

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

SUMMER IN LONDON 2007

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, and the development of politics and policies in 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:

- B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran and P. Norton, *Politics UK*, (London, Pearson Education Ltd, 2006) SIXTH EDITION.

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

- P. Dunleavy, A. Gamble & G. Peele (Eds.) *Developments in British Politics 8* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

The following may also be useful:

S. George and I. Bache, *Politics and Policy in the European Union* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001) provides a good overview of the European Union.

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

Cook & Sked's *Post-War Britain* provides a useful historical overview of post-war Britain.

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 from right to left these are: *the Daily Telegraph*, *the Times*, *the Independent* and *the Guardian*.

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

THE INTERNET

The political parties have web-sites, as do most UK papers. 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. Please word-process your papers. 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.

Exams 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.

¹ S. George, *Politics and Policy in the European Union* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996).

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. Why should power-sharing work today in Northern Ireland when it failed in the past?
6. "Membership of the European Union has undermined the Member States' sovereignty" - discuss.
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 & M. Moran, "Introduction: Explaining Politics", chapter 1 in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran and P. Norton, *Politics UK*.

Other Reading

P. Dunleavy et al, "Introduction", Chapter 1 in *Developments 8*

P. Dunleavy, "The 'Westminster Model' and the Distinctiveness of British Politics" in *Developments 8*

WEEK I: B) THE POLITICS OF THE CONSTITUTION

Essential Reading

P. Norton, "The Changing Constitution", Chapter 15 in *Politics UK*

P. Norton, "The Crown", Chapter 16 in *Politics UK*

Other Reading

M. Flinders, "The Half-Hearted Constitutional Revolution", in *Developments 8*

WEEK II: A) PARLIAMENT

Class discussion topic:

Should the powers of Parliament be strengthened? If so, how?

Essential Reading

P. Norton, "The House of Commons", in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran, and P. Norton, *Politics UK*, (London, 2001).

P. Norton, "The House of Lords", in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran and P. Norton, *Politics UK*, (London, 2001).

Other Reading

P. Cowley, "Making Parliament Matter" in *Developments 8*

WEEK II: B) POLITICAL PARTIES AND IDEOLOGY 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

B. Jones, "Defining the Political World", in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran and P. Norton, *Politics UK*.

D. Kavanagh, "Voting Behaviour" in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran and P. Norton, *Politics UK*.

Other Reading

S. Childs, "Political Parties and Party Systems" in *Developments 8*

WEEK III : A) THE MYTH AND REALITY OF CABINET GOVERNMENT

Class Discussion topic:

Are British Prime Ministers more powerful than American Presidents?

Essential Reading

D. Kavanagh, "The Cabinet and Prime Minister" in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran, and P. Norton, *Politics UK*.

P. Norton, "Ministers, departments and civil servants", in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran and P. Norton, *Politics UK*.

Other Reading

R Heffernan, "The Blair Style of Central Government" in *Developments 8*

WEEK III: B) MINISTERS, CIVIL SERVANTS AND LOBBYISTS

Class discussion topic:

Would Britain benefit from a growth in political lobbying?

Essential Reading

B. Jones, "The policy-making process" in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran and P. Norton, *Politics UK*.

B. Jones, "Pressure Groups" in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran and P. Norton, *Politics UK*.

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

S. Bulmer, "Britain and European Integration", in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran & P. Norton, *Politics UK*.

Other Reading

M. Smith, "Britain, Europe and the World" in *Developments 8*

WEEK IV: B) THE JUDICIARY AND THE BRITISH STATE

Class Discussion topic:

Should the Courts be made more powerful in the British political system?

Essential Reading

P. Norton, "The Judiciary" in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran and P. Norton *Politics UK*.

Other Reading

M. Flinders, "The Half-Hearted Constitutional Revolution", in *Developments 8*

M. Saward, "The State and Civil Liberties in the Post 9-11 World" in *Developments 8*

WEEK V: A) ELECTORAL REFORM

Class discussion topic:

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the plurality form of election? Is electoral reform necessary?

Essential Reading

D. Kavanagh, "Elections", chapter 8 in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran and P. Norton *Politics UK*.

Other Reading

J. Bartle and S. Laycock, "Elections and Voting" in *Developments 8*

WEEK V: B) NATIONALISM AND SCOTTISH & WELSH DEVOLUTION

Class discussion topic:

Is devolution likely to lead to the break up of the United Kingdom?

Essential Reading

Bill Jones, "Devolution" in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran and P. Norton
Politics UK.

Other Reading

C. Jeffery, "Devolution and the Lopsided State" in *Developments 8*

WEEK VI: A) NATIONALISM AND POLITICS: NORTHERN IRELAND

Class discussion topic:

Is meaningful democracy possible in Northern Ireland?

Essential Reading

J. Tonge, "Northern Ireland", in B. Jones, D. Kavanagh, M. Moran & P. Norton, *Politics UK*

WEEK VI: FINAL EXAM