

Politics and Prisons

Final year module

Lecturer: Sarah Colvin

Prisons mirror the societies that create them. Issues of gender, class, and race are clearly in play, and political and ethical questions around justice, punishment, rehabilitation, deviance, and “normal” citizenship. This module engages with theories and ideas around some of the thornier issues every democracy faces.

Most of us have never been inside a prison, and may not even know where our local prison is. But we have probably watched *Prison Break*, *America’s Toughest Prisons*, *Bad Girls*, or *the Shawshank Redemption*. Why are prisons so invisible in real life, but so visible in film and television? Documentary and fictional films will be shown and analyzed as we address issues of media and reality.

Finally we look at prisoners as subjects as well as objects of discourse. The international writers’ union, PEN, runs writing programmes in prisons. Texts written by prisoners will provide a basis for answering the questions: what is the point of writing in prisons, and what do prisoners have to write about anyway?

This module builds analytical and critical skills introduced in second-year modules such as *Foundations of Modern Political and Social Theory or Institutions, Politics, and Policies of the EU*, and it complements other final-year modules such as *Contemporary Political Theory*; *British Politics and the Media*; *International Ethics*; *Gender in World Politics*; and *Critical Approaches to Security*.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module students should:

- Demonstrate a thorough knowledge and understanding of contemporary and historical arguments around prison
- Critically analyse these arguments to reach an independent assessment of the meaning and function of prison, and the challenges it poses to a democratic society
- Communicate opinions and arguments with clarity and balance
- Demonstrate an understanding of theoretical/analytical concepts such as discourse, narrative, representation, self-representation

Assessment

- Class presentation (10%)
- Class participation/teamwork (10%)
- 4000-word essay: 40%