

How We Do Things in Econ 2340 Maymester in London, “War, Pillage, Plunder, and Other Economic Conflicts.”

This gives you a short guide and more complete description of how we do things in this Maymester.

First, students are to arrive in London on Thursday, May 12. All we ask is that you arrive at a London airport (if you are flying, which most will) by Thursday morning, or early afternoon/evening at the latest. You will have received instructions by then on the various ways you can use public transport, i.e., subway (“tube”), or taxi, to get to the FIE (Foundation for International Education) in central London. FIE provides dorms—and student life services-- for all the Maymester Vanderbilt in London students. This housing is in an excellent location for access to all things London, either on foot or via the London Underground (the extensive London subway system) or via bus. It is in a nice residential area, which requires you to not use the grounds and area as a party location. We had a few students a few years ago that were sent packing by FIE to find their own digs (at their own expense as well) after they had been repeatedly warned by FIE staff to behave. We do not want to have this happen again. But all in all, students have seemed very satisfied with the living arrangements.

Most of these “flats,” as the British call them, hold anywhere from four to seven residents and have a complete kitchen. To reiterate, you will be living in a very safe, picturesque part of London – it’s the location of many embassies. Nearby there are an abundance of pubs, restaurants, and night-life. Glorious Hyde Park is only a few blocks away.

On Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday--May 12 through May 15--, FIE has you in their hands as they conduct an orientation. Among other things, you will receive “tube” passes and instructions on how to use the tube, or underground as it is also called. (Note: this means you should NOT buy a tube pass with your own money when you arrive in London).

Then on Monday May 16th, we meet as a class in the morning. The classrooms are in a building operated by FIE, and are about a five minute walk from the dorms. This day will be much like what our routine will be throughout the class: meet two or three hours in the FIE classrooms in the mornings, then reconvene at the location of a co-curricular activity either in the afternoon, or,

when we go to a play, in the evening. We will not meet Friday, May 20, or Friday, May 27. This allows you two (2) three-day weekends to explore London or to go farther afield.

Most of our co-curricular activities are reachable by tube. Our usual routine will be to break from the classroom after our morning session, then meet at the tube station closest to FIE at a designated time, and then travel as a group to our co-curricular activity location. Occasionally, we will not meet at the FIE tube station. Rather, you will be responsible for navigating yourself through London and arriving on time at our designated location.

Our tentative (we may not be successful in getting to all of them, but should get to most of them) co-curricular activities and associated topics are (not necessarily listed in chronological order: we arrange our schedule closer to May to be able to work with various guides):

1. A visit to the Imperial War Museum. This museum in the past focused on WWI, which is an interesting case study of the causes of negotiation failure. And among other things, the museum had displays on trench warfare, which provide a rich source of study of what we will learn are known as “principal-agent” problems. It is a remarkable museum, located in the former mental hospital known as “Bedlam.”
2. We attend at least one play, and with luck two (depending on what’s on). In years past, we attended “Romeo and Juliet” at the Globe Theater, “Life of Galileo” at the Young Vic, “Billy Elliott,” “War Horse,” and an unusual production of “Peter Pan” in the open-air theater in Regents Park. The exact play (or plays) we see depends on what is on offer.
3. A visit to the British Museum. This is something former students recommended to include, so we do it now. It connects to a variety of topics in the economics of conflict, especially with regards to pillage and plunder.
4. A visit to St. Paul’s Cathedral. We start at the memorial outside that pays tribute to the firemen who during the WWII bombing of London risked their lives to put out fires atop the cathedral dome. We then tour the inside, stopping at a shrine that pays tribute to U.S. airmen who fought in the Battle of Britain. This connects with our discussions of the costs and benefits of strategic bombing in conflicts, i.e., resource allocation *within* a war. We end up in the basement where we observe various exhibits that show how entwined church and state are in Great Britain. There is also an exhibit about the Falklands War, which we use as a jumping-off point for “wag the dog” theories of the origins of

conflicts. And the view from the top of the dome for those willing to make the climb is impressive—if it is open.

5. A visit to the Tower of London. This is associated with a unit we will study on the economics of castles. One of the interesting features of castles connects with bluffing strategies in games with asymmetric information. We play a little poker to make this connection clear.
6. A visit to the Churchill War Museum. This gives good background information for our discussion of WWII issues. My wife and I usually then go to The Churchill Arms for a pint and further discussion with those students who are inclined to join us.
7. (tentative) A visit to Parliament. Parliament is an institution that evolved in ways that illustrate the importance of coalition formation and “balance of power” ideas about how conflict is avoided. We have arranged this in the past during your orientation weekend, right off the bat.
8. (tentative) A visit to the British Army Museum, which covers a broader sweep of history than the Imperial War Museum.
9. A trip to Cambridge. We take a bus. We visit a cemetery, then spend some time exploring Cambridge. It’s an all-day affair.

Details about grading are found in the syllabus. But briefly, about a third is participation, a third is a journal from which you send me daily reports, and a third is our final exam. If you must, you will be able to catch a flight out of London the day of June³. But you have your flat until Saturday morning June 4, so you can enjoy one more night in London if you desire.