Governance for the Twenty-First Century: Retaining, Re-tooling, or Re-building?

Semester in Dialogue

Summer 2014
The SFU Semester in Dialogue: Governance for the 21st Century
May-June 2014

DIAL 390, 391 (10 credits)
7 weeks, 20 students
SFU Harbour Centre, Vancouver, BC

Faculty

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Administration

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Location: SFU Harbour Centre Campus, HC 3050

Time: The program is intensive, meeting five days a week from 10:00-4:00 PM. Note that students are not able to take other courses during the semester, or have employment or other commitments during the course hours.
Course Description

As citizens of the twenty-first century our lives are in an ever-accelerating state of change. Technological advances, the speed at which we do business, the global nature of commerce and culture, and even the growing instability of the earth’s environment all point towards continuous change and the need for rapid responses. And yet, in the center of this maelstrom of change and re-examination, sits a surprisingly immovable, presence: our systems of governance.

Municipal, provincial, and federal elected bodies would be easily recognizable to any 150 year-old historical visitor in form, function, process, and guiding principles. Large unelected bureaucracies still operate on antiquated foundations in a kind of stasis, struggling to respond to the change revolving all around. Yet, there is a new generation of young voters that has grown up submerged in the information age and is unlikely to accept a democracy where their only interaction is to vote once every few years. This generation has answers at their finger-tips, can organize a flash-mob in a matter of hours, and for whom the deep ruts of any political party affiliation belie their own complex fluidities of identity and interest.

This course is interested in the possibilities our current historical situation offers to these deeper questions of governance, citizenship, privacy, human rights, democracy, and freedom. The plan is to deconstruct the current systems into manageable constituent parts and carefully examine each of these for ongoing utility through a variety of lenses. Potential questions might include: What are the component parts of our current systems of governance? What is the range of possible replacements? What are the options for governance that might previously not have been considered as a result of our ability to encounter each other across the globe instantaneously? What are the hopes, fears, dangers, and possibilities for new forms of governance or parallel alternate structures as individuals, communities, cities, and nations move forward?

What happens to our lived experience of governance, often first encountered in the family, when most families are blended, where father no longer “knows best”, and external adjudicators are often not available to solve any of our problems? What is the role of the citizen in light of technologies that are capable of mining our every personal data, or releasing mountains of information (e.g. wikileaks and Anonymous) that were previously hidden, or rapidly bringing together groups and public opinions in direct response (e.g. Occupy, the Arab Spring, or the BC marijuana action)?

How do governments, judicial systems and the bureaucracies that support them need to change in the face of this new world order and the growing sense that we have indeed entered a new epoch, the Anthropocene? How do we imagine a new politics and the architecture of new models of governance to replace the “democracy on one day every four years” system? Can the horse and buggy structures of Congressional and Parliamentary politics that have caused gridlock in Washington and a total shift of power from the Commons to the prime minister’s office in Ottawa evolve into something more
accountable, accessible and responsive? How might the next generation use the tools of the new media to build alternative networks of communication and popular governance in the shadow of the old order? Are our technological advances outstripping our systems of governance?

**Student Learning Outcomes**

We hope the students come away with:

- A sense of the range of governance that exists across their small groupings, their communities, Vancouver, and the world. What are the possibilities for governance? How do governance and bureaucracy interact, influence, and impede each other? How are decisions made with regard to governance, both in form and in function? What are our individual options as citizens, voters, and individuals with regard to governance and its possibilities moving forward?
- Expertise that they can carry forth with them into the world, ranging from the particular to the general, a sense of themselves as having some ability to step into complex situations see governance patterns and potentially facilitate, work *with*, varied and various stakeholders.

More Specifically:

**-Interdisciplinary and Collaborative Learning**

Students learn to:

- Appreciate the complexity of collaboratively defining shared goals for a project
- Demonstrate the ability to recognize governance and thoughtfully consider the range of possibilities and responses
- Describe their own learning in reflective writing assignments
- Appreciate the complexities and potential inadequacies of governance across a range of contexts
- Experience group projects with real deadlines in a real situation
- Appreciate the complexity of collaborative and interdisciplinary projects

**-Governance**

Students learn to:

- Develop an individual project that forms one part of the larger course theme
- Demonstrate the implementation of a major group project related to the theme of governance in the 21st century
- Investigate individual, local, and global best practices for governing with particular focus on the Vancouver context

**-Design and Dialogue Process**

Students learn to:

- Listen deeply and participate in regular dialogues with guests and each other
● Plan, facilitate, host and report on the implementation of public events
● Apply visualization, information and communication design principles and skills
● Experience action based problem solving scenarios

Assignments and Activities
Please note: below is a list of possible assignments. It is likely that we will not do all of these, and other related ideas might be substituted between now and Summer 2014.

Growing the Story: This assignment involves initially building a process for class work, then learning how to engage and facilitate dialogue through a case study. Details will be provided on the day these exercises begin, but note that the latter “growing the story” exercise will involve an overnight assignment requiring evening work at SFU.

Weekly Reflections: This assignment will involve short weekly writings that reflect more deeply on: some aspect of the course, some question that needs further exploration, some insights students have had on their learning and knowing, or some concept that needs more attention. These we will return to you with feedback in hopes of extending the conversation, expanding your knowledge, and helping your writing and thinking.

Photos and biographies: students work in pairs to prepare brief biographical sketches of each other. Each 200-word biography is prepared by the other member of each pair and is based on an interview and follow-up discussion with that person. Each completed biography is accompanied with a photo of the person and is emailed to Linda Bannister for posting on the Semester in Dialogue website.

First Paragraph: each student will prepare an opening paragraph related to the course theme. Working collaboratively, each anonymous paragraph is reviewed and edited by the entire class and faculty. The assignment demonstrates effective approaches to giving and receiving feedback and constructively supporting one another in writing situations.

Explaining the Governance: In pairs students will select any system of governance that draws their attention. They will be asked to write short discussions on the salient components of the system along with the key critiques and challenges thereof. This will assist in learning how to listen openly and then encapsulate positions while also developing the ability to take a thoughtful and critical position (e.g. Is this system viable in other settings, what does this system do well and less so, what and where are the biases, what are the required and necessary premises, etc.).

Preparing for Dialogue with Thought Leaders: a student will be assigned to each Thought Leader to prepare a short document circulated to all students electronically a week prior to the guest’s visit. The handout should include a brief biography, one or two readings on the topic and discussion questions for the Thought Leader. The student will be responsible for greeting the guest, facilitating the dialogue, and thanking the Thought Leader at the end of the day.
Thought Leader debriefs: a short debrief will be held after most visits, either during or right after lunch.

Op-Ed Piece: You will write and submit an article for a daily newspaper. Initially, you will deliver your piece verbally and receive feedback, followed by writing and rewriting a 700-word article to submit as an opinion/commentary piece to a major Canadian newspaper.

Its all about community: In this small group project the students will be asked to map, make sense of, and immerse themselves in a currently functioning and likely alternatively governing Vancouver community (e.g. the dock workers union of the Vancouver port, or the LGBT community in Davie Village, or the Shriners, or the Vancouver Club). This project is structured around getting a sense of the who/what/how of this community and will assist students in getting a close up sense of how various communities answer important questions of governance. How is the community organized and governed? What are the explicit/implicit rules/systems/modes of governance? How does this community understand itself? How does it identify its boundaries/limits, and how are friends/threats identified? What is verboten, i.e. tacitly forbidden?

Public Dialogue: Students choose a topic of broad public interest related to the course theme, and organize, advertise, facilitate, and report on a public dialogue. Students will be responsible for every stage of this event, with input from faculty and thought leaders.

Other assignments: Additional short assignments may be developed throughout the semester.

Final individual project: produce a 3000-word manuscript or equivalent in other media including but not limited to painting, sculpture, video, audio, multimedia, dance, etc. Your work should be on a topic relevant to the course theme and suitable for submission to major public outlets such as newspapers, magazines, book publishers, documentary film festivals, television or radio stations, art galleries, or other appropriate venues. You will be required to submit a “proposal to the editor” by mid-May.

Grading and Feedback

Grading and mentoring will occur at various points throughout the semester. Mentoring will be provided by the instructors (and students) as various assignments emerge. Written assignments will be reviewed and edited in a timely fashion by faculty. Opportunities to revise and resubmit them (as necessary) based on feedback from the instructors will be provided. Oral presentations will be critiqued both in class and privately. Mentoring will be available to all students. It is expected that students will meet with the instructors on a regular basis to discuss projects and any issues relating to the course.

While informal feedback will be provided to students throughout the semester, formal grading will occur in the context of 2 evaluation areas. They are as follows:
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<tr>
<th>Evaluation Areas</th>
<th>Course Number – Letter Grade Assigned for Each Course</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral Presentations, Participation, Hosting, Reflections</td>
<td>DIAL 390</td>
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**Readings**

The approach to general reading assignments is different than that typically associated with undergraduate courses. Students will be provided with a set of readings prior to course that are meant to provide some shared general background knowledge and to act as aids in developing your individual perspectives. Students are encouraged to read and digest such information. You may also be offered, on an ongoing basis, short readings to help build the perspectives that will contribute to specific dialogues throughout the course. It is important to read these carefully in order that you may contribute thoughtfully. In addition, a reading package directly connected to the concept of dialogue will be attached to guide some of your preparations.


2. [http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/10/russell-brand-on-revolution](http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/10/russell-brand-on-revolution)

3. Jeffery Sachs’ article on the US budget ... attached

4. John D. Whyte’s article on Republicanism ... attached

5. E.F. Schumacher’s book ... Small is Beautiful ... easy to find online

6. John Locke’s essay ... Of Property, Chapter V Second Treatise of Civil Government ... [http://www.constitution.org/jl/2ndtr05.htm](http://www.constitution.org/jl/2ndtr05.htm)

7. Fredrich Engels essay on the Iroquois Confederacy ... [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/ch03.htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/ch03.htm)

8. First Episode of “Yes Minister ...”
   Part 1: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Io841WQVM1M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Io841WQVM1M)
   Part 2: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZBM3kCoPEk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZBM3kCoPEk)
9. Chapter One of Richard Crossman’s Diaries … The backbench diaries of Richard Crossman … one copy in Bennett Library … DA 591 C76 A33 … don’t forget to share!

10. Dialogue Readings Package … attached

Field Trips

A number of field trips will occur during the semester. Groups of students will be asked to organize the transportation and events for each trip.

Guests and Dialogue

There will be numerous guests in our classroom throughout the course. Invited guests from diverse professions and organizations will be asked to engage in open and respectful discussions with students about the issues associated with the semester’s focal topic. We intentionally structure the sessions to avoid lecture and question/answer format and encourage conversations in which students are interacting fully with guests. These experiences are designed to teach skills in “reading the room,” hearing a variety of perspectives, and respectfully sharing your own views.

To facilitate such exchanges, student pairs are assigned responsibilities for preparing their classmates for specific guest visits. A week prior to the guest visit, they distribute to the entire class: a one-page biography of the guest they are ‘hosting’, any readings that are deemed salient, and a sample of possible questions to lead the dialogue. Each student pair will also be responsible for connecting with and greeting, their guest(s), facilitating the dialogue, and thanking their visitor. Details for the format and content of information provided to the class follow.

We’ll talk with a wide range of thought leaders with experiences in governance and bureaucracy across all levels of government and beyond. These will include those who are directly elected, who work within the unelected realms of government, who are actively trying to respond to current realities of government, who have and do think hard about the questions the course is interested in, and who have to successfully negotiate various forms of governance across the spectrum.

Confirmed Guests and Thought Leaders for Summer 2014:
(N.B. there will likely be further additions and/or deletions given the living realities of our guests)

Mark Warren, professor of Political Science, UBC
Stuart Poyntz, professor of Communications, SFU
Marilyn Waring, author, feminist economist, former government minister in New Zealand
Doug McArthur, professor in the School Public Policy, SFU
Ben Finkelstein, Province of BC: Climate action Secretariat, Green Communities
Sophie Pierre, BC Treaty Commission
Carolyn Lukensmeyer, founder and former president, America Speaks
Adrian Dix, Provincial politician, former leader of the NDP
Joel Bakan, professor of psychiatry, UBC
Kerry Jang, Vancouver city council
Joel Solomon, founding member of the Social Venture Network and president of Renewal Partners
Anne Giardini, President of Weyerhauser
Fiona Rayher, Co-founder and Artistic Director of Gen Why Media
Lyndsay Poaps, Metro Vancouver
Tracey Vaughn, Senior Public Engagement Advisor, Vancouver
Jamie Biggar, Executive director, Leadnow
Tara Mahoney, SFU’s Public Square and Co-founder of Gen Why Media
Paul Geddes, President BC Libertarians