

**UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH**  
**Department of Political Science**

**POLS 3270 LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ONTARIO (WINTER 2019)**

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**Course Objectives:**

The purpose of this course is to build on the student's knowledge and understanding of Canadian politics and public policy by focusing specifically on local or municipal government in Ontario. While local government provides citizens with the potential for having the most obvious and immediate impact on the decision-making process regarding issues that are of direct relevance, such as water and waste water treatment, garbage collection, snow removal, and the provision of recreational services for example, it also tends to be the level of government that they pay the least attention to with only 30-40% of the electorate typically bothering to vote in a municipal election. This course examines this paradox by exploring the great potential for citizen engagement and democratic participation inherent in local politics.

Under the Canadian Constitution, the provincial government determines municipal governance structures and powers. In recent years, there has been a trend towards decentralisation in government with the devolution of responsibilities, both programmatic and financial, from the federal government to the provinces. The provinces, in turn, have been downloading many services to the municipalities without providing them with adequate resources to assume this responsibility. This has given rise to the call for the creation of a "new deal" for cities, which would ultimately require additional federal and provincial investments in the municipalities. Former Prime Minister Paul Martin made a substantial financial commitment to assist municipal governments, as did Premier McGuinty, who adopted a new city charter for Toronto, but this is only the beginning in terms of adequately addressing the needs of our urban conurbations. The Harper government has made the gas tax transfer permanent, but otherwise showed little interest in the urban file.

Municipalities drive our economic prosperity, so efforts must be undertaken to ensure their success. The current political landscape, however, is not particularly encouraging. Thus far, the Trudeau Liberals have not resurrected the new deal and Ontario just elected a Doug Ford-led Conservative government that decided to cut Toronto City Council from 47 to 25 members in the middle of the fall 2018 municipal election campaign. It remains to be seen what his broader agenda will be with respect to municipalities across the province, although he has publicly stated he does not intend to tinker with the size of other municipal councils.

Students who have completed this course should have:

- (i) a sound understanding of the changing role that municipalities play in the Canadian federal system of government;

- (ii) the ability to distinguish between the federal and provincial machinery of government from that of municipal governments;
- (iii) an awareness of the key urban issues confronting municipalities;
- (iv) an ability to critically examine and offer constructive solutions to some of our shared local problems;
- (v) an enhanced ability to conduct political science research using a variety of sources;
- (vi) greater confidence in sharing and expressing ideas with classmates through lecture discussions and a formal presentation.
- (vii) an enhanced awareness of the potential for civic engagement at the local level

### **Required Texts**

Andrew Sancton. *Canadian Local Government: An Urban Perspective*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2015).