do not share individual

work on Facebook Groups, Google Drive, Discord, Dropbox, etc.). In the past, such sharing of individual work has resulted in incidents of plagiarism and academic misconduct.

The course assessment will be determined as follows:

List of Components

In Class Tests (3 x 20)	60%
CRR (2 x 15)	30%
Participation	10%

TOTAL OF ALL COMPONENTS: 100%

Note: all components must be complete to pass this course.

Letter grades have a grade point assigned that is used to calculate your GPA (Grade Point Average). The following table explains and defines Dalhousie’s grading system and shows the GPA value that corresponds with each letter grade.

Grade	Grade Point Value		Definition	Notes
A+ A A-	4.30 4.00 3.70	90-100 85-89 80-84	Excellent	Considerable evidence of original thinking; demonstrated outstanding capacity to analyze and synthesize; outstanding grasp of subject matter; evidence of extensive knowledge base.
B+ B B-	3.30 3.00 2.70	77-79 73-76 70-72	Good	Evidence of grasp of subject matter, some evidence of critical capacity and analytical ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with the literature.
C+ C C-	2.30 2.00 1.70	65-69 60-64 55-59	Satisfactory	Evidence of some understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems; benefitting from his/her university experience.
D	1.00	50-54	Marginal Pass	Evidence of minimally acceptable familiarity with subject matter, critical and analytical skills (except in programs where a minimum grade of 'C' is required).

F	0.00	0-49	Inadequate	Insufficient evidence of understanding of the subject matter; weakness in critical and analytical skills; limited or irrelevant use of the literature.
INC	0.00		Incomplete	
W	Neutral and no credit obtained		Withdrew after deadline	
ILL	Neutral and no credit obtained		Compassionate reasons, illness	
P	Neutral		Pass	
TR	Neutral		Transfer credit on admission	
Pending	Neutral		Grade not reported	

E. ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

Participation:

Absences are to be expected during pandemic and I encourage you to stay home if you are symptomatic with flu or cold symptoms or are asymptomatic with a positive Covid test. You are still, however, required to make up for any missed content by requesting notes from the Accommodations Office. If sickness prevents you from attending more than TWO consecutive classes, you will need to provide me with a doctor's note explaining your absence. Participation points will be deducted if you miss THREE or more classes throughout the term without explanation.

Note, even as participation requirements are somewhat relaxed due to the pandemic, you are expected to be an active participant in class when in attendance. Use of devices during class except for the purpose of notetaking, arriving late, distracting others, are all cause for participation deductions and may result in your removal from the classroom. Participation points of 8/10 or higher, will be assigned to students who attend class regularly (barring illness), are focussed and prepared to learn, and are willing to participate in class discussion (Note, engaged listening is a form of participation).

Critical Responses

You are expected to contribute TWO 1250-1500 word Critical Reading Reflections (CRRs) over the semester. A prompt will be circulated for each CRR.

Critical reflections should be thoughtful and thorough, written in clear prose, and engage closely with the assigned content. I expect to see references to assigned content to support your claims.

Note, that a critical reflection is not a summary or description of the reading. Rather, you should demonstrate your understanding of the material by reflecting on the author(s)' claims and applying them to your practical experience, or by bringing them into conversation with other reputable published opinions you have encountered.

Direct quotes must be marked as such and referenced, and you must link to any sources which have directly informed your thinking on a particular issue. The writing style may be first person but should be polished and clear. Assume your reader is informed and interested in your analytic perspective – do not, therefore, spend time, introducing basic concepts covered in the course in these assignments.

Please include the word count at the top of your assignment along with your name, the date, and a title.

The overall mark on the assignment will consider your critical engagement with the assigned material, the originality of your questions and observations, and the clarity of your writing. A grading rubric will be provided.

*Note, a grade of A or higher on these assignments is reserved for submissions that exceed expectations across the grading rubric.

In Class Test (20% x 3 - 75 min)

There will be **THREE in class tests. Each will be designed to take 60 minutes.** If you require longer than 80 minutes (class duration), please contact the Accommodations Office.

Student Declaration of Absence forms will not be accepted to excuse you from completing this assignment. **If you are unwell the day of the exam, it is your responsibility to schedule a make-up exam with me within one week of the test** (barring unforeseen events such as a family death, a severe medical condition, or proof of positive Covid test – proof of which will be required to schedule a make-up exam outside of the set window). **If you do not reschedule your missed exam within this window, you will receive zero on this assignment.**

Academic Integrity

At Dalhousie University, we are guided in our work by the values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility and respect. As a student, you are required to demonstrate these values in the work you do. The University provides policies and procedures that every member of the university community is required to follow to ensure academic integrity.

Academic work is a process of learning from and building on the work of other people. Academic integrity means that we must be honest about our debts to others and their influence on our

ideas and language on our own. It is therefore essential to acknowledge any content, written, multimedia, oral presentations, that have directly influenced the framing and language you use in your own academic work. Academic acknowledgement includes using quotations for direct quotes, followed by citation and citing authors you have paraphrased, or whose ideas you have drawn from in your work. Academic integrity means trustworthy conduct such as not cheating on examinations and not misrepresenting information. It is the student's responsibility to seek assistance to ensure that these standards are met. We will be using Urkund in this class as a tool to avoid academic integrity issues.

If you are ever unsure about any aspect of your academic work, please contact me or a TA. The library also offers services to help you ensure your academic integrity.

We all have moments where we are overwhelmed and fall behind in our work. Whatever you do, do not plagiarize, or otherwise cheat in such instances. Instructors are required to report every suspected offence.

If you find yourself tempted to cheat because you are overwhelmed or falling behind in your work, please reach out to me or our TA and explain your situation.

F. COURSE-SPECIFIC POLICIES

i. Communication with the Professor

In all email communications with me, please include POLI3505 in the subject line and proper greetings and salutations. Always sign-off with your full name. I will do my best to respond in 24 hours, M-F.

I will not be checking or responding to course related email on weekends and holidays. Office hours are T/TH 3-4 p.m., by appointment. If you are unable to make this time, I will be available by appointment for limited windows most Fridays. Please email to book a time.

We will be using Brightspace. Please check it regularly for announcements, assignments, and other resources.

ii. The Use of Course Materials

Lectures and course materials prepared by the instructor are the instructor's intellectual property and are covered by the Canadian Copyright Act. Students wishing to record lectures or other course materials in any way (this includes tape recording, filming, photographing PowerPoint slides, Brightspace materials, etc.) are required to ask the instructor's explicit permission. It is absolutely forbidden for a student to post, publish, or circulate the instructor's work on a website or to sell them in other forms without formal permission.

iii. Course Attendance and General Expectations

Substantial and constructive dialogue on challenging issues is an important part of academic inquiry and exchange. It requires willingness to listen and tolerance of opposing points of view.

Consideration of individual differences and alternative viewpoints is required of all class members, towards each other, towards instructors, and towards guest speakers. While expressions of differing perspectives are welcome and encouraged, the words and language used should remain within acceptable bounds of civility and respect.

Attendance is essential for success in this course and students will be expected to come to class with readings in hand, prepared to take notes and to engage in class discussion.

Written skills are important in this course. Proficiency in English therefore is assumed. Writing support is available for students at Dalhousie University. Students are strongly encouraged to seek out this support ahead of time.

iv. Missed or Late Class, Tests, or Assignments

1. Student Declaration of Absence policy

Dalhousie students are asked to take responsibility for their own short-term absences (3 days or less) by contacting their instructor by email prior to the academic requirement deadline or scheduled time and by submitting a completed Student Declaration of Absence to their instructor in case of missed or late academic requirements.

The Student Declaration of Absence Form was introduced in select courses to replace sick notes for absences of three days or fewer that result in missed or late academic requirements. The Student Declaration of Absence Form functions the same as a sick note. It may be used **TWICE** in this class for this purpose. If you are ill and must miss more than one assignment, please provide a formal doctor's note.

Student Declaration of Absence do not excuse students from completing work required for this class. If you submit an SDA to account for a late assignment or missed test, you are still responsible for making up the assignment and test, within one week. If you will be absent for longer than 3 days and are unable to complete or revise work please see the long-term absence policy available online. The following paragraphs outlines long-term absence policy:

"Where long-term absences are due to major or chronic physical or mental health conditions, documentation must be provided by on-campus or off-campus primary care health professionals. Documentation should indicate the dates and duration of the condition (**confidential health information of the exact condition is not required**), when possible should describe its impact on the student's ability to fulfill academic requirements, and include any other information a primary care health professional considers relevant and appropriate."

For more information, see here:

[https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/dept/university_secretariat/policy-repository/Student%20Absence%20Regulation%20\(May%202018\)%20\(3\).pdf](https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/dept/university_secretariat/policy-repository/Student%20Absence%20Regulation%20(May%202018)%20(3).pdf)

2. Missed Tests or Assignments

If you miss class, it is your responsibility to catch up with lecture material you have missed by requesting notes through Accessibility Services.

Test dates are scheduled in advance and cannot be changed. No make-up tests or extensions will be granted for missed tests or essays unless students have formal supporting documentation explaining why they were unable to fulfill the requirements. Examples of formal supporting documentation include a completed absence declaration form (if you have not yet already submitted one in this course), or a note issued by a certified physician/practitioner.

If you are absent from class or unable to complete any other term work, you are responsible for contacting your instructor as soon as possible to request reasonable accommodation. Extensions and the writing of make-up tests will only be granted under extraordinary and unforeseen circumstances. Appropriate documentation must be submitted within 5 days of the missed course requirement.

3. Late penalty

Late critical responses will be penalized 2% percent per day of lateness (weekends included) up to a maximum of 20%. Late course work will not be accepted after the end of the exam period.

v. Procedure for Appealing Assignment Grades

Should you have legitimate concerns regarding assignment grades, you are welcome to submit a half-page typed appeal that explains the reasons why you are contesting the grade (to be submitted to the teaching assistant and to the professor no later than 5 days, weekends included, past the date that you received your assignment grade). Please note that the re-evaluation of an assignment may result in a higher or lower grade, or the grade may remain the same.

vi. Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have accessibility-related needs that may require accommodations, please feel free to contact me and/or Student Accessibility Services as soon as possible:

https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/accessibility.html

vii. Submission of Work and the Use of Urkund

All assignments will be submitted to Brightspace. The terms that apply to Dalhousie University's use of Urkund are specified online: https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/academic-integrity/faculty-resources/urkund--plagiarism-detection.html

F. University Policies, Statements, Guidelines, and Other Resources for Support

This course is governed by the academic rules and regulations set forth in the University Calendar and the Senate.

University Statements

Student Code of Conduct

Everyone at Dalhousie is expected to treat others with dignity and respect. The Code of Student Conduct allows Dalhousie to take disciplinary action if students do not follow this community expectation.

Students are required to comply with health and safety requirements on campus, and should be considerate of others' health concerns. Non-compliance may be reported under the Code of Student Conduct.

Diversity and Inclusion – Culture of Respect

Every person at Dalhousie has a right to be respected and safe. We believe inclusiveness is fundamental to education. We stand for equality. Dalhousie is strengthened in our diversity. We are a respectful and inclusive community. We are committed to being a place where everyone feels welcome and supported, which is why our Strategic Direction prioritizes fostering a culture of diversity and inclusiveness (Strategic Priority 5.2).

Recognition of Mi'kmaq Territory

Dalhousie University would like to acknowledge that the University is on Traditional Mi'kmaq Territory. The Elders in Residence program provides students with access to First Nations elders for guidance, counsel and support. Visit their office at:

Room 107, Indigenous Student Centre
1321 Edward Street Phone: (902) 494-6803

University Policies and Programs

- Important Dates in the Academic Year
http://www.dal.ca/academics/important_dates.html
- University Grading Practices: Statement of Principles and Procedures
https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/policies/academic/grading-practicespolicy.html
- Scent-Free Program <https://www.dal.ca/dept/safety/programs-services/occupational-safety/scent-free.html>

Learning and Support Resources

- General Academic Support - Academic Advising: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/advising.html
- Copyright and Fair Dealing: <https://libraries.dal.ca/services/copyright-office/fairdealing/fair-dealing-guidelines.html>
- Libraries: <http://libraries.dal.ca>
- Student Health Services: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/health-and-wellness/services-support/student-health-and-wellness.html
- Counselling and Psychological Services: <https://www.dal.ca/counselling>
- Black Student Advising: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/communities/blackstudent-advising.html
- Indigenous Student Centre: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/communities/indigenous.html

- eLearning Website: <https://www.dal.ca/dept/elearning.html>
- Student Advocacy Services: <http://www.dsu.ca/dsas>
- Dalhousie Ombudsperson: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities/where-to-get-help/ombudsperson.html
- Writing Centre: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/writing-andstudy-skills.html. Assistance with learning to write academic documents, reviewing papers for discipline -specific writing standards, organization, argument, transitions, writing styles and citations.
- Studying for Success program and tutoring: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/study-skills-and-tutoring.html

SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNED READINGS

Week 1: Introduction

W/Sept. 6: Introduction and syllabus review

Week 2: Political Liberalism

M/Sept. 11: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice, Revised Edition*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) §§10-16 (pages 47-86), §§22-24 (pages 109-123).

W/Sept. 13: Jürgen Habermas, "Three Normative Models of Democracy," *Constellations*, 1994, 1(1) [Reprinted in *Inclusion of the Other*]

Week 3 Distributive (In)justice?

M/Sept. 18: Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, pp. ix-xiv; 149-64; 167-78; 213-31

W/Sept. 20: "Nozick's Entitlements," Onora O'Neil, Ch. 16, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*.

Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Part IV, sections 41-45, 47, 50; Part V (entire)

Week 4 Historic Injustice

M/Sept. 25 "Superseding Historic Injustice," Jeremy Waldron, Ch. 19 "

W/Sept. 27 Thompson, Janna. "Historical Injustice and Reparation: Justifying Claims of Descendants." *Ethics* 112, no. 1 (2001): 114–35. <https://doi.org/10.1086/339139>.

Week 5 Review

M/Oct. 2 University Closed

W/Oct. 4 Midterm Review

Week 6 Test

M/Oct. 9 Thanksgiving (no class)

W/Oct. 11 Midterm

Week 7 Indigenous, Race, and Post-Colonial Thought

M/Oct. 16 Glen Coulthard, "Introduction" and "The Politics of Recognition in Colonial

Context" in *Red Skin White Masks*

Franz Fanon, "On Violence" in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox, (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

Rec: Glen Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada," *Contemporary Political Theory* 6:4, 2007

W/Oct. 18 Charles W. Mills, "Introduction" and "Overview" in *The Racial Contract*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997).

Rec: Michael O. Hardimon, "The Ordinary Concept of Race," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 2003, 100(9), 437–55.

1st CRR Due Friday 11:59 p.m.

Week 8 Structural Injustice and Post-Marxism

M/Oct. 23 Wendy Brown, "Rights and Losses" in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

W/Oct. 25 "Political Responsibility and Structural Injustice," Iris Marion Young

Week 9 Midterm 2

M/Oct. 30 Review

W/Nov. 1 Second Midterm (in class)

Week 10 Gender, Sex, and Liberalism

Nov. 6 Susan Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?"

Responses to Okin: al-Hibri, "Is Western Patriarchal Feminism Good? Third World/Minority Women;" Honig, "My Culture Made Me Do It;" Nussbaum, "A Plea for Difficulty" (BB);

Nov. 8 Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," in *Feminism and Politics*, ed. Anne Phillips, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Week 11 Reading Week (no class)

Week 12 Public Reason, Rhetoric and Post Truth

M/Nov. 20 Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics"

W/Nov. 22 Linda Zerilli, "Value Pluralism and the Problem of Judgment: Farewell to Public Reason," *Political Theory*, 2012, 40(1), 6-31.

Simone Chambers, "Discourse and Democratic Practices," in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, ed. Stephen K. White, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

2nd CRR 2 due Friday 11:59 p.m.

Week 13 Post-humanism and the Anthropocene

M/Nov. 27 Zolkos, M. (2018). Life as a Political Problem: The Post-Human Turn in Political Theory. *Political Studies Review*, 16(3), 192–204.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929917720431>

W/Nov. 29 Cord, Florian. "Posthumanist Cultural Studies: Taking the Nonhuman Seriously" *Open Cultural Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2022, pp. 25-37. <https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2020-0138>

Week 14 Conclusions and Review

M/Dec. 4 TBD

T/Dec. 5 Conclusions and Review

W/Dec. 6 Final Exam (in class)