Boston University Study Abroad
London

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British Media in the Digital Age
COM CM 744
Summer 2015

Instructor Information

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Course Objectives

To give an overall picture of contemporary British media (both state-funded and commercial); to provide a broad study of the major developments in the history of the British press and television in the postwar era; to relate the media to broad changes in British society and put them into a social context; to examine the changes wrought by the proliferation of new social media; to examine the work of specific media institutions, such as newspapers and television, in detail; to stimulate critical analysis of all kinds of media products through written work and discussion. The ultimate aim is to increase awareness of British media in the digital age, and to give an insight into how they are organised, why they have developed into their present form, and what they say about the British nation.

Course Overview

The course will introduce the student to the wide range British media, from national institutions such as the main newspapers and the BBC, to the new digital media. It will provide an overview of the history and current status of the country’s media, and offer a sound introduction to other sectors of the creative industries, such as theatre, music and fashion. The course will focus especially on the theme of Britishness, and on how national identity is expressed in the institutions, practices and products of the media. What does it mean to be British today, and how is this identity projected by broadcast media, newspapers and other broader cultural forms? Such questions will be covered through lectures and visits to institutions, which exemplify the broad spectrum of the subject. The course will cover issues such as government funding for culture, censorship and freedom, as well as the relationship between media and citizenship. It will look at examples of various media with the aim of stimulating critical analysis through written work and
discussion, and will complement other learning opportunities open to graduate students in London.

Methodology
The course will be taught over nine four-hour sessions. Lectures by Aleks Sierz and Lia Ghilardi will be supplemented with in-class video screenings, field trips, visiting speakers, and will involve readings from relevant texts as well as other class exercises.

Assessment
20% Class participation.
40% Class Presentation in the final week of core phase.
40% Final Paper (2,500 words), submitted in the final week of core phase.

Course Outline:

Session One:
Introduction: What Does It Mean To Be British Today?
1) Course introduction: Student introductions; outline of sessions; explanation of assessment; reading list; course visits and dates.
2) Why national identity is a negotiation, a discussion, rather than a given? Discuss: what is Britishness, and how does it differ from Englishness? How is national identity expressed in symbols, stories and other cultural artifacts? Class exercise: Three icons of Britishness.
3) In-class video about Britishness.
4) Outline of British post-war history, covering milestones such as the Welfare State debate; Coronation televised; Suez Crisis; ‘Never Had it So Good’ generation; the Profumo scandal; Swinging London; 1970s social unrest; Thatcherism and the Falklands War; 1990s New Labour and Cool Britannia; financial crisis and the new Toryism.
5) Short visit from BU Librarian: sources and resources.

Session Two:
The Great British Press
1) History of newspapers in Britain from 18th-century coffee houses, and their vigorous pamphleteering, to the 19th-century industrialization of the press and the rise of the Fourth Estate, followed by the era of the press barons in the 20th century.
2) The relationship between the press and political power today. Discuss: do British newspapers wield power without responsibility?
3) Spot the Difference: Broadsheets and tabloids. Class exercise comparing the form and content of British newspapers using key samples. Analysis of the ways in which different newspapers report the same story. Focus on language use.
4) Magazines: how magazines are opinion formers and life style shapers. Case study: Private Eye as a cultural provocateur. Issues: Are lads’ mags sexist? Do women’s magazines perpetuate the image of the ‘domestic goddess’? The rise of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) press in Britain: a sign of greater tolerance, or a lucrative niche market?
5) Briefing for first class visit.
**Session Three:**
**BBC and Other Broadcasting Media**
1) The rise of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), from monopoly radio to monopoly television. John Reith’s vision. How is the BBC funded and what is its remit in relation to nation-building, identity and pride? Issues: bias, and neutrality. Discuss: what is public-service broadcasting? How does the BBC exemplify traditional British values (stewardship and patronage) and how does it contribute to improving the general level of education of the citizens?  
2) Class exercise: watch two programmes and assess them against these public service values (eg, Newsnight and The Great British Bake Off).  
3) Challenge of ITV and other commercial channels. The battle for audiences in 24 hour news. Discuss: Entertainment or public service? A uniquely British set-up.  
4) Case study: British soaps, when they started, and how do they deal with social issues. Viewing patterns.  
5) Discussion of first class visit.

**Session Four:**
**High culture: Theatre and the Performing Arts**
1) Overview of the British system of arts funding by the state. The Arts Council: is this body an example of the nanny state or a genuine patron? What the “arm’s length policy” is and by what means was the British system of arts funding developed in the postwar period. Discuss: why should the state fund the arts? The social, moral, cultural and aesthetic implications of state funding.  
2) The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the rise of creative industries policies during the 1990s.  
3) Overview of the live performing arts sector, including theatre, opera, dance and classical music. When were the National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company set up, how are they funded and what do they do? Questions of high art versus mass entertainment. The role of the performing arts in creating cultural identity. Discuss: are the arts in Britain caught between the risk of being too elitist and the urge to dumb down?  
4) The West End phenomenon. The rise of the block-buster musical (is London imitating the American model?)  
5) Toffs and the opera. The ROH versus ENO: class, populism and artistic innovation.  
6) City branding through culture. Case study: urban regeneration and city branding through cultural events and initiatives.  
7) Briefing for second class visit.

**Session Five: Monday June ??**
**Popular Culture: Pop Music, Fashion and Celebrity**
1) Post-war urban sub-cultures (key cities: Brighton, Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, the London burbs). Questions of class in British popular culture. Pop music, fashion and sub-culture (from Mods and Rockers to Rave Culture). Discuss: Social mobility and taste.  
2) Punk music and Britain’s Do It Yourself culture. Case study: Vivienne Westwood versus Stella McCartney.  
3) In class video of BBC documentary about “chavs”, X Factor and celebrity culture.  
4) The British Film industry. From Brief Encounter to Four Weddings, Slumdog Millionaire and Skyfall: British Identity in a globalised world.  
5) Discussion of second class visit.
Session Six: Tuesday June ??

New Media and Journalism
1) Overview of New Media and the digital revolution.
2) Death of Fleet Street: Rupert Murdoch’s restructuring of the British newspaper industry in the 1980s. Discuss: Has new media in the digital age saved the newspapers? (Online versions of newspapers, and newspaper blogs.)
3) The Phone Hacking Scandal and the Leveson Inquiry: Is Freedom of the Press an absolute value and, if not, how do you regulate this sector?
4) Citizen journalism and bloggers. Participatory journalism, twitterati and their opinion-forming power. Virtual democracy and the new public sphere.
5) Briefing for third class visit.

Session Seven:
New Media and Broadcasting
2) Limitless programmes for all? The public debate about BBC Three: Why has the Director General of the BBC decided to make this an internet-only channel?
3) What’s the point of the BBC Licence Fee? Discuss: What are the arguments for and against the retention of the current system of funding the BBC?
4) Discussion of third class visit.

Session Eight:
New Media and Daily Life: Shopping, Surveillance and Risk
1) Britain as a land of shoppers: 24/7 Shopping and endless choice at the click of a mouse. But what are the ethical and the economic implications of this?
3) Surveillance. Big brother is watching you: London as the surveillance capital of the world. Discuss: What has happened to the concept of privacy in an age of government snooping and individual indiscretion?
4) Case study: What’s the point of the Official Secrets Act in a digital age? Subversion and the Public Interest defence.
5) Briefing for fourth class visit.

Session Nine:
Course review
1) Student Evaluation Forms.
2) Discussion of fourth class visit.
3) Quiz and review of what you have learned (twenty questions about the material covered in the course).
4) General review of topics covered in the course as exam preparation.
5) How to use the Pecha Kucha method for Class Presentation (exam).

Exam day
Class Presentation and Final Paper Due
**Required Reading**

**Set textbooks:**
Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (Pan, 2007)

**Suggested additional readings:**

**Overviews:**

**Britishness:**
Kate Fox, *Watching the English* (Hodder, 2004)
Lonely Planet, *British Language and Culture* (Lonely Planet, 2013)

**Traditional Media:**
Nick Davies, *Flat Earth News* (Vintage, 2009)
Toby Young, *How To Lose Friends and Alienate People* (Abacus, 2002)

**Cultural Industries and Urban Regeneration:**
Department for Culture, Media and Sport, *Culture at the Heart of Regeneration* (DCMS, 2004)
David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries* (Sage, 2007)

**Digital Media:**
Adrian Athique, *Digital Media and Society: An Introduction* (Polity, 2013)
Glen Greeber and Royston Martin (eds), *Digital Cultures: Understanding New Media* (Open University, 2008)
Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York University, 2008)
Vincent Miller, *Understanding Digital Culture* (Sage, 2011)
Negroponte, Nicholas, *Being Digital* (Coronet, 1996)

**Popular culture:**
Steve Blandford, *Film, Drama and the Break-Up of Britain* (Intellect, 2007)
Ken Gelder, *The Subcultures Reader* (Routledge, 2005)
Jon Savage, *England’s Dreaming* (Faber, 2005)

**Issues:**
Raymond Kuhn, *Politics and the Media in Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

**Useful websites:**
The BBC: [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)
The Guardian: [www.guardian.co.uk/](http://www.guardian.co.uk/)
The Department for Culture, Media and Sport: [www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk)
The Arts Council: [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)