

Government and Politics in Great Britain – (Political Science 3320)

Spring 2011

(This syllabus is current as of January 18, 2011, but is subject to change.)

Instructor: Noah Kaplan

Class: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:00 – 2:30 pm, Heyne Building 28

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Office Hours: Wednesday, 9:30 am – 11:30 am and by appointment.

This course surveys modern British politics and policy. Fifty years ago British government was seen as a model of efficiency. Then for a time its troubled economy and domestic unrest dominated the news. Next came a renaissance. Then all was doom and gloom again. After that, soon-to-be Prime Minister Blair, never one to exaggerate, promised “[t]he biggest programme of change to democracy ever proposed.” But after thirteen years in power, “New Labour” lost the 2010 election – but the Conservatives did not win a majority in Parliament! The upshot has been the first coalition government in the U.K. since the Second World War. How did all this come about? How real were the changes under New Labour and what changes can be expected under the current coalition government?

This course will introduce you to the institutions, political culture and a number of the major political issues in Britain today. The course has an overtly comparative perspective, in order that students receive exposure to the contemporary differences between politics in the USA and Britain. The first half of the course will introduce the principal British political institutions. This part is designed to provide students with a grasp of the framework within which British politics takes place. The second half of the course will cover electoral politics and various ways it has been influenced by public opinion and the mass media, a discussion of the first coalition government in the U.K. since the Second World War, and, finally, Britain’s place in the world and Britain’s relationship with Europe.

By the end of the course, you should have a good grounding in British political institutions and political culture. In other words, I hope you will have gained something of a ‘feel’ for British politics, as well as an understanding of the functioning of the political system. You should also be in a position to draw upon this understanding to critically review the structure and functioning of US political institutions (e.g. this course should assist you in thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of the US political system, and provide you with an awareness of a very different model of a democratic political system). Finally, once you have taken this course you should have a more developed understanding of the attitudes and values prevalent in contemporary Britain (e.g. why Britons hold particular social and political views, and why they hold views that are at variance with those held in the US).

Prerequisites and Expectations: Students wishing to take this course must have taken U.S. and Texas Constitutions and Politics (POLS 1336) or U.S. Government: Congress, President and Courts (POLS 1337). Because of the comparative character of the course, a sound appreciation of American government and politics is necessary for students to be able to effectively compare both political institutions and political culture across the two countries.

The lectures will be delivered on the assumption that students have done the requisite reading for the particular class. Each class will involve **both** lecture and discussion. During the discussions I will be looking for student's thoughts on the differences between the US and Britain, strengths and weaknesses of the particular component of the British system being covered, what the US might learn from British political institutions and political practice, and what the British might learn from the US, as well as how different practices and institutions might work in different settings (e.g. US institutions in a British setting or vice versa).

Readings and Assignments: Readings for each class are specified in the attached syllabus. The required books can be found at the UH bookstore. These books are:

Required Text

- *British Politics* (2006 edition) by Robert Leach, Bill Coxall and Lynton Robins.

Note: The course's textbook is available at "College Store" at 3503 Elgin (at the corner of Elgin and Scott).

Recommended Texts

- *Blair's Britain, 1997-2007* edited by Anthony Seldon.
- *Developments in British Politics 8*, edited by Patrick Dunleavy et. al.
- *Britain Since 1945*, edited by Jonathan Hollowell.

NOTE: Students are expected to have reviewed carefully the assigned weekly readings in **advance** of that week's Tuesday class. Since I do not expect you to purchase any books other than the required textbook by Leach et al., readings from works other than the textbook will be posted on the course's blackboard site the week prior (at a minimum).

Newspapers

I expect you to read regularly at least one British broadsheet throughout the course. Which broadsheet you choose is up to you. There are four major broadsheets to choose from and they are all freely accessible on the web.

- The Guardian (center left) www.guardian.co.uk
- The Independent (center) www.independent.co.uk
- The Times (center right) www.thetimes.co.uk
- The Telegraph (right/establishment) www.telegraph.co.uk

Starting January 27th, you must bring in an article from one of these four papers **every** Thursday (except exam weeks 1, 5, 9, 11 & 15). The article should be related to the topic of the week (to the extent possible). You must have your name and the date on the article and hand it in at the end of class. I will often initiate discussion by asking a student to read her/his article aloud to the class and then ask questions related to the article. Of the 10 weeks you are expected to submit an article, you can miss one without penalty.

Exams: There will be three exams. The exams will be on February 17th, March 31st and April 28th.

Grading:

1. Attendance, participation and weekly newspaper article – 25%.

The weekly readings must be read before the first class for which they are assigned. Readings for each week are specified in the attached syllabus. You should always come prepared to discuss the assigned material. I will call on individuals to respond to specific questions from time to time. I have kept the readings relatively manageable - 60 to 100 pages a week, on average. I have done this to facilitate your ability to stay current with the readings, as well as to encourage close scrutiny of the texts.

Attendance is taken at the beginning of each class period. If you miss more than two classes, your course grade will be reduced by one letter grade for each additional class you miss. If you do not miss more than two classes and you bring in newspaper articles on all the required dates, but do not participate in class discussions, you will receive a “B” for this part of your grade. The more you participate in class discussion, the more I will “bump up” your grade for this part of the course (up to a maximum of “A+”).

2. Each exam will be worth 25% of the final grade.

Prerequisites: This course presupposes a basic knowledge of the American political system, as demonstrated by the completion of “U.S. and Texas Constitutions and Politics” and “U.S. Government: Congress, President and Courts” (i.e., 1336 and 1337 are prerequisites).

Make-Up Exams: I will give make-up exams only in extraordinary circumstances. These are limited to 1) absences due to membership in an official university group or athletic team that will be out of town on the day of the exam 2) serious illness or injury and 3) family emergencies. In all instances, I will require documentation. Students who will miss an exam due to membership in an official university group must notify me at least FIVE days in advance, and I will have you take the exam before you leave town.

Academic Etiquette: Do not carry on side conversations or read the newspaper during class. Doing so is disrespectful to your classmates, and I will ask you to leave the room. Turn off all cell phones during class. Turn off all laptop computers during class. All cellphones and computers must remain off your desk throughout class (e.g., they should stay in your bag etc...).

Cheating and Plagiarism: All students are expected to observe the University of Houston’s rules against cheating and plagiarism. See the section on “Academic Honesty” in the University of Houston Studies handbook for a full statement regarding UH’s rules against cheating and plagiarism. A succinct discussion of the University’s policies with links to all the relevant regulations can be found at http://www.uh.edu/provost/stu/stu_syllabsuppl.html. Any violation may result in expulsion from the University. Cheating and plagiarism in this class will be punished to the maximum extent possible.

ADA Statement: The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal antidiscrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact UH's Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at (713) 743-5400.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1 (Jan. 18th & 20th) – Introduction/Logistics and Demographics/SES

The first session will provide an introduction to the course. The second will review some of the basic demographic and social/economic characteristics of the contemporary UK.

For Thursday, Jan. 21st, read

- Leach, Chapter 3 (pages 35-52)

Week 2 (Jan. 25th & 27th) – A Bit of Background: Trends in Post-War British History & Ideology

- Leach, Chapters 2 & 6
- Holloway, Chapter 12
- Recommended: Holloway, Chapter 8 (on post-war British political theory)

Week 3 (Feb. 1st & 3rd) – The Prime Minister & Cabinet Government

- Leach, Chapters 11 & 12
- Dunleavy, Chapter 2
- Recommended: Seldon, Chapter 1

Week 4 (Feb. 8th & 10th) – Parliament

- Leach, Chapter 13
- Dunleavy, Chapter 3
- Seldon, Chapter 2

Week 5 (Feb. 15th & 17th) – The Changing Constitution

- Leach, Chapter 10
- Seldon, Chapter
- Recommended: *Dunleavy 7, Chapter 2

NOTE: First Exam on Feb. 17th.

Week 6 (Feb. 22nd & 24th) – Parties

- Leach, Chapter 7
- Holloway, Chapter 3
- *Dunleavy 7, Chapter 7

Week 7 (March 1st & 3rd) – Parties (continued)

- Seldon, Chapter 8
- Dunleavy, Chapter 4
- “Labour’s Third Term: A Tale of Two Prime Ministers” by Nicolas Allen (36 pages) in *Britain at the Polls 2010*
- T.V. Film: “The Deal” (2003)

Week 8 (March 8th & 10th) – Campaigns, Voting & Elections

- Leach, Chapter 4 & 5
- Dunleavy, Chapters 5
- Discuss economic voting.

Week 9 (March 15th & 17th) – Spring Holiday

Week 10 (March 22nd & 24th) – Campaigns, Voting & Elections (continued)

- “Recession, Scandal and War: The Political Context,” Chapter 2 (25 pages) of *The British General Election of 2010*
- “From Blair to Brown” Chapter 3 (24 pages) of *The British General Election of 2010*
- “The Results: How Britain Voted” by David Denver (19 pages) in *Britain Votes 2010*
- “So What Went Wrong with the Electoral System? The 2010 Election Result and the Debate About Electoral Reform” by John Curtice (16 pages) in *Britain Votes 2010*
- Recommended: “The Great Divide: Voters, Parties, MPs and Expenses” (26 pages) by Oliver Heath in *Britain at the Polls 2010*

Week 11 (March 29th & March 31st) – Public Opinion, the Media & the 2010 Election

- Seldon, Chapter 3
- “The Policy Mood and the Moving Centre” by John Bartle, Sebastian Avellaneda and James Stimson (28 pages) in *Britain at the Polls 2010*
- Recommended: Less is More: Immigration and the European Integration at the 2010 Election by Sean Carey and Andrew Geddes (16 pages) in *Britain Votes 2010*

NOTE: Second Exam on March 31st.

Week 12 (April 5th & 7th) – Public Opinion, the Media & the 2010 Election (continued)

- Leach, Chapters 9
- “The Media and the 2010 Election Campaign: the Television Election?” by Dominic ring and Stephen Ward (16 pages) in *Britain Votes 2010*
- “A Much Debated Campaign” by Nicholas Allen, Judith Bara and John Bartle (27 pages) in *Britain at the Polls 2010*
- Watch some of the first debate in class
- Recommended: Seldon, Chapter 7
- Recommended: Holloway, Chapter 11

Week 13 (April 12th & 14th) – The 2010 Election and Coalition Government

- “The Politics of Coalition” by Philip Norton (19 pages) in *Britain at the Polls 2010*
- “Five Days in May: A New Political Order Emerges” by Ruth Fox (15 pages) in *Britain Votes 2010*
- “Conservative Liberal Democratic Negotiations Agreements” (about 7 pages) published May 12th: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/may/12/lib-dem-tory-deal-coalition>
- The Coalition: our programme for government (about 20 pages):

- http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/coalition_programme_for_government.pdf
- “The coalition agreement for stability and reform” (about 3 pages):
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/coalition-agreement-may-2010_0.pdf
 - Labour Oldham Byelection Victory and its Implications:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/jan/14/oldham-byelection-nick-clegg-labour-victory>

Week 14 (April 19th & 21st) – Britain and the EC/EU

- Leach, Chapter 15
- Seldon, Chapter 24
- Dunleavy, Chapter 3

Week 15 (April 26th & 28th) – Review and Third Exam

- Review/catch-up on April 26th.
- **THIRD EXAM** on April 28th.