Professor Michael Smart

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Learning objectives

In this course you will learn:

- basic facts about taxation, revenues, and expenditure programs of governments in Canada and around the world
- theoretical and quantitative tools used by economists for government policy analysis
- how to marshall economic arguments and statistics and communicate them effectively to an audience
- how to evaluate policy arguments of others – what unstated assumptions are being made, what objectives are being sought, what factors are causal, and so on.

At the broadest level, students come out of this course with a better sense of what government does, and a more sophisticated understanding of the arguments about government policy used by politicians, experts, and the media – at least, that is the hope!

Grading

The grading scheme is

Weekly quizzes	22%
Tutorial problem sets	12%
Policy essays	34%
Essay peer reviews	4%
Class debate	15%
Participation	13%

Students will join groups of about six to participate in an in-class mock debate on a chosen policy issue.

Students will individually write 2 policy essays (2000 words each) and provide peer-feedback on 2 essays per submission. Students will select a topic from the provided lists on Quercus.

From the Office of Academic Integrity:

"Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (https://uoft.me/pdt-faq)." Additional information can be found at http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/. **Late papers will be assigned a penalty of 10% per week.**

Participation scores will be determined based on the following activities:

- in-class quizzes on required readings and lectures
- attendance at mock debate sessions, lectures, and tutorials
- contributions to informal in-class discussions

Students missing in-class graded assignments must present a written request for special consideration by the beginning of the next lecture, together with a valid documentation. **Failure to adhere to these procedures will result in a grade of zero for the assignment.**

Lectures and tutorials

Lectures take place on Wednesdays during the scheduled class time. Graded quizzes on lecture content will be due before each class meeting. Discussion questions have been provided for each lecture. It is recommended that you prepare for lectures by reviewing the provided discussion questions. **The use of cellphones is prohibited at all times during class – including during mid-class health breaks.**

There will be occasional tutorials scheduled during the "third hour" in the timetable, as noted on the course website. In the tutorials, our TAs will take up solutions to problem set questions. Attendance at tutorials is strongly encouraged. As well, the tutorial hour may be used for our mock debate presentations. Attendance on these days in mandatory.

Readings

The recommended textbook:

Rosen, Wen, and Snodden, 2016, *Public Finance in Canada*, Fifth Edition, (McGraw-Hill Ryerson).

It is strongly recommended that students read the textbook. You can purchase it from Amazon or other retailers – any recent edition will do. It will also be available at Robarts library on short-term reserve.

Some students may also wish to consult:

Gruber, 2016, *Public Finance and Public Policy*, (Worth Publishers).

This is an excellent book which covers much of the same material – but it is written for a US rather than a Canadian audience.

Required readings are available from the course website.