

Graduate Course JO 708
The Foreign Correspondent: Reporting from Europe

Tutor: David McNeil

Overview:

This course will introduce you to the world of the Foreign Correspondent. In the United States, ambitious reporters often seek an overseas posting that lasts a few years because it could enhance their career prospects back home. In Britain, and many other European countries, the job of Foreign Correspondent is viewed as a career in itself, not simply a means of gaining promotion.

There are two major themes running throughout the course. Many Foreign Correspondents find themselves covering wars, so we will analyse the role of the War Correspondent. In that context, we will consider the extraordinary impact of photo-journalism as well as the development of coverage by radio, television and newspapers from the first media war – the Boer War – to the first television war – Vietnam – to the recent war in Iraq. There will be a particular emphasis on the skills involved in reporting conflict, including the delicate relationship between reporter and soldier and the arguments over how much of the reality of war should be shown on television. The major wars of the last century originated in Europe. Since 1945, driven by a determination to end the cycle of violence, European states have been working to develop interlocking institutions that are supposed to make it almost impossible for inter-European disputes to be resolved by force. We will examine how those institutions have been formed and the issues involved in reporting their evolution.

On a practical level, we will explore the day-to-day life of a Foreign Correspondent. What credentials – journalistic and linguistic – are required? How does a Foreign Correspondent ‘find’ the news and process it? We will evaluate the relative merits of different areas of reporting – political, social and personal. Foreign Correspondents need to be highly-skilled interviewers, whether for electronic or print media. We will work to develop those skills in class.

Throughout this course, students will be encouraged to compare and contrast the working of journalism in the United States with the way it is done in Europe.

Reading List

t.b.c.

Your grade in this course is based on two assignments and an examination. Your first assignment will require you to write a leader/editorial in the style of The Economist news magazine on the subject to be chosen by your tutor and will make up a third of your final grade. For the second assignment, you will need to produce an article written as though for publication by a newspaper or magazine in the United States. The choice of subject is up to you, on the understanding that it must be based on an issue of topical interest. That assignment will also be worth a third of your final grade, as will the exam, which will be taken over a two-hour period. Five essay questions will be posed and you will select two from those five. Each of the two essays will be given equal weight in the marking process.

The following Boston University table explains the grading system that is used by most faculty members on Boston University British Programmes:

Grade %	Honour Points	Usual
A	4.0	93-100
A-	3.7	89-92
B+	3.3	85-88
B	3.0	81-84
B-	2.7	77-80
C+	2.3	73-76
C	2.0	69-72
C-	1.7	65-68
D	1.0	60-64
F	0.0	Below 60

Grading Criteria

“Incomplete” grades are not permitted, because of the obvious difficulty in making up missed work once a student has left the country. All work must be completed on time. The grades should reflect the quality of the work. Lecturers and students should use the following criteria for an understanding of what each grade means.

A This exceptional grade is assigned only to work that has persistently outstanding quality in both substance and presentation. The student must demonstrate a sustained capacity for independent thought and extensive study, producing rigorous and convincing analyses in well-ordered prose.

A- Awarded to work that is clearly focused and analytical and based on wide reading. The student must cover all the principal points of a question and systematically develop a persuasive overall thesis, allowing for one or two venial omissions or inept expressions.

B+, B, B- This range of grades indicates that the student has shown some evidence of original thought and intellectual initiative. The student has cited sources beyond the class materials and shown a degree of originality in perception and/or approach to the subject. The work will show thoughtful management of material and a good grasp of the issues. The differences between a B+, a straight B and a B- may reflect poor presentation of the material, or mistakes in punctuation, spelling and grammar.

C+, C, C- Work in this range is satisfactory, but uninspiring. If the work is simply a recitation of the class materials or discussions and shows no sign of intellectual engagement with the issues, it cannot deserve a higher grade. Should an essay fail to provide a clear answer to the question as set, or argue a position coherently, the grade will fall within this range. Quality of presentation can lift such work into the upper levels of this grade range. Work of this quality which is poorly presented and riddled with errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation will fall into the lower end of the range. To earn a passing grade, the work must demonstrate that the student is familiar with the primary course material, be written well enough to be readily understood, be relevant to the assignment and, of course, be the student's own work except where properly cited.

D or F This failing grade indicates that the work is seriously flawed in one or more ways:

- Obvious lack of familiarity with the material
- So poorly written as to defy understanding
- So brief and insubstantial that it fails to properly address the subject
- Material presented is not relevant to the assignment
- Demonstrates elements of plagiarism

Course Chronology

Monday

Oct. 18 Course introduction
The Foreign Correspondent – motivation and priorities
- function within the structure of an international newsgathering system
- sources and subjects
- essentials of technique

Tuesday

Oct. 19 The Foreign Correspondent – interviewing and filing
- “tricks of the trade”
The War Correspondent – photo journalism

Monday

Oct. 25 The War Correspondent
- a strategy for survival
- relations with the military
- censorship
- ethics

- Monday
Nov. 1 The evolution of war reporting
- the birth of the newsreel
- the first media war
- Monday
Nov. 8 War and Television
-BBC in Vietnam
- Monday
Nov. 15 The European Union
- reporting from Brussels – guest speaker
- set Assignment One
- Monday
Nov. 22 The NATO Alliance
- formation and development
- searching for a new raison d’etre
- Monday
Nov. 29 The International News Agencies
- guest speaker
- set Assignment Two
- Monday
Dec. 6 Inter-active workshop
- press releases
- the art of the interview
- Monday
Dec. 13 Radio Journalism
- making programmes at the BBC
- Tuesday
Dec. 14 The Way Ahead
- joint ventures
- the digital revolution
- Wednesday
Dec. 15 Final Exam

The tutor, David McNeil, brings to this course vast experience as a Foreign Correspondent for the BBC for 21 years. For 19 of those years, he was based outside the U.K. in the Middle East, Africa and the United States. He has covered numerous wars and insurrections and has reported for the BBC from 46 countries.