Boston University Study Abroad London

British Journalism, Culture & Society

COM JO 358 (*Core course*)

Spring 2018

Instructor information:

Name: Ellie Levenson

Class dates and time: Wednesdays and Thursdays 9.15am-1.15pm (starting Thu 18 Jan)

Contact Hours 40 + take home exam

BU Telephone:

Email:

Office hours: By appointment

Course Objectives

This course takes a twin approach, offering students both an introduction to British media and society that will aid their understanding of and participation in their internships, and a series of writing workshops to build upon the journalism skills they may have acquired elsewhere in their studies. The aim is that students will be able to read and understand British newspapers by the end of the course, and produce a publishable feature from conception to completion.

Element One – British media, culture and society

This element of the course will look at the types of newspaper and broadcaster that exists in the UK and seek to understand their news agendas, tone and place in the psyche of the nation. It will also cover British political systems and parties, and the institutions and cultural elements that make up life in the UK. This will include a look at current affairs and the headlines each week. This element of the course will include regular guided and independent reading, analysis and discussion of British newspapers and websites.

Element Two – Journalism skills
Through a series of practical assignments, this element will look at the different types of non-news article journalists may write in their careers and ways to find and realise ideas. Please be prepared to speak about your ideas and read out your work.

The programme will include specially arranged field trips, details of which will be made available early in the semester.

**Assessment:**

There will be a **compulsory final take home examination on Monday 19 Feb. It will consist of questions relating to Element One.** Exam arrangements will be posted on the BU London website and in the Student Newsletter two weeks before exam dates.

There will be **three** compulsory written assignments: (1) an analysis of a British newspaper article about a topical news subject – this will be graded and it is hoped it will give students a guide as to how prepared they are for the exam (2) two journalistic reports based on a field trips to designated areas of London – the first of these will be graded with feedback and the second of these will be submitted as part of the final grade. Deadlines for the two assignments will be announced shortly after the semester begins.

There will also be compulsory weekly assignments during the semester, which will be discussed in class.

**Overall marking:** 1/3rd class participation 1/3rd the **journalistic report** (the second assignment in (2) above); 1/3rd final examination.

**Grading**

Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria and policies on plagiarism: [http://www.bu.edu/london/current-semester](http://www.bu.edu/london/current-semester)

*Final Grades are subject to deductions by the Academic Affairs Office due to unauthorised absences.*

**Attendance Policy**

**Classes**

All Boston University London Programme students are expected to attend each and every class session, seminar, and field trip in order to fulfill the required course contact hours and receive course credit. Any student that has been absent from two class sessions (whether authorised or unauthorised) will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their continued participation on the programme.

*Authorised Absence:*

Students who expect to be absent from any class should notify a member of Academic Affairs and complete an Authorized Absence Approval Form 10 working days in advance of the class date (except in the case of absence due to illness for more than one day. In this situation students should submit the Authorised Absence Approval Form with the required doctor’s note as soon as
possible). The Authorised Absence Approval Request Form is available from: http://www.bu.edu/london/current-semester/

Please note: Submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Form does not guarantee an authorised absence

Students may apply for an authorised absence only under the following circumstances:

- **Illness (first day of sickness):** If a student is too ill to attend class, the student must phone the BU London Student Affairs Office (who will in turn contact the student’s lecturer).

- **Illness (multiple days):** If a student is missing more than one class day due to illness, the student must call into the BU London Student Affairs Office each day the student is ill. Students must also provide the Student Affairs office with a completed Authorised Absence Approval Form and a sick note from a local doctor excusing their absence from class.

- Important placement event that clashes with a class (verified by internship supervisor)

- Special circumstances which have been approved by the Directors (see note below).

The **Directors will only in the most extreme cases allow students to leave the programme early or for a significant break.**

*Unauthorized Absence:*

Any student to miss a class due to an unauthorised absence will receive a **4% grade penalty** to their final grade for the course whose class was missed. This grade penalty will be applied by the Academic Affairs office to the final grade at the end of the course. As stated above, any student that has missed two classes will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their participation on the programme as excessive absences may result in a ‘Fail’ in the class and therefore expulsion from the programme.

**Religious Holidays**

Boston University’s Office of the University Registrar states:

‘The University, in scheduling classes on religious holidays and observances, intends that students observing those traditions be given ample opportunity to make up work. Faculty members who wish to observe religious holidays will arrange for another faculty member to meet their classes or for cancelled classes to be rescheduled.’

**Special Accommodations**

Each student will need to contact the Office of Disability Services to request accommodations for the semester they are abroad. Students are advised by BU-ODS not to expect the same accommodations as they receive on campus.

BU London can only uphold special accommodations if we have received the appropriate documentation from the BU-ODS. We cannot accept letters from other universities/centres.
All disabilities need to be known to the ODS in Boston if they are to be used as a reason for requiring a change in conditions, i.e. reduced internship hours or special accommodations for the internship schedule.

**Lateness**

Students arriving more than 15 minutes after the posted class start time will be marked as late. Any student with irregular class attendance (more than two late arrivals to class) will be required to meet with the Associate Director for Academic Affairs and if the lateness continues, may have his/her final grade penalised.

**Course Outline**

**Thu 18 Jan – Introductory session**

We will use this session to get to know each other and explore some of our first impressions of the media in the UK and current news stories. We will look at the big stories of the day and how different publications are covering the same story, and analyse who the readers and consumers of the various publications may be.

We will also identify some British opinion formers and decision makers, from celebrities to politicians, for you to follow on social media. We will discuss these each week.

Please familiarise yourself with the UK national newspapers before this date – either hard copies or online. They are:


You may also like to familiarise yourself with the Sunday versions of the above newspapers where such versions exist, and with weekly magazines The Spectator and New Statesman.

**Wed 24 Jan – The British political system**

Including: Who are our representatives and how do they get there? What is their job? Why don’t we have a written constitution? What does the monarchy actually do? What’s the difference between the PM and an MP, an AM and an MSP, and the several types of Mayor? What are the main political parties and who are the current main players? Who can vote and how do we do this? What’s the difference between the United Kingdom and Great Britain? What’s our role in the world – special relationship with the US, relationship with the rest of the Europe, position in the Commonwealth? Etc

**Thurs 25 Jan - The types of article and how to get ideas**

We will look at the different types of articles found in newspapers and magazines and ensure we have common points of reference for the course. We will discuss which types we enjoy and which we find challenging, and the pros and cons of writing each type. We will also look at what makes a good feature idea and using everyday conversations, objects and observations, we
will look at how to come up with ideas that can become workable readable articles.

**Wed 31 Jan – Guest speaker tbc**

**Thurs 1 Feb – Field Trip**

London based field trip with journalistic assignments. Details tbc

**Wed 7 Feb – Writing features**

A look at how to write features, use experts and incorporate descriptive language, we will also read examples from across various publications and prepare for next week’s assignment.

**Thurs 8 Feb – guest speaker tbc**

**Friday 9 February – contingency class**

**Wednesday 14 Feb – all day field trip**

Field trip to the Tower of London forming the basis of your assessed journalistic assignment.

**Thursday 15 Feb**

Revising session recapping on the content of the course and ensuring the class feels comfortable with understanding British media and politics.

**Take home exam - Monday 19 Feb**

**Contingency Class Date: Friday 9 February** Students are obligated to keep this date free to attend class should any class dates need to be rescheduled.

There will be selected readings available online or as hard copies issued to students each week. In addition to this students are expected to regularly read British newspapers and to read the following book ahead of the course:

Creativity and Feature Writing: How to get hundreds of new ideas every day by Ellie Levenson (Routledge)

Those wishing to do further reading may enjoy:

Flat Earth News by Nick Davies (Vintage)

The Insider by Piers Morgan (Ebury)

Notes from a small island by Bill Bryson (Black Swan)