

## **COURSE SYLLABUS**

### **POLI 4390: PRACTICUM PLACEMENT IN PUBLIC POLICY: NGOS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

**Winter 2021**

**Department of Political Science  
Dalhousie University**

---

**Professor:** Dr. Margaret Denike

**Office:** 364 Henry Hicks Administration Building

**Office Hours:** **[tho during COVID, I will be working virtually]**  
by appointment: please do not hesitate to contact me to set  
up a phone or zoom meeting

**Email:** m.denike@dal.ca

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

This course is designed to provide students who have fourth-year standing in the Department of Political Science or the Programs in Gender & Women's Studies, and Law, Justice & Society, the opportunity to gain practical experience by working at a government or non-government, research, or advocacy organization that is instrumental in shaping public policy or advancing human rights; to learn about the services, projects, and campaigns undertaken by specific organizations; to apply and share the knowledge that they have gained from their academic studies in political theory, public policy, international relations, and/or human rights advocacy; and to become familiar with the day-to-day challenges of employment in government and non-government organizations and public services.

During this COVID year, both Dalhousie University and the Host Organizations have moved away from face-to-face (F2F)/in-office/in-person working arrangements to ones that are largely –if not exclusively—virtual. While we are all refining the details as we go along, this entails students working independently on research projects or other support services that are assigned by your supervisors, who will be regularly meeting with you, ideally, virtually, to review and discuss your work. You are free to work out directly with your supervisor any arrangements to work in-person, including to attend events, meetings, or interviews, for example – as long as they are COVID-respecting. Please make sure to communicate your preferences, and to discuss any need for accommodation.

## COURSE OVERVIEW AND REQUIREMENTS

Before the Winter break (December 2020), you will learn about your placement, and be introduced (through me, via email) to your potential supervisor, at which point **you will take the lead in arranging a virtual meeting with them**, to discuss the project, and to arrange a schedule for it.

This meeting and/or contact with your supervisor will ideally happen at your earliest convenience: at least one of the supervisors will be leaving town once the Fall term classes are finished. Others – including students-- may have concerns about the project and want to have the opportunity to consider something else. **Students are asked to make a point of confirming with me, via email, once this meeting has taken place, so I can relax and know that you're in good shape to complete your first 7 hours by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of January.**

**At your initial meeting with your supervisor, you will discuss the project that they have in mind, and you will arrange a schedule for you to be working and/or meeting with them, however briefly, on a regular basis during the winter term when the practicum is underway. At this time, you will also clarify with them whether and to what extent there will be any in-person contact, with attention to the COVID-respecting conditions and obligations that are in place for the organization and the university.**

The main reason that we have finalized the placements before the holiday break, is to ensure that you are ready to start putting in your hours when your other courses begin in the Winter term, although we have a bit more flexibility than most courses do: your placement will begin in the second week of January, so that by January 15, you will have completed the first 7 hours of your placement, in accordance with the arrangement made at your initial meeting with your supervisor.

In keeping with the expectations of any 0.5 credit courses, students are required to spend one day per week (i.e., up to an average of 7.0 hours per week; or, if worked in a single day, 8 hours with up to one hour off for lunch) for a period of 11 weeks [12 weeks minus the Reading Week] for a total of 77 hours.

Please know that, while your supervisors are essentially your 'boss' for the purpose of the project you will be undertaking under their supervision, they are not necessarily aware of the requirements of this course, nor of whatever else you are expected to do to fulfill to complete the course requirements. Indeed, they may well be looking to you for clarification on questions such as the start date, end date, number of hours. While I have already provided this information to them, it is possible that they have forgotten such details: in this case, it is your responsibility to know these things, and to convey this to them. If you have any questions, please a) make sure to review this syllabus, again, as it

may likely answer your questions; and b) contact me [m.denike@dal.ca], and I will happily answer them.

### **Virtual Group Meetings:**

You will see in your schedule that the ‘class’ is scheduled in the Academic Timetable for Tuesday evenings at 5:30-8:30 pm; however, this block of time is reserved ONLY as a general place-holder, for monthly group meetings that I had built into the course before COVID struck. Under the current COVID circumstances, we will NOT be holding any in-person group meetings this year. Instead, we will hold one or two virtual meetings, the dates for which will be provided through a Brightspace announcement.

The placements will run through to the end of second last week of classes, with your last 7 hours completed by Thursday April 1 [or, if you fall behind, and need to make up time, Friday April 9].

Additionally, you are encouraged to contact me and meet with me individually at any time that you have concerns about your placement, or have difficulty contacting your supervisor, etc.

### **Winter Study Break**

**You are NOT expected to work during the Winter Study Break (Feb 15-20), although you are welcome to negotiate this with your supervisor, if, for example there is a different time that you need to –or prefer to-- be away.**

Please make sure to remind your supervisors of this, especially since they are typically not on a Dalhousie / academic schedule and may not have occasion to be reminded otherwise.

### **Flexibility**

There is plenty of flexibility for determining your working schedule with your supervisor. For example, if it is more suitable for both of you, you may agree to work during the reading week, and simply end your practicum a week early. Or, if you are working on a project that requires an extensive time commitment for a short period of time –such as organizing a conference or public event—you may make an arrangement with your supervisor to work many of the required hours during that period, while taking a break in the preceding or subsequent weeks. What matters is that you are clear with each other about your expectations, and that you communicate about them –with both the supervisor and with me.

## **EVALUATION PROFILE**

**The course is evaluated on a PASS/FAIL basis, with the following requirements:**

### **1. Required hours**

To pass the course, and obtain credit, students must complete the required hours for the placement, which is 77 hours within a practicum placement or on a given project devised by the practicum supervisor (i.e., 7.0 hours per week for 11 weeks, in accordance with a schedule developed between the student and the placement supervisor and completed by the last day of classes. If the student stops attending the placement organization or putting in the required hours, without making the appropriate arrangements for make-up time, the course will be considered incomplete, and the student will NOT be able receive a 'pass.' In addition to this expectation:

### **2. 1-minute Video Recording (10%) (Due April 3)**

By the last week of your placement, students are asked to make a 1-2 minute recording of themselves, in which you describe your placement (where you were and what this organization is about), your project within it (ie what you did); your general experience there, and any other information or advice that you think would be of interest to students who may be considering placements in the years to come. Please submit this with your final report, in a format that can be uploaded on our website. You can find samples submissions on the Practicum Placement link on the website for the Department of Political Science.

### **3. Written Report (40%) (Due April 3)**

Students are required to submit a final written report (7-9 pages or 1800-2500 words), due on or before the last meeting of the practicum group during the last week of classes. This report may be descriptive or analytical: your objective will be to provide a summary and description of the project that you have undertaken and/or the work that you engaged in. This report may then be made available to interested practicum students in the coming years, to enable them to see the range of work and the types of projects completed for this course and/or the nature and scope of the services provided by placement agencies. To facilitate writing this report, you are strongly advised to keep a weekly diary on your activities, which may be compiled, re-written, and submitted at the end of the term. Beyond your own personal touch and discussion of what you learned from this experience, the report needs to clearly specify a) the name and nature of the service or agency; b) the type of work it does, including, for instance, its mandate, mission, campaigns, etc.; and c) the specific project or work that you undertook, and what this entailed. (40%)

#### 4. Satisfactory Review (50%)

Students are required to obtain satisfactory reviews provided by the placement agency, indicating that the student fulfilled the basic and general responsibilities in terms of regular and respectful communication, and timely attendance or work on a project in accordance with the schedule determined by the student and supervisor. Brief forms will assessment forms will be provided to the supervisors, to be completed after each of the three months.

#### **ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS**

For any reason, if you are not able to work in a given week, you are expected to make arrangements with your supervisor as to how you could make up these hours. Most importantly, you are expected to inform your supervisor in advance of your absence, and propose an alternative arrangement to him/her.

The placement location and supervisor has been arranged by the course Coordinator. Once you, the student, have been informed of your placement, you are responsible for setting an initial meeting with your supervisor, and determining a working schedule that suits both of you and that enables you to fulfill the course requirements of 'up to one day per week' in the placement or on a given project. **This must be done BEFORE YOUR PLACEMENT BEGINS.**

There will be tremendous variation in the nature of the work and projects, depending on the organization or service. Ideally, the placement agency will devise a project or series of tasks that will enable you to learn about the nature and scope of the service they provide; the roles of different staff members; the types of projects or initiatives that are typically undertaken by them; and the challenges confronted with specific projects or campaigns.

In some instances, you may be assigned a specific research project by your supervisor, which you will undertake over the academic term and submit in your last week of service. In others, you may simply 'shadow' your supervisor or another employee, and assist them in day-to-day tasks. Others may entail working for two hours, three to four days per week, with some of this time spent away from the agency or business location. And still others may require a heavy time commitment for a week or two (such as assisting in organizing and/or attending a conference), with an extended break before or afterwards. Whatever the arrangement, it is hoped and expected that you and your supervisor will be clear to each other about your understandings and expectations, talk openly about them, and arrive at an arrangement that is beneficial to both you and the agency, such that both gain from the knowledge, assistance, and experience of the other.

Students are responsible for communicating regularly with your supervisor, for being prompt and reliable in attendance, and for ensuring that you are clear about your roles, tasks and expectations. If you have any concerns about the work or project, please feel free to speak to your supervisor about them.

At any time, if you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of your placement, please never hesitate to contact me at [m.denike@dal.ca](mailto:m.denike@dal.ca).