



Boston University British Programmes
CAS PO 360 British Political Institutions
Dr Paul Cousins
Core Class,

Instructor information

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Course Overview

This course will introduce you to the main political institutions and actors in Britain today. It will focus upon the historical and cultural context of British politics and detailed consideration will be given to competing political ideas and ideologies, divergent conceptual methods drawn from the social sciences and popular perceptions of British politics. The overarching framework will be consideration of Britain as a changing *liberal democracy* and an examination will be made of what Britain shares and what differentiates it from other liberal democracies such as the U.S.A. and other European Union states. Some of the latter are unitary (as is the U.K.) others are federal.

Britain is arguably the world's oldest parliamentary democracy. It has an apparently confusing set of political institutions that combine historical continuity and change to modernity. Britain is heralded as a modern, free and democratic country, yet the head of state is a hereditary monarch, and there is an established church under the protection of the monarch. There is a bicameral legislature, yet one chamber is not elected. There are *liberties* under common law and it is only recently that human rights were codified and become an integral part of British law. There is a constitution but it is not written in a single document. Elections are free and corruption is virtually non-existent, and the electorate take a lively interest in political matters, as befits a free popular democracy. Nevertheless, there is no separation of powers, rather the reverse, in fact, and the electoral system has created a distorted political system, dominated by a Party which won just 35% of the vote on a turnout of 61% of those eligible to vote, but which has a majority of 66 seats in the House of Commons. As you may discover while you are here, there is also a culture of pervasive secrecy in public life, despite the fact that the Government is in favour of the citizen's *right to know*

At the social and cultural level mainland Britain is a strongly homogeneous and consensual polity. Religion, race, language, ethnicity, nationality all figure in society, but have not so far translated into major political cleavages. Social class is still more significant as it has been for more than a century.

Since 1973 Britain has been a member of the European Union and this has had a profound effect on British politics. It is an issue which cuts right across traditional divisions, and, at times, has come close to destroying the basic two party political system in the U.K. More recently, Scotland and Wales gained the right to govern themselves with regard to devolved matters. All these factors have contributed to causing the 'British' to question exactly who they are and what is their place in the modern world.

Last Summer, after ten years as Prime Minister, Tony Blair was replaced by Gordon Brown, who promised to govern in a different manner to his predecessor. He has, in fact, had a torrid time over the last six months. The Conservative and Liberal Democrat leaders are also new to their posts. It is an interesting time to be in London!

The course aims to give you a thorough, if basic, knowledge of political Britain, preparing you for your internship placements, and hopefully giving you an enjoyable experience at the same time!

The main **teaching method** will be by lecture but the classes will be interactive and you will be expected to participate fully.

Required reading. Please purchase and read:

I. Budge, I. Crewe, D. McKay,

K. Newton, The New British Politics (latest edition)
P Dunleavy Developments in British Politics, Number 8

Additional Reading (all in the BU library)

Some available as pdf downloads from the bu-london website: <http://www.bu-london.co.uk/PO360.html>

Bill Coxall, Lynton Robins and Robert Leach	Contemporary British Politics
H. Barnett	Britain Unwrapped
Bill Jones	Politics UK (5th Edition).
S. Ludlam	New Labour in Government
D. Leonard	Elections in Britain
D. Kavanagh	The Powers Behind the Prime Minister
D. Kavanagh et al	British Politics
R. Eccleshall	Biographical Dictionary of British prime Ministers.
T. Enright	The British Political Process: An Introduction.
V. Bogdanor	Devolution in the United Kingdom.
J. Barry-Jones	The Road to a National Assembly for Wales.
J. Morrison	Reforming Britain
P. Joyce	Law, Order and the Judiciary.
L. Pye	British Politics: Ideas and Concepts.
A. Heywood	Politics.
A. Vincent	Modern Political Ideologies.
P. Norton	The Constitution in Flux.
P. Hennessy	The Hidden Wiring.
	The Prime Minister: The Office and its Holders Since 1945
	The Secret State
M. Moran	British Politics and Society.
M. Moran	Politics and Governance in the UK
C. Pilkington	Issues in British Politics.
D. Butler et al	The British General Election of 1997.
D. Butler &	
D. Kavanagh	The British General Election of 2005
D. Wring	Marketing the Labour Party.
D. Rosenbaum	From Soapbox to Soundbite
A. Brown	Politics and Society in Scotland
B. Taylor	The Scottish Parliament.
B. Coxall & L. Robins	Britain Since the War.
J. Redwood	Stars and Strife.
R. Rogers	How Parliament Works
M. O'Neil(ed)	Devolution and British Politics
J. Tonge	Northern Ireland
A. Geddes & J. Tonge	Britain Decides
J. McGary & D O'Leary	The Northern Ireland Conflict
S. Weir	Unequal Citizens
J. Pinder	The European Union
A. Blair	Companion to the European Union
M. Keating	The Government of Scotland
Rowntree Trust	Power to the People

The above list is a sample, the most up-to-date, of an excellent collection of references on British politics. You will have no trouble finding out all you need to know. In addition, you are expected to purchase and read a "serious" British broad sheet newspaper such as *The Guardian*, *The Financial Times*, *the Independent*, *The Telegraph* or *The Times*. There are also excellent weekly publications such as *The Economist*, *New Statesman and Society* etc. The required texts provide very good academic analysis but you are required to be as up-to-date as possible with your political information. There are also very current affairs programs such as *Newsnight* on BBC 2, (no commercial breaks) and *Channel Four News*.

Boston University's Code of Student Responsibilities

All students are responsible for having read the Boston University statement on **plagiarism** that is available in the *Academic Conduct Code*. Students are advised that the penalty against students on any Boston University Program for cheating in examinations or for plagiarism may be expulsion from the program or the University; or such other penalty as may be recommended by the *Committee on Student Academic Conduct*, subject to approval by the Dean.

The value of any grade, credit, honour or degree received by a student presupposes that all work is her or his own. A student who uses or relies upon work of others or who, except under conditions expressly permitted by the instructor, furnishes assistance to another student, violates the standards of the University. Students must insist on academic honesty and integrity from their fellow students and must report promptly any case of alleged violation of academic conduct. Failure to do so is a violation of this code.

Plagiarism can take many forms, including the reproduction of published material without acknowledgement or representing the work of others as your own. This includes the increasingly common practice of obtaining and downloading *internet* sources. Students should be extremely careful when producing work for this course that all work is correctly sourced.

Attendance will be used to moderate final grades and a register will be taken at each session. Absenteeism from class without adequate written justification will result in a diminution of final grade on a pro-rata basis. Conversely, excellent attendance will result in an upgrade of the classification where the final examination standard is borderline.

Schedule and Basic Reading

Please note that precise sections, where relevant, are given below, but you are strongly encouraged to research each topic from the additional reading suggested, and the wider range of books available. Other reading will be suggested in class.

Week beginning

Induction Lectures

Reading

Citizens rights and the Constitution (Prof. Sullivan)

Budge Chapter 4, Dunleavy pp1-38

Reading

Understanding British Politics

Budge Part 1

Reading

The two Houses of Parliament: the Commons and The Lords; the Monarchy

Budge chapter 18, Dunleavy pp 18-38

Westminster Walk – details to be given in class

Reading

The Major Political Parties

Budge chapters 16 & 17, Dunleavy 119-135

Reading

The Executive: Prime Minister and Cabinet

Budge chapter 15, Dunleavy pp100-118

Reading

The Civil Service

Dunleavy pp 82-99

Reading

Local Government and Devolution; UK and EU

Budge chapters 11, 12 & 19, Dunleavy chapters 9-12

Reading

Elections and Voting Behaviour (Prof. Sullivan)

Budge chapter 15, Dunleavy pp 119-135

Final Examination:

Please note that further readings will be indicated in class

Assessment of the Course:

There will be an **end of course final examination of two hours** in which you are required to **answer two examination questions. There will also be an essay of 2500 words, to be handed in at the end of the course on an approved topic. In the third week there will be a class test.**

The examination will count for **50%** of the final grade, the paper **30%** and the test **10%**, and another **10%** will be allocated for participation and attendance.

Your grades will be based on the following criteria: the relevance of your answer to the topic chosen, clarity of expression and continuity, explicit evidence of having read the main information and arguments in the required and supplementary reading. In addition, extra credit will be given for the strategic use of up-to-date illustrative material from the press or other media consulted.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students missing lectures without a doctor's letter or authorisation from the Director or from the Placements Team will automatically be docked a - or a + from their final grade. Persistent lateness will also be penalised in the final grade. A register of attendance will be taken at the beginning of each session, and marks will be awarded for attendance. Absence can be conveyed by advising a senior member of staff in the Academic Affairs Office with a request that the information be passed on to me. Leaving it to another class member to convey messages will not be acceptable. Appointments for interviews for internships should not conflict with attendance at classes.

Any student who is unable to attend a class, or take part in an assignment because of religious reasons, must give notice of the fact in advance. He/she will be required to make up for time lost. In this situation arrangements must be made with another student for class notes to be shared.

Course work must be delivered before agreed deadline, failure to hand in on time will result in deducted marks.

I will make some time available in each session for students to raise questions etc. Should students wish to discuss matters with me in person I will also be available during the break mid-lecture.

GRADING SYSTEM

The following Boston University table explains the grading system that is used by faculty members on Boston University's British Programmes.

Grade	Honour Points	Usual%	Definition
A	4.0	93-100	Excellent
A-	3.7	89-92	
B+	3.3	85-88	
B	3.0	81-84	Good
B-	2.7	77-80	
C+	2.3	73-76	
C	2.0	69-72	Satisfactory
C-	1.7	65-68	
D	1.0	60-64	Low pass
F	0.0		Unmarked Fail

“Incomplete” or **I** grades are not permitted to be issued by faculty, because of the obvious difficulty in making up missed work once the student has left the country. All work must be completed on time. The grades reflect the quality of the work.

It is also important to realise that grades below C may not be transferable to non BU students' home institutions. Lecturers and students should use the following criteria for an understanding of what each grade means.

“Withdrawn” The Boston University Provost has announced that faculty members may no longer assign grades of "W" (Withdrawn). In supporting this policy, the Registrar's Office will no longer assign W grades on individual students' official Boston University records, even if the grade sheet has a "W" recorded for a student. Alternative grades to "W" are "F" (Failing) or "MG" (Missing Grade).

GRADING CRITERIA

A This exceptional grade is assigned only to work that has persistently outstanding quality in both substance and presentation. The student must demonstrate a sustained capacity for independent thought and extensive study, producing rigorous and convincing analyses in well-ordered prose.

A- Awarded to work that is clearly focused and analytical, and based on wide reading. The student must cover all the principal points of a question and systematically develop a persuasive overall thesis, allowing for one or two venial omissions or inapt expressions.

B+, B, B- This range of grades indicates that the student has shown some evidence of original thought and intellectual initiative. The student has cited sources beyond the class materials, and shown a degree of originality in perception and/or approach to the subject. The work will show thoughtful management of material, and a good grasp of the issues. The differences between a B+, a straight B and a B- may reflect poor presentation of the material, or mistakes in punctuation, spelling and grammar.

C+, C, C- Work in this grade range is satisfactory, but uninspiring. If the work is simply a recitation of the class materials or discussions, and shows no sign of genuine intellectual engagement with the issues, it cannot deserve a higher grade. Should an essay fail to provide a clear answer to the question as set, or argue a position coherently, the grade will fall within this range. Quality of presentation can lift such work into the upper levels of this grade range. Work of this quality which is poorly presented, and riddled with errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation, will fall into the lower end of the range. To earn a C grade, the work must demonstrate that the student is familiar with the primary course material, be written well enough to be readily understood, be relevant to the assignment, and, of course, be the student's own work except where properly cited.

D A marginal pass can be given where some but not all the elements of the course have been completed satisfactorily.

F The failing grade indicates the work is seriously flawed in one or more ways:

- *Obvious lack of familiarity with the material
- *So poorly written as to defy understanding
- *So brief and insubstantial that it fails to properly address the subject
- *Material presented is not relevant to the assignment
- *Demonstrates evidence of plagiarism

PLAGIARISM

Simply stated, plagiarism is taking another's work and presenting it as your own.

Dictionary definitions of plagiarism frequently include terms such as theft or steal. Plagiarism is, in fact, intellectual theft. It is one of the most serious forms of academic misconduct. Plagiarism committed by a student will certainly result in course failure and may result in suspension or dismissal. In the professional world it can ruin a career.

Boston University's Code of Student Responsibilities states:

All students are responsible for having read the Boston University statement on plagiarism, which is available in the Academic Conduct Code. Students are advised that the penalty against students on a Boston University program for cheating on examinations or for plagiarism may be "expulsion from the program or the University or such other penalty as may be recommended by the Committee on Student Academic Conduct, subject to approval by the dean."

The value of any grade, credit, honour or degree received by a student presupposes that all work submitted by a student is his or her own. A student who uses or relies upon the work of others or who, except under conditions expressly permitted by the instructor, furnishes assistance to another student, violates the standards of the University. Students must insist upon academic honesty and integrity from their fellow students and must report promptly any case of alleged violation of academic conduct. Failure to do so is a violation of this code.

Plagiarism can take many forms, including the reproduction of published material without acknowledgement, or representing work done by others as your own. This includes the increasingly common practice of purchasing and downloading work from Internet "paper mills." Students should be extremely careful when submitting work for this course that all work is correctly sourced. Print-outs of web sites that have been used in research may be required by the lecturer in cases of a grade dispute and all web site based reference material should be kept by the student until after the end of the semester.

I hope that you find this an interesting and challenging course.

Paul Cousins,