

**PPAS 4190 3.0 Section A
Fall 2026**

Ethics and the Public Service: Integrity and Democracy

Thursday, 4:00pm – 7:00pm

Class will be in person
but you must also check eClass for asynchronous components.

Course Outline

Course Director:

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Office Hours: Online – Time and Link to be provided on eClass Website:

1. Land Acknowledgment

First Nations peoples have lived on this part of Turtle Island for millennia, stewarding the land, the water and all that contributes to life in this region. Today, the culture and presence of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples enrich the lands and people of this territory.

More than two centuries ago, the Mississauga people welcomed settlers to this territory, providing sustenance and engaging in trade and commerce. Between 1781 and 1820, eight treaties were signed between the Crown and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, who opened their territory to settlement. Today, York University's Keele Campus is located on Toronto Purchase Treaty, No. 13 lands and is situated on the traditional territory of the HuronWendat and Haudenosaunee.

Treaty history is foundational, and it is our collective responsibility to honour the land, as we honour and respect those who have gone before us, those who are here and those who have yet to come. We are grateful for the opportunity to be learning, working and thriving on this land, and we commit to learn the truth and be active in the process of reconciliation. ([LA&PS Land Acknowledgement](#)).

2. Prerequisites

AP/PPAS 2110 6.0, or AP/PPAS 2110 3.0 “Canadian Government,” or AP/PPAS 2910 6.0, “Canadian Democracy in a North American Context,” or GL/POLS 2100 6.0, “Introduction to Canadian Government”, or permission of the instructor (**which is granted to students with a serious interest in the subject matter**).

NOTE: If you are a student in the Department of Philosophy, it is acknowledged that you will likely not have these prerequisites. This course is best situated in the applied/practical ethics category, and as such you should have taken classes in, philosophy of law, political philosophy, ethics, and/or applied ethics. Philosophy students have taken this course for credit towards their degree requirement, but it is recommended that they speak to their program Chair. Please feel free to reach out to me to discuss.

3. Course description

This course analyzes the basic ideas that underlie ethical principles and values in the public sector in democratic countries, with emphasis on Canada. The course examines ethical standards and current events in politics and the public service, situating these standards within the broader principles of ethical management, policy making, and public administration. Ethical government is important to our democracy, and it is therefore crucial for students of politics and policy to be able to understand what rules of ethical conduct exist, how those rules are administered and/or enforced, and to be able to think critically about how those rules might be improved. This course introduces students to important concepts, including: critical and ethical decision and policy making, with some focus on the responsible use of emerging technology such as Artificial Intelligence; corruption; conflicts of interest; lobbying and lobbyist registration; whistleblowing in the public sector; and patronage and conventions of public service neutrality and loyalty.

Students in this course will gain a deep understanding of ethical decision making within the context of public administration, and why the use of public office for personal gain is wrong. We will learn to analyze and make decisions about typical ethical dilemmas that arise in the public sector, both with regard to public servants and elected politicians. Codes of conduct for federal, provincial, and municipal public servants are examined, along with the structures for advising and resolving disputes about the application of those codes. With regard to elected politicians, the Canadian system of independent oversight commissioners (e.g. ethics commissioners and lobbyist registrars) is highlighted. Through an examination of these themes, the course provides students with analytical tools for identifying ethical problems and a framework for managing ethical conduct. Attention will also be given to 'hidden' (as opposed to explicit) ethical concerns in public sector management, including decision making under uncertainty and information asymmetry; risk and moral hazard; allocation of scarce resources; demands and identification of stakeholders; expected outcomes and probable consequences; and the responsible use of technology.

It is recognized that the course covers a broad range of subjects and that most students are new to them. Selections of managerial ethics and decision making will be incorporated throughout the course and will be available through eClass. Students must be willing and eager to engage in the subject matter in a critical manner. Students must also be prepared to undertake a research project, with an honours-level depth of engagement and proper citations.

This course requires students to responsibly use Artificial Technology for the final project and incorporates customized managerial mini-simulations throughout the course.

4. Learning Objectives

Students will learn:

- to identify broad normative factors particular to public management and decision making;
- how to recognize an ethical dilemma and how to analyze typical ethical dilemmas that arise in public sector workplaces;
- why ethics is important to democracy;
- how mechanisms designed to incentivize ethical conduct and, when necessary, punish public sector actors for their unethical conduct, are integrated into public sector institutions;
- the reasons for public sector codes of conduct and strategies for compliance;
- the reasons for conflict of interest policies and legislation covering elected politicians, and the mechanisms developed in Canada to ensure that elected politicians (federal, provincial and municipal) understand the rules and comply with them;
- the theory behind lobbyist registration rules federally, provincially and municipally, and how those registration regimes operate;
- the theory behind public sector disclosure of wrongdoing (aka whistleblowing) rules and how whistleblower protection regimes operate; and,
- how to speak and write clearly about public sector ethics issues.

5. Evaluation

Assignment:	Six (4) Mini-Sim reflections	Value (%):	20
Assignment:	Participation – short post class memo (1% each)	Value (%):	10
In class:	Use of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.)	Value (%)	5
Assignment:	Stakeholder analysis	Value (%):	10
Assignment:	Case project proposal	Value (%):	5
Assignment:	Individual multimedia presentations	Value (%):	20
Assignment:	Final case project report	Value (%):	30
TOTAL:			100%

6. Technical Requirements for Taking the Course

Several platforms may be used in this course (e.g., eClass, Zoom, Choosify, etc.) through which students will be required to interact with the course materials, the course director, as well as with one another. Please review this syllabus to determine how the class meets, and how office hours and presentations will be conducted.

7. Participation

Attendance during weekly class sessions is mandatory. That said, do not hesitate to reach out to me (your instructor) if you have concerns about the scheduling of the sessions or if you need to make special arrangements with respect to your attendance on specific weeks. If we end up on Zoom, you will then also be expected to enable your video so that we can engage with one another in thoughtful conversations about the course content. You will be expected to engage and ask questions both in-person and, if we are forced online, through the Zoom chat function. Inappropriate or disrespectful language will not be tolerated and you may be removed from class until the matter has been addressed.

Your participation grade will be based upon a short memo outlining your engagement in the scheduled class sessions, the outline of the memo will be given in class. You will indicate the specific topics of discussion and very briefly explain how you participated in class discussion.

Please also see [Academic Consideration for Missed Course Work](#)

8. Student Conduct

Students, course instructors and staff have a joint responsibility to create and maintain a welcoming and inclusive learning environment. All students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#). Whether online or in-person, students and course instructors are expected to cultivate and sustain a professional relationship characterized by mutual respect and courtesy. In all classrooms, any disruptive and/or harassing behaviour will not be tolerated. To ensure that you adhere to the rules of the virtual classroom, please review what counts as proper ‘etiquette’ (the basic rules for communicating with others in online spaces) by consulting the [student guide to e-learning](#). **If you experience an inappropriate online incident that makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, please contact me immediately so I can work to resolve the issue.**

Please respect the privacy of your peers and instructors. Never share private information about your peers and instructors without their permission. Remember, no aspect of your courses should be recorded or distributed without everyone’s consent.

Please see the [Academic Conduct Policy and Procedures](#)

9. Academic Integrity

In this course, we strive to maintain academic honesty to the highest extent possible. Please familiarize yourself with the meaning of academic integrity by completing SPARK’s Academic

Integrity module at the beginning of the course. Breaches of academic honesty range from cheating to plagiarism (i.e., the improper crediting of another's work, the representation of another's ideas as your own, etc.). All instances of academic dishonesty in this course will be reported to the appropriate University authorities and can be punishable according to the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty.

Turnitin

To promote academic integrity in this course, students may be required to submit their written assignments to Turnitin (via the course's eClass site) for a review of textual similarities and the detection of possible plagiarism. In so doing, students will allow their material to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used only for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin service are described on the Turnitin.com website. York students may opt out of using Turnitin. If you wish to opt out, you should contact your instructor as soon as possible.

Artificial Intelligence

It is recognised that AI is a revolutionary tool that is changing the way society functions. It is also recognized that public institutions and private entities are beginning to utilize the amazing power and opportunity that AI represents, in both decision making and policy development for their respective constituents. It is anticipated that in the next five years most governments, institutions, and organizations will be employing AI in day-to-day operations in some way shape or form. Thus, this course is structured around the belief that students should have a safe, structured exposure to employing AI in a professional way that explores the opportunities and risks of using this tool.

Students in this course will use AI in a very specific way and for a very specific purpose. Authorized use will be LIMITED under proscribed purposes. Students may not employ AI outside of this permitted use. The responsible use will be outlined both in class and in assignment instructions. We will go through how to use AI in a way consistent with the way governments and organizations are currently exploring its responsible use. There will be a required in-class Artificial Intelligence module for using AI in any assignment.

Using AI to produce written content is a strictly prohibited violation of academic integrity.

10. Accessibility

While all individuals are expected to satisfy the requirements of their program of study and to aspire to achieve excellence, the University recognizes that persons with disabilities may require reasonable accommodation to enable them to perform at their best. The University encourages students with disabilities to register with Student Accessibility Services to discuss their accommodation needs as early as possible in the term to establish the recommended academic

accommodations that will be communicated to Course Directors through their Letter of Accommodation (LOA).

Please let your instructor know as early as possible in the term if you anticipate requiring academic accommodation so that we can discuss how to consider your accommodation needs within the context of this course. Sufficient notice is needed so that reasonable steps for accommodation can be discussed. Accommodations for tests/exams normally require three (3) weeks (or 21 days) before the scheduled test/exam to arrange.

Religious Observance Accommodation

York University is committed to respecting the religious beliefs and practices of all members of the community, and making reasonable and appropriate accommodations to adherents for observances of special significance. Should any of the dates specified in this syllabus for course examinations, tests, or deadlines conflict with a date of religious significance, please contact the instructor within the first three (3) weeks of class. If the date falls within the formal examination periods, you must complete and submit a Religious Accommodation for Examination Form at least three (3) weeks before the start of the exam period.

11. Required textbook

Readings will be posted on eClass or emailed to you free of charge.

12. Weekly Topics and Readings

Please go through the REQUIRED readings (which may include asynchronous video and audio recordings) for the lecture prior to the class. After the class, go through the assigned materials again more carefully. The quantity of assigned materials is quite reasonable; you should have no difficulty keeping up.

FOUNDATIONS: 2 weeks

Class 1: Introduction to course; Introduction to Canadian Government

In our first class you will be:

- Introduced to the course and what is required of you;
- Introduced to some basics about how the Federal, Provincial, Municipal governments are structured and operate so that everyone in the class has the same background knowledge;

- Taught about the unique relationships & responsibilities that exist in and across government.
 - Introduced to the basic ideas and vocabulary of ethics through required readings.
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Class 2: *Ethical Decision Making*

- This week you will learn how to identify ethical dilemmas and how to make considered, wellinformed and defensible decisions when confronted with a dilemma.
 - We will also talk about different theories of ethics because they can sometimes be used to help us understand another person's decision-making or to help us bridge the gap between what two different parties believe is "the right thing to do".
 - Introduction to stakeholder analysis and evaluation discussed in class.
 - In class module on AI.
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THE PUBLIC SERVICE: 3 weeks

Class 3: *Conventions (Cabinet, Ministers, and the Civil Service)*

This week we will learn more about:

- The different public service environments (e.g. ministries, agencies, ministers' offices, etc.) We will also learn about:
 - Cabinet and its related conventions
 - Political Neutrality
 - The Duty of Loyalty
 - What it means to "Act in the Public Interest"
 - The duty of fairness and the principles of natural justice
 - Online mini simulation/activity about political neutrality (will be posted on eClass). Play through before class, and we will work through this together.
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Class 4: *Public Service Codes of Conduct*

This week you will learn about:

- Conflicts of interest & other in-service ethics rules
- Post-service ethics rules
- Ethics executives & the idea of "reporting up"
- Whistleblowing
- Ethics Case presented and stakeholder analysis process discussed in class.

- Online mini simulation/activity about whistleblowing (will be posted on eClass). You must also complete the related assignment.
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Class 5: *Digital Government*

This week you will learn about:

- The important role that data plays in policy making.
 - We will also discuss the increasing digitization of our bureaucracies and the important risks that arise as we move to automate (and outsource!) certain kinds of public sector decisionmaking.
 - Online mini simulation/activity about the role of data in public policy making (will be posted on eClass).
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Class 6: *Money, Influence & Politics*

This week you will learn about:

- Lobbying (incl. cash-for-access & loopholes)
 - Patronage
 - Online mini simulation/activity about lobbying (will be posted on eClass).
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ELECTED OFFICIALS (FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL): 2 weeks

Class 7: *Conflicts of Interest and Unethical Conduct*

This week you will learn about:

- Dirty hands / Lying in the public interest
 - Abuse of Authority & Misuse of resources
 - Undue Influence
 - Online mini simulation/activity about lobbying (will be posted on eClass). You must also complete the related assignment.
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ACCOUNTABILITY: 2 weeks

Class 8: *The Basics of Accountability*

This week you will learn about:

- Traditional approaches to accountability, incl committees
 - More Customs & Conventions
 - Cabinet & Party Codes Conduct
 - Public Inquiries
 - Election Laws & Criminal Laws
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Class 9: *Understanding Officers & Agents of Parliament; Independence*

This week you will learn more about the officers and agents of parliament. We will discuss how those Office are established; what their roles are; the balance that must be met between independence and accountability, etc. Topic areas covered will include:

- Ethics / Integrity;
 - Lobbying;
 - Whistleblowing / Disclosure of Wrongdoing;
 - Privacy & Freedom of Information;
 - Ombudspersons;
 - Auditors General; and
 - Environmental Commissioners
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MUNICIPAL ETHICS: 1 week

Class 10: *Municipal Ethics and Accountability Issues*

This week you will learn about how ethics infrastructure is different at the municipal level. This difference primarily stems from the fact that municipal government is not party based (i.e. councilors are not affiliated with the Liberals, Conservatives, NDP or Green parties) and this changes the dynamic and the accountability relationships applicable to ethics oversight officers (e.g. integrity commissioners, ombudspersons and lobbyist registrars). We will also discuss the concept of *political acuity* and its role as an important skillset that can help support and sustain stronger council-staff relations.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND GOVERNANCE ETHICS

Class 11: *Indigenous Systems of Governance*

This week you will learn about how ethics infrastructure operates in band councils and how that differs from those that we see in parliamentary systems. This will of course involve learning about band councils (as established under the Indian Act), forms of governance traditionally used by Indigenous peoples, and the relationship between the two. We will discuss the experience of Indigenous peoples who serve (or have served) as elected representatives in parliamentary government.

Class 12: *Behaving Ethically and Summary / Overview*

In this class we will take a step back and talk about what lessons you have learned and how you can use this information as you move forward in your career. I will ask you to tell me which topics that you wish you could learn more about and we will continue to discuss how important it is to always be thinking about the important role that ethics and accountability play in helping us achieve good governance practices in the public sector.