

## Module 12: Contemporary Society and Political Systems

<b>Stage</b>				II			
<b>Semester</b>				1			
<b>Module Title</b>				Contemporary Society and Political Systems			
<b>Module Number</b>				12			
<b>Module Status (Mandatory/Elective)</b>				Mandatory			
<b>Module NFQ level (only if applicable)</b>				7			
<b>Pre-requisite Module Titles</b>				None			
<b>Co-requisite Module Titles</b>				None			
<b>Is this a capstone module? (Yes or No)</b>				No			
<b>List of Module Teaching Personnel</b>				Dr Maurice Coakley, Robbie Smyth			
<b>Contact Hours</b>				<b>Non-contact Hours</b>			<b>Total Effort (Hours)</b>
<b>Lecture</b>	<b>Practical</b>	<b>Tutorial</b>	<b>Seminar</b>	<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Placement</b>	<b>Independent work</b>	
48		12		48		92	200
<b>Allocation of Marks (Within the Module)</b>							
	<b>Continuous Assessment</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Practical</b>	<b>Final Examination</b>	<b>Total</b>		
<b>Percentage contribution</b>	60%			40%	100%		

### Module Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this module, the learner will be able to:

1. Engage in independent social and political research
2. Identify key social problems and tensions
3. Understand some of the key political systems domestically and internationally
4. Critically discuss contemporary social and economic issues
5. Develop critical judgements and analytical skills
6. Pursue further study and research in the social science field

## Module Aims

This module aims to enable the learner to:

- Introduce learners to the working of contemporary society
- Enable learners to analyse key issues in social and political development

## Module Objectives

The objectives of this module are to have learners:

- (1) Develop their thinking and analytical skills beyond the scope introduced in Understanding Society
- (2) Build a habit of independent reading and inquiry into complex societal issues, both in a domestic and international context.
- (3) Be able to compare and contrast different opinions, interpretations and theories on contemporary political issues
- (4) Begin to generate independent academic views on societal issues

## Module Curriculum

**(1) Change and continuity in the contemporary social order:** The world we live in is often described as ‘post-industrial society’, an ‘information society’ or as a ‘knowledge economy’. The module looks at the advantages and limitations of these terms, and attempt to develop a balanced assessment of the changes and continuities in the contemporary social order.

**(2) A world of consumers:** Contemporary society is often called a ‘consumer society’, but it is not always clear how consumption is different from earlier periods. The module looks at the role of advertising and media in promoting consumerism and also explores changing patterns of consumption, including the rising levels of debt which have come to underpin these new forms of consumption.

**(3) Class in contemporary society:** There are many indications that older class identities are breaking down, yet these changes in how people perceive themselves have been accompanied by a trend towards increased social inequality in North America and Western Europe with the wealthier sections of society becoming richer, while the least prosperous sections have lost ground. The module explores how classes and notions of class has evolved and explore how wider social changes impact on collective identities.

**(4) Dynamics and limits of the contemporary social order:** The module concludes by exploring the overall dynamics of this social order and asking whether it possesses structural (internal) or ecological limits to its operations.

### **(5) Food and Society**

This topic examines the relationship between trends in food consumption and social, economic and other factors that drives these trends.

We analyse and discuss the impact marketing, media, economic, ethnic and other factors have on the food choices of the individual and society in general.

### **(6) Friendship and technology in contemporary society**

Who are your friends? Is there an observable structure as to why people are friends? What impact is technology, communications technology in particular, and society having on friendship? In this topic we study how the definitions and conception of friendship have developed since the Greek philosophers like Aristotle examined the concepts of why friendship matters.

### **(7) Environmentalism**

The issues of climate change, GM foods, renewable energy, public transport, protecting endangered species and tackling waste management are just some of environmental problems confronting society today.

We want to identify and analyse not just the core environmental questions but also to develop an understanding of green politics and environmental ideologies.

### **(8) Elections and electoral systems**

Electoral democracy is considered a must for modern states and there are more elections and more people participating electorally than ever before globally. However, in established democracies like Ireland, Britain and the USA participation in elections by voters is falling, while in other states such as the USA very close elections have thrown the voting systems open to question. In the USA and other systems the amount of money spent by candidates has brought into question how fair and accessible electoral systems are.

We examine all of these issues in this topic while comparing and contrasting first past the post, PR List and PRSTV systems.

### **Recommended Reading**

- Erik Assadourian (2010) *Transforming Culture : From Consumerism to Sustainability*, Journal of Macromarketing
- Baylis, Smith & Owens, (2011) *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Oxford University Press
- Ha Joon Chang (2010) *23 Things They Don't Tell You about Capitalism*, Penguin.
- Andrew Gamble (2009) *The Spectre at the Feast*, Palgrave
- Guptill Amy E, Copelton Denise A, Lucal Betsy (2013) *Food & Society: Principles and Paradoxes*, Polity
- Heywood Andrew (2013) *Politics*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Palgrave MacMillan.
- Pollon Michael (2007) *Unhappy Meals*, New York Times, January 2007
- Viki Smith (2012) 'You get the economy you chose': the Political and Social Construction of the New Economy, *Work and Occupations*.
- Richard Wilkinson & Kate Pickett (2009) *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal societies almost Always Do Better*, Allen Lane.

### **Secondary Reading**

- Adams Ian (2002) *Political Ideologies Today*, Manchester University Press
- P. Conceicao & R. Mendoza, (2009) Anatomy of the Global Food Crisis, *Third World Quarterly*
- Neil Fligstein (2009) Politics, the Re-organization of the Economy, and Income Inequality, 1980-2009, *Politics and Society*
- Nicholas Garnham, (2002) *The Information Society: Myth or Reality*, GRICIS.
- Heywood Andrew (2012) *Political Ideologies*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Palgrave Macmillan
- Maria Ivonova Jack Metzgar (2010) Are the 'Poor' Part of the Working Class or in a Class by Themselves? *Labor Studies Journal*.
- Marsh, Sinnott, Garry & Kennedy (2008) *The Irish Voter – the nature of electoral competition in the republic of Ireland*, Manchester University Press
- McKeever Robert, Davies Philip (2012) *Politics USA*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Pearson
- Andrea Migone (2007) Hedonistic Consumerism: Patterns of Consumption in Contemporary Capitalism, *Review of Radical Political Economics*
- Graham Murdock, (2004) Past the Posts: Rethinking Change, Retrieving Critique, *European Journal of Communication*.
- Frank Trentman (2009) Crossing Divides: Consumption and Globalisation in History, *Journal of Consumer Culture*
- John Urry (2010) Consuming the Planet to Excess, *Theory, Culture and Society*
- Robert Wade (2011) Global Trends in Income Inequality, *Challenge*
- Watson James L, Caldwell Melissa L, (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating: A Reader*, Wiley-Blackwell

## Module Learning Environment

The module learning environment is rooted in developing the learner's independent reading and research skills, challenging them through discussion and presentations to engage with the curriculum topics. There are a series of dedicated readings on each topic ranging from long media reports and analysis to academic journals and book chapters. Online resources such as Moodle and the college journal catalogue provides a bedrock for the learner to build their reading on and into topics from a news media to an academic perspective.

## Module Teaching and Learning Strategy

This module is delivered with a mixture of lectures which introduce module topics developing on them through class discussion of the readings and learners' own independent research. Each topic is capped with a seminar that includes the individual learner presentations. The tutorials focus initially on assignment completion, class presentations and then exams.

The lectures are driven by the curriculum topics, and the use of web readings and online resources that enable the learner to prepare for each topic through a series of graded readings introducing more depth of an analysis as the learners and lecturers work through the topic.

## Module Assessment Strategy

### Assignment:

The assignment is designed to meet the learning outcomes of demonstrating critical understanding of the module topics while also engaging in independent reading and research.

Learners are required to:

- (1) Write one essay outlining the major socio-economic changes which have occurred over the last two or three decades in any country, city or region of your choice.
- (2) Research and write an academic essay on a contemporary political issue.
- (3) Prepare a class presentation on one of the curriculum topics. The presentation must demonstrate independent reading. The learner presenter is expected to be able to also discuss and answer questions on the content.

Element Number	Weighting	Type	Description
1	25	Academic essay	1,800 to 2,200 word essay, independently researched and written
25	25	Academic essay	Same as above
3	10	In class presentation	Learner makes a formal presentation with notes and leads the discussion and questions in a seminar setting.

### Exam

Learners take an end of term exam where they are asked to discuss key aspects of the module demonstrating the depth of their retained knowledge of the curriculum, a critical understanding of the issues involved and evidence of their independent reading. There is a wide choice of topics allowing learners to concentrate on particular module topics.

The exam is constructed to meet the learning outcomes of: demonstrating an 'understanding of the key political systems domestically and internationally; critically discuss contemporary social and economic issues; while articulating critical judgements and analytical skills.