SOCl 438 A03 (Spring 2019)

Issues in Contemporary Sociology: Political Sociology

Instructor: Dr. Douglas Baer

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Class meetings: 1:30-4:30, Mondays
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Course Description and Objectives:

This course will review sociological approaches to the study of political issues and struggles in contemporary western societies. The seminar course will discuss civil society and civic engagement, the relationship between social movements and formal political processes, the relevance of “left” versus “right” conceptualizations of public opinion, the relationship between religion and politics, the relevance of “social class” to contemporary social and political divisions, struggles over the welfare state (including a comparative examination of welfare state structures and their social and political support), the contraction of the welfare state in the past 40 years, immigrant social and political engagement and the “politics of immigration,” the “culture war” in American politics (and elsewhere) and the implications for Canada, conservative political movements (including anti-immigrant, nationalist and/or anti-welfare variants) in Canada and elsewhere, the future of the Canadian “left,” environmental politics, and the impact of voting systems.

Skills Development:

The main objective of the course is to provide participants with an ability to critically discuss issues in Canadian politics and to place these issues in comparative perspective.

Course Organization:

The course is set up as a 3-hour weekly seminar.

Evaluation:

This course will be co-listed as a graduate class, Sociology 535. Expectations for undergraduate students reflect the status of the course registration (fewer requirements than graduate students).

1) First paper, critical assessment of issues and debates in the literature on any topic covered in the first 8 weeks, 12pp.+ (the paper does not need to emphasize the scholarship actually discussed in the class as long as it is related to the general topic area), 25% of final grade

2) Second paper, critical assessment of issues and debates on the literature on any topic covered in the course not covered by the first paper. 17pp+ 45% of final grad

3) Contributions to weekly discussions. 30% Twice a term, students will act as either “lead discussants” or “second discussants” for an article or book chapter the class will be discussing, raising questions about the article/chapter to help generate discussion. Also twice a term (not the same week when acting as a lead discussant), students will provide a brief report on an article that most of the class will not have read but is relevant to the topic being discussed that week. Contributions will also take the form of responses and commentary during the class.