

St. Lawrence University
London Programme
Dr Andreas Staab
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British Politics

Contact:

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

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 in British political debates. The emphasis will be contemporary debates, whilst integrating an international, often comparative outlook, although 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 aim to use the location of London as Britain's political capital but also as one of the world's most diverse urban centres, complemented by a variety of excursions and study trips.

Learning Outcome:

Students who undertake this course and participate fully can expect to gain a thorough knowledge of the country's political process. 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 (with particular reference to class participation):

Attendance at the sessions and excursions is obligatory. The sessions combine introductory lectures, presentations, discussions and group work. Presentations should provide an introduction to the key themes which open the seminar for further discussion. In some sessions, students are asked to participate in debates, during which presenters should aim to make controversial (but reasoned) contributions, questioning the other presenters' points 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 seminar is to develop curiosity in the subject, to exchange information and to explore approaches and debates. **Students are expected to prepare for each session, to the extent that they are able to point to the key problems and challenges of each topic.**

Assessment

The final course grade consists of four components:

1. First Take-Home Essay: 20 %
2. Report on 'Multiculturalism: 20 %
3. Presentation and Class participation: 20 %
4. Final Take Home exam: 40 %

- The report on multi-culturalism is based on your interview with a council official responsible for ethnic diversity at one of the London boroughs to which you will be assigned to. The report should be analytical and in-depth with a space limit of 1000 words.

- Two extended essays: the first one will be handed out towards the beginning (around Week 3), while the final exam will be handed out on our last day of class. In both take-home exams, students will be given a choice of questions, out of which they have to answer one. Proper referencing, footnotes and a bibliography are expected. At least five sources per essay should be consulted. The space limit for each of these essays is 1000 words.

- 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:

- The Westminster system of government: The Prime Minister has no power (Wed September 15).
- Europe: What could/should the UK have done differently in its approach to Europe? (Tuesday, September 28)
- Economic policies: We are all Thatcherites now? (Wednesday, October 27)
- Northern Ireland. Should all of Ireland be governed by the Irish? (Tuesday, November 9)

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.

4.00	10 points (outstanding intellectual and organizational achievement)
3.75	9 points (exceptional)
3.50	8 points (very good)
3.25	7 points (good)
3.00	6 points (average)
2.75	5 points (satisfactory)
2.50	4 points (limited)
2.25	3 points (deficient)
2.00	2 points (severe shortcomings)

Essential Reading:

Budge, Crewe, McKay and Newton (2007). *The New British Politics*, London, Pearson Longman. 4th edition.

Further Reading:

For further study, exam preparation or for presentations, you ought to consult more than just a text book. Below are some sources which are at our library.

- Dearlove, J and Saunders, P (2000) *Introduction to British Politics*, Polity, Cambridge.
- Dunleavy, P, Gamble, A; Holliday, I and Peele, G (2006) *Developments in British Politics 8*, London, Palgrave. Check out the updates on the www.palgrave.com/politics/dunleavy website)
- Dunleavy, P, Gamble, A; Heffernan, R, I and Peele, G (2003) *Developments in British Politics 7*, London, Palgrave
- Seldon, A (ed. 2001) *The Blair effect*, London, Little, Brown and Co.
- Jones, B, Kavanagh, D, Moran, M, Norton, P (2004) *Politics UK – fifth edition*, Longman (utilise in particular the book's website, www.booksites.net/jones)

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. The Seldon book offers the best assessment of the first period in office of the Blair government, but is directed primarily at the British 'political pundit'. 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.

Study Visits and Excursions:

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:

- A visit to the House of Commons (the UK's parliament). Wednesday, November 3
- Visit to City Hall on Wednesday October 20 from 10.00 to 11.30, when the London Mayor has to answer questions from the London Assembly.
- Intelligence squared: public debate on 'Assisted Suicide' on Tuesday, October 19 from 6.45 – 8.30 at the Royal Geographic Society, Kensington Gore, Tube: South Kensington (directions to be given in class)
- Students will also have to organise an interview with the ethnic diversity department at one of the London councils. We will prepare for these interviews in a special session in class. The interview should be summarized in a report which represents a part of the overall assessment (see page 2).
- We will also attend a public lecture at the nearby London School of Economics; one of the world's top universities, which regularly invites public speakers of extremely high calibre. We will decide in class which lecture we should attend.

Internet:

Naturally, the internet can also be an invaluable source of information. In particular the BBC's website is excellent (and massive). You might also want to look at the websites of the UK's national newspapers (such as www.guardian.co.uk, www.ft.com, www.independent.co.uk, www.telegraph.co.uk, www.thetimes.co.uk). The official website of the UK government is: www.ukonline.gov.uk. Be advised though that websites are no replacement for proper research into academic articles and books. While the former offer up-to-date information, they also often lack analytical depth, which is where the latter excels.

Course Calendar

Sep 1	the Constitution of the United Kingdom
Sep 7 and 8	the Westminster Model: the Core Executive
Sep 14 and 15	the Westminster Model: Parliament and Party System <u>Please note: First Essay handed out</u>
Sep 21 and 22	<u>No class</u> : compensation for LSE visit and Intel. Squ. Debate
Sep 28	Britain and the European Union
Sep 29	Multiculturalism
Oct 5	Electoral Systems and Electoral Behaviour
Oct 6	The 2010 elections
Oct 12 and 13	<u>No class</u> : Term Break
Oct 19: 10.00 – 12.00	London and local politics
Oct 19: 6.30 – 8.00	Intelligence Squared Debate: assisted suicide
Oct 20	<u>Visit to City Hall</u>
Oct 26	Social policies
Oct 27	Economic policies
Nov 2	Devolution in Wales and Scotland
Nov 3	<u>Visit to the House of Commons</u> : Meeting time and place TBA
Nov 9	Northern Ireland
Nov 10	Workshop: Presentation of Multi-culturalism Report
Nov 15 – 19	Exam Week

Still to be decided and/or confirmed:

- Visit to the House of Commons
- Public lecture at the London School of Economics

Course Topics:

The Constitution of the United Kingdom

Topics:

- Introduction to the course material and ways through which to examine the British political system
- Characteristics of the UK constitution
- Recent constitutional Changes

Reading: Budge¹: chs. 1 and 4

The Westminster Model: The Core Executive

Topics:

- Actors and institutions within the UK's system of government
- The functions and powers of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and government departments

Reading:

Budge, chs. 5 and 6. Jones, chs. 19-20

The Westminster Model: Parliament and Party Systems

Presentation: The Prime Minister has no power

Topics:

- Placing parliament in the context of modern politics.
- The main ideologies and political families in British Politics

Reading: Budge, chs.16-18.

Britain and European Integration

Presentation:

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

Topics:

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

Reading: Budge, chs. 8-9. Jones et. al. Ch.31

Multiculturalism

Topics:

- To what extent is the UK a multi-cultural society?
- Where within the UK is multiculturalism most (and least) prevalent?
- What is the country's immigration policy and how has it changed over time?

Reading: Budge, ch. 26

¹ Please note: The chapter references of the Budge book are based on the fourth edition (2007). The older editions have different chapter structures, so please adjust accordingly.

Electoral Systems and Electoral Behaviour and the 2010 election

Topics:

- The electoral System of the UK: Do votes still count?
- Analysis of the 2005 elections: party pledges, the campaign, the strategies
- Analysis of the 2010 campaign: who offered what?

Reading: Budge, ch. 15. Jones, chs. 8, 9.

London and Local Politics

Topics:

- How is local government organised in the UK
- What are the powers of the London Mayor
- What are the big issues facing Londoners at the moment?

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

Social policies

Topics:

- The nature of social policies: the welfare state
- Development and challenges of the welfare state
- Who benefits? Who (should) pay(s)?

Reading: Budge, chs. 25. Jones, chs. 26, 27.

Economic policies

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

Topics

- Economic actors
- Income and Spending of the UK
- Thatcherism and Blairism

Reading: Budge, chs. 24. Jones, chs. 26, 27

Devolution in Wales and Scotland

Topics:

- How are Scotland and Wales governed
- Has Devolution resulted in better democracy?
- Devolution: has Blair started the break-up of the UK?

Reading: Budge, chs. 11. Jones, chs. 14 and 15. www.scotland.gov.uk, www.wales.gov.uk

Northern Ireland

Presentation: All of Ireland should be governed by the Irish

Topics:

- The reasons for the historical division
- Attempting the regulation of ethno-national conflict in Northern Ireland.

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