

AHA International
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Modern Britain

Contact:

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Please use email for initial questions, crisis management, etc. Meetings can be arranged where necessary. Please use subject line 'AHA'.

Course Description:

The course provides an intensive introduction to the principal institutions, parties and ideologies in British politics. It will also focus on prominent issues that affect British society today. The emphasis will be contemporary but some use will be made of historical explanations.

Aims and Objectives:

The course introduces competing analytical and political interpretations, drawing in particular on the fields of comparative politics and public policy. The course aims to evaluate key institutional, social and political developments and place them in the context of analytical debates. We also aim to use the location of London as Britain's political capital, by organising a variety of excursions.

Learning Outcome:

Students who undertake this course and participate fully can expect to gain a thorough knowledge of the country's political processes and key political and societal issues. The key to this course is to conceptualise the United Kingdom as a political system and its relationship to other aspects of Britain's national life, society and history.

Pre-requisites:

This course does **not** require an existing familiarity of the UK's political system. Its success however depends on **your ongoing** interest in exploring British politics during your stay in London.

Rules and Procedures:

Attendance at the sessions and excursions is obligatory. The seminars combine introductory lectures, presentations, discussions and group work. Presentations should be short and sharp, providing an introduction to the key themes which open the seminar for further discussion. In some seminars, students are asked to perform debates. Presenters should aim to make controversial (but reasoned) contributions, questioning the other presenter's point of view. Shared preparation will enhance the quality (and enjoyment) of the debates. In general, you are expected to prepare and contribute to

ALL seminars. The objective of the course is to develop curiosity in the subject, to exchange information and to explore approaches and debates.

Assessment

The assessment is divided into four equal parts.

- 1. A final exam on the last day of the course. Students will be given a choice of questions out of which they have to answer one. Students are allowed to use their course notes, but no further material (any electronic devices, laptop, books, articles, etc.) may be permitted.
- 2 + 3: Two extended essays which will be handed out towards the beginning (around Week 3) and in the middle (around Week 6). Students will be given a choice of questions, out of which they have to answer one. The essay is a 'take-home exam' and proper referencing, footnotes and a bibliography (at least five sources per essay should be consulted) are expected. The space limit of this essay is 1000 words.
- 4. Presentation(s) and class participation. Over the course of the semester, you are required to give one presentation per term. Presentations should be **no longer than 25 minutes** and should provide the seminar group with a discussion base. Hence, presentations ought to cover key factual points, but should also give some 'food for thought'. You can choose from four topics:
 - Westminster Model: The Prime Minister is powerless
 - Economic policies: We are all Thatcherites now?
 - Europe: What could/should the UK have done differently in its approach to Europe?
 - Northern Ireland. Should all of Ireland be governed by the Irish?

Grading System

Each of these four modes of assessment will be graded on a scale from 1 – 10. The final grade represents the average score of these 4 assessments based on the following scale.

A:	10 points (outstanding intellectual and organizational achievement)
A minus:	9 points (exceptional)
B plus:	8 points (very good)
B:	7 points (good)
B minus:	6 points (average)
C plus:	5 points (satisfactory)
C:	4 points (limited)
C minus:	3 points (deficient)
D:	2 points (severe shortcomings)

Essential Reading:

Budge, Crewe, McKay and Newton (2007). *The New British Politics*, London, Pearson Longman. 3rd Edition.

Further Reading:

- Jones, B, Kavanagh, D, Moran, M, Norton, P (2005) *Politics UK* – fifth edition, Longman (utilise in particular the book's website, www.booksites.net/jones)
- Dearlove, J and Saunders, P (2000) *Introduction to British Politics*, Polity, Cambridge.
- Dunleavy, Heffernan, R, Cowley, P. and Hay, C. (2006) *Developments in British Politics* 8, London, Palgrave (check out the updates on the www.palgrave.com/politics/dunleavy website)

The different books do very different things, and students may find it useful to consult different sources and share books. Dearlove and Saunders provide a sociological introduction, paying particular attention to controversies about the British state. Dunleavy et al. offer a slightly more advanced introduction to British politics than Jones et al. The latter book is ideal for a basic coverage of the key issues, but can become rather boring at times. Its website is excellent. In general, please note that political change in the last years has been significant and thus makes older editions and books slightly dated when it comes to institutional matters.

Internet:

www.bbc.co.uk (for news coverage)
www.guardianunlimited.co.uk (the Guardian)
www.ft.com (the Financial Times)
www.independent.co.uk (the Independent)
www.telegraph.co.uk (the Telegraph)
www.thetimes.co.uk (the Times)
www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk (the main paper for Northern Ireland)
www.irishnews.com (the Nationalist paper for Northern Ireland)
<http://www.ukonline.gov.uk/> (the official British government website).
<http://www.ukpol.co.uk/> (British politics web-site)

Study Visits:

During the semester, the course aims to integrate study visits, many of which are dependent on our class schedule and are therefore subject to confirmation. However, our options include:

- The House of Commons (the UK's parliament)
- A visit to City Hall, when the London Mayor has to answer questions from the London Assembly.
- We will also try to attend one or two public lectures at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). These lectures usually take place in the evenings (6.30 – 8.00). At the time of writing this syllabus, the precise schedule of LSE events had not been published. We will however, agree in class, which lectures this course ought to attend.

Course Calendar

Sep 21 - 22	no class (compensation for LSE lectures and City Hall)	
Sep 28	The Constitution of the United Kingdom	
Sep 29	The Westminster Model: the Core Executive	
Oct 5	Westminster Model: Parliament and Party System	
Oct 6	Westminster Model: Parliament and Party System	Essay 1 handed out
Oct 13	Workshop Session	
Oct 14	Electoral Systems and Electoral Behaviour	
Oct 19 and 20	No class: mid term break	
Oct 26	Social policies	
Oct 27	Economic policies	Essay 2 handed out
Nov 03	Devolution in Wales and Scotland	
Nov 04	Visit to Parliament (to be confirmed)	
Nov 09	Britain and the European Union	
Nov 10	The Euro	
Nov 16	London and local politics	
Nov 18	Wednesday 10.00 – 11.30 am: Visit to City Hall (to be confirmed)	
Nov 23	Northern Ireland	
Nov 24	Final Exam	

To be confirmed:

1. one or two LSE public lectures (usually evenings between 6.30 and 8.00)
2. Visit to House of Commons:
3. Visit to City Hall

Course Topics:

The Constitution of the United Kingdom

Topic: introduction to the course material and ways through which to examine the British political system.

Reading: Budge et al: chs. 1 and 4

The Westminster Model: The Core Executive

Topic: The key principles of cabinet government

Reading:

Budge et al: chs. 5 and 6.

Jones et al: chs. 19-20

The Westminster Model: Parliament and Party Systems

Presentation: 'The Prime Minister is powerless'

Topic: Placing parliament in the context of modern politics. The traditional party system under challenge. The main ideologies and political families in British Politics

Reading: Budge et. al. chs.16-18.

Workshop Session

This session relates to the topic '**The Westminster Model: Parliament & Party System**' Students will be given a specific task and have to submit a report of their findings which will be part of the overall grading process. (see Assessment Guidelines).

Electoral Systems and Electoral Behaviour

Elections in the 21st century: Do our votes still count?

Reading:

Budge et.al, ch. 15

Jones et. al. chs. 8, 9.

Social policies

Topic: Public policies under Labour – Conservative policies under a different label?

Reading:

Budge et al, chs. 24-25.

Jones, et. al, chs. 26, 27.

Economic policies

Presentation: 'We are all Thatcherites now.' Does this apply to economic policy under Labour?

Reading: Budge et al, chs. 24-25. Jones, et. al, chs. 26, 27

Devolution in Wales and Scotland

Topic: Devolution – is Blair breaking up the UK?

Reading:

Budge et. al: chs. 11 and 12.

Jones, et al. chs. 14 and 15

www.scotland.gov.uk, www.wales.gov.uk

Britain and European Integration

Topic: Britain's attitude towards and relationship with the European project: Why has Britain been such an awkward partner in Europe?

Presentation:

What could (or should) Britain have done differently in its approach to Europe?

Reading:

Budge et. al, Chs. 8-9

Jones et. al. Ch.31

The Euro

Topic: Should Britain adopt the EU's single currency?

Reading: Budge et. al, Chs. 8-9.

Jones et. al. Ch.31

London and Local Politics

Topic: What are the powers of the London Mayor, and the big issues facing Londoners?

Reading: Budge et al, ch. 12., www.london.gov.uk

Northern Ireland

Topic: Attempting the regulation of ethno-national conflict in Northern Ireland.

Presentation: All of Ireland should be governed by the Irish

Reading: Budge et. al. ch.10, Jones et. al. ch.30