



Boston University Study Abroad
London

British Journalism, Culture & Society
COM JO 358 (Core course)

[Semester details here]

Instructor Information:

Name: Ellie Levenson
Class dates and time: [Weekdays and times here]
Contact Hours: 40 + 2-hour final 'open' exam
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Learning Outcomes:

This course will address the following BU Hub Areas:

Global Citizenship and Intercultural Literacy
Intellectual Toolkit – Creativity and Innovation

Course objectives:

Delve into the British psyche. Students will be asked to notice, discuss and reflect, via observations and a range of reading materials and class discussions, British obsessions such as the weather, celebrity, the royals and the British class system, and draw parallels and distinctions between this and their own culture. (Global Citizenship and Intercultural Literacy Hub Learning Outcome 2)

Recognize the differences between British newspapers and contrast this with newspapers in their home country. Students will be able to recognize the socio-economic and cultural differences between individual British newspapers and their audiences, and British newspapers as a whole compared with those in their home country. (Global Citizenship and Intercultural Literacy Hub Learning Outcome 2)

Contextualize British culture to the extent that they can join in 'water cooler chat' during their internships. By the end of the course students will be able to discuss current events and stories in the press as they happen and feel confident

that they understand the context and social reasons why these topics are being discussed at that moment in time. (Global Citizenship and Intercultural Literacy Hub Learning Outcome 2)

Develop the ability to think creatively about communication. Students will push the boundaries of conventional writing styles, using the new ways of thinking about writing and idea generation that they have learned on the course, to creatively present information to readers in a way that captures and maintains their attention. (Intellectual Toolkit—Creativity & Innovation Hub Learning Outcome 1)

Identify what makes good ideas and how to generate them. Students will recognize the key elements of features and practice generating ideas for them. In class and in their reflection journals, students will follow initial ideas tangentially across research areas and facets of interests. They will gain the confidence to express 'bad' ideas in order to access their creativity and the 'good' ideas. They will learn how to differentiate workable ideas from others based on the time, resources and interest available. Sessions will also cover how to use current news stories, people, objects and trends to generate new angles and audiences for their ideas. (Intellectual Toolkit—Creativity & Innovation Hub Learning Outcome 1)

Confidently write from different perspectives and for different audiences, recognizing the readers' cultural context and their own as the writer. Students will harness their creativity through learning how to observe the world around them as brimming with ideas whose focus can be narrowed for the appropriate angle and audience. As students of journalism they will actively balance their interest in an idea with the needs of their audiences. They will develop this skill in tandem with their own viewpoint and writing styles, exploring the creative possibilities in order to produce accessible, informative and entertaining feature writing exercises. Through the two feature writing exercises based on class field trips to areas and landmarks of interest within central London, students will be writing as outsiders for an audience familiar with London, having absorbed enough Britishness to write engagingly for an audience that is both familiar with the subject and yearning for new angles on their city and culture. (Intellectual Toolkit—Creativity & Innovation Hub Learning Outcome 1)

Engage in the creative process by producing publishable features from conception to completion. Applying the creativity-enhancing skills they have learned in class and developed during their homework assignments and field trip exercises, students will be able to confidently produce a finished feature with greater objectivity about which of their ideas are worth pursuing. They will be able to plan and organize their research to ensure an innovative and readable feature. They will apply the creative ways of thinking learned in class to create articles that both explore their own ideas and push the boundaries of feature article writing, with as much emphasis placed on the creative process and ambition that leads to their idea as to the finished product. (Intellectual Toolkit—Creativity & Innovation Hub Learning Outcome 2)

Understand and experience creativity as a learnable, iterative process, and gain practice and confidence in expanding how students develop ideas using a variety of concrete techniques. By the end of the course students will have their own individualized toolkit for developing original ideas and new ways of thinking that will serve every step of their creative careers. (Intellectual Toolkit—Creativity & Innovation Hub Learning Outcome 2)

Additional Course Objectives

Understand the workings of the British State. Students will learn how our representatives are elected, the structure of our parliamentary system, how Government operates, and the basics of key institutions such as the BBC, NHS and education system, and be able to define and contextualize key terms and concepts.

Be confident readers of British newspapers. By being able to define and contextualize the way in which the British State and institutions work, and the cultural conversations and conventions in the UK, students will be able to read and understand the British press, including the recognition of the political bias and socio-economic backgrounds of the publications and the readers. Each week they will be asked to read a different newspaper and analyze its content individually. This will be followed by class discussion about each newspaper.

Recognize different genres of writing and audience within a British context. Students will write their own op-ed and feature articles demonstrating an understanding of audience and genre. Students will be able to recognize the linguistic, structural and creative differences between the types of article published in mainstream British publications, and reproduce these in their own work.

Analyze the social, political and economic factors that influence published content. Students will learn to identify which of these structural forces impact upon their own work, and the work of others, and how this may consciously and subconsciously impact how they write and consume journalism.

Assessment

There will be a compulsory final ‘open’ examination on [date]. Exam arrangements will be posted on the BU London website and in the Student Newsletter two weeks before exam dates. (30%)

There will be **three** compulsory written assignments:

(1) an op-ed article based on a class exercise but completed independently (20%)

(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. (30%)

A weekly Reflection Journal that will include analysis of a different British newspaper each week, thoughts and observations on British culture and society, and ideas generation. This, alongside **class participation**, will be graded. (20%)

Grading

The following Boston University table explains the grading system that is used by most faculty members in Boston University's Study Abroad London Program.

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Honor Points</u>	<u>Usual %</u>
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	Unmarked

Grading Criteria

'Incomplete' or **I** grades are not permitted because of the obvious difficulty in making up missed work once the student has left the country. All work must be completed on time. We also do not allow **'Audits'** (AU), **'Withdrawals'** (W), or **'Pass/Fail'** (P) grades.

The grades 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 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 (see following section in Academic Conduct Code)

Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria and policies on plagiarism:

<https://www.bu.edu/london/files/2016/09/ACADEMICHANDBOOKAY201617.pdf>

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

Attendance Policy

Classes

All Boston University London Program students are expected to attend each and every class session, seminar, and field trip in order to fulfil the required course contact hours and receive course credit. Any student that has been absent from two class sessions (whether authorized or unauthorized) will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their continued participation on the programme. This may result in the student having to take a medical leave of absence from the programme or withdraw from the programme.

Authorized 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 Authorized Absence Approval Form with the required doctor's note as soon as possible). The Authorized Absence Approval Request Form is available from:

<http://www.bu.edu/london/report-absence/>

Please note: Submitting an Authorized Absence Approval Form does not guarantee an authorized absence

Students may apply for an authorized 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 in to the BU London Student Affairs Office each day the student is ill. Students must also provide the Student Affairs Office with a completed Authorized Absence Approval Form and 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 unauthorized 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 program.

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/centers.

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 Assistant Director of Academic Affairs and if the lateness continues, may have his/her final grade penalized.

Course Outline

Students are expected to have read all of the resources on Blackboard each week which, given the topical nature of the class, may be added at short notice prior to the class.)

Session 1 - 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 analyze who the readers and consumers of the various publications may be. We will consider what effect varying narrative structures and prose styles have on the same set of facts. 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.

We will talk about your Reflection Journals and what they should contain.

As a group we will define key concepts in understanding the British State – looking at the constituent parts of the United Kingdom, the voting system and the system of Government.

Session 2 - The British political system

We will look at issues arising from your Reflection Journals and discuss a specific British newspaper, title TBC

As a group we will look at the British State 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.

Session 3 - The types of article and how to get ideas

We will look at issues arising from your Reflection Journals and discuss a specific British newspaper, title TBC

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. We will discuss and practice in class the creative component of generating ideas, recognizing both some of our habitual patterns of thought as well as how we can consciously practice new ways of thinking.

Introduction to op-ed writing (and reading) and to the structure of features and their component parts.

Session 4 - Guest speaker

We will look at issues arising from your Reflection Journals and discuss a specific British newspaper, title TBC

Our guest speaker will be from the heart of government and PR to look again at the British State and answer any questions about how it operates in reality compared to the theory.

We will look again at feature ideas, honing techniques for coming up with ideas, and looking at how to work out which ideas are worth pursuing. We will discuss the process through which the most promising ideas can be written out into article drafts and useful criteria for determining which of these could then be developed into compelling features.

Session 5 – More on features

We will look at issues arising from your Reflection Journals and discuss a specific British newspaper, title TBC

A look at how to write features, use experts and incorporate descriptive language, we will also read examples from across various publications, discuss the effects that each writer's approach to the structure and style of the example has for the persuasiveness of the feature. We will also prepare for next week's assignment.

We will start to develop our op-ed ideas and in small groups hone our arguments and consider audience type for incorporating into the op-ed assignment and the feature.

Session 6 – Field trip and op-ed assignment due

London based field trip with journalistic assignments. Details TBC
Your op-ed assignment will be due in today.

Session 7 – Writing features

We will look at issues arising from your Reflection Journals and discuss a specific British newspaper, title TBC

You will write your features from the Session 6 assignment, with help from small groups and one on one time with your lecturer, including feedback on your current draft's structure and style.

Your revised feature will be due in at the end of this week.

Session 8 - Feature feedback

We will look at issues arising from your Reflection Journals and discuss a specific British newspaper, title TBC

You will receive feedback – as a class and individually – on your feature assignment in preparation for your graded feature in **Sessions 9 & 10**. You will be able to articulate in class-wide discussion, in small groups and in writing the most constructive and challenging instances of incorporating feedback or of substantially changing the approach of your feature.

We will look at the British class system, using video clips to try to make sense of this from an outsider perspective.

We will revisit the structure of the British State to ensure students have understood previous lessons, and have the opportunity to recap on anything that needs it.

Sessions 9 & 10 – All day field trip and assessed feature writing assignment

This field trip changes on an annual basis but previous field trips have been to the Tower of London, Cutty Sark and Greenwich Observatory.

Students will be expected to find points of interest in an unfamiliar place and combine this primary research with their ability to formulate feature writing ideas and see them through to completion.

Contingency lecture – [date]

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)