

Athabasca University

Oil and Democracy

SPRING 2012

Directed Studies I (3 credits)

Directed Studies II (3 credits)

This unique opportunity allows Athabasca University students to enrol in two directed studies courses that comprise a face-to-face classroom experience with University of Alberta Community Service Learning (CSL) students at the UofA campus, a weekly lecture series that CSL will run in conjunction with the UofA's Parkland Institute, and a placement with a community organization in Edmonton. These intensive "hands-on" senior courses will allow students to complete six AU credits in six weeks.

While there are no prerequisites for this course, they are geared toward senior undergraduate and graduate students. Students will enrol in two directed studies courses in consultation with the instructors with a start of May 1, 2012. Regular attendance at class, the Parkland Institute/Community Service Learning speaker's series, the community service placement, and one of the Canadian Political Science Association's "Oil and Democracy" panel sessions is mandatory. Students will submit assignments on the fixed dates indicated in this syllabus and will complete all course work by June 15, 2012. For more information and permission to register in these courses, call Lorna Stefanick (780.438.0128) or Meenal Shrivastava (780.244.6017)

Classroom: University of Alberta campus, room TBA

Class time: Monday/Wednesday (9:30 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.)

Thursday (6:00 – 8:50), Parkland Institute Speakers' Series

Professors: Dr. Lorna Stefanick (Governance), Athabasca University and

Dr. Meenal Shrivastava (Political Economy), Athabasca University

Teaching Assistant: Matt Dow, University of Alberta

Course Content

These directed study courses explore the state of democracy in Alberta in an attempt to discern if Alberta is afflicted with the resource curse that has long plagued nations in the Global South.

While much work has been done exploring this question with reference to states in the Global South, little scholarly work has been undertaken on the Global North. Through course work and community-based projects, students will explore the thesis that "oil inhibits democracy" through the examination of three broad themes: the context of democracy in Alberta, rights claims in an oil economy, and governance. Students will experience firsthand how community organizations use their own knowledge to address, challenge and integrate democratic engagement and advocacy in the context of an energy economy and society. Additionally, working in interdisciplinary groups, students contribute to community-based projects.

Lecture Schedule

Week 1: Contextualizing Democracy, Class dynamics in national issues and the staples economy

Week 2: Institutions of Democracy, Accountability, and Privatization

Week 3: Women, Migrant Labour, Worker Safety in an Oil-economy

Week 4: Issues of Equity, Aboriginal Rights

Week 5: The Environment, and International Activism

Week 6: Progressive Thought in Alberta,

Canadian Political Science Association panels on Oil and Democracy

Course Objectives

The primary objective of this course is to enable students to engage with the following question: How does the reliance on oil production impact democratic participation and governance in Alberta? This will be facilitated by gaining knowledge of the context of democracy and its institutions in Alberta; labour, equity, environmental and aboriginal issues in oil-based economies; the concept of class applied in the national and international context; and finally the history of progressive thought in Alberta. A secondary objective of the course is to provide students with the conceptual and theoretical tools needed for analyzing the variety of agents, institutions, and issues of democracy at the national, international and community levels.

Course Environment & Activities

This is an interdisciplinary course. You can expect to read material from a variety of disciplines, including political studies, political economy, sociology, labour relations, environmental studies, public administration, gender studies, critical theory, and human geography. Monday and Wednesday classes will feature class discussions and guest speakers. On Thursdays we will meet for about an hour before the public speaker series, which runs from 7-9 pm. We will combine in-class seminar style theoretical learning and practice, including engagement with community organizations and service groups in the non-profit sector and interacting with the speakers in the speaker' series. The course will be thematically structured through seminar readings, discussions, and presentations. Your practical work in your community placement will complement the theoretical readings and seminar discussions.

A major component of these courses is working with a community-based partner: you will devote a total of 30-35 hours to a specified project over the course of six weeks. Pre-arranged placements and projects will be selected whose mandates correspond to the course's focal themes. Examples of the types of groups that students might be placed with include: the Pembina Institute, Amiskwaciy Academy, Fruits of Sherbrook, Terra Informa, and Worker's Health. Students should note that this rich and unique experience is also quite intensive (six credits in six weeks) as it combines class contact time, a speaker's series, and working with a community group in addition to reading and completing assignments.

Requirements and Evaluation

Directed Study #1

Students will be required to attend three weeks of classes beginning May 7; participate in 15-18 hours of a community-based placement beginning May 7; attend the Parkland Institute/CSL speaker's series on May 10, 17, 24; and submit assignments as outlined in below.

Assignment 1: review essays (500 words each/2 pages)	80%
• undergraduates: 4 essays (20% each assignment)	
• graduate students: 5 essays (16% each assignment)	
Assignment 2: active participation	20%
• individual participation	Total: 100%

Directed Study #2

Students will be required to attend three weeks of classes beginning May 28, participate in 15-18 hours of a community-based placement beginning May 28; attend the Parkland Institute/CSL speaker's series on May 31, June 7, and June 14; attend one of the CPSA Oil and Democracy panel sessions on June 13; and submit assignments as outlined below.

Assignment 1: group project and participation	20%
Assignment 2: individual reflections paper (due June 15)	50%
• undergrads 3000 words/12 pages	
• graduate students 4000 words/16 pages	
Assignment 3: group reflection and presentation on partner organization (June 11)	30%
	Total: 100%

Assignments

Directed Study #1,

Assignment 1 – Critical review essays

Write a review essay on any **one** of the required weekly readings from the course reading list. Reflect on a facet(s) of your CSL experience that illustrates and/or potentially challenges a key idea in the reading. Your essay should not just summarize the reading but should also explain how it relates to the objectives of the course. You are expected to assess the reading critically, using the theories and concepts discussed in the course. Explain what insights you have drawn from the reading, the in-class speakers, and the speaker series, and how it was applied to your project with the partner organization.

Students are required to do four (undergrads) or five (graduate students) review essays from a choice of six weekly readings; the assignment is due 9:30 a.m. of the Monday following the week in which the readings were assigned.

Assignment 2 - Individual participation

The individual component of the participation grade will be assessed by virtue of your engagement in class discussions, with course guest speakers, and in the speaker series.

Directed Study #2

Assignment 1 – Group participation

This participation grade will be based on your work as a group organizing one session of the speakers' series. This will require you to organize yourselves in groups of a minimum of three individuals to organize and participate in the weekly speakers' series. Each group must do the following: 1) work closely with the teaching assistant in organizing the logistics of the weekly lecture, including introducing the speaker(s); 2) prepare a list of questions related to the topic of the evening to facilitate public discussion; 3) discuss your group's involvement in the speaking engagement and the relevance of the talk for the course in the speaker's series session debriefing in class.

Assignment 2 – Individual Reflections Paper

This reflective paper will demonstrate your ability to link the theories, practice, and institutions of democracy introduced in the course, with your experience of community service learning. The paper will have two central purposes:

- 1) Explain how your experience with the community organization is relevant in advancing any of the processes or institutions of democracy.
- 2) Explain the insights you have derived from the course material, the class speakers, and the speaker series, and how these were applied to your project with the partner organization.

Your paper should include some of the following elements that provide the provincial context that the organization is situated in, in order to fully explain its relationship to democratic process and institutions:

- the historical and geopolitical context of an oil economy
- the political institutions and processes in an oil economy
- the impact of the discovery of oil and its share in the economy
- the impact of international trends on a society/economy tied to oil
- environmental issues in an oil economy
- socio-economic issues in an oil economy

Assignment 3 – Group Reflection and Presentation to Community Partners

A 20 minute group presentation on the last day of class will be done with other students who are working with the same community group as you are; the audience will be other students in the class, and representatives of the organization that you were working for. The task of your group is to briefly describe the history and purpose of the organization, as well as the project that you and your fellow students undertook as part of your CSL experience. The major focus of your

presentation will be to discuss the relationship of your organization to the theories, concepts, and themes of the course, with particular reference to the organization's role in promoting structures and/or processes of democratic governance. The linkages between course concepts and the work you did for the community project can be presented as a group, or individually, as determined by your group. The grade, however, will be give to the group.

Note: There is no final exam in these directed studies courses.