



SYLLABUS

CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

Contact Hours: 40

Language of Instruction: English

LONDON, ENGLAND

COURSE DESCRIPTION

At the end of October 2019, Britain is due to leave the European Union after almost half-a-century of membership. That decision, made in a nationwide referendum in June 2016, came as a huge surprise to most politicians and commentators. It has revealed deep divisions in British society and has reshaped political loyalties and debate. With only a few weeks left before 'Brexit', it's far from clear whether Britain will leave as scheduled, whether it will do so with or without a deal with the EU ... and there is talk of a possible early general election later this year. The country is in the throes of the greatest political turbulence for many decades and how that plays out will become clearer during the months you spend in London.

Contemporary Britain in a Global Context examines contemporary British politics and society and is the core course of the GEO London semester. We will discuss the commanding themes in British politics and public life and look at their historical context. The course provides an introduction to the principal institutions, parties and issues in British politics. This will extend to consideration of key social issues - including race and diversity and aspects of popular culture from broadcasting to sport, from music to the monarchy.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course aims to analyze key cultural, social, economic and political developments and so provide students with a context for their study options. It will provide students with the grounding and analytical tools to compare and contrast contemporary Britain with the United States. We aim to take advantage of London's unique status not simply as Britain's political and cultural capital but also as one of the world's most diverse urban centers. Classes will include talks by experts and those directly involved in the political process, and will be complemented by excursions and study trips.

LEARNING OUTCOME:

Students who undertake this course and participate fully can expect to gain a thorough knowledge of the country's political process, as well as its key cultural, social and economic challenges.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY

The course introduces competing interpretations, drawing in particular on the fields of comparative politics, history and economics. Students will be able to gain from direct access to scholars of and participants in Britain's political processes.

RULES AND PROCEDURES

Attendance at the sessions and excursions is obligatory. The sessions combine introductory lectures, presentations, discussions and group work. In some sessions, students will be asked to participate in debates and to prepare and deliver group presentations. You are expected to prepare actively for all classes and to contribute to all seminars.

STUDY VISITS AND EXCURSIONS:

During the semester, the course aims to integrate study visits, many of which are dependent on our class schedule and so subject to confirmation. These are likely to include:

- A visit to the London Assembly for Mayor's Question Time
- A walk through London's diverse and absorbing East End
- A tour of the newly regenerated King's Cross area
- A three-day visit to the Scottish capital, Edinburgh

ESSENTIAL READING:

Martin Upham (2017) *Britain Explained: Understanding British Identity* - an excellent book by a former director of GEO London

FURTHER READING:

Links to recent articles will be provided for each class. There is one recent book in particular that you are encouraged to study ahead of the class visit to Edinburgh - Iain Macwhirter (2014) *Disunited Kingdom: how Westminster won a referendum but lost Scotland*.

WATCH OR LISTEN TO THE NEWS:

This is essential. Our classes will be shaped by current political debates and developments - and you need to be well informed. The main TV news bulletins are on BBC1 at 18:00 and 22:00 and Channel 4 at 19:00. In the morning most opinion formers listen to the Today programme on BBC Radio 4 (93.5 FM) from 06:00 to 09:00.

... AND SURF THE WEB:

The BBC's news website is a good place to start www.bbc.co.uk/news - but you also need to read more partisan news platforms. The Guardian www.guardian.co.uk tends to take a left of centre view - while the Telegraph www.telegraph.co.uk (a subscription website but you can get a sense of its news coverage without subscribing) is right of centre.

METHOD OF EVALUATION (GRADING)

The standards for this course will not be lower than at home. An A will be awarded only for the best quality work; poor work will be appropriately graded. Include a bibliography. There is no need to use encyclopaedias.

1. Class Presentation: 10%
2. Two written assignments with topics and deadlines to be advised: each 20%
3. Research Project: 30%
4. Research Project Presentation: 10%
5. Class Participation and Attendance: 10%

1. Presentations, Class Participation:

Over the course of the semester, students are expected to give occasional presentations to the class. These are designed to encourage discussion and debate and will sometimes be group presentations involving PowerPoint and other forms of displaying information and illustrating argument.

Students are expected actively to take part in class discussion and debates and to ask questions of visiting speakers. Failure to do so, and failure to attend regularly without appropriate reason for absence, will be reflected in your grade.

2. Written Assignments:

Over the course of the semester you will be required to undertake two written assignments, each of between 500 and 1,000 words. These should include references, footnotes and a bibliography as appropriate. The deadlines for these assignments will be the last Mondays in September and October - the first assignment is given below, and topics for the remaining assignment will be circulated in due course.

The first written assignment: *'Imagine you are an ambassador in London representing a small and distant nation - in 500 words, write a summary for your government about what Brexit is, how and why it happened, and what its likely consequences will be.'*

3. Research Project:

You will complete a 1,500 word research project (or by agreement a video, podcast, or visually driven work) - an opportunity for you to study in depth an aspect of London that is of particular interest to you. In putting together your project you are encouraged to draw on the materials and approaches you encounter in all your classes, walks, tours and other experiences. You are free to be as creative and contemporary as you wish in your use of media. Your research should not rely exclusively on internet sources. You will be required to make use of a range of resources only available to you because you are in London.

Choosing a topic: You will agree a topic with your instructor before the mid-term break, and it must be completed by DATE. A focused and specific topic will be best. You could choose a street, a person, a moment in time, the impact on London of war, redevelopment, immigration, fashion, music ... be adventurous!

4. Research Project Presentation:

This presentation will provide an opportunity to share your research with the rest of the class as well as to demonstrate communication skills. You need to think about how you make your

research interesting and accessible to others. Your presentation should take ten minutes and you should be prepared to answer questions.

COURSE OUTLINE

These are all provisional and may change to take account of study trips, the availability of guest speakers and to reflect emerging political issues and controversies

- Session 1 **'Brexit'**
+ why did Britain vote to leave the EU?
+ why has Europe proved such a divisive political issue?
+ what happens now?
(*Britain Explained*, chapter 9)
- Session 2 **Parties and elections**
+ political journalist Olivia Utley helps us make sense of what's happening in British politics
+ how did Boris Johnson become prime minister?
+ why has the Labour Party swung to the left?
+ what has happened to the centre ground in politics?
(*Britain Explained*, chapters 1 to 3)
- Session 3 **A Stroll round King's Cross**
+ one of London's most troubled inner-city areas has been transformed by a vast regeneration project
+ we will visit the refurbished canal-side warehouses and look at what's left of the 'old' King Cross
- Session 4 **The rise of Scottish nationalism**
+ ahead of our visit to Edinburgh, Dr Martin Upham - author of *Britain Explained* - will talk about the rise of the Scottish National Party
+ is Scotland heading out of the United Kingdom?
(*Britain Explained*, chapter 7)
- Visit to Edinburgh**
- Session 5 **Walk round London's East End**
+ your prof leads you through Shoreditch, Brick Lane and Whitechapel - a chance to see a side of London not always visible to visitors
+ along with a visit to the Bishopsgate Institute (tbc)
- No Class: Mid-Term Break**
- Session 7 **How Parliament Works - and the role of local government**
+ how the House of Commons and the House of Lords operate and the importance of the committee system
+ the remit and structure of local government

- + the concept of the 'northern power house'
- + the Northern Ireland peace process
(*Britain Explained*, chapters 4, 5 and 6)
- + and a chance to catch up on just where we are on Brexit!

Session 8

Gender and Diversity

- + Dr Amanda Milburn will talk about feminism in Britain, its achievements and challenges
- + the history of immigration and race relations in Britain
- + who are Britain's ethnic minorities and how are they doing
- + the influence of the gay rights movement
(*Britain Explained*, chapter 12)

Session 9

Cool Britannia

- + Britain's exceptional contribution to popular music from The Beatles to Ed Sheeran, via the Sex Pistols and the Spice Girls

Session 10

Mayor's Question Time

- + we will sit in on a session of the London Assembly when questions are put to the Mayor of London
- + **this will be a morning class - questions start at 10 a.m. and we will meet outside City Hall at 9:30 a.m.**
(*Britain Explained*, chapter 8)

Session 11

Monarchy - and Soft Power

- + screening of 'The Queen'
- + the current role of the British monarchy
- + the other institutions which provide soft power: the Premier League, the Universities, the BBC

Session 12

Your Presentations

- + the first of two sessions given over to the presentation to the class of your research projects

Session 13

More of Your Presentations

- + the remaining research presentations, at the conclusion of which you should know a great deal about 'Britain Today'

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