

POL2376S/POL476S
Narrative and Politics
Winter 2020
Professor Sanford Borins
Monday noon to 2 p.m., Larkin 340
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Course website: see Quercus

Description and Objectives

With the rise of Internet-enabled government and the explosive growth of social media, narrative (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 narrative 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 discussed 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 7059, Mondays 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 (Feb. 3)	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* or *Public Representations* 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 Monday March 30.

Required Reading and Viewing

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

I am in the process of writing a successor volume, entitled *Public Representations: Narratives, Fables, Governing*. It deals with political narrative texts from the UK and several other European countries, Canada, and the US, primarily published between 2010 and 2016. Chapters are available in draft on Quercus.

I encourage you to visit every text's entry on the Internet Movie Data Base (www.imdb.com) and Rotten Tomatoes (www.rottentomatoes.com). The former has a variety of interesting material (plot synopses, quotes, gaffes, and trivia) and the latter links to reviews by professional critics. However, visiting these sites is no substitute for watching the movie 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 from the Media Commons at <https://mediacommons.library.utoronto.ca/criterion-demand>. They may also be available in

hardcopy in the U of T library. I have many of these texts on DVD and could lend them out (to students having access to DVD players, most likely at the Library).

Course Topics, Viewing and Reading Assignments

Jan. 6

Introduction to the Course; Text, Narrative, Fable

Required Reading:

Borins and Herst, *Public Representations*, chapter 1 (on Quercus)

Recommended Reading:

Borins, *Governing Fables*, chapter 1

Exemplary student papers: Mini-symposium on Narrative and Public Administration in *Public Voices* 16:1 (Fall 2019), introduction by Sandford Borins, papers by Joshua White and Irene Poetranto (on Quercus)

Jan. 13

Conceptual Frameworks

- i) Hollywood screenwriting: Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*, pp. 135-54 (on Quercus)
- ii) Erikson's theory of the human life cycle: Wikipedia: Erikson's stages of psychosocial development; *Everyone Rides the Carousel* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKt7__yeszw)
- iii) Psychology of Film: Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (University of California Press, 2009), chapter 4 ("The Sensual Medium"), pp. 112-139 (on Quercus)

Jan. 20

Election Fables and Advertisements

Read and discuss: *Public Representations*, chapter 5

Susan Delacourt, "How the Liberals won – an inside look at the targeting and tactics that got Trudeau re-elected," *Toronto Star*, Nov. 23, 2019 (on Quercus)

Susan Delacourt, "How Obama – and Trump – helped Trudeau win the election," *Toronto Star*, Nov. 24, 2019 (on Quercus)

Student presentations on Liberal and Conservative narratives and advertising texts in the October 2019 federal election

Jan. 27

British and European Political Fables

Read and discuss: *Public Representations*, chapter 2

Recommended reading: *Governing Fables*, chapters 3, 4 (pp. 63-134)

View and report on selected episodes of *Borgen*

Feb. 3

Presentation of student narratives

Feb. 10

Return of papers and debrief of student narratives

Presentation of paper proposals

Feb. 17

Reading Week

Feb. 24

Canadian Political Fables

Read and discuss: *Public Representations*, chapter 4

View: *Tommy Douglas: Keeper of the Flame, Prairie Giant* (both available free on YouTube)

March 2

US Political Fables: Heroic and Sacrificial

Read and discuss, *Public Representations*, chapter 3, pp. 1-47

Recommended reading: *Governing Fables*, chapter 5 (pp. 135-175)

View: *Selma, All the Way*

March 9

US Political Fables: Ironic, Satirical, Tragic

Read and discuss, *Public Representations*, chapter 3, pp. 48-90

View: selected episodes of *Veep*

March 16

Presentation of student papers

March 23

Presentation of student papers

March 30

Learning from Experience ... or Not

View: either *The Fog of War* or *The Unknown Known*

Read: *Governing Fables*, pp. 201-208

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 Note 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 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.