

Topics in Political Theory: Justice and Reconciliation
Political Science 459
Course Syllabus
Winter 2024

(Please check MyCourses for the official syllabus.)

Course Professor: Catherine Lu

Prerequisites: A 300- or 400-level course in political theory (preferably 333, 334, 362, 433 or 434), or permission from the Course Profs 434), or permission from the Course Profs

This topics course in Political Theory examines the concepts of justice and reconciliation in response to social and political injustices in modern international relations that have culminated in war, atrocity, and/or oppression. Themes to be discussed include victimhood and the sense of injustice; accountability and punishment; law, politics and morality; individual, corporate, and collective responsibility; historic injustice; structural injustice; moral and political responsibility; alienation; and reconciliation. The course will focus on the concepts and practices of justice and reconciliation in modern international and transnational relations, focusing on war, colonialism, and settler colonialism.

The specific objectives of the course are (1) to clarify the concepts of justice and reconciliation, (2) to identify, understand and assess different conceptions/forms of each as responses to various contexts of political injustice and harms, (3) to engage in a critical evaluation of existing practices of justice and reconciliation, especially in response to colonial and settler colonial injustice and alienation. The general objectives of the course include developing the ability to evaluate political and philosophical arguments critically, and improving the skills of communicating normative and interpretative arguments in oral discussion and written work.

Method of evaluation

Your course grade will be assessed as follows:

Course Assignments	Course grade percentage
Seminar participation (best 8)	25%
Discussion notes	20%
Research Paper Proposal (due Feb 20)	10%
Oral research paper presentation	5%
Research paper (due April 17)	20%
Written final	

Seminar participation (25% of course grade)

All assigned readings for a week should be done before each seminar. As this class is a seminar, attendance and participation are mandatory. Be prepared to discuss and analyze texts in an in-depth manner. There will be as little lecturing as possible; it is up to students to advance the discussion. Your seminar participation grade will be an average of your grades from your *best eight seminars (out of 10, excluding the final exam and last two weeks)*. Every time we meet, I will assign a letter grade for oral participation. If your participation is excellent (you show a command of the assigned readings, some originality and/or intellectual curiosity in the discussion, and your arguments are pertinent, clear and solid) you will receive an A-range grade; if it is good to very good (your remarks are competent, interesting, and well-articulated, even though you may not have fully digested the material) you will receive a B-range grade. If it is not very good (your remarks indicate superficial knowledge or lack of familiarity with basic arguments of the required readings), you will receive a C-range grade. If you don't say anything during the seminar, or go off on tangents unrelated to the course readings, your highest grade for the session will be a D.

Discussion notes (20% of course grade)

Students will submit discussion notes (minimum half a page, maximum one typed page, single-spaced, 12 point font) on at least TWO of the assigned readings for any given week (or two chapters when there is only one author's work). These notes should identify and critically assess a key argument or point of contention from the readings. The notes can also end with a few key questions, either generated by the key argument or point of contention identified, or more generally, raised by the week's readings. These notes should be sent via email to the Course Professor, *and the rest of the class*, by 5 pm on the Monday before each Tuesday seminar. If you miss the 5 pm deadline, then you will receive a 0 for that week. Discussion notes that are substantive and show solid engagement with the selected readings, demonstrating analytical rigor, critical thinking, and/or intellectual curiosity, will receive a + (positive sign). Discussion notes that are off-topic, filled with lengthy quotations from the readings, or only describe (accurately or inaccurately) the reading content but do not engage critically with it, will receive a - (negative sign). The grade for the discussion notes will be determined as follows:

7 + evaluations or above : Grade A

6 + evaluations: Grade A-

5 + evaluations: Grade B+

4 + evaluations: Grade B

3 + evaluations: Grade B-

2 + evaluation: Grade C+

1 + evaluation: Grade D

0 + evaluations: Grade F

Research paper proposal (10% of course grade)

Although the Course Professor will suggest some general topics, students are encouraged to formulate their own precise essay topics. The Course Instructor must approve essay topics in advance (by Tuesday, February 13). The research paper proposal should be

three pages (single-spaced), plus an annotated bibliography. Further instruction will be provided. Due February 20, 2024.

Oral presentation of research paper drafts (5% of course grade)

The last two seminars of the course will be devoted to students giving oral presentations on their research paper drafts, and giving feedback on the presentations of their peers. Student presentations should be 10-12 minutes in length. A two-page outline (in point form) of your presentation should be submitted via email to the Course Professor on the Monday before the Tuesday presentation. Further instructions will be provided.

Final exam (20% of course grade)

There will be an in-person written exam on March 26. The exam will cover all required readings in the course, and require answering two questions in essay form. Further instructions will be provided.

Research paper (20% of course grade)

The research paper should be a maximum of 5,000 words (references included), and a minimum of 4,000 words. Papers that deviate significantly from the previously approved paper topic will be penalized. The final draft of the research paper is due on Wednesday, April 17, to be submitted via email. If students are seriously ill or distracted by a serious emergency, it is their responsibility to inform the Course Professor before the paper is due so that we can make other arrangements. Papers will lose 1/3 of a letter grade per day late. (An A will become an A-, etc.)

University and Course Policies

1. In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).

2. McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

3. In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

4. Any slides, video recordings, lecture notes, etc. distributed in class or on MyCourses remain the Course Professor's intellectual property. As such, you may use these only for your own learning (and research, with proper referencing/citation) ends. You are not permitted to disseminate or share these materials; doing so may violate the instructor's intellectual property rights and could be cause for disciplinary action under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

5. As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the [Office for Students with Disabilities](http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/), 514-398-6009, (<http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>) to receive further information and assistance. However, *please remember that the OSD has no authority* to approve changes to course assignment due dates, to devise alternative assignments, or to waive course requirements.

6. The use of internet is prohibited during class. Students are encouraged to bring their own notes of the readings, and when available, printed copies of the readings. If you are seen to be distracted from the course material (eg checking on your phone or computer or other electronic device either email, social media, or other websites not directly relevant to the course), you will receive a 0 for the seminar session.

