



Boston University Study Abroad **London**

British Political Institutions in Theory and Practice: A Comparative Perspective **CAS PO 221/IR 359 (*Core*)**

Course Overview

This course provides a basic but critical and thorough understanding of political Britain and thereby also prepares you for your internships and the broader socio-political context in which they take place. Thoroughness requires clear knowledge of the defining features of British political institutions and the values which underpin and legitimise them, such as liberty, equity, leadership, equality, security, efficiency, prosperity, effectiveness, integrity, global power, democracy, internationalism, nationalism, localism, sustainable development, and national identity. Politicians and political parties often claim many, if not all, such values for their parties and policies, but in practice prioritise and pursue them in accordance with their ideological agendas, constituencies, and electoral calculations. The course enables you to critically reflect on and develop your own value priorities and apply or possibly revise them through examining key institutions and debates about their intrinsic or comparative strengths and weaknesses.

As the “mother of democracy”, the cradle of “industrial revolution” (and more sports that you would care to name), the largest empire in history, a longstanding centre of Global Finance (and the Anglo-American model of capitalism), a head of state that heads the Commonwealth of (54) Nations, an architect of the UN System and Bretton Woods Institutions, a permanent member of the Security Council and a leading member of NATO and the renewed western alliance... and the first country to leave the European Union under the banner of “Global Britain”, the UK has much to offer the students of modern Politics and International Relations.

We start with setting the long-term context of our course through an overview of the institutionally lasting political turning points in the history of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. By way of an evolutionary review of the major attempts to establish international governance we then approach the foundation of supranational state now called the EU from which the UK has recently exited but with unfolding consequences that may break up the country and undermine its international power and reach. With the broad historical and international contexts thus established, we turn to the country’s major political agencies. Throughout, we seek out the concepts and empirical evidence required for critical understanding and evaluation of these institutions and actors and ask in each case whether and how they may be reformed. A comparative perspective helps locate and illuminate the deficits or valuable aspects of British institutions and practices.

Course Objectives

This course enables you to develop your own ideal of citizenship and exercise it through

critical and constructive examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the institutions and actors covered in the course and proposing reforms based on your own value priorities.

The course also prepares you for the general political aspects of internships that follow its completion, and in turn provide the opportunity to further explore, test, and develop your understanding of British political institutions, parties, citizens, colleagues, and society in a work environment and as professionals as well as students of social sciences.

Hub Areas and Learning Outcomes

In pursuing the above objectives, the course fulfils the following mutually reinforcing Hub Learning outcomes:

Social Inquiry 1

1. *Students will identify and apply major concepts used in the social sciences to explain individual and collective human behaviour including, for example, the workings of social groups, institutions, networks, and the role of the individual in them.*

You will examine descriptively, critically and constructively the UK's main political institutions, multiple layers of governance, and actors and illustrating their interaction with reference to particular cases, namely the workings of social groups and institutions and the role of individual and collective actors in pursuing particular policies.

Global Citizenship and Intercultural Literacy

1. *Students will demonstrate, through comparative analysis, an understanding of global diversity as expressed in at least two different languages, cultures, religions, political systems, or societies.*

This learning outcome is primarily achieved through developing your comparative and normative understanding of citizenship and politics in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at local, national (Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland), central (Westminster), supra-national (EU), international (UN, NATO...), and global levels. In pursuing and demonstrating this outcome, you are expected to critically draw on the British media as well as on your knowledge and experience of the US and/or other countries.

Critical Thinking

1. *Students will be able to identify key elements of critical thinking, such as habits of distinguishing deductive from inductive modes of inference, recognizing common logical fallacies and cognitive biases, translating ordinary language into formal argument, distinguishing empirical claims about matters of fact from normative or evaluative judgments, and recognizing the ways in which emotional responses can affect reasoning processes.*

Using alternatives and empirical evidence provided by models of governance drawn from the UK and other countries, you will critically and constructively reflect on your own normative stance and apply the result to your evaluation of strengths and weakness of British and other political institutions and actors.

The identification and application of pertinent social science concepts, critical examination of primary and secondary sources, and appropriate selection of and reference to supporting evidence required are essential for an informed understanding and evaluation of the nature

and behaviour of British and other political systems and actors. Yet almost all important political questions are contested, and opposed views are frequently maintained by selective use of evidence and worse. You are expected to approach every question from two or more perspectives and strive to present the strongest version of the position (or positions) that you may ultimately reject whilst subjecting your own favoured position to the most robust scrutiny before asserting it.

2. *Drawing on skills developed in class, students will be able to evaluate the validity of arguments, including their own.*

With its focus on value hierarchies, clashing ideologies and theoretical perspectives, competing political parties and reform agendas, this course is ideally suited for developing the skills necessary for sound critical and self-critical evaluation of arguments. Through lectures, scholarly and media sources, class discussions and debates as well presentations, other assignments and even free distribution of quality national newspapers representing contrasting ideological orientations, your critical and self-critical skills are regularly put to test and developed. You are expected to approach every question from two or more perspectives and strive to present the strongest version of the position (or positions) that you may ultimately reject, whilst subjecting your own favoured position to robust scrutiny.

Grading

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

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Honour 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. This can be accessed via Blackboard Learn: <http://learn.bu.edu>

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

Attendance Policies

Classes

All Boston University London Programme students are expected to attend every class session, seminar, and field trip to fulfil 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:

The Authorised Absence Approval Request Form is available through the Academic Affairs section of the BU London Personal Page: <https://fm.bu-london.co.uk/fmi/webd/>

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

Students who expect in advance to be absent from any class should notify a member of Academic Affairs and complete an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form ten working days in advance of the class date.

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 notify Academic Affairs as soon as possible by submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form in advance of the class. If it is the student's first absence of the semester (from any class) a doctor's note is not required.
- **Illness (multiple days):** If a student is missing more than one class day due to illness, the student must complete an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form and a sick note from a local doctor excusing their absence from class. Once well enough, the student will need to meet with Academic Affairs.
- 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.

Unauthorised 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 Academic Affairs 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 Disability & Access Services to request accommodations for the semester they are abroad. Students are advised by BU-DAS 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-DAS. We cannot accept letters from other universities/centres.

All disabilities need to be known to the DAS 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 Academic Affairs and if the lateness continues, may have their final grade penalised.