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<th>Class title</th>
<th>The Government and Politics of Britain</th>
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<td>Course number(s)</td>
<td>POLS 34440</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher(s)</td>
<td>Professor Richard Heffernan</td>
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**Course Overview:**
This course covers a number of topics, including constitutional politics; the role of the prime minister and the cabinet; executive and legislative relations, including the role and function of parliament; devolved and local government; electoral politics, parties and the party system; interest group politics; political communications and the mass media; and the impacts of membership of the European Union.

It is expected that even students with no existing knowledge of British politics will develop an advanced understanding of the workings of government and politics in Britain and learn how different actors, institutions and processes help formulate public policy. The government and politics of the US will be used throughout as a means of comparison.

The course will be taught each week by an informal lecture in the first session followed by student presentations and class discussion in the second session.

**Assessment structure:**
The requirements of this class will be a term paper, class presentation and discussion and a final examination. The final exam counts 40% toward your final grade, the term paper 40% and the class presentation and discussion 20%.

THE TITLE OF THE TERM PAPER MUST BE DRAWN FROM THOSE PROVIDED BELOW IN EACH SECTION. IT MUST BE NO LONGER THAN 3,000 WORDS IN LENGTH. The term paper will be submitted in class in week twelve of the term.

The final exam will be closed-book.

**Required resources**
Lectures will introduce each topic in detail and required reading for the course will be organised around two British politics textbooks. Other
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<th>Classroom policies</th>
<th>Standard London Undergraduate Program attendance policies apply.</th>
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1. **Introduction to the Class: Institutions and Actors in British Politics.**

2. **The British Constitution: Unitary State and Constitutional Monarchy.**

   Presentation topic: Is there a British Constitution? What are the political impacts of an uncodified constitution?

   Other questions to consider: Where does sovereignty lie within the British political system? How do we distinguish citizens and subjects? What are the powers of the Crown? Why should Britain have a Monarchy?

   Term paper: Where does sovereignty ultimately lie under the British Constitution?

Reading

Moran, M, Chapter 4 ‘Cultures, Constitutions and British Political Culture’ in **Politics and Governance in the UK**

Russell, M, Chapter 2 ‘Constitutional Politics’, in Heffernan (et al eds) **Developments in British Politics 9.**
3. **Executive Government I: Prime Minister and Cabinet.**

Presentation topic: What are the sources of Prime Ministerial power?

Additional questions to consider: How powerful is the British Prime Minister? Is he or she an ‘elected dictator’? Can the Prime Minister command the government? If so, how?

Term paper: “The British Prime Minister is President in all but name”. Discuss.

Reading

Richards, D Chapter 3 ‘Changing Patterns of Executive Government’ in Heffernan (et al eds) *Developments in British Politics 9*


4. **Executive Government II: Ministers and the Civil Service.**

Presentation topic: What is meant by the idea of the ‘core executive’?

Additional questions to consider: How much autonomy do ministers enjoy? Are all ministers equal? Does the Cabinet matter? What are the functions of the British Cabinet System? What is the relationship between ministers and their civil servants?

Term paper: Is the Prime Minister or the Cabinet at the ‘core’ of the Core Executive?

Presentation topic: Does parliament matter?

Additional questions to consider: Why and how does the executive command the legislature in the British political system? Can parliament hold the government to account? If so, how? What functions does parliament have? Can it initiate legislation? How representative is the House of Commons? The House of Lords?

Term paper: "The modern role of a backbench MP is to heckle the governmental steamroller" (Austin Mitchell MP). Is this a fair description of the function of the British House of Commons?

Reading

Moran, M, Chapter 9 ‘Parliament in the Westminster System’ in Politics and Governance in the UK

Kelso, A Chapter 4 ‘Changing Parliamentary Landscapes’ in Heffernan (et al eds) Developments in British Politics 9
6. Electoral Politics: Voters, Parties and the Electoral System

Presentation topic: How does the British electoral system work?

Additional questions to consider: Why do electors vote? How are ties of association between electors and parties forged? How are electoral choices exercised?

Term paper: “The single member plurality system provides for both democratic and effective government”. Discuss.

Reading

Moran, M, Chapter 17 ‘How Elections Are Decided’ in Politics and Governance in the UK

Denver, D, Chapter 5 ‘Elections and Voting’ in Heffernan (et al eds) Developments in British Politics 9

7. The British Party System

Presentation topic: What are the functions of British political parties?

Additional questions to consider: What form does the British party system take? Which is the more significant party goal, office seeking or policy seeking? How do British political parties compete with each other? Is it the case that what politicians say and do matters more than what voters think and want?
Term paper: Are political parties run by parliamentary leaders, and not by their members? If so, why?

Reading

Moran, M, Chapter 14 ‘Parties and their Organisation’ and Chapter 18 ‘How Leaders are Selected’ in Politics and Governance in the UK

Cowley, P, Chapter 6 ‘Political Parties and the British Party System’ in Heffernan (et al eds) Developments in British Politics 9

8. United Kingdom Politics: Government Beyond Westminster

Presentation topic: How ‘united’ is the United Kingdom?

Additional questions to consider: How ‘united’ is the United Kingdom? Is it threatened by regionalism and nationalism? What is devolution? Are Scotland and Wales ‘autonomous’? Why should they have their own Parliament and Assembly? How ‘local’ is local government?

Term paper: Can a unitary state be less unitary? Discuss with reference to devolution and local government.

Reading

Moran, M, Chapter 10 ‘The Devolved System of Governance: England and Wales’ and Chapter 12 ‘The Worlds of Local and Regional Government’ in Politics and Governance in the UK
Scully, R and Wyn Jones, R Chapter 7 ‘Territorial Politics in Post-Devolution Britain’ in Heffernan (et al eds) Developments in British Politics 9

9. Britain and the European Union

Presentation topic: What have been the consequences of British membership of the European Union?

Additional questions to consider: Has membership of the European Community involved fundamental changes in the British Constitution? Specifically, has Whitehall and Westminster ceded power to Brussels? What are the arguments for Britain being at the ‘heart of Europe’? To what extent is Britain likely to be a member of a federal United States of Europe?

Term paper: Does participation in the European Union really limit British sovereignty?

Reading

Moran, M, Chapter 5 ‘Europeanizing British Politics’ in Politics and Governance in the UK

Thorlakson, L, Chapter 14 ‘Britain’s Place in the European Union’ in Heffernan (et al eds) Developments in British Politics 9


Presentation topic: Is the British government susceptible to interest group pressure?

Additional questions to consider: What are pressure groups for? How do we distinguish pressure groups and interest groups? Are all interest groups equal or do some have more power than others? Which resources determine the power of an interest group?

Term paper: How can interest groups access government and influence legislation?

Reading

Moran, M, Chapter 9 ‘Representing Interests in the Westminster System’ in Politics and Governance in the UK

Heffernan, R, Chapter 6 ‘Pressure Group Politics’ in Heffernan (et al eds) Developments in British Politics 9

11. Media and Politics I: The News Media and Political Behaviour

12. Media and Politics II: Political Communications and its Impacts

First presentation topic: How does the news media influence British politics?

Second presentation topic: How can politicians influence the media? Why should they try to do so?

Additional questions to consider: Can the news media determine electoral preferences? To what extent does the news media either constrain or empower politicians?
Term paper: Critically evaluate the impact of the news media on contemporary British politics.

Reading for both weeks

Moran, Chapter 16 ‘How Political Communications Happens’ Politics and Governance in the UK


Blair, T (2007) Speech on Public Life and the Media, 6th June
http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKZWE24585220070612

Watch:
Part one: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxXv_KK-AnE
Part two: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yf9mrV5-P8


Presentation topic: What is the nature of Britain’s ‘special relationship’ with the US?

Additional questions to consider: What is Britain’s present day standing in the world? Should British foreign policy favour Europe or the United States? Britain and 9/11. Britain, Iraq and Afghanistan

Term paper: “Great Britain has lost an Empire, but not yet found a role” (Dean Acheson, 1962). Discuss.
Reading

Gamble, A, Chapter 16 ‘Britain in the World’ in Heffernan (et al eds) Developments in British Politics 9

Moran, M, Chapter 4 ‘Britain in a Globalising World’ in Politics and Governance in the UK

Wallace, W ‘The Collapse of British Foreign Policy’ International Affairs Vol 82 No 1 2005 pp53-68

14. Northern Ireland in British Politics

Presentation topic: What explains the political divisions within Northern Ireland?

Additional questions to consider: What divides republicans and unionists? Can the situation in Northern Ireland be explained by religious difference? Is it prompted by competing national identities? Should Northern Ireland be seen as a British or an Irish ‘problem’?

Term paper: “The problems of Northern Ireland create an unresolvable conflict”. Discuss

Reading

Moran, M, Chapter 11 ‘Devolved Government in Northern Ireland’ in Politics and Governance in the UK (sections on Northern Ireland, pp232-246)

The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs:


http://foreignaffairs.gov.ie/home/index.aspx?id=335
Gormley Heenan, C, Chapter 8 ‘Power Sharing in Northern Ireland’ in Heffernan (et al eds) Developments in British Politics 9

Term paper: “The problems of Northern Ireland create an unresolvable conflict”. Discuss