

**POL2376S/POL476S  
Narrative and Politics  
Winter 2017  
Professor Sanford Borins  
Wednesdays noon to 2 p.m., LA 212  
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Course website: see Blackboard portal**

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**Description and Objectives**

With the rise of Internet-enabled government and the explosive growth of social media, narrative narratives (often referred to as story-telling) has become an essential mode of public discourse, a key means through which ideas about politics, governance, policy, and activism are articulated and circulated. In this course we will explore archetypal narratives shaping the way politics is represented (in popular cultural genres, especially film) and practiced (in campaign advertising). We will consider dominant narrative constructs and, drawing on recent interdisciplinary research, the mechanisms that make them so powerful.

Communications is an essential political skill and the use of is an important type of communication. Stories often connect emotionally with people in ways that other types of communications do not. This class will also draw upon the techniques used in the narratives presented in class as a basis for telling our own stories.

**Learning Objectives**

- To understand key narratives widely used in politics and government
- To understand how these narratives are presented in moving image narration
- To understand how narratives shape the public's understanding of politics, governance, and public policy
- To enhance the student's ability to communicate his/her own narrative

**Office Hours: Rotman 7026**, Wednesdays from 11:30 to noon and 2 to 2:30 p.m.

**Evaluation**

Student evaluation will be based on the following:

1. Individual narrative assignment (week 5)	25 %
2. Class participation	35
3. Term Paper (due at start of last class)	40
Total	100 %

**Narrative Assignment**

The individual narrative assignment involves a short written essay (5 pages maximum) and a short in-class presentation about yourself, applying the conceptual approaches and tools presented in class. Details of the assignments will be provided in the two weeks before it is due.

### **Class Participation**

**You must participate in class discussion.** To participate in class discussion, you must prepare the material in advance, which includes watching movies or television series before the class in which they will be discussed. I will post discussion questions in advance on the course website. Students, individually or in groups, will be asked to make short presentations to begin the discussion.

The purpose of class discussion is to advance *as a group* toward insight and understanding. Class discussion is a cooperative, not a competitive, exercise. You will thus be assessed on your display of the qualities conducive to collective learning.

### **Term Paper**

The term paper will require you to discuss a contemporary text or texts (movies, television series, novel, play) dealing with politics, policy, or governance that is not discussed in detail in *Governing Fables* using the approaches and tools presented in course. The maximum length, including footnotes and references is 25 double-spaced typewritten pages. Topics require the approval of the instructor.

The paper is due at the start of the last class, noon Wednesday April 5.

### **Required Reading and Viewing**

Sandford Borins, *Governing Fables: Learning from Public Sector Narratives* (Information Age Publishing, 2011): at the U of T bookstore, online from the publisher at <http://infoagepub.com/products/Governing-Fables>, or online from other providers (e.g. amazon.ca).

I encourage you to visit every text's entry on the Internet Movie Data Base ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)) and the movies' entries at Rotten Tomatoes ([www.rottentomatoes.com](http://www.rottentomatoes.com)). The external reviews by professional critics are particularly valuable. However, visiting these sites is no substitute for watching a movie or television series yourself and forming your own judgment.

### **Availability of Texts.**

The movies in this course are classics, and should be available on Netflix or YouTube other online providers. They may also be available in the public library system or the U of T library. Another rental alternative is Videoflicks, 1701 Avenue Rd. (north of Lawrence), tel. 416-782-1883, [info@myvideoflicks.ca](mailto:info@myvideoflicks.ca).

I have all episodes of the three television series (*Yes Minister*, *West Wing*, *Borgen*) and will lend DVDs of selected episodes.

### **Course Topics, Viewing and Reading Assignments**

**Jan. 11**

**Introduction to the Course; Text, Narrative, Fable**

Required Reading:

Borins, *Governing Fables*, chapter 1

**Jan. 18**

**Conceptual Frameworks**

- i) Hollywood screenwriting: Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*, pp. 135-54 (on Blackboard)
- ii) Erikson's theory of the human life cycle: Wikipedia entry for Erik Erikson; Everyone Rides the Carousel ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m\\_e17mS7VBY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_e17mS7VBY))
- iii) Psychology of Film: t.b.d.

**Jan. 25**

**Narrative and Election Advertising**

Borins working paper, *It's the Way you Tell It: Conflicting Narratives in the 2015 Federal Election Campaign*

**Feb. 1**

**The Tumultuous Seventies**

View: *The Candidate* (1972), *All the President's Men* (1976)

Read: *Governing Fables*, 148-57

**Feb. 8**

Presentation of student narratives

**Feb. 15**

Return of papers and debrief of student narratives

Presentation of paper proposals

**Feb. 22: Reading Week, no class**

**March 1**

**The Neo-conservative Eighties**

## **Yes Minister; Yes, Prime Minister**

View and report on selected episodes of *Yes Minister* or *Yes Prime Minister*

Read: *Governing Fables*, 67-80; Borins, "Public Choice: 'Yes Minister' Made it Popular, but Does Winning a Nobel Prize Make it True?" *Canadian Public Administration* 31:1 (1988), 12-26 (on Blackboard)

## **March 8**

### **The Return of Political Idealism**

View and report on selected episodes of *The West Wing*

Read: *Governing Fables*, 161-172

## **March 15**

### **A European, Feminist Perspective**

View and report on selected episodes of *Borgen*

Read: *Governing Fables*, chapter 8

## **March 22**

Presentation of student papers

## **March 29**

Presentation of student papers

## **April 5**

### **Learning from a National and Personal Tragedy**

View: *The Fog of War*

Read: *Governing Fables*, chapter 6

## **Late Assignments**

Assignments are due on the days assigned. The only exception is an adequately documented emergency and/or medical illness. Please contact me *as soon as* the problem arises. Late assignments without documentation and advance instructor permission will be assigned a penalty.

## **Academic Integrity**

Please be aware of the importance of academic integrity and the seriousness of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism. The more obvious instances of plagiarism include copying material from another source (book, journal, website, another student, etc.) without acknowledging the source, presenting an argument as your own – whether or not it is a direct quotation – rather than fully acknowledging the true originator of the idea, having another person help you write an essay, and buying an essay. All of these are instances of academic dishonesty, which the university takes very seriously, and they will result in an academic penalty. These penalties can range from failing the assignment, failing the course, having a notation on your academic transcript, and/or suspension from the university. For further information on the University’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters, see:

<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies.behaveac.htm>. To avoid problems in your assignments, please consult “How Not to Plagiarize” by Margaret Proctor: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>

### **Office Hours, Email, and Telephone Policy**

Students are invited to meet with me during posted office hours or by appointment. I will respond to emails within 24 hours. I will respond to emails sent in the evening very early the next morning. If you want to speak to me over the phone, please send an email to arrange a mutually convenient time.

### **Accessibility Needs**

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodation for a disability, or have an accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom, or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible:

[Disability.services@utoronto.ca](mailto:Disability.services@utoronto.ca) or <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility>

### **Course Modification Statement**

The instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus during the term with reasonable notice and an explanation.