

PPOL 2320
Experiments in Power: Why We Make the Rules We Make

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This interdisciplinary course examines the psychological foundations of governance through hands-on simulations and empirical inquiry. Students explore how individual cognition, group behaviour, and social context shape rule-making and public decision processes. Integrating principles from social psychology, behavioural economics, and public policy, the curriculum addresses topics including cognitive biases, authority dynamics, fairness, and identity-driven group interactions. Assignments engage students in real-time policy design, ethical analysis, and persuasive campaign development, fostering a deeper understanding of cooperative systems and societal leadership. No specific disciplinary background is required. Students from all academic fields will benefit from the practical insights into how governance is constructed, challenged, and communicated. The course emphasizes collaborative problem-solving, critical reflection, and communication strategies applicable across diverse professional domains.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course equips postgraduate students with interdisciplinary knowledge, advanced analytical skills, and critical attitudes to understand and navigate the psychological foundations of governance. Students will explore cognitive biases, authority dynamics, fairness, and group interactions, while engaging in simulations, policy design, and ethical analysis to develop practical governance strategies.

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. **Analyze** how cognitive biases influence public decision-making processes.
2. **Evaluate** the ethical implications of obedience and authority in governance systems.
3. **Apply** principles of fairness and inequality to design a simulated governance system.
4. **Demonstrate** effective collaboration in resolving group conflicts during decision-making simulations.
5. **Create** a public campaign using framing techniques to influence policy acceptance.
6. **Reflect** critically on personal biases and their impact on governance decisions.

EXPECTATIONS:

By this point in your academic career, I expect that you are responsible, independent students. At the same time, some the topic matter may be new to a good portion of you. This means that class discussion, analysis, exercises and participation will be crucial for your understanding and processing of the material. ***Attendance is mandatory, and the expectation is that you will do the readings for each session before class.*** I am committing to be in class, each day, and on time (and earlier in my office when possible), ready to guide and support you through the course. I ask that you make the same commitment to yourselves and to your learning. **Every unexcused absence, late arrivals and leaving early will have an impact on final grades. More than 3 absences, excused or unexcused, will result in a 0 in participation.**

Our lectures will consist of a mix of theory (lecture), discussion, and application. Governance is a cooperative, interdisciplinary endeavour, and working through the material together is as much an element of the course as the subject matter itself. The structure of the course gives multiple ways for students to develop your skills by contributing orally and in writing. But working on oral skills is an important element of the class, and the expectation is that ***all students will come to class prepared to participate.***

At HKUST, we have a wonderful diversity of students. They bring with them a wealth of perspectives and experiences. So, while vigorous discussion is encouraged, disrespect, inside of the classroom or out, will not be tolerated. We will work under Chatham House rules- what is said in the classroom stays in the classroom. Furthermore, under no circumstances will any student resort to personal attacks, however dry or wit. Any disrespectful or disruptive students will be asked to leave the class.

ASSESSMENT

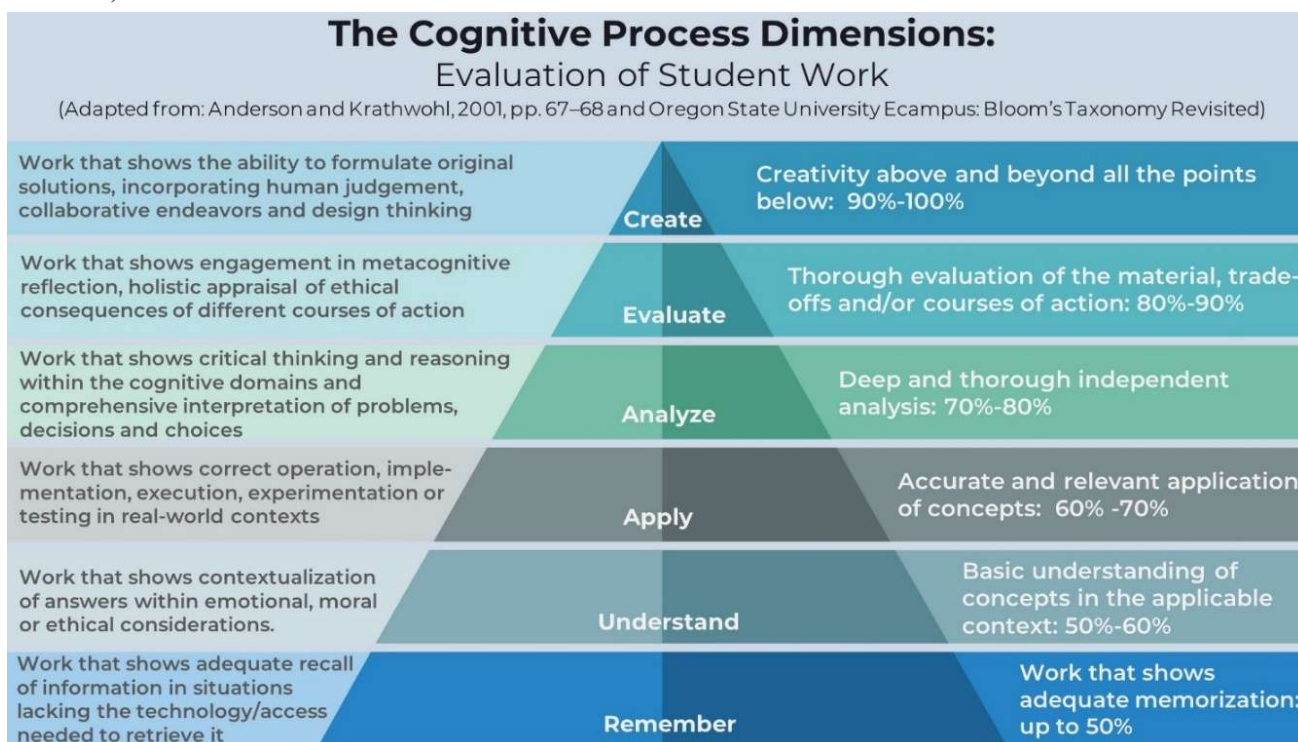
The details of the assignments and different graded components of the class will be explained during class and via Canvas. The overall structure and points assigned to each are as follows:

<i>Component</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Class Attendance & Participation	15%
Reading Quizzes	20%
Local Policy Analysis (Individual)	20%
Local Policy Analysis (Group)	20%
Final Public Campaign Design (Group)	25%

1. **Local Policy (Implementation) Analyses** - Students select a recent Hong Kong policy relevant to electoral themes and analyze it through the dual lens of decision-making science and governance. The assignment cultivates skills in policy interpretation, conceptual application, and scholarly argumentation.
2. **Public Campaign Design (Simulation)** - This final group project synthesizes course learnings into a comprehensive electoral campaign simulation. Students design and justify a campaign package grounded in decision-making theory and bias mitigation. The assignment hones strategic communication skills, empirical testing design, and ethical accountability, equipping students to translate complex theory into practical, impactful political communication.

GRADING:

For each assignment, we will provide the outline and general marking rubrics. But for all assignments, it will be helpful to keep Bloom's Taxonomy in mind. In general, the different levels relate to grades as follows (but keep in mind, different assignments may have particular requirements that need to be met which may change this a bit):



Please note that fulfilling the basic requirements of an assignment is not enough, in and of itself, to warrant an 'A' grade. Very good work, that fulfils the assignment, often gets a grade of a B+ or even a B. To get into the A range, we expect to see original thought, nuance, drawing on a range of sources of information (course readings, cases, empirical data, etc..), that is well organized , creative and thoughtful.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All work must be entirely your own. Please **cite** the relevant work whenever you borrow ideas from others, using the proper reference format (e.g., APA, MLA). Examples of violations of the academic integrity code include but are not limited to: *failure to use quotation marks when quoting, failure to give full credit when paraphrasing, use of others' ideas or work products, submission of work prepared through impermissible collaboration, and submission of work prepared by you for another class. (Your work in this class may be related to your work in another class, but the work you submit for this class should not duplicate that submitted for another class. If you anticipate an exception, please do not hesitate to ask.)* Violation of the Academic Integrity Code may result in failure in the course, as well as more serious academic sanctions. For details about the academic integrity code, please refer to <https://acadreg.ust.hk/generalreg.html>.

"The University's approach to cases of academic misconduct is fundamentally educational. The process for dealing with these cases is designed to enable students to better understand the nature of academic misconduct and the high standards of academic integrity that are expected. The sanctions available in confirmed cases of misconduct are intended to signal the importance that the University places on maintaining these high standards and to communicate this to students.

Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to:

Cheating: conduct designed to mislead those responsible for making a judgment on a student's academic performance or standing, including:

- Unauthorized conveyance or receipt of examination or test questions
- The giving, receiving or utilizing of unauthorized information or assistance in completing an assignment, test or examination
- Breaches of the regulations for examinations set out in the Annex
- Impersonating another student or allowing oneself to be impersonated by another student in participating in a test or examination
- Submission of academic work containing purported statements of fact or references to sources that have been fabricated
- Presenting for credit work that has already been accepted for credit in another course

Plagiarism: the presentation of work which originates from other sources, including the work of other students, as the student's own work, without appropriate attribution to the source." THIS INCLUDES THE USE OF AI content creation.

<http://acadreg.ust.hk/generalreg.html>

Please check for plagiarism before you turn in each homework, for example using the anti-plagiarism software Turnitin available on Canvas. **A rule of thumb is that the similarity score should not exceed 15%, excluding references.** But it is entirely possible to have a similarity score below 15% and still commit plagiarism! Look holistically and check for accidental copying/cut and paste, missing references, or even insufficient paraphrasing (i.e. just changing word order or minor words, as opposed to summarizing in your own words). If you have any questions, the Instructor and TA are more than happy to discuss.

GENERATIVE AI

In this course, you are expected to produce original and authentic work that reflects your own understanding and creativity. The use of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, Bing Chat, Claude, Google Bard, or any other automated assistance, to complete any part of your assignments is strictly prohibited, unless you have a written permission from the instructor, or we are expressly using such tools in class. Generative AI tools are not reliable sources of information, and they may produce inaccurate, misleading, or plagiarized content. Using these tools without proper citation and acknowledgment *is a form of academic dishonesty, and it will result in serious consequences, such as a failing assignment grade, a report to the dean, or even a failing final grade.* Therefore, you are strongly advised to avoid using generative AI tools for your coursework, and instead, rely on your own skills, knowledge, and resources.

CLASS RECORDINGS

Under no circumstances may students record, transcribe, livestream, photograph, or otherwise capture any part of this class without my prior written permission; this prohibition explicitly includes real-time translators, speech-to-text apps, smart devices, or any tool that documents or uploads my words to the cloud, an online service, or an AI system.

Recording or uploading class content without consent infringes my intellectual property—this course is my paid professional work—and risks that material being stored, misused, taken out of context, or used to train third-party models; it also chills discussion and compromises the privacy of classmates.

Violations are strictly forbidden and may result in disciplinary or legal consequences; anyone who records or uploads material will be required to delete all copies and may face further institutional action. If you need a recording or transcript for a documented accessibility need, request written permission in advance.

LATE HOMEWORK POLICY

Late assignments will incur a penalty for each day they are late, except in cases where extensions have been granted by the instructor. Except for emergencies, extensions are much more likely to be granted when they are requested *well in advance*, with strong justification. If you are struggling to complete your coursework, please come discuss it with us sooner rather than later, as it is always easier to adjust things before there is a crisis.

READING MATERIAL

There is no single book that covers all the topics of this course. Essential material is provided via Canvas. You are not expected to read everything on the reading list. Aim to read the required readings for each class meeting. Further reading provides for alternative sources as well as opportunities for more in-depth study for assignments.

We will also, when appropriate, make use of other media, including film, podcasts, etc. These will be provided via the library, freely available links, or viewing sessions, depending on the source.

CLASS SCHEDULE (Subject to topic adjustment as necessary)

<i>Mon</i>	<i>Wed</i>	<i>Week</i>	<i>Title</i>
	02-Sep	1	Introduction
07-Sep		2	Governance and Decision-Making
	09-Sep		
14-Sep		3	Foundations of Cognitive Biases
	16-Sep		
21-Sep		4	Heuristics and Mental Shortcuts in Governance
	23-Sep		
28-Sep		5	Obedience and Authority in Governance
	30-Sep		
05-Oct		6	Ethical Dilemmas in Governance
	07-Oct		
12-Oct		7	Principles of Fairness and Equality in Governance Systems
	14-Oct		
19-Oct		8	NO CLASS
	21-Oct	8	Group Dynamics in Decision-Making
26-Oct		9	Conflict Resolution and Coalition-Building
	28-Oct		
02-Nov		10	Framing and Messaging in Policy Communication
	04-Nov		
09-Nov		11	Designing Public Campaigns
	11-Nov		
16-Nov		12	Reflecting on Personal Biases in Governance (Simulation)
	18-Nov		
23-Nov		13	Final Presentations
	25-Nov		
30-Nov		14	Wrapup