

**Boston University British Programs  
COM CM 744  
International Political and Media Systems  
Graduate Class  
Alexander MacLeod**

## **Course Objectives and Overview**

This course offers graduate students a detailed examination of political systems in leading world countries, together with a sustained analysis of how political processes interact with mass media to influence the conduct of government and international relations. The standpoint will be Europe-based, enabling students from the United States to consider issues from a refreshing perspective that takes account of differing political and media perceptions and priorities. The course will help students to develop their own analytical abilities and professional skills.

## **Details of Course**

Studies will be approached from two interrelated standpoints:

- (1) Description, analysis and comparison of political systems in Europe (including the Russian Federation) and the Americas, as well as other selected territories; and how mass media systems function there. This section will establish a solid factual basis for (2) below.
- (2) Consideration of how political and media systems interact to produce national and international policies. The assumption here is that in a 24/7 global news environment, politics and the media are becoming increasingly interdependent and are creating challenges for professionals in both fields.

**In (1) above**, political, constitutional and policy issues will be viewed historically as well as in contemporary terms. Emphasis will be placed on the differing ways in which democracy is interpreted and functions in different nations and regions. Examples will include the United States, the European Union (including Britain) and the Russian Federation. The functioning of political systems in southern Asia may also be considered. In addition, countries where democracy does not exist, or does so in a limited form, will be examined. In this category, examples may include China, Pakistan, as well as selected Middle Eastern countries.

**In (2) above**, the stress will be on the interaction of the mass media and the political process in the digital age. Questions posed will include:

- To what extent do the mass media - print journalism, television, radio and the Internet - facilitate sound democratic government?
- Are there circumstances where an intrusive media can impede democratic government?
- What are the barriers to constructive relations between political systems and the mass media?
- What has been the impact of globalisation on national and international political discourse? What does the future hold?

### **Study topics (mass media)**

These will include:

- political reporting and analysis;
- war and terrorism reporting;
- the impact on government of the current trend towards celebrity obsession in the mass media;
- patterns of media ownership;
- the role of lobbyists nationally and internationally.

An important element of the course will be contributions by qualified guest lecturers, as well as London Faculty members with specialist knowledge and interests.

The course will consist of nine lecture days, including field trips. The latter may include visits to the House of Commons; the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House); BBC World Service global headquarters; Reuters global headquarters; the London offices of the European Union; and the London Secretariat of the 53-member [British] Commonwealth of Nations.

There will be opportunities for students to make brief presentations to the group on topics selected from the overall course structure.

Students will be required to research and write a 5000-word essay on an agreed topic relating to media coverage of international politics.

There will be a Final Examination.

### **Required Readings**

Information Age Journalism: Journalism in an International Context by Vincent Campbell

The Mission: Journalism, Ethics and the World (International Topics in Media)  
by Joseph B. Atkins (Editor)

Issues in World Politics by Brian White, Richard Little, and Michael Smith

Behind the Front Page: a Candid Look at How the News is Made by David S. Broder

Prime Ministers and the Media :Issues of Power and Control by Brian McNair

Global Journalism: A Survey of International Communication by John C, Merrill

Global Journalism: Topical Issues and Media Systems by Arnold S de Beer and John C. Merrill

Total Lobbying: What Lobbyists Want (and How they Try to Get It) by Anthony J. Nownes

**NOTE:** Reading of British daily and Sunday newspapers is a non-negotiable element of this course. Each day students will be required to read from a selection of national and international newspapers and be prepared to answer questions about them during classes.

**NOTE ALSO:** Students will be required to view a range of British television programmes, with emphasis on news and public affairs programmes. The same will apply to accessing the Internet as a source of news and analysis. Students must be prepared, during classes, to answer questions about their reading, viewing and surfing.

Students will be required to take a lively interest in news developments in the UK, as well as globally on a selective. Among international papers to be read will be the monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique* (English language edition).

Any student who does not have access to a working TV set or Internet-accessible computer must report this immediately.

### **Assessment Methods and Grading Criteria**

Particular attention will be paid to class attendance (including punctuality) and participation; roll calls will be routine. A reasonable standard of dress must be maintained at all times. Eating or drinking during class will not be permitted.

**Overall marking: 20 per cent** class participation, including class tests; **40 per cent** major written assignment; **40 per cent** final examination.

Grading is in accordance with the Boston University classification scheme as follows:

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Honour Points</b>	<b>Usual %</b>	<b>Definition</b>
A	4.0	93-100	Excellent
A-	3.7	89-92	
B+	3.3	85-88	
B	3.0	81-84	Good
B-	2.7	77-80	
C+	2.3	73-76	
C	2.0	69-72	Satisfactory
C-	1.7	65-68	
D	1.0	60-64	Low pass
F	0.0	Below 60	Fail

**“Incomplete”** or **I** grades are not permitted to be issued by faculty, because of the obvious difficulty in making up missed work once the student has left the country. All work must be completed on time. The grades reflect the quality of the work.

It is also important to realise that grades below C may not be transferable to non BU students' home institutions. Lecturers and students should use the following criteria for an understanding of what each grade means.

**“Withdrawn”** The Boston University Provost has announced that faculty members may no longer assign grades of "W" (Withdrawn). In supporting this policy, the Registrar's Office will no longer assign W grades on individual students' official Boston University

records, even if the grade sheet has a "W" recorded for a student. Alternative grades to "W" are "F" (Failing) or "MG" (Missing Grade).

## Grading Criteria

**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 inapt 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 grade range is satisfactory, but uninspiring. If the work is simply a recitation of the class materials or discussions, and shows no sign of genuine 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 C 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** A marginal pass can be given where some but not all the elements of the course have been completed satisfactorily.

**F** The failing grade indicates 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 evidence of plagiarism

## Plagiarism

**Plagiarism is expressly forbidden and, if discovered, will be punished severely. Random checks on this issue will be made. Please read carefully the official BU rules below**

In every case, when assigned written work, students must retain a hard copy of their paper in addition to submitting the paper for marking. If by special arrangement it is agreed that you may e-mail material for marking to me or Academic Affairs, it is mandatory that you retain a hard copy of what is sent.

Boston University's Code of Student Responsibilities states:

*All students are responsible for having read the Boston University statement on plagiarism, which is available in the Academic Conduct Code. Students are advised that the penalty against students on a Boston University program for cheating on examinations or for plagiarism may be expulsion from the program or the University or such other penalty as may be recommended by the Committee on Student Academic Conduct, subject to approval by the dean."*

*The value of any grade, credit, honour or degree received by a student presupposes that all work submitted by a student is his or her own. A student who uses or relies upon the work of others or who, except under conditions expressly permitted by the instructor, furnishes assistance to another student, violates the standards of the University. Students must insist upon academic honesty and integrity from their fellow students and must report promptly any case of alleged violation of academic conduct. Failure to do so is a violation of this code.*

Plagiarism can take many forms, including the reproduction of published material without acknowledgement, or representing work done by others as your own. This includes the increasingly common practice of purchasing and downloading work from Internet "paper mills." Students should be extremely careful when submitting work for this course that all work is correctly sourced. Print-outs of web sites that have been used in research may be required by the lecturer in cases of a grade dispute and all web site based reference material should be kept by the student until after the end of the semester.

### **Terms and Conditions**

Anyone who for legitimate reasons cannot attend a class or will be late attending must give advance notice of his/her projected absence. This can be done either by advising a senior member of staff, with a request that the information be passed on to me; or by **e-mailing**. **Leaving it to another class member to convey messages will not be acceptable**. Appointments for interviews for internships must not be allowed to clash with attendance at classes. If there appears to be a possibility of a clash, raise the issue with me at the earliest possible moment.

Any student who is unable to attend a class, or to take part in an assignment, because of religious reasons, must give notice of the fact in advance. He/she will be required to make up for time lost.

Guest lecturers will be invited to explore with the class some of the themes mentioned in this statement. Video presentations will be included in class work, **but these will not substitute for regular out-of-class viewing of and listening to British TV and Radio**.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that to make this course effective, all class members must be prepared to adopt a lively, proactive approach throughout. This includes positive and creative participation in class discussions. Shrinking violets (people who are reluctant to participate) will be at a distinct disadvantage!

ALEXANDER MacLEOD

AlxndrMacL@aol.com