

Advanced Higher Modern Studies Approved List of Dissertations

Revised, June 2005

ADVANCED HIGHER MODERN STUDIES DISSERTATION TITLES

These titles have been selected from submissions in the first few years of the new course. Some titles in this document may go out of date quite quickly and more up-to-date ideas may be found by adapting these, or past paper questions. Centres are still at liberty to devise further titles. They may submit these for approval in the normal way by 1 October. This list will be updated as necessary.

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STUDY THEME 1: COMPARATIVE POLITICS AND RESEARCH METHODS

Titles in this theme may be amended to cover Scotland, the UK, the USA and/or Germany.

Context A: Functions of Political Parties

- ◆ Moving away from a socialist ideology to become a ‘catch-all’ party has been an electoral asset for ‘New Labour’.
- ◆ The emergence of ‘New Labour’ has forced the Conservative Party to change.
- ◆ AMS was the right choice as the method for electing the Scottish Parliament.
- ◆ The ‘Third Way’ approach of ‘New Labour’ is devoid of ideological principle.
- ◆ The Scottish Socialist Party may become a major force in Scottish politics, filling the political void created by the Labour Party’s adoption of the ‘Third Way’.
- ◆ All major parties have divisions within and between them.
- ◆ The Liberal Democrats’ policies are not based on an ideology.
- ◆ Bush, Blair and Clinton: Three of a kind?
- ◆ To what extent is the Republican Party in the USA identical to the Conservatives in the UK?
- ◆ New Labour has abandoned its socialist roots.

Context B: Functions of Elections

- ◆ The party system of a country is a reflection of the type of electoral system which it uses.
- ◆ A political leader’s greatest ally is the media.
- ◆ To what extent does the media drive the political agenda in the UK and the USA?
- ◆ In the UK and the USA voting behaviour is influenced more by the media’s constant scrutiny of politicians’ morals than by party policies and ideologies.
- ◆ Despite arguments to the contrary, newspapers exercise a significant influence on voting behaviour in the UK.
- ◆ It is the electoral systems themselves, not the political parties, which are to blame for low turnouts in the UK and the USA.
- ◆ Women have more of an impact on American politics than they have on UK politics.
- ◆ Social class is no longer important when explaining voting behaviour.

- ◆ The personality and image of the party leader is now the decisive factor in achieving electoral success in the United Kingdom.
- ◆ Foreign policy was the most decisive factor in explaining the outcome of the 2004 election in the USA.
- ◆ Proportional Representation ensures a more inclusive and democratic outcome than FPTP.
- ◆ Is the increasing professionalism of election campaigning in the UK and the USA having an impact on election results?

Context C: Decision-making in Central Government

- ◆ Pressure groups seldom have any significant influence on government decision-making in the UK.
- ◆ The mass media have more influence on central government than pressure groups and public opinion.
- ◆ Legislation proposed by the UK Prime Minister has a greater likelihood of becoming law than that which is proposed by an American President.
- ◆ In the USA and UK, there has been a reduction in the effectiveness of the checks on central government.
- ◆ Is Tony Blair the first UK president?

Context D: Central and Devolved/State government

- ◆ States' rights in the USA and devolution in the UK disguise the centralist tendencies of the federal government in the USA and the Westminster Parliament.
- ◆ The establishment of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh and Northern Irish Assemblies threatens the union of the United Kingdom.
- ◆ Devolution has failed the Scottish people.

STUDY THEME 2: LAW AND ORDER AND RESEARCH METHODS

Context A: Theories of Law and Order

- ◆ The incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into the Scottish Legal System may have significant consequences, which may benefit society in Scotland.
- ◆ Identity cards are an infringement of civil liberties.
- ◆ The UK government has failed to enforce the rights of asylum seekers.
- ◆ The European Convention on Human Rights has undermined the legal system in the UK.
- ◆ Recent legislation appears to have reduced the human rights of people in the UK.
- ◆ People are interested in rights and not responsibilities.
- ◆ The war on terror necessitates a restriction of individual liberty.
- ◆ Only those who attempt to disrupt the state should fear the use of new technology by the police and other government agencies.

Context B: Crime and Public Disorder in the UK

- ◆ Criminals are born that way.
- ◆ Working class people are more likely to commit crime.
- ◆ Statistics on reported crimes are inherently unreliable.
- ◆ Crime does not take place in middle class areas.
- ◆ Why has there been an increase in drug related crime?
- ◆ How strong is the economic impact of crime on society?
- ◆ The criminal justice system is not progressing in the fight against bigotry.
- ◆ Racism is not only surviving but thriving in Scotland today.
- ◆ Social deprivation and crime are inextricably linked.

Context C: Responses to Crime and Public Disorder in the UK

- ◆ The creation of a fully comprehensive national database is the best way to deal with crime in the UK.
- ◆ The ‘Not Proven’ verdict is out of date and in a modern Scottish society should no longer be an option for juries.
- ◆ Arming the police will act as a deterrent to crime.
- ◆ Scottish legislation relating to stalking and harassment should be reformed.
- ◆ Recent changes in UK policing have transformed the police into a force fit for the twenty first century.
- ◆ Racism is not institutionalised in Scottish police forces.
- ◆ Drug courts are the most effective method of dealing with drug related crime.
- ◆ The political parties’ policies on law and order are nothing more than ‘knee jerk’ reactions to public concerns.
- ◆ The Children’s Hearing System is failing both the Scottish public and young people.
- ◆ New technology is more likely to hinder than help in the fight against crime.
- ◆ Restorative justice – the future model for punishment and rehabilitation or just another passing fad?
- ◆ ‘New Labour’ is the natural party of law and order.
- ◆ Law and order policies of the main political parties are identical.
- ◆ How successful are the Scottish Prison Services in recruiting, retraining and promoting ethnic minority officers?
- ◆ Parents should be punished for crimes committed by their children.
- ◆ Is locking up more criminals for longer the best way to reduce crime?

Context D: The Penal System

- ◆ There are no effective alternatives to prison.
- ◆ Is capital punishment in the USA justifiable retribution?
- ◆ Privately run prisons will not solve the problems that exist in publicly run prisons.
- ◆ Ethnic minorities are more likely to be given custodial sentences.
- ◆ Are drug dependent offenders being given the opportunity to reform?
- ◆ The penal system is ineffectual in dealing with crime.
- ◆ The prison system fails to meet the needs of women.
- ◆ The drug culture in Scottish prisons has grown out of hand.
- ◆ Are prisons responsible for the high recidivism rates?
- ◆ Does the punishment fit the crime?

STUDY THEME 3: THE EUROPEAN UNION AND RESEARCH METHODS

Context A: The United Kingdom and the European Decision-making Process

- ◆ Why are there deep divisions both within and among major UK political parties about UK participation in the EU?
- ◆ The Euro is a political problem, not an economic one.
- ◆ Britain does not want to be at the heart of the EU.
- ◆ UK and EU politicians have let down our farmers, the fishing industry and environmentalists: they obviously have little influence on the policy-making process.

Context B: Representation in the European Parliament

- ◆ All member states should use the same electoral system to elect MEPs.
- ◆ The EU parliamentary structure will have to change fundamentally to cope with EU enlargement.
- ◆ The voice of women is not adequately heard in EU politics.
- ◆ Electoral systems are to blame for poor turnouts in European Parliamentary elections across the EU.

Context C: Decision-making in the European Union

- ◆ The European Parliament has failed to bring the European Commission under control.
- ◆ The European Commission is the only body in the EU which has gained in power.
- ◆ The EU decision-making process needs radical reform.
- ◆ The Council of Ministers is undemocratic and unaccountable.

Context D: The European Union and the Wider World

- ◆ Enlargement of the EU will slow down its political and economic development.
- ◆ Political, economic and human rights standards demanded by the EU mean that some prospective members will never be able to join.
- ◆ The expansion of the EU is good for all members and prospective members.
- ◆ The economic problems associated with EU enlargement outweigh the perceived political benefits.

TOPICS FROM THE HIGHER COURSE

The experience of examiners, over 2001–2005, would suggest that candidates who submit dissertations based on a Higher topic may produce less satisfactory dissertations than those using themes from the Advanced Higher Course.

Decision–making in Central Government

- ◆ Parliament is in decline: its power and authority have been transferred to the Prime Minister.
- ◆ Conflicting demands make the role of an MP impossible in the UK.

The Government of Scotland

- ◆ Devolution means that there is little need for the post of Secretary of State for Scotland.
- ◆ The Scottish Parliament has no real power.

Political Parties and their Policies

- ◆ The internal organisation of the Labour Party has become more democratic in the last ten years.
- ◆ The Conservative Party must adapt or die.

The Electoral System, Voting and Political Attitudes

- ◆ Social class is no longer a major influence on voting behaviour in the UK.
- ◆ ‘First Past the Post’ is the most suitable way to elect members to the Westminster Parliament.

Income and Wealth in the UK

- ◆ Labour has failed to bridge the poverty gap in the UK.
- ◆ The government’s policy of moving the unemployed from welfare to work has been a great success.

Health Care in the UK

- ◆ The National Health Service is under funded and can no longer provide universal and comprehensive health care for the UK population.
- ◆ The NHS has failed the people of the UK.
- ◆ Inequalities in health have been exaggerated.

A Society in Change — South Africa

- ◆ Blacks have made no social or economic progress since 1994.
- ◆ There is no real political opposition in South Africa.

A Society in Change — China

- ◆ The Communist leadership has relaxed its economic control over the Chinese people but its political grip remains.
- ◆ China's human rights record is unacceptable.

Ethnic Minorities in the USA

- ◆ Affirmative action has been of great political and economic advantage to African Americans in the USA.
- ◆ African Americans and Hispanics have made little political progress in the USA.

The European Union

- ◆ Enlargement is not in the best interests of the present members of the EU.
- ◆ The CAP must be reformed.
- ◆ The economic problems of European enlargement outweigh the political benefits.

Global Security

- ◆ The United Nations has failed in its peacekeeping duties over the last ten years.
- ◆ NATO is now the world's peacekeeper.

The Politics of Food

- ◆ NGOs are the only effective providers of aid.
- ◆ Food shortages in the Sudan* are not caused by natural factors.

* or any other country, region, or sub-Saharan Africa