

The UK Academic System

Academic Culture

The UK academic system puts more emphasis on individual learning outside of the classroom than the US academic system. Professors can help clarify any questions, but each student should approach them, and they will not be as accessible as US students are typically accustomed. Students are expected to take charge of their own education when studying abroad in the UK. **This study abroad program is geared towards students who are motivated, self-sufficient, and eager to immerse themselves into the UK educational system.**

UK students are admitted not to a university as a whole but to a specific department. There are no “general education requirements,” and so students exclusively study within their major. As a result, there are few, if any, “elective” courses that are typically found at most US four-year institutions.

Teaching Style

There are generally fewer hours spent in the classroom per week than in the US; however, students are expected to do a lot more individual study and spend a lot more time in the library. Plan on studying 3-4 hours for every hour spent in class. **This will seem more like graduate work.**

LECTURES: These are large classes, usually lasting around one hour, where a lecturer (or tutor) talks about a subject and the students take notes. In some courses, a hundred or more students may attend a lecture. In a lecture there is little, if any, interaction between student and lecturer.

SEMINARS: These are smaller classes where students and a tutor discuss a topic. Seminars are usually intended to encourage debate about an issue. This process helps students learn to analyze a topic critically. While students are not expected to speak in lectures, students are expected to speak in seminars.

TUTORIALS: These are meetings between a tutor and an individual student or small group of students. Tutorials are usually intended to offer more focused guidance on a piece of work in progress or that has been already completed.

Assessment (Grading)

The UK academic system does not include continuous assessment of students’ academic performance like typical US higher education. **It is not uncommon to have a large percentage of your grade based upon only one or two exams or papers.** Exams or papers should be a student’s very best work, and students should set a specific study plan for themselves throughout the semester. **STUDENTS SHOULD NOT PRESUME A CLASS IS EASY BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO HOMEWORK!** Remember the professor assumes the student will be assigning themselves homework and that will be reflected in the exam.

Grade Translation

In the UK system, it is often more difficult to obtain higher grade designations (A’s or B’s) than in the US system. Grades are awarded by percentages rather than letter grades and high percentages are rarely awarded by UK professors. *For example, an 80% in most British/Irish universities is considered to be the equivalent of publishable quality work!* To figure out how your UK grades will translate back to Emory, please refer to the credit and grade translation memo for your particular program.