

**Course Title: British Politics**

**Course Learning Outcomes:**

- Acquiring knowledge of social and economic contexts of British politics
- Exposure to British political culture, governmental institutions, elections, the legal system, and the media
- Gaining first hand experience in conducting independent research
- Comparative analysis of British and American political systems

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This is an introductory course on contemporary British politics, and therefore requires no previous political science courses. The overall objective of the course is to provide the students in a systematic fashion with a basic understanding of the system of government and the political process in Britain, as well as the socio-historical processes that have shaped modern Britain. These include the Monarchy, the Parliament, political parties, the Prime Minister, political ideology, and political culture; are among topics discussed in this course. Throughout the course, comparisons with American politics and society will be made as a point of reference to provide the student with a better framework for understanding British politics.

You are also required to read on a daily basis relevant articles in quality dailies, such as *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. Other publications should be consulted, such as *The Economist* and *The New Statesmen*. Students are also advised to watch the television news. In particular, BBC 2 *Newsnight* (weekdays at 22.30) or Channel Four *News* (Weekdays at 19.00).

**CORE TEXTBOOK:** Robert Leach, Bill Coxall and Lynton Robins, British Politics, Palgrave, 2006

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### **Course Requirements**

You will write one essay of between 1500 – 2000 words. You must submit the essay by hard copy in class by the date specified below. Students will also make a presentation to the class in pairs on a subject that is relevant to the class.

There will be a final examination, which will take the form of essay questions. These questions will cover topics you have studied over the course of the semester in the readings and lectures. Finally, discussion questions are outlined for each class. I will expect you to be aware of current developments in British politics

Students are also strongly advised to make a number of independent visits to sites that bear relevance to British politics and society, that relate to the topic or topics scheduled for discussion at the class meeting.

#### **COURSE ASSESSMENT:**

1. Essay: 25%
2. Presentation: 25%
3. Participation 10%
4. Final: 40

#### **ATTENDANCE POLICY:**

You will have 30% off your participation grade deducted for every absence from a class meeting.

## Course Outline

	<b>Topics</b>
TOPIC 1	<b>Introduction to the course.</b> Political, historical, and social background of Britain since WWII Reading: Leach et al, <u>British Politics</u> , chapter 1.
TOPIC 2	<b>The British Constitution</b> <b>Reading:</b> Leach et al, <u>British Politics</u> , chapters 10 and 16 <b>Discussion questions:</b> The case for a written constitution. Does the Monarchy have a future?
TOPIC 3	<b>The Executive.</b> Reading: Leach et al, <u>British Politics</u> , chapters 11 and 12 <b>Discussion questions:</b> the powers of the Prime Minister. What are they, and how far are they controlled? Are they similar to those of the US President?
TOPIC 4	<b>Visit to the Cabinet War Rooms</b>
TOPIC 5	<b>Parliament.</b> Reading: Leach et al, <u>British Politics</u> , chapter 13 <b>Discussion questions:</b> what roles do the Houses of Parliament play?
TOPIC 5	<b>Visit to the Houses of Parliament</b> <b>Discussion questions:</b> how important are political parties in modern politics compared with special interest groups?
TOPIC 6	<b>Political Parties and Elections</b>  Reading: Leach et al, <u>British Politics</u> , chapters 5, 7 and 8  <b>ESSAYS DUE</b>
TOPIC 7	<b>The Legal System.</b> Readings: Leach et al, <u>British Politics</u> , chapter 14 <b>Discussion question:</b> how far should the judiciary limit the powers of the executive? Specific attention will be placed on the 'war against terror'.
TOPIC 8	<b>British Foreign Policy – the 'special relationship'</b> Reading: Leach et al, <u>British Politics</u> , chapter 26 <b>Discussion question:</b> why does the UK rely on its relationship with the US and how does it benefit Washington?
TOPIC 9	<b>Visit to the Imperial War Museum</b>
TOPIC 10	<b>The Armed Forces and the State</b>
TOPIC 11	<b>Class Presentations and Final Examination</b>

### Grade Descriptions

<b>Grade</b>	
<b>A</b> <b>A-</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Displays evidence of extensive and detailed research;</li> <li>• Displays clear evidence of independence of thought and originality;</li> <li>• There is strong evidence of critical and analytical thinking, an ability to contextualize, grasp concepts and their interrelationship, and to relate theory to practice;</li> <li>• Shows evidence of breadth and depth of knowledge;</li> <li>• Contains appropriate references, quotations, and bibliography to illustrate points and reinforce arguments.</li> </ul> <p><b>Projects and Practical Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates innovative use of relevant technology and skills, together with a strong ability to apply, in the right measure, the appropriate skills to achieve</li> </ul>

	<p>the desired outcome.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Displays strong evidence of the ability to relate theory to practice;</li> <li>• Displays high standards in the overall execution and presentation of the final work;</li> <li>• Contains clear evidence of independent thought and creativity.</li> </ul>
<p><b>B+</b> <b>B</b> <b>B-</b></p>	<p>The student's work is above average in the following ways:</p> <p><b>Essays:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Displays relevant knowledge with evidence of wide-ranging research, but probably not both;</li> <li>• There is evidence of critical and analytical thinking, an ability to contextualize, grasp concepts and their interrelationship, and to relate theory to practice;</li> <li>• Work is well-written, but may lack clarity and with good but not flawless grammar, spelling and punctuation;</li> <li>• There is some evidence of independent thought.</li> </ul> <p><b>Projects or Practical Assignments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is evidence of the ability to relate theory to practice;</li> <li>• Creative work shows some degree of originality;</li> <li>• Aspects of the work may be outstanding and reflective of independent thinking, but are not consistently so;</li> <li>• Considered use of relevant technology and skills is clearly demonstrated with an ability to apply the necessary skills to achieve the desired outcome;</li> <li>• Displays a generally good standard in the execution and presentation of work.</li> </ul>
<p><b>C+</b> <b>C</b> <b>C-</b></p>	<p>The student's work is of average quality in the following ways:</p> <p><b>Essays:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge demonstrated is generally relevant, but not necessarily comprehensive;</li> <li>• Research, where undertaken, is neither wide-ranging nor detailed;</li> <li>• There is evidence of conceptual understanding, but critical and analytical judgements may be lacking;</li> <li>• There is insufficient use of referencing, arguments may not be fully formed, and structure may be flawed;</li> <li>• Writing is adequate but may lack clarity and contain major grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors;</li> <li>• Displays some evidence of independent thought, but not enough to form original conclusions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Projects and Practical Assignments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competent standards are demonstrated in the execution and presentation of the work;</li> <li>• Demonstrates competent use of relevant technology and skills, but may contain technological flaws or methodological errors;</li> <li>• Creative work may be competently executed, but flawed in its certain respects or lack sufficient originality;</li> <li>• Displays some evidence of ability to relate theory to practice, but only on a limited attempt to explore the context which the project has been assigned.</li> </ul>
<p><b>D</b></p>	<p>The student's work is below average in the following ways:</p> <p><b>Essays:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge is incomplete and superficial. Research, though evident, is cursory;</li> <li>• Displays limited evidence of conceptual understanding or signs of critical or analytical thinking;</li> <li>• The work is executed and presented to a not entirely acceptable standard;</li> <li>• Writing is adequate, but may demonstrate poor organization or some lack of</li> </ul>

	<p>clarity. May contain grammatical errors or extensive use of idioms;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Displays minimal independence or originality of thought.</li> </ul> <p><b>Projects and Practical Assignments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The standard of execution and presentation is not wholly satisfactory;</li> <li>• The relevant use of technology and skills displays only a limited ability to achieve the desired outcome;</li> <li>• The work may be of good standard but shows limited independent thinking and consistency;</li> <li>• The work shows minimal evidence of the ability to relate theory to practice and insufficient effort to explore the context within which the project has been assigned;</li> <li>• Creative works lacks originality or is flawed in its execution.</li> </ul>
<b>F</b>	<p>The student's work is of inadequate quality in the following ways:</p> <p><b>Essays:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge is insufficient in quality, scope or relevance. There is little or no evidence of research, or research has been misinterpreted so as to present a distorted view;</li> <li>• There is little or no evidence of conceptual understanding or demonstration of meaningful critical or analytic thinking;</li> <li>• There is little or no evidence of independent or original thought;</li> <li>• There is no clear argument, or the central thesis may be poorly argued and lacking in appropriate referencing;</li> <li>• Writing is unclear, inadequately structured, or incomprehensible. Language skills including vocabulary, grammar, spelling or syntax may be inadequate for academic work;</li> <li>• Standard execution and presentation is unacceptable.</li> </ul> <p><b>Projects or Practical Assignments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is insufficient evidence of an ability to relate theory to practice;</li> <li>• Poor standards are demonstrated in the use of technology and skills, and with little or no evidence of the ability to apply the necessary skills to achieve the desired outcome;</li> <li>• Execution and presentation of the work are poor;</li> <li>• There is no evidence of independent thought;</li> <li>• There is unclear, inarticulate or incomprehensible.</li> </ul>

### **Additional Readings**

Note: the following readings are available on request.

Barker, David, 'Britain and Europe: The Argument Continues', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 54, 2001, pp. 276-288.

Barker, David, Britain and Europe: Treading Water or Slowly Drowning, Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 56, 2003, pp. 257-275

Barnett, Anthony, 'The Constitutional Crisis and the Monarchy', Politics Review, Vol. 5, No. 1, September 1995, pp. 1-4.

Bogdanor, Vernon, 'Devolution: Decentralisation or Disintegration?', The Political Quarterly, Vol. 70, No. 2, April-June 1999, pp. 185-194.

Bogdanor, Vernon, 'Reform of the House of Lords: A Sceptical View', The Political Quarterly, Vol. 74/ 4, October-December 1999, pp. 375-381.

Bogdanor, Vernon, 'The Constitution and the party System in the Twentieth Century', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 57/4, 2004, pp. 717-733.

Bradbury, Jonathan and James Mitchell, 'Devolution: New Politics for Old?', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 54, 2001, pp. 257-275.

Byrne, Iain and Stuart Weir, 'Democratic Audit: Executive Democracy in War and Peace', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 57/2, 2004, pp. 453-468.

Cowley, Philip, 'The Commons: Mr Blair's Lapdog', Parliamentary Affairs, 54 (2001), pp. 815-828.

Crowe, Brian, 'A common European foreign policy after Iraq?', International Affairs, 79, 3 (2003), pp. 533-546.

Danchev, Alex, 'On Specialness', International Affairs, 72, 4 (1996), pp. 737-750.

Danchev, Alex, 'On friendship: Anglo-American Relations at fin siecle', International Affairs, 73, 4 (1997), pp. 747-759

Donnelly, Katy, 'Parliamentary Reform: Paving the Way for Constitutional Change', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 50, 1997, pp. 246-262.

Dunne, Tim, 'When the Shooting Starts: Atlanticism in British Security Strategy', International Affairs, 80, 5 (2004), pp. 893-909.

Flinders, Matthew, 'Shifting the Balance? Parliament, the Executive and the British Constitution', Political Studies, 50, 2002, pp. 23-42.

Grant, Alan, 'Party and Election Finance in Britain and America: A Comparative Analysis', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 58/1, 2005, pp. 71-88.

Hazell, Robert, 'Labour's Constitutional Revolution', Politics Review, November 1999, pp. 2-5.

Hazell, Robert, 'Reforming the Constitution', The Political Quarterly, Vol. 72, No. 1, January-March 2001, pp. 39-49.

Hazell, Robert, Meg Russell, Jeremy Croft, Ben Seyd and Roger Masterman, 'The Constitution: Rolling out the New Settlement' Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 54, 2001, pp. 190-205.

Hazell, Robert, Meg Russell, Jeremy Croft, Ben Seyd and Roger Masterman, 'The Constitution: Consolidation and Cautious Advance', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 56, pp. 157-169.

Heffernan, Richard, 'Why the Prime Minister cannot be a President: Comparing Constitutional Imperatives in Britain and America', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 58/1, 2005, pp. 53-70.

Hennessy, Peter, The Hidden Wiring (London: Victor Gollancz, 1995).

Hennessy, Peter, The Prime Minister: The Office and its Holders since 1956 (London: Allen Lane Press/Penguin, 2001).

Hennessy, Peter, 'Rulers and Servants of the State: The Blair Style of Government 1997-2004'. Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 58/1, 2005, pp. 6-16.

Hennessy, Peter, 'Informality and Circumspection: the Blair Style of Government', The Political Quarterly, 2005, pp. 3-11.

Jones, Erik, 'Debating the Transatlantic Relationship: Rhetoric and Reality', International Affairs, 80, 4 (2004), pp. 595-612.

Kellner, Peter, 'Britain's Culture of Detachment', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 57/4, 2004, pp. 830-843.

Prince, Sue, 'The Law and Politics: Upsetting the Judicial Apple-Cart', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 57/2, 2004, pp. 288-300.

Riddell, Peter, 'Prime Ministers and Parliament', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 57/4, 2004, pp. 814-829.

Seaton, Janet and Barry K. Winetrobe, 'Modernising the Commons', The Political Quarterly, Vol. 70/2, April-June 1999, pp. 152-160.

Shaw, Malcolm, 'The British Parliament in International Perspective', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 57/4, 2004, pp. 877-889.

Smith, Julie, 'A Missed Opportunity? New Labour's European Policy 1997-2005', International Affairs, 81, 4 (2005), pp. 703-721.

Stephens, Philip, 'The Blair Government and Europe', The Political Quarterly, Vol. 72, No. 1, January-March 2001, pp. 67-75.

Theakston, Kevin, 'Prime Minister's and the Constitution: Attlee to Blair', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 58/1, 2005, pp. 17-37.

Wallace, William, 'The Collapse of British Foreign Policy'. International Affairs, 82, 1 (2005), pp. 53-68.

Williams, Paul, 'Who's Making British Foreign Policy', International Affairs, Vol. 80, No. 5 (2004), pp. 909-929.

## Some Guidance for Essays

1. Consider the question throughout – how does each point you make contribute to your answer.
2. Know what you are talking about – do not include technical terms, names, quotes from books, just to impress the reader.
3. Avoid long quotations.
4. Be critical. If you consider someone's idea or explanation inadequate, say so and why – do it clearly and simply.
5. Make sure your essay has a structure to it: i.e. it must have an introduction, middle and a conclusion. Start by explaining what the question means; outline how you are going to answer it. Then move onto the main body of the essay making your points, and backing them with references. Finally, draw some conclusions.
6. Answer the question.

### Essays: (1,800-2,000 words)

- **DO NOT MAKE UP YOUR OWN ESSAY TITLE**
- **You will also lose marks for not writing the appropriate number of words.**
- **Footnotes/references and a full bibliography are mandatory.**

1. Why does the 'Special Relationship' remain a central part of British Foreign Policy?
2. Does the United Kingdom have a constitution?
3. Compare and contrast the powers of the British Prime Minister and the President of the United States.
4. Why has membership of the European Union divided opinion in the UK?
5. To what extent is the judiciary able to challenge executive decision-making in the United Kingdom compared with the United States?
6. To what extent are the House of Commons able to control the power of the Executive?

**A note on internet sources:** under no circumstances will students use encyclopaedic websites like Wikipedia. Students who use sites of this nature will fail the assignment.