



SOC 865

Political Economy for Social Policy and Research

S2 Evening 2014

Sociology

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General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

Unit Convenor

Ben Spies-Butcher

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Credit points

4

Prerequisites

Admission to MPASR or PGDipPASR or PGCertPASR

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description

This unit offers students an introduction to key concepts and theories in political economy used by social theorists and policy analysts. It takes a comparative approach, looking to different theoretical traditions within political economy and economic sociology, as well as an applied focus. Key concepts will be discussed in terms of their application to different policy issues in areas like health, education and the labour market. Discussion includes the use of quasi-markets, issues of inequality, commodification and consumerism, risk and globalisation, budgets, taxes and spending, and macroeconomic issues of labour supply, inflation and aggregate demand.

Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at <https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates>

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

Understand and interpret concepts from political economy

Understand the historical development of different theoretical traditions in political economy

Critically apply concepts from political economy to understanding contemporary policy issues

Explain in verbal and written forms the economic implications of policies clearly to an

educated, non-expert audience

Identify and integrate policy and theoretical information for a specific topic

Read critically across social scientific disciplines

Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Due
<u>Short Exercise</u>	20%	29th August
<u>Issue Analysis</u>	30%	10th October
<u>Policy Analysis</u>	40%	14th November
<u>Seminar participation</u>	10%	Ongoing

Short Exercise

Due: **29th August**

Weighting: **20%**

This exercise is designed to familiarise you with some of the key economic concepts in the course. The task is to take one of the key concepts from the beginning of the course and relate it to the interests of social policy and research. First, choose one of the three readings below and the concept that goes with it. You will need to explain what the concept is and how the reading develops it. You then need to link this concept to a current policy or social research concern. For example, you might discuss how the division of labour relates to the paid care workforce, or to hospital reforms, or you might discuss how commodification applies to the delivery of social services, where the distinction between producer and consumer is less stark than for physical commodities. You are not expected to go into depth. Rather the exercise is designed to demonstrate your understanding and ability to apply concepts. Briefly explaining the key aspects of the concept and one potential implication is all that is required.

Remember too, this is a short exercise. It is not designed as a research assignment, although you may wish to refer to a few additional references. Instead the focus is on demonstrating that you understand the argument and can relate the concept to social analysis.

Division of labour. Smith, A 1952, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, London, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Chapters 1-3: 3-10.

Fictitious commodities. Polanyi, K. 1944, "The Self-Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities: Labor, Land, and Money," *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Boston: Beacon Press, 68-76.

Commodity fetishism. Marx, K. 1976 [1867], 'The fetishism of the commodity and its secret', *Capital*, vol. 1, London: Penguin, 163-177.

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Issue Analysis

Due: **10th October**

Weighting: **30%**

This assignment is linked to the Policy Analysis. The topic you choose in this assignment should be related to the policy you analyse in the next assignment. The task here is to engage with a significant economic and policy debate. In the next assignment you discuss how the current policy discussion has utilised economic arguments and frameworks. But here, you are focused on the issues in a more general sense. This is a research task, so you are expected to read widely, and to go beyond the material presented in this course outline.

The aim of this exercise is to demonstrate an understanding of how an economic issue impacts on social relationships, and to ground your analysis in a firm research base. The broader research done here should also assist in the next assignment. This task should be structured as an essay. Select one of the following topics, or see the convener to develop your own topic by week 4.

1. How can we explain women receiving lower incomes, in general, than men in rich, developed economies? What implications does this have for social policies aimed at promoting support for care work?
2. In most OECD countries income inequalities have been increasing over the past 30 years. How might we explain this increase in inequality and what policies might be needed to reduce inequality?
3. What evidence is there that global inequality is declining? How might we explain the decline of global inequality? Does this demonstrate the benefits of market competition?
4. Can continued economic growth be made consistent with ecological sustainability? What types of economic reforms likely to promote ecological sustainability?
5. How has the increasing reliance on financial instruments and personal debt to manage economic affairs affected the economic security of workers? In what ways have government policies influenced the trend towards 'financialisation'?
6. Is fiscal austerity limiting the ability of governments to respond to democratic demands? To what extent have budgetary pressures from existing welfare state programs constrained the ability of new social programs to adjust for changing circumstances?

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- Identify and integrate policy and theoretical information for a specific topic
- Read critically across social scientific disciplines

Policy Analysis

Due: **14th November**

Weighting: **40%**

In this assignment you will explore the application of market economics to social and environmental policy making. You will need to select a case study where policy has changed (or is proposed to change) to provide a greater role for market forces in the production or allocation of resources. This should ideally be related to the topic of your last assignment.

Your analysis will need to outline the policy changes and the rationale for the change. You should then explore the effects (or predicted effects) of the policy change and address arguments both in favour and against the policy change. You should conclude by suggesting ways forward, has the policy been effective and what might make it more effective?

Below are a few examples you might wish to choose. You can also choose a different topic.

- The decision to grant equal pay for care workers in 2012
- The Clean Energy Future package or the European Emissions Trading Scheme
- The introduction of HECS
- The private health insurance rebate and proposals to means test this
- Water privatisation in Bolivia
- Increasing the compulsory contributions to superannuation
- The first home savers scheme

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Seminar participation

Due: **Ongoing**

Weighting: **10%**

As part of your involvement in the course you are expected to actively participate in seminars. This involves reading and thinking about the required readings each week. It also involves making some contribution to discussion. You will be assessed on the basis of your contributions in terms of both your understanding of the issues and your effort to engage with the subject matter. This is not a measure of *how much* you contribute, but of the *quality* of your contributions.

It is also important that everyone contributes in a way that promotes reasoned discussion and includes all. If you find it easy to contribute, be careful not to dominate debate. If you find it difficult, make an effort to get involved, or discuss the issue with your tutor so they can help you participate fully. Debating and discussing ideas is an important part of academic life and sociological inquiry.

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- Explain in verbal and written forms the economic implications of policies clearly to an educated, non-expert audience
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Delivery and Resources

Each week there will be one two-hour seminar between 6pm – 8pm Monday in W5A 107. Attendance is compulsory.

All reading material for the course is available through e-reserve and the iLearn unit. Lectures will also be recorded, but as the class is based on a seminar format recordings may not cover all of the content as class discussion cannot be recorded.

All written assignments for this unit are to be submitted through iLearn and Turnitin. Feedback and results will also be given through iLearn. There is no hard copy marking in this unit.

You may also want to consult Stilwell (2012), *Political Economy: The contest of economic ideas*,

3rd ed. Oxford. Copies are available from the Co-op Bookshop. This book covers much of the economic content of the course in an accessible way.

Some of the more sociological content is also covered in Spies-Butcher, Paton & Cahill (2012), *Market Society: History, theory, practice*, Cambridge, also available from the Co-op Bookshop.

Unit Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Lecturer
1	4th August	Introduction	BSB
2	11th August	Competition, Trade and Efficiency	BSB
3	18th August	The Rise of Market Society	BSB
4	25th August	Commodities and Social Relations	BSB
5	1st September	Inequality	BSB
6	8th September	Growth, Affluence and Sustainability	BSB
7	15th September	Production, Finance and Crisis	BSB
Mid Semester Break 22nd-7th October			
8	6th October	Labour Day Public Holiday	NA
9	13th October	Managing the State	TBC
10	20th October	Fiscal Crisis and the Welfare State	BSB
11	27th October	Quasi-markets and Marketisation	TBC
12	3rd November	Case Study	BSB
13	10th November	Conclusion	BSB

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central](#). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

Academic Honesty Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html

Assessment Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy.html>

Grading Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grading/policy.html>

Grade Appeal Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/gradeappeal/policy.html>

Grievance Management Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grievance_management/policy.html

Disruption to Studies Policy http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/disruption_studies/policy.html *The Disruption to Studies Policy is effective from March 3 2014 and replaces the Special Consideration Policy.*

In addition, a number of other policies can be found in the [Learning and Teaching Category](#) of Policy Central.

Student Code of Conduct

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: https://students.mq.edu.au/support/student_conduct/

Sociology Policies

Referencing guide http://www.mq.edu.au/about_us/faculties_and_departments/faculty_of_arts/departments_of_sociology/current_students/undergraduate/useful_links/sociology_reference_guide/

Late Submission of Work

To help students submit their work on time, staff will endeavour to hand out essay and assignment questions at least three weeks in advance of the due date.

All assignments which are officially received after the due date, and where no extension has been granted by the course convenor or tutor, will incur a deduction of 5% for the first day, and 1% for each subsequent day including the actual day on which the work is received. Weekends and public holidays are included.

Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of support services for students. For details, visit <http://students.mq.edu.au/support/>

Learning Skills

Learning Skills (mq.edu.au/learningskills) provides academic writing resources and study strategies to improve your marks and take control of your study.

- [Workshops](#)
- [StudyWise](#)
- [Academic Integrity Module for Students](#)
- [Ask a Learning Adviser](#)

Student Services and Support

Students with a disability are encouraged to contact the [Disability Service](#) who can provide appropriate help with any issues that arise during their studies.

Student Enquiries

For all student enquiries, visit Student Connect at ask.mq.edu.au

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit <http://informatics.mq.edu.au/help/>.

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use Policy](#). The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.

Graduate Capabilities

PG - Discipline Knowledge and Skills

Our postgraduates will be able to demonstrate a significantly enhanced depth and breadth of knowledge, scholarly understanding, and specific subject content knowledge in their chosen fields.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understand and interpret concepts from political economy
- Understand the historical development of different theoretical traditions in political economy
- Identify and integrate policy and theoretical information for a specific topic

Assessment tasks

- Short Exercise
- Issue Analysis
- Policy Analysis
- Seminar participation

PG - Critical, Analytical and Integrative Thinking

Our postgraduates will be capable of utilising and reflecting on prior knowledge and experience, of applying higher level critical thinking skills, and of integrating and synthesising learning and knowledge from a range of sources and environments. A characteristic of this form of thinking is the generation of new, professionally oriented knowledge through personal or group-based critique of practice and theory.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understand and interpret concepts from political economy

- Understand the historical development of different theoretical traditions in political economy
- Critically apply concepts from political economy to understanding contemporary policy issues
- Identify and integrate policy and theoretical information for a specific topic
- Read critically across social scientific disciplines

Assessment tasks

- Short Exercise
- Issue Analysis
- Policy Analysis
- Seminar participation

PG - Research and Problem Solving Capability

Our postgraduates will be capable of systematic enquiry; able to use research skills to create new knowledge that can be applied to real world issues, or contribute to a field of study or practice to enhance society. They will be capable of creative questioning, problem finding and problem solving.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understand the historical development of different theoretical traditions in political economy
- Critically apply concepts from political economy to understanding contemporary policy issues
- Identify and integrate policy and theoretical information for a specific topic

Assessment tasks

- Short Exercise
- Issue Analysis
- Policy Analysis
- Seminar participation

PG - Effective Communication

Our postgraduates will be able to communicate effectively and convey their views to different social, cultural, and professional audiences. They will be able to use a variety of technologically supported media to communicate with empathy using a range of written, spoken or visual formats.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Explain in verbal and written forms the economic implications of policies clearly to an educated, non-expert audience
- Identify and integrate policy and theoretical information for a specific topic
- Read critically across social scientific disciplines

Assessment tasks

- Short Exercise
- Issue Analysis
- Policy Analysis
- Seminar participation

PG - Engaged and Responsible, Active and Ethical Citizens

Our postgraduates will be ethically aware and capable of confident transformative action in relation to their professional responsibilities and the wider community. They will have a sense of connectedness with others and country and have a sense of mutual obligation. They will be able to appreciate the impact of their professional roles for social justice and inclusion related to national and global issues

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Critically apply concepts from political economy to understanding contemporary policy issues
- Explain in verbal and written forms the economic implications of policies clearly to an educated, non-expert audience
- Read critically across social scientific disciplines

Assessment tasks

- Short Exercise
- Issue Analysis
- Policy Analysis
- Seminar participation

PG - Capable of Professional and Personal Judgment and Initiative

Our postgraduates will demonstrate a high standard of discernment and common sense in their professional and personal judgment. They will have the ability to make informed choices and decisions that reflect both the nature of their professional work and their personal perspectives.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Critically apply concepts from political economy to understanding contemporary policy issues
- Read critically across social scientific disciplines

Assessment tasks

- Issue Analysis
- Policy Analysis
- Seminar participation

Changes from Previous Offering

A number of more recent publications have been added, especially in the weeks on inequality and sustainability. Essay questions have been updated based on feedback from last year. We now have a public holiday in week 8, and this has meant one of the two case study weeks has been rested.