



Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa

École d'études politiques | School of Political Studies

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Faculté des sciences sociales | Faculty of Social Sciences

**SCS3000-SCS4000 – Field-Research Course
Policy making in a governmentless context:
the case of social policy in Northern Ireland**

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Professor : Nathalie Burlone, Ph.D.

Email : nburlone@uottawa.ca

Office : FSS 7006

Tel. : 562-5800 (2242)

Office hours : By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Description

The course aims at understanding how certain contemporary social problems are answered in different governmental contexts. The course will focus on sensitive issues and how they are understood and supported in the policy formulation process in NI in comparison to Canada. Specifically, the course is organized along two axes: 1) an introduction to the political and social context of Northern Ireland with an explicit attention on social policy making; 2) an immersion in two specific social issues (social justice and homelessness). The course will include group lectures (12 hours), visits to historical sites and meeting with policy actors/groups.

Northern Ireland (NI) is a stimulating setting from a public policy development perspective where the public service and non-profit organizations are very much involved in policy making and implementation since the collapse of the government in January 2017. NI also provides students an opportunity to study social issues and policy making in a post-conflict society, presenting more stability and security than other conflict zones while, at the same time, carrying a past that still impact social policy development.

Objectives

At the end of the course, students will have:

1. a better understanding of how certain contemporary sensitive social problems are defined and policies formulated in relation to political settings, social environments, groups and institutions;
2. developed and/or improved critical analysis skills to better understand how the framing social issues and the political context influence policy formulation (and transformation) of social policies;

3. developed and/or improved their empirical skills through a stimulating immersion in a particular social context;
4. observed and appreciated how large scale changes in supranational policy networks impact a post-conflict region;
5. investigated in depth two important social issues specific to the field of inquiry;
6. understood what and how networks of actors associated with each policy issue influence the policy making process.

EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES

The course focuses on how social issues are answered in the special governmental context of Northern Ireland, stressing the importance of understanding the role(s) and impact of history and policy actors in the policy process. Students will learn more about social policymaking in NI through lectures, workshops, conferences, site visits and meetings with policy actors. Lectures and workshops (around 18hrs) are planned to provide students important background information on social policymaking and specific social issues in NI. The lectures will be complemented by site visits, meeting with diverse social policy actors and conferences.

Students are expected to prepare for the scheduled activities (having both done the required readings and reflected on the issues underlying the topics addressed) as well as actively participate in the discussions. Through their assignments, students will delve more deeply into aspects of the issues presented to them. They will also have the opportunity to learn and put into practice interview techniques with local actors. Finally, keeping a daily logbook will allow them to develop a personal reflection on the topics covered in the course. This logbooking is intended to be an important preparation tool for their final individual fieldwork essay.

EVALUATION

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|---|----------------|
| 1. 2 oral presentations | 2 x 15% |
| In team, students will choose an aspect of the material covered in week 1 and 3 to explore more deeply and prepare a short presentation (15 to 20 minutes) for the group. No written paper is expected. | |
| 2. Interview + presentation | 20% |
| For week 2, students (in team) will be assigned a policy actor to interview (themes will be identified beforehand in the interview workshop earlier in that week). Teams will have to prepare a short summary of the interview to present to the group. | |
| 3. Daily individual logbook | 20% |
| Each student is expected to keep a daily logbook, focusing (not exclusively) on at least (but not exclusively) a critical reflections regarding the social issues presented, their empirical research experience and personal reflections | |
| 4. Individual fieldwork experience essay: | 20% |

Using their daily individual logbook, student will have to write a 2000 word essay on the topic of their choice, focussing on the value-added (and shortcomings) of fieldwork in relation to sensitive social issues.

5. Participation :

10%

Participation is evaluated for both the preparation days before departure as well as during the field research weeks.

COURSE STRUCTURE

- **Week 1: Introduction to NI social policy context and policy actors**

- Day 1:
 - Arrival in Belfast and settling in + free day
- Day 2:
 - AM: Meeting at Ulster University - School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences
 - PM: City tour (including Belfast City Hall and Peace Walls)
- Day 3:
 - AM: Lecture 1 on NI social policy context (3hrs)
 - PM: Visit Stormont – The Northern Irish Parliament Buildings
- Day 4:
 - AM: Lecture 2 on NI social policy actors (3hrs) and policy making in a divided society
 - PM: Meeting with the Head of the Race and Equality Unit in the Executive Office of the NI Assembly, Professor Duncan Morrow (former head of the Community Relations Council), and Stephen Agnew, MLA and leader of the Green Party in NI
- Day 5:
 - AM and PM : Individual and team work – preparation of presentation 1
- Day 6:
 - AM: Team presentation 1
 - PM: Visit to the Centre for Innovation (part of the NI Civil Service) OR Visit to the Northern Ireland Office - Westminster Department in charge of overseeing the NI Assembly on behalf of Westminster
- Day 7:
 - AM: Visit to Titanic Centre in Belfast
 - PM: Visit St George's Market

- **Week 2: Social justice case**

- Day 1:
 - AM: Lecture 3 : Historical and sociological elements on the treatment of women on the island of Ireland (3hrs)
 - PM: Workshop : Interview skills (3hrs)
- Day 2:
 - AM: Case - Magdalene Laundries – Dr Leanne McCormick of Ulster University who is currently conducting work on Magdalene Laundries in NI
 - PM: Meeting with Victims Support Commission

- Day 3:
 - AM: Team work – preparation of interviews
 - PM: Meeting with social justice groups – Survivors and Victims of Institutional Abuse (SAVIA). Working with Leanne to ID a group specifically working with Magdalene Laundries Survivors (and/or a member of the Historical institutional Abuse Inquiry board)
- Day 4:
 - AM: Team interviews with policy actors
 - PM: Team interviews with policy actors (con't)
- Day 5:
 - AM : Preparation - presentation of interview results
 - PM : Visit Crumlin Road Gaol
- Day 6:
 - AM: Interview presentations
 - PM: free time
- Day 7:
 - AM and PM : Visit to Dublin
- **Week 3: Social insecurity and homelessness in NI**
 - Day 1:
 - AM: Lecture 4 : Historical and contemporary perspective on homelessness in NI (3hrs)
 - PM: Visit to Extern, who deliver a range of statutory and voluntary services to homeless groups in NI
 - Day 2:
 - AM: Lecture 5: Historical and contemporary perspective on homelessness in Canada + comparative discussion (3hrs)
 - PM: Meeting with NI homelessness policy network – Housing Rights Service NI, Bryson Group, NI Housing Executive, Simon Community, Colum Eastwood (MLA, chair of All Party Group on Housing), Participation and Practice of Rights (coordinating several resident-led housing campaigns across NI)
 - Day 3:
 - AM: Visit with Focus Ireland (to be confirmed)
 - PM: Meeting with policymaker - Lousie Ward Hunter, Deputy Secretary for Housing in Department for Communities
 - Day 4:
 - AM and PM : Individual and team work - preparation of presentation 2
 - Day 5:
 - AM: Team presentation 2
 - PM : Visit to Office of the Social Housing Reform group in the Department for Communities
 - Day 6:
 - Conclusion of course – Visit to Giant's Causeway
 - Day 7:
 - Departure for Ottawa

PRELIMINARY READING LIST

- Beirne, M., Knox, C. (2014). Reconciliation and Human Rights in Northern Ireland: A False Dichotomy?, *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 6(1), 26– 50.
- Birrell, D. (2014) Qualitative research and policy-making in Northern Ireland: barriers arising from the lack of consensus, capacity and conceptualization, *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 27(1), 20-30.
- Birrell, D., Gray, A.M. (2017). Devolution: The Social, Political and Policy Implications of Brexit for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, *Journal of Social Policy*, 46(4), 765–782.
- Bloomer, F., Pierson, C. (2017). Macro- and Micro-Political Vernacularizations of Rights: Human Rights and Abortion Discourses in Northern Ireland, *Health and Human Rights*, 19(1), 173-185.
- Doran, P., Hodgett, S. (2018). “Societal Wellbeing: Catalyst for Systems and Social Change in Northern Ireland?”, in *The Politics of Wellbeing: Theory, Policy and Practice*, Ian Bache & Karen Scott (Eds), 169-194
- Gray, A. M., Birrell, D. (2012). Coalition Government in Northern Ireland: Social Policy and the Lowest Common Denominator Thesis, *Social Policy and Society*, 11 (1), 15-25.
- Hamber, B., Kelly, G. (2016). Practice, Power and Inertia: Personal Narrative, Archives and Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland, *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 8(1), 25-44.
- Hughes, C. (2017) Resisting or enabling? The roll-out of neoliberal values through the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland, *Critical Policy Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/19460171.2017.1374872 (Published online: 20 Sep 2017).
- O’Mahoney, J. (2018) Advocacy and the Magdalene Laundries: towards a psychology of social change, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, DOI: 10.1080/14780887.2017.1416803 (Published online: 11 Jan 2018)
- O’Connor, K. (2013). Belfast Revisited: Everyday Policy-making in a Contested Environment, *Irish Political Studies*, 28(1), 58-77.
- O’Connor, K. (2015). What are the ideas and motivations of bureaucrats within a religiously contested society?, *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 83(1), 1-22.
- Watts, B., Fitzpatrick, S. (2017). Ending Homelessness Together in Northern Ireland: A Unique Challenge, *European Journal of Homelessness*, 11(2), 117-134.