Boston University Study Abroad London
British Political Institutions
CAS PO 360/IR 359 (Core course)
Spring 2013

Instructor Information
A. Name
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Course Overview
This course will introduce you to the main political institutions and actors in Britain today. It will explore the historical, social, and international contexts of British politics and detailed consideration will be given to competing ideologies and values that have shaped political developments in this country by drawing on pertinent social science approaches and concepts. We will consider Britain as a changing liberal democracy and examine what the country shares and what differentiates it from other liberal democracies such as the U.S.A. and other European Union states.

Arguably this country stands as the world’s oldest parliamentary order. It has an apparently incoherent set of political institutions that combine historical continuity and change, hereditary and democratic, traditional and modern institutions. 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 long standing liberties under common law, but 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 codified in a single document. Elections are free, and notwithstanding recent scandals over MPs’ expenses or the relationship between the politicians, police and the media, the political system is comparatively corruption free. Nevertheless, the separation of powers is subject to significant constraints, and the ‘first past the post’ electoral system is criticized for undervaluing the preferences of the citizens who do not favour one of the two main parties.

Britain, or the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to give the country’s full title, is a multi-national state and the consequences of this plurality have been manifold, ranging from decades of violent conflict in Northern Ireland or the rise of much more benign forms nationalism in Scotland and Wales to the British variant of liberal ‘multiculturalism’ that has developed with the arrival of successive groups of immigrants, many from Commonwealth countries, an unique association of the UK and 53 of its former colonies. In addition to the UK, the Queen is also the head of 15 other states, all members of the commonwealth. Yet, from a broad comparative perspective, British polity may be considered consensual without religious, racial, ethnic and nationality differences translating into major political cleavages, Northern Ireland (or north of Ireland preferred by the (mainly catholic) ‘nationalists’) excepted. Social class remains more significant in shaping mainstream political divisions, and parties’ are still primarily distinguished with reference to equality or liberty, state or market, individualism or collectivism. That said the convergence of several major developments have blurred or overlaid the differences traceable to these values. These include the end of the ‘Cold War’ and (until recently) the unquestionable triumph of neo-liberal capitalism and
consumerism, the dissolution or marginalization of traditional working class and trade unions, acceleration of ‘globalization’, and growing importance of transnational issues such as environmental degradation, political religion, North-South divide, immigration, terrorism or indeed the current global economic crisis. The combined impact of such changes compelled the major political parties to squeeze together in the ‘centre-ground’ whilst striving to rebrand and differentiate themselves with overarching concepts such as Tony Blair’s ‘Third Way’ or now David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ and the ‘Good Society’ of the new leader of the opposition Labour party, Ed Miliband. However such grand visions are, at least for the time being, overshadowed by something that President ‘it’s the economy stupid’ Clinton understood well. Having said that, it is also worth noting that Tony Blair, the most successful Labour leader of all time, was terminally damaged not by poor economic numbers, but by a misfired political decision.

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 that cuts right across traditional divisions, and, at times, has come close to destroying the basic two-party political system in the UK. Recently, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition partners are at loggerheads over prime minister Cameron’s decision in December 2011 to veto a proposal by Germany and France aimed at overcoming the Euro crisis. Cameron’s move has made visible the extent of the divide over Europe between the generally Europhile LibDems and the increasingly Eurosceptic Conservatives. Yet, the Prime Minister is under pressure by the large and growing Tory Eurosceptic contingent inside and outside the parliament to reduce the role of EU in the governance of the UK. The election of a socialist president in May 2012 on a ‘growth’ platform critical of the German-led ‘austerity’ agenda in response to the EU’s crisis raises difficult questions for the Tory-LibDem coalition who have also prioritized deficit reduction. Both EU’s future and UK’s future within EU will remain subject to intense debate inside and outside the government during your stay in this country. In recent by-elections, the Eurosceptic cum Europhobic United Kingdom Independent party (UKIP) displaced Liberal Democrats as the third party in England, although it is yet to achieve representation in the House of Commons. The growing popularity of the UKIP poses a serious threat to Conservative party as taking more votes from traditional Conservative voters than the more Euro-friendly Labour and LibDems.

Between 1997-2001, Tony Blair’s first government embarked on a series of major constitutional reforms including elected mayors for London and certain other cities, reducing the number of hereditary peers and so on. Following referendums in 1997, Scotland and Wales gained the right to govern themselves with regard to ‘devolved’ matters. Coming into effect in 1999, devolution has in turn fuelled demands for greater powers for Scottish parliament and Welsh assembly. Although initially opposed by the Conservatives, these reforms now appear irreversible and are accepted by all major parties. As with membership of EU, devolution has significantly changed the long standing centralized ‘Westminster model’ of governance, although most observers would argue that its fundamental features remain in place. Following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, and after many setbacks, Northern Ireland (the fourth and last national component of the UK), too, now has its own assembly and ‘power-sharing’ administration. To these developments must be added the questions posed by the Iraq war and the decline in America’s relative international power for Britain’s ‘special relation’ with the US. These and other factors have contributed to causing the English, too, to question exactly who they are and what is their place in the modern world. At present, the question of Scottish referendum for independence is the major issue in this area, pitting the three major UK parties, Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat, against Scottish National Party (SNP). SNP surprised the political class by gaining the majority of seats in Scottish parliament in 2011, and for the first time since devolution gave Scotland the taste of a single party majority government. Yet, the support for independence in Scotland has rarely gone above 30%, and by winning the 12 of Britain’s 65 Olympic medals, the Scottish members of UK team have certainly strengthened the cause of the union. The question is due to be settled in a referendum in 2014.

In June 2007, after ten years as Prime Minister, Tony Blair was replaced by Gordon
Brown, who promised to govern in a different manner to that of his predecessor. He, in fact, had a torrid time over the last three years without fulfilling his promise. Consequently for the first time since 1992, the result of the May 6 2010 General Election was uncertain up to polling day with the Conservatives eventually topping the poll but without a majority of seats in the House of Commons. The outcome has been the present Conservative-Liberal Democrat government, the first coalition government in the UK since the Second World War. For some the Coalition policies represent a significant departure from both Tony Blair’s New Labour and the Conservative party of Margaret Thatcher. Others, however, see the present government taking advantage of the financial crisis to pursue an agenda largely set in terrain with the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and Ronald Reagan in 1980 and continued through Clinton presidency and the years of Blair and Brown’s premiership from 1997 - 2010. Yet, others consider Cameron above all a follower of Blair, especially in respect of his attempt to ‘modernise’ the Tories, move it to the centre, and reach out the “natural” supporters of other parties.

Apart from the re-election of the Conservative mayor of London (Boris Johnson), last May’s local elections produced massive defeats for the governing parties. Even Johnson’s re-election may be seen as a mixed blessing for the government, as he is considered the frontrunner to replace Cameron should the latter falter. After two years in power, the coalition no longer can wholly blame the economic and other difficulties on the last Labour government. Until recently, it was Liberal Democrats and their leader Nick Clegg that seemed to have paid the electoral costs of the compromises involved in forging the ruling coalition. Now, however, issues most closely identified with the Conservatives such as the failures of economic policy and ‘double dip’ recession, growing inequality and unmerited executive pay, unpopular health reform, and the long running exposure of the illegal activities and questionable political influence of the Murdoch’s media group are hitting the coalition’s senior partner hard. The tensions between the coalition partners, however, entered a new phase on 6 August 2012 when Nick Clegg, the LibDem leader and deputy prime minister, formally withdrew the government’s published bill for the reform of house of lords as a result of widespread opposition from ‘backbench’ Conservative MPs. House of Lords’ reform has been a long standing Lib Dem policy and this setback has severely damaged the coalition internally and in the wider political arena. Emboldened by growing tensions within the coalition, the continuing economic difficulties, its improving opinion poll numbers, and the shifting balance of power elsewhere in Europe, the Labour party should become a more effective opposition. All this and more makes this period particularly interesting for students of British politics.

Against this background, the course aims to give you a critical and thorough, if basic, understanding of political Britain and thereby also prepare you for your internship. Thoroughness requires clear knowledge of the defining features of British political institutions, and the major debates about their nature. Critical understanding is mediated by a clear application of the values with reference to which we may judge institutions, policies or indeed political systems. Such values include, liberty, equity, equality, efficiency, prosperity, effectiveness, global power, democracy, internationalism, sustainable development, and national identity. Politicians often claim all or most of them for their parties and policies, but in practice prioritize and pursue them in accordance with their ideological agendas, constituencies, and electoral calculations.

The same goes when we turn to evaluate Britain’s unitary political system where ministers are at same time members of one of the houses of parliament, or first past the post system that governs elections to the House of Commons. The advocates of these systems often defend them by claiming that they produce more effective and efficient governance compared to alternatives based on clear separation of the executive and legislature or some form of proportional representation. Their opponents usually emphasise the democratic deficit of the evolving ‘Westminster model’ whilst also questioning its effectiveness, and so the debate goes on. Once you have examined such debates in the light of the structural logic and actual performance of the institutions in question, you have to draw your own conclusions with reference to your own value hierarchy. This process would be facilitated and enriched by the comparative perspective which can illuminate
the otherwise hidden weaknesses and strengths of every system. You are of course fortunate for knowing at the least the American system as citizens as well as students of politics.

The results of 2011 Census have just been published (December 2012) and the following link [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_290685.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_290685.pdf) provides a clear statistical overview of the country, the region, and the city in which you’ll be living, studying and working in the next few months. The following is taken from the section *Who We Are:*

- The resident population of England and Wales on 27 March 2011 was 56.1 million, a seven per cent (3.7 million) increase since 2001 with 55 per cent (2.1 million) of this increase being due to migration. One in six people were aged 65 or over (16 per cent, 9.2 million).
- Four out of every five usual residents of England and Wales described themselves as in very good or good health (81 per cent, 45.5 million).
- Fifty nine per cent (33.2 million) recorded their religion as Christian and 25 per cent (14.1 million) reported that they had no religious affiliation.
- Most residents of England and Wales belonged to the White ethnic group (86 per cent, 48.2 million) in 2011, and the majority of these belonged to the White British group (80 per cent of the total population, 45.1 million). In London in 2011, 45 per cent (3.7 million) out of 8.2 million usual residents were White British.
- Ninety one per cent (51.0 million) usual residents considered themselves to have at least one national identity of English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, or British.

**Learning and Teaching**

Each session will be divided in to lectures, group discussions, and group and individual presentations. Thus the learning and teaching will be interactive and you are expected to participate fully.

**Assessment**

- A final two hours examination on Monday 18th February. (40% of the final grade).
- An essay of approximately 2500 words to be submitted on Friday 15 February by 1pm.
- An oral presentation in one of the sessions addressing for about 10-15 minutes one of the issues covered in that session or in the course as agreed (10% of the final grade). Each presentation will be prepared and presented as part of a group project developed and delivered by two or more students, depending on the class size.
- Regular attendance and participation (10% of the final grade). In addition to contribution to class discussion, ‘participation’ also includes sharing pertinent questions, useful website links and articles, and observations arising from following the media or attending events.

**Assessment Criteria**

In assessing your work, particular attention is paid to the following qualities:

**Relevance** - Make sure that you have understood the question and its key terms precisely and outline and develop your answer accordingly. Don’t simply write everything you remember or can glean about the general issue in question.

**Substance** - You should demonstrate familiarity with the main facts and arguments regarding the topic in question. Explicit evidence of having studied and understood the required readings is essential. You are expected to develop your argument and provide supporting evidence by drawing on the press or other media as well as academic journals. A comparative approach, based on data from the US and other countries, is also valued. The conclusions you present should be
your own and refer explicitly to the sources, arguments, evidence, and values on which they are based.

Clarity - Your coursework should be in an accessible and clear language.

Coherence - The arguments presented should be well structured and the relationship between them made clear. The conclusions should be informed by preceding discussion and evidence and not merely asserted. You are encouraged to structure your essay with headings that indicate the major aspects of the question. This may help avoid repetition as well as enhance the clarity of presentation.

Referencing - The sources for the arguments and factual information should be stated consistently and fully.

Grading
Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria and policies on plagiarism: http://www.bu.edu/london/current-semester

Attendance Policy
Classes
All Boston University London Programme students are expected to attend each and every class session, tutorial, and field trip in order to fulfill the required course contact hours and receive course credit. Any student that has been absent from two class sessions (whether authorised or unauthorised) will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their continued participation on the programme.

Authorised Absence:
Students who expect to be absent from any class should notify a member of Academic Affairs and complete an Authorized Absence Approval Form 10 working days in advance of the class date (except in the case of absence due to illness, for which students should submit the Authorised Absence Approval Form with the required doctor's note as soon as possible). Please note: Submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Form does not guarantee an authorised absence

Students may apply for an authorised absence only under the following circumstances:
- Illness, supported by a local London doctor's note (submitted with Authorised Absence Approval Form).
- Important placement event that clashes with a class (verified by internship supervisor)
- Special circumstances which have been approved by the Directors (see note below).

The Directors will only in the most extreme cases (for example, death in close family) allow students to leave the programme early or for a significant break.

Unauthorised Absence:
Any student to miss a class due to an unauthorised absence will receive a 4% grade penalty to their final grade for the course whose class was missed. This grade penalty will be applied by the Academic Affairs office to the final grade at the end of the course. As stated above, any student that has missed two classes will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their participation on the programme as excessive absences may result in a ‘Fail’ in the class and therefore expulsion from the programme.

Schedule and Basic Reading
*British Politics Politics* (edited by R. Leach et al, Palgrave: 2011) is this course’s main textbook and should be purchased. *UK Politics* (edited by B. Jones and P. Norton, Pearson: 2010) *Developments in British Politics* (edited by R. Heffernan et al. Palgrave: 2011), and *The New British Politics* (edited by I. Budge et al., Pearson: 2007) may also be consulted for succinct discussions of the topics covered in the course. Details of the sections directly related to each session’s topic are given below.

1. **Thursday 17 January:** *Britain in International Context: The European Union, the USA & the Commonwealth*
   Leach, chapters 15 & 24; Jones, chapter 25, 27, pp. 54-55; Heffernan, chapters 14 & 16; Budge, 8-9.

2. **Wednesday 23 January** *British Politics in an Historical Context*
   Leach chapters 1-3; Jones, chapters 2-3 & Appendix; Heffernan, Chapter 1; Budge, Introduction & chapter 27.

3. **Thursday 24 January** *The Major Political Parties and Competing Ideologies*
   Leach, chapters 5-7; Jones, chapters 4-5, 11; Heffernan, chapter 6; Budge chapters 16 & 17.

   At 2.30 pm, you will meet Blue Badge Guide Andy Charlton at Westminster tube station for a guided walk of Westminster (details of where to meet will be sent to you).

4. **Wednesday 30 January** *The ‘Westminster’ model of Governance and the British Constitution*
   Leach, chapters 10 & 18; Jones, chapter 13; Heffernan, chapter 2; Budge chapter 4.

5. **Thursday 31 January** *The Executive: the Prime Minister, Cabinet, and Civil Service*
   Leach, chapters 11-12; Jones, 17-19 and pp. 379-81; 480-82; Heffernan, chapter 3; Budge, chapters 5-7.

6. **Wednesday 6 February** *The Houses of Parliament and the Crown*
   Leach, chapter 13; Jones, 14-16; Heffernan, chapters 4-5; Budge chapter 18.

7. **Thursday 7 February** *Britain as a Multi-national State: Devolution*
   Leach, chapters 16; Jones, chapters 12; Heffernan, chapter 7

8. **Wednesday 13 February** *Local Government in Britain*
   Leach 17; Jones, 19

**Please note:** students on the Internship Programme will have their first Internship Tutorial meeting on Wednesday 13th February, from 1.30pm-3.00pm in the Courtfield Room, 74-76 Courtfield Gardens, SW5 0NL (entrance on Collingham Road).
9. Thursday 14 February  Review of the Course. In this session in addition to reviewing the course, we will address any remaining tasks (e.g. presentations) or questions about the issues pertaining to the course.

Friday 15 February  Submit your essay by 4.00pm.

Monday 18 February:  Final Examination. Exam times and locations will be posted on the BU London website and in the Student Newsletter two weeks before exam dates.

***All students must attend a mandatory drop-in session (to sign Internship Agreement and for any questions about placement, social programmes, travel and academics) on Monday 18th February, 1.00-2.00pm in the Boston Room, 43 Harrington Gardens, SW7 4JU. Food will be served!

You are encouraged to attend the many scholarly and political events that take place in London during your period of study and many of which are free and open to the public. Of particular interest to all students of politics, international relations and public policy are talks that take place at London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Details can be found at www.lse.ac.uk/events.

Further Reading

Further readings and supplementary notes are posted on the course webpage and will be extended or updated as appropriate: https://lms.bu.edu

Selected Additional Reading (all in the BU library)

P. Toynbee and D. Walker  Dogma and Disarray: Cameron at Half-Time
A. Gamble  Between Europe and America: the Future of British Politics
H. Barnett  Britain Unwrapped
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. Ecclesshall  Biographical Dictionary of British prime Ministers
T. Enright  The British Political Process: An Introduction
V. Bogdanor  Devolution in the United Kingdom.
V. Bogdanor  The New British Constitution
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 Prime Minister: The Office and its Holders Since 1945
The Secret State
Mass Media, Academic Journals, Websites

You are advise to read a “serious” British newspaper such as The Guardian, Independent, Daily Telegraph or Times, Financial Times (regularly updated full text versions of the first three are available on line). The Sunday editions of these papers are also informative. The Economist (weekly) and Prospect (monthly) are two informative magazines available at the library. Newsnight on BBC 2, (10.30-11.15 pm with no commercial breaks) and Channel Four News (7-7.45 pm) are worth watching to keep up with current political developments as is BBC Radio 4’s Today programme (6-9 am) a daily news and current affairs programme that is part of the staple diet of Britain’s political class. Andrew Marr Show, Sundays 9-10 a.m. is a must see for those interested in British politics.

A particularly useful website for most matters related to the British constitution and other aspects of ours course is: University College Constitution Unit at: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/.

In addition to the websites of political parties which you can simply Google, the following ‘grassroots’ websites should be useful for gauging how the coalition partners are being viewed by their “core constituencies”:

http://conservativehome.blogs.com/
http://www.libdemvoice.org/

Of the various pressure groups associated with the Labour party, you may start with http://www.compassonline.org.uk/.

You may access electronically a wide range of Politics journals at http://www.bu.edu/library/index.shtml, including Political Studies, The British Journal of Politics and International Relations and Politics, three of the British Political Studies Association’s journals. Parliamentary Affairs and Political Quarterly are among other useful
journals for the purposes of our course.

A sample of the on line information provided by the UK government and other official agencies and think tanks is provided as follows:

- Government Information Service http://www.open.gov.uk
- http://www.number-10.gov.uk (Prime Minister’s office)
- *EU’s sever: europa.eu.int
- www.psr.keele.ac.uk/parties (link to political parties)
- www.ukpolitics.org.uk (general link to other political websites)
- www.statistics.gov.uk (economic and social statistical data)
- www.cabinet-office.gov.uk (central and local government)
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation http://www.jrf.org.uk (Major charity with a social mission)
- Institute of Economic Affairs: www.iea.org.uk (right of centre think tank)
- Fabian Society: www.fabian-society.org.uk (traditional Social Democratic)
- Institute for Public Policy Research: www.ippr.org.uk (‘New Labour’)
- New Economics Foundation: www.neweconomics.org (radical)
- ResPublica www.respublica.org (‘Red Tory’ and close to David Cameron)
- http://thebigsociety.co.uk/

**Terms and Conditions**

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 and at the end of class.

**Note:** Please turn off all mobile phones in class; laptops can only be used for note-taking.