



SYLLABUS

BRITAIN TODAY: ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

Instructor: Andrew Whitehead
Contact Hours: 45
Language of Instruction: English

LONDON, ENGLAND

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In June last year, against all expectations, Britain voted to leave the European Union. Within hours, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, resigned. This June, his successor, Theresa May, held a surprise general election. It didn't go quite as she expected. Britain is in the throes of the greatest political turbulence for half-a-century, and how that plays out will become clearer during the months you spend in London.

Britain Today 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 guided tour around the Houses of Parliament
- A walk through London's diverse and absorbing East End and a chance to have an accompanied tour of Brixton, an inner city area south of the river
- A visit to the London Assembly for Mayor's Question Time
- A three-day visit to the Scottish capital, Edinburgh

ESSENTIAL READING:

Martin Upham (2017), *Britain Explained: Understanding British Identity*, London, John Harper Publishing - an excellent and brand new 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. The best current affairs analysis is on Newsnight (BBC2) at 22:30. 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 make several visits a month 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 600 and 1,000 words. These should include references, footnotes and a bibliography. The deadlines for these assignments will be the first Mondays in October and November - the first assignment is given below, and topics for the remaining assignments will be circulated in due course.

The first written assignment will be due by 13:00 on Monday 2nd October. This is what you need to write about: *'Imagine you are an adviser to Britain's Prime Minister - write a briefing note for her on the political and diplomatic challenges posed by Brexit and recommend courses of action'*.

3. Research Project:

You will complete a 1,500 word research project - 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 different kind 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 Monday 27th November. 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, the representation of London in film or painting ... 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

- Monday 11 September **'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)
- Monday 18 September **Parties and elections**
+ what went wrong for Mrs May in June's general election?
+ why has the Labour Party swung to the left?
+ what has happened to the centre ground in politics?
(*Britain Explained*, chapters 1 to 3)
- Monday 25 September **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 the ethnic minorities and how are they doing
+ the influence of the gay rights movement
(*Britain Explained*, chapter 12)
- Monday 2 October **The rise of Scottish nationalism**
+ ahead of our visit to Edinburgh, Dr Martin Upham will talk about the rise of the Scottish National Party
+ is Scotland heading out of the United Kingdom?
(*Britain Explained*, chapter 7)
- 4 - 6 October **Visit to Edinburgh**
- Monday 9 October **The streets of Brixton**
+ cultural researcher and tour guide Kelly Foster takes us round the inner city area of Brixton, which has long been one of London's most diverse and happening places
- Thursday** 12 October **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.**
- Monday 16 October **No Class: Mid-Term Break**
- Monday 23 October **Houses of Parliament**
+ a guided tour round Parliament including the debating chambers of the House of Commons and the House of Lords
+ **this will be a morning class with an early start - the tour begins at 9 a.m.**

- Monday 30 October No class this week – a chance for you to push ahead on your research project
- Monday 6 November **Walk round London's East End**
+ your prof leads you through Shoreditch, Brick Lane and Whitechapel - a chance to see aspects of London not always visible to visitors
+ along with a visit to the Bishopsgate Institute (tbc)
- Monday 13 November **London and the nation**
+ centralisation of power and the role of local government
+ the London Mayor - what is he in charge of?
+ the concept of the 'northern power house'
+ the Northern Ireland peace process
(*Britain Explained*, chapters 4, 5, 6 and 8)
- Monday 20 November **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 and (once) One Direction
- Monday 27 November **Your Presentations**
+ the first of two sessions given over to the presentation to the class of your research projects
- Monday 4 December **Your Presentations**
+ the remaining research presentations, at the conclusion of which you should know a great deal about 'Britain Today'

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