



Course Title and Number:	British Life and Cultures (BLC)
Credit Hours:	3 credits
Pre-requisites:	None

Course Objectives

British Life & Cultures is the required core course for students who will be participating in the Open Enrolment internship and study program. It aims to facilitate student orientation by helping individuals to connect their workplace experience within the broader context of British society. Similarly it aims to offer an important socio-historical framework within which students can place the more specialised courses they will take.

Course Outcomes

By the end of the course students should have moved beyond the initial phase of adjustment to studying and working in Britain. The course will have enabled individuals to develop an understanding of British society as an integrated whole which is more than the sum of its parts. This in turn should encourage critical discussion and reflection about the differences between US, British and European cultures, and the collective relationship that individuals have with their own societies. As part of this course there will be a minimum of **four field trips** to introduce students to locations, organisations & socio-political issues that are of importance to contemporary Londoners

Assessment Methods (requirements set out in **Appendix**)

20% Attendance, Presentation and Participation

20% Critique of British newspapers and media

20% Mid-Semester Test

20% Extended Essay (1500 words)

20% Final Exam

Set Readings

Chris Rojek, *Brit Myth: Who do the British Think They Are?* (Reaktion 2007)

In addition, there will be selected chapters from “Understanding Britain: Approaches for International Students” edited by Dominic Janes and John Makey + additional articles/chapters as hand-outs

Some useful Websites

Topic: General news information

Guardian www.guardian.co.uk

Times www.timesonline.co.uk

www.bbc.co.uk

Pathe News – historical archive film

Topic: Politics, Government and Regional Identity

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3984387.stm

<http://www.devolution.ac.uk/>

<http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/>

Parliament <http://www.parliament.uk/>

Greater London Authority www.london.gov.uk

No 10 Downing Street <http://www.number-10.gov.uk>

<http://www.sinnfein.ie/history>

armagh media project <http://inarmagh.net/>

<http://www.snp.org/>

<http://www.plaidcymru.org/>

Topic: Monarchy and royalty

<http://www.royal.gov.uk/output/Page1.asp>

European Union www.europa.eu.int

Topic: London resources

<http://www.untoldlondon.org.uk/>

Globe Theatre [<http://www.shakespearesglobe.org.uk>](http://www.shakespearesglobe.org.uk)

Tate www.tate.org.uk [<http://www.tate.org.uk>](http://www.tate.org.uk)

British Museum www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

National Maritime Museum www.nmm.ac.uk [<http://www.nmm.ac.uk>](http://www.nmm.ac.uk)

Imperial War Museum www.iwm.org.uk [<http://www.iwm.org.uk>](http://www.iwm.org.uk)

British Library www.bl.uk [<http://www.bl.uk>](http://www.bl.uk)

<http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/>

Public Record Office www.pro.gov.uk

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Women's Library www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk

Topic: Multiculturalism debate

<http://83.137.212.42/sitearchive/cre/diversity/integration/index.html#ref>

www.movinghere.org.uk

<http://www.blackpresence.co.uk/>

www.fantompowa.net/Flame/slavery_in_london.html

http://www.museumindocklands.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/COCD2D0D-1ED3-4187-87CF-03DA3014A4DF/0/LSS_press_pack.pdf

<http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/history/communities/black.html>

<http://bnp.org.uk/>

Topic: Sustainable Development

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/climate-change>

<http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/environment/strategy.jsp>

<http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/environment/climate-change/ccap/index.jsp>

Topic: Britain and European Union

European Union www.europa.eu.int

<http://www.europeanmovement.eu/index.php?id=5154>

<http://www.ukip.org/>

Instructional Methods:

Classroom format - lectures, visual media exercises, videos, discussions and set fieldwork

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability/special need should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please ensure you have provided FIE with documents that establish the special accommodations made for you at your home institution.

Core Course Content

- Topic One The People of the United Kingdom
- Issues related to nationality and identity
 - Is Britain a nation?
 - Totemic symbols - UK / USA cultural similarities and differences eg patriotism
 - Ethnic Diversity and Multiculturalism
- Topic Two The Media
- Press, Radio, TV: Ownership, Regulation and Influence
 - Examination of media bias
 - Historic importance of newspapers determining news agenda
- Topic Three Class and Power
- How Parliament works
 - How the British feel about their government – strengths and weaknesses
 - The Party System and other trends in Contemporary Politics
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- Upper, Middle and Working Classes
 - The Monarchy and the Aristocracy
- A Republic in Britain?

Topic Four The Arts (with supporting guest lecture and field trips)
Notions of “high culture” and “pop culture” in music, theatre, visual arts
Some typically British characteristics?

Topic Five Britain and International Relations

Impact of Empire, wars and decolonisation

The “special relationship” with Washington DC

The European Union – further integration or not

The ‘euro’ debate

Conclusion

Extended Essay Progress Reports/ Presentations

Preparation for final exam

Final exam

Questions & Answers, Evaluations, Conclusions

BLC course re-visited in light of experience gained after living in London

Co-curricular activities will include:

- **Parliament tour**

Tour of the building and the two Houses (Lords + Commons) when not being used for debates. Access is only permitted on certain days/times and the guides are variable in quality, being conducted by various staff who has worked there for years. The building is a Victorian fantasy with extraordinary decorative motifs linked to UK history and government so it has a visual dimension regardless of the commentary.

- **British Museum**

Worth seeing in its own right as a world-class museum covering antiquities and ethnography. Links to classroom teaching as it shows. Britain's past engagement with the rest of the world on several levels. Issues raised such as ownership and means of acquisition during the age of Empire (Parthenon sculptures, Rosetta Stone, Benin bronzes etc) but also how growing awareness of the enormous diversity of the rest of the world's cultures, flora and fauna. Europe and the “Grand Tour” was no longer enough to satisfy the nation's curiosity and our global political, economic and military reach facilitated “collecting” on a grand scale. It stimulated a scholarly understanding of Britain's own past so the Celtic, Roman and Anglo-Saxon galleries can be used as visual aids to explain issues of nationality and identity

- **Shakespeare Globe**

Interactive lecture by an actor who explains (with some student participation) the differences between putting on a production 400 years ago on Bankside compared to a West End theatre nowadays. Also a visit to the stage, frequently getting groups actually on stage itself to get the feel of being in an open-air theatre where actors see everyone in the audience. Terrific support for any course with a drama/theatre content because it looks at the mechanics of writing, rehearsing, acting and “hearing a play” as opposed to watching. Interesting for non-theatre majors too with a combination of social history and, surprisingly, business interest – money keeps cropping up as the explanation behind most things to do with theatre.

- **Tate Modern**

There is considerable resistance from some students to the type of works in Tate Modern. Showing a video as preparation is advisable, therefore, so they reflect upon the traditional way that “art” came in framed rectangles on walls and using very limited media (oils, watercolours, marble etc). Examples of works by the young British artists (yBa’s) can be shown in class and followed up with more examples at the gallery. If possible, asking students to compare with the National Gallery so they can write an essay on how successfully the two types of public galleries serve their purpose – and to question what the purpose is.

- **Imperial War Museum or Cabinet War Rooms**

A field trip to follow on from a 20 min DVD on the Blitz of London in WWII. Main purpose of the visit is **not** to bang the drum for Britain and “its finest hour” but to open eyes to war as part of the European historical legacy to the world. More specifically, industrial war in its nation state form which has now spread to other parts of the world on the back of Europe’s empires. It prepares students for the session on Britain and Europe: Britain’s view of itself as not really part of Europe, a place where foreigners lure us to our peril. Also raises the issue of the use of war as an instrument of foreign policy, something which the European Union considered incorporating in its founding charter. And who really won WWII – USA, USSR or Britain?

- **Docklands Walking tour**

Docklands is the area of the old Port of London which closed in the early 70’s, leaving 8 sq miles of land for re-development, chiefly as an overflow for financial services from the nearby City. Much modern architecture, the UK’s tallest building and lots of landscaped waterside developments. It can be used to show “modern” London.

- **National Portrait Gallery**

The brief of this important collection is to represent important Britons rather than the work of great artists, although the two aren’t mutually exclusive. The visit enables students to put faces to people they are reading and learning about.

- **Brick Lane Tour + meal**

The area is historically associated with the social deprivation of London's East End (prostitution, dock workers, charitable missions and housing) and has been the place of entry into British life for waves of foreign immigrants. French Huguenots gave way to Irish, Jewish and, most recently, Bangladeshi settlers connected with the restaurant and clothing trades – all mixed in with those cockneys who remain despite recent gentrification. A good field trip for sampling the sights, smells and tastes of an area very different from Kensington.

- **Greenwich**

The focus for is on Britain's maritime heritage, emphasising the importance of sea-faring to an island which developed a commercial and military dominance in the past.

- **Inns of Court**

This is London's legal district with the 4 Inns which all barristers must belong to. Loads of history, architecture and atmosphere, a few literary links (Shakespeare, Dr Johnson) and the legal differences and similarities between USA/UK which can be pitched a several levels depending on background of students.

FIE's Attendance Policy

Class attendance is mandatory. Regular attendance is essential to achieving a passing grade in a course. A class constitutes lectures, student presentations, discussions, seminars, field visits, tests and examinations as per the class schedule.

In addition to physical presence in class, a student's class **participation score of 20%** will be based on the mastery of assigned course readings as reflected in a consistent contribution to class discussions, in-class exercises, and in asking questions that enrich the on-going discourse. Occasional participation will have a negative impact on a student's participation score.

Class attendance will be formally recorded, and incorporated into a student's final grade. Attendance is taken at the beginning of each class. Any student arriving late in class by 5 minutes or more will be marked absent for that day, unless the tardiness is excusable. It is the responsibility of the student to contact the course Instructor in advance, in the event of an excused absence. Absence from class does not relieve a student of responsibility for assignments. There is a strong relationship between class attendance and success or failure in the classroom. It is the responsibility of the student to communicate with the instructor about absences due to illness or family emergency. Class absences are deemed excused only at the discretion of the Academic Directors and require documentation, where possible.

An excused absence or an excused reason for being late to class is any documented emergency and/or acute illness or injury directly involving the student. **Unexplained absence is not permitted.** Two unexplained absences will be flagged immediately by the Instructor who will file an Unsatisfactory Progress Report with the Academic

Directors. The Academic Directors and the Instructor will then take a joint decision on further action.

Appendix: Assessment Methods for BLC

20% Attendance, Participation and Presentation

In addition to the **Attendance + Participation** components (see above), students will be given a date for a short presentation (c5/10 minutes) on a subject to be determined and agreed in advance with the faculty. In addition the faculty will distribute a schedule to structure class discussion around required reading assignments from the texts. Students should try to keep abreast of British current affairs by reading any of the daily news providers, hardcopy or online (BBC, Guardian, Independent, Financial Times, Times, Telegraph) and watching TV news and current affairs programs such as Channel 4's evening news (7.00pm daily) or BBC2's 'Newsnight' (10.30pm daily).

20 % Critique of British newspapers and media

The purpose of the exercise is to puncture the American "cultural bubble" that can surround students studying in London. This will help individuals to immerse themselves in the concerns of people who live in London, not the USA. It is an opportunity to see how the media encourages people to view issues from the perspective of their own nationality above all others. This exercise will raise ethical issues concerning political bias, sensationalism, objectivity and responsibility.

Some useful tips:

Base your analysis on direct textual comparison of the exact SAME story in at least two different papers. Look for a breaking news story where the facts are generally agreed but the interpretation is not

Don't stick to one type of newspaper only. The idea is to compare the different types of coverage ranging from the tabloids to the broadsheets so you should always select one quality and one tabloid as a minimum

Can you detect bias? If so, give examples in their words, not yours

Compare vocabulary and identify key words or phrases which are designed to play on the emotions of readers (which is why **examples cited should give the journalist's words, not yours**)

Does the journalist give proper attribution to quotes or opinions cited?

NOTE: grading will be on the basis of your **analytical method** so any assertions you make **must** be supported by **examples cited from the text** that support your observations.

20% Extended Essay (1500 words)

This is an opportunity to develop an idea, experience or encounter at greater length for each student in an individual way. It is important, therefore, that the title (in the form of a question to be analysed and answered) for the essay is submitted to the faculty for approval in advance and completed by Week 12 at the latest.

20% Mid-Semester Test and 20% Final Exam

To be held in the usual classrooms on the appropriate dates scheduled in advance. The questions and format of the exam will be determined by faculty as appropriate and will be based on the topics covered in classes, field trips and readings from the text.

Grading Criteria of the Written Assignments

Grade of A

Treatment of topic that indicates some originality of thinking (not simply a recapitulation of other sources), and captures the reader's attention through clear organization of ideas and engaging presentation (perhaps showing humour, questioning of received judgement of others, metaphor, illuminating quotes). If the paper were only heard, not read, it would hold the listener's attention because of careful, precise & imaginative use of vocabulary.

An emphasis on analysis rather than descriptive or emotive content

A paper that is very well-organized in general outline and that develops a coherent answer to the question posed. Analytical assertions made in the answer should be backed up by strong supporting evidence drawn from the knowledge acquired through classes, reading assignments & field trips.

Only minor errors in the mechanics or conventions of the English language, including format for citations

Grade of B

Treatment of topic that reflects substantial breadth, depth and a prose

style which is simple to follow and easy to read. There should be no confusion as to the meaning of the vocabulary and language employed.

An emphasis on the descriptive or emotive content rather than analysis
A paper that is well-organized in general outline and that provides an identifiable answer to the question posed. General analysis and supporting evidence which demonstrates an accurate understanding, but lacking the detail and clarity of the A paper

Essays should indicate an ability to work from ideas that are general to points which are specific, and show some progression of material & thoughts in developing an answer

Few errors in the mechanics or conventions of the English language

Grade of C

Treatment of topic that reflects some breadth as well as depth and detail, but without presenting an answer that is consistently clear to the reader

Generally well-organized, but lacking good development of ideas

Analysis and supporting evidence which demonstrates only partial understanding and contains occasional factual errors

Regular but minor errors in the mechanics or conventions of the English language

Grade of D or F

Inadequate or minimal treatment of topic (the reader is left asking many questions about the topic and/or the understanding shown)

Poor organization (lacks focus, rambles and fails to develop ideas)

Regular and serious errors in the mechanics or conventions of the English language (errors in punctuation, spelling, syntax)

Warning: A Note on Plagiarism

Plagiarism is not something that is looked for as it is not something anyone would expect to find. It is unlikely that model (and therefore available for copying) answers exist for the type of essays for this course, instructors will be forced to implement FIE policy on this unacceptable practice if it is discovered. Even though instructors do not actively seek it, be warned that it will almost certainly be detected if it occurs - there are tell-tale signs that make it quite easy to distinguish between original work and that which is copied from websites, and Google is so convenient for detecting the source. Citation of facts and quotes from websites is acceptable, as is the case for

books and other legitimate sources (museum displays, lectures etc). **Wikipedia** should be used only for the purposes of background information and should **not be cited as a source or authority**. The definition of plagiarism is when work that is not the author's own is passed off as such, and this is never an acceptable practice.