NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

SUMMER IN LONDON 2017

BRITISH POLITICS

Lecturer: Dr Scott Kelly
**COURSE OBJECTIVE**

This course provides an introduction to British politics, and therefore carries no previous political science requirements. It will provide an introduction to the study of politics, focusing predominantly on the British system of government and the historical processes that have shaped modern Britain. The topics include theories of the state, parties and party systems, central government, nationalism, devolution, the Northern Ireland question, ‘Brexit’ and Britain’s awkward relationship with the European Union. The course topics will be approached from a theoretical and historical perspective in the lectures, and applied to analysis of current British politics in the classes.

**CORE TEXTS**

You should purchase the following core textbook for this course:


The following is also recommended for more detailed analysis of some core issues:


The following may also be useful:

P. Norton’s *The British Polity* provides a good introduction to the subject.


T. Bingham, *The Rule of Law* (Penguin, 2011) is a good introduction to the role of the judiciary in public policy.
**THE MASS MEDIA**

You are **required** to read at least one English quality paper daily, as analysis of current events in class will otherwise be impossible. Roughly, in terms of political viewpoint, from right to left these are: *the Daily Telegraph, the Times, The Independent* (only available online) and *the Guardian*.

*The Economist* provides a good weekly overview and analysis. The Senate House Library holds back issues.

**THE INTERNET**

The political parties have web-sites, as do all UK papers (*The Times* has a paywall). The European Union Web-site is worth visiting (www.europa.eu.int) as is the BBC (http.news.bbc.co.uk).

**GRADING, COURSE-WORK AND EXAMS**

**Paper: 40%**
You will be required to write a paper of between 2,000 and 2,500 words long. The essay questions are set out below. All citations should be cited in full, e.g. as a footnote in the following form.\(^1\) Please include a bibliography of works consulted.
The paper will be due at the beginning of week 6.

**Exam 40%**
The Course features a final exam. You will be asked to answer 2 essay questions in one hour.

**Class Presentations and Participation: 20%**
You will be asked to do a short class presentation during the term, and to provide brief accounts of the week’s developments in British politics. The class participation grade reflects these assignments as well as overall performance in class. All students are expected to contribute to class discussions on a weekly basis.

No unexplained absences are permitted from this class. If unexplained absences occur they may have an impact on your class participation mark.

---

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Please make sure you answer the questions. If you wish to write on another topic, please arrange this in advance.

1. Are there any meaningful ideological differences between the main British political parties?

2. “The House of Commons is little more than a talking-shop” – discuss.

3. “The Prime Minister is only as strong as his or her colleagues allow him or her to be” – discuss.

4. Do strong interest groups cause bad government?

5. Will devolution lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom?


7. “The doctrine of Parliamentary Sovereignty means that the judiciary is powerless to check the executive” – discuss.

8. Would Britain benefit from a written constitution?
SECTION ONE: THE BRITISH STATE

WEEK I: a) INTRODUCTION: THE WESTMINSTER MODEL

Essential Reading

B. Jones “Politics in perspective”, chapter 1 from B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran and P. Norton, Politics UK.

Other Reading

A. Gamble ‘What’s British about British Politics?’ in Developments 10

WEEK I: b) PARLIAMENT

Essential Reading


Other Reading

M. Russell ‘Parliament: A significant restraint on Government’ in Developments 10

WEEK II: a) THE CONSTITUTION

Class discussion topic:

Would Britain benefit from a codified constitution?

Essential Reading


**WEEK II: b) POLITICAL PARTIES AND IDEOLOGY AND VOTING IN THE UK**

**Class discussion topic:**
What do the two main British political parties stand for? Are there any significant differences between them?

**Essential Reading**


**Other Reading**

M. Kenny ‘Ideological politics and the party system’ in *Developments 10*

P. Webb ‘The Party System: turbulent multi-partyism or Duopolistic Competition? In *Developments 10*

P. Cowley ‘Political recruitment and the political class’ in *Developments 10*

---

**WEEK III: a) THE MYTH AND REALITY OF CABINET GOVERNMENT**

**Class Discussion topic:**
Are British Prime Ministers more powerful than American Presidents?

**Essential Reading**


P. Norton, “Ministers, departments and civil servants”, chapter 18 from *Politics UK*

**Other Reading**

B. Yong and T. Bale ‘Britain’s Experience of Coalition Government: Continuity and Change’ in *Developments 10*
**WEEK III: b) MINISTERS, CIVIL SERVANTS AND LOBBYISTS**

**Class discussion topic:**
Would Britain benefit from a growth in political lobbying?

**Essential Reading**


B. Jones, “Pressure Groups” chapter 10 from Politics UK.

**Other Reading**

C. Haddon ‘Developments in the Civil Service’ in Developments 10

M. Grasso ‘Political Participation’ in Developments 10

**SECTION TWO: CHALLENGES TO THE BRITISH STATE**

**WEEK IV: a) BRITAIN AND EU: AN AWKWARD PARTNER?**

**Class Discussion Topic:**
Has EU membership undermined British sovereignty?

**Essential Reading**

N. Rees, “Britain and the future of the EU”, chapter 27 from B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran & P. Norton Politics UK

**Other Reading**

A. Geddes ‘Britain beyond the European Union’ in Developments 10
**WEEK IV: b) JUDICIARY AND THE BRITISH STATE**

**Class Discussion topic:**
Should the Courts be made more powerful in the British political system?

**Essential Reading**


---

**WEEK V: a) NATIONALISM: SCOTTISH & WELSH DEVOLUTION NORTHERN IRELAND**

**Class discussion topic:**
Is devolution likely to lead to the break up of the United Kingdom?

**Essential Reading**


**Other Reading**

C. Jeffery ‘The United Kingdom after the Scottish Referendum’ in *Developments 10*.

---

**WEEK V: a) NATIONALISM: NORTHERN IRELAND**

**Class discussion topic:**
Is genuine democracy possible in a divide society like Northern Ireland?

**Essential Reading**

WEEK VI: a) TRIP TO PARLIAMENT

WEEK VI: b) FINAL EXAM