

Response to feedback on the POLIS papers and Politics and International Relations Part II.

We asked students to rate their papers across four dimensions: the overall scope and content, the paper guide, the lectures, and the supervisions. They used a seven-point scale from '1', which was 'very satisfied', to '7', which was 'very dissatisfied'.

Some papers received very positive feedback and there were aspects of all papers that were complimented. Nonetheless, there were some pertinent issues of concern in light of which the Department will make some specific changes. Some of these issues pertained to several papers and some to individual papers. Where concerns were expressed about individual supervisors the paper organiser has reviewed these with the supervisors concerned.

General

- A number of students expressed concern that they were allocated a graduate or post-doc supervisor whilst others were taught by the paper organiser or another member of the academic staff. The Department recognises that there are issues of perceived and actual fairness in supervisor allocation. It would be wrong though to assume that students are necessarily at a disadvantage if they are taught by someone who is not a member of the academic staff. In some instances graduate students and post-doctoral fellows were the most praised supervisors for a paper. Experience, however, can be an issue with some supervisors. Accordingly, the Department will ask all Part II paper organisers to look at the way they allocate supervisors and endeavour to ensure that no student is allocated an inexperienced supervisor for a paper for the whole of the academic year.
- The Department will review, as it does each year the training provided to graduate supervisors.
- To deal with the issue of fairness when it comes to revision in Part IIA where there are large numbers of students, the paper organisers for each of the Part IIA papers will hold an additional office hour for the first three weeks of the Easter term.
- In the interests of encouraging intellectual engagement in writing essays, the Department will ask supervisors to refrain from setting word limits for supervision essays. Whilst the vast majority of supervisors do not do this, it is clear that students find it frustrating when supervisors ask for short essays.
- The Department will ensure that all paper guides for 2014-15 are published on the web by the end of the second week of September.
- Students should note that the Director of Undergraduate Education is available to advise those students who do not have a Director of Studies from POLIS in making Part IIB paper choices.

- The Department will ensure that there is no repeat of the problems of content being removed from the undergraduate section of the POLIS website and placed on other sites.
- For HSPS Part IIA will have four rather than three papers and if students take Pol 5 (a long-essay paper) they will have considerable choice of study area, which the Department hopes will address some of the concern about the breadth of content of Part IIA.

Part 1

Pol 1 (Politics)

- In view of the concern about the absence of any woman authors among the set texts, there will be two set texts written by women for 2014-15.
- The lecturer for the democracy section will review the use of examples in those lectures in relation to the themes of democracy covered. It should be noted, however, that in beginning with the Federalists and following various themes through from there more weight will necessarily be given to the US than other parts of the world in some lectures.
- Students should be aware that all the set texts covered in the lectures are part of the paper and examinable.

Pol 2 (International Relations)

- There will be some changes to the lectures for the paper for 2014-15. In particular the order of the lectures in the Michaelmas term will be restructured. Students should note that the purpose of looking at theory in the early part of the paper is not to go through definitions of different 'isms' as an end in itself.
- Whilst some respondents asked for more contemporary examples, students should note that contemporary examples are there to illustrate themes rather than for their own sake. The paper aims to provide a conceptual and historical approach to International Relations.

Part II

Pol 1 (The History of Political Thought up to c.1700)

- There were no specific issues raised about Pol 1.

Pol 2 (The History of Political Thought c.1700-c.1890_

- The paper guide will be revised for 2014-15 with clearer guidance about reading for Politics and International Relations students.

- A summary of the comments on the lectures have been passed to the History Faculty, which provides the lectures for this paper.

Pol 3 (Ethics of World Politics)

- In light of the number of supervisors necessary to teach this paper, the paper organiser will prepare a specific supervisors' guide for this paper that will be issued to all supervisors to ensure that all supervisors understand fully what teaching the paper requires.
- The paper organiser will include some additional aspects in the paper guide for 2014-15 based on material included in other paper guides.

Pol 4 (Comparative Politics)

- This paper will have a new format for 2014-15. The essay component will be replaced with a general section taught by lectures and conventional supervisions that will directly complement each other.
- Students are expected to do some general background reading for the case studies, but the lecturers will be reminded that they cannot expect students to have extensive prior knowledge of the cases. The lectures for the Middle East for 2014-15 will be given by a more experienced lecturer than they were in 2013-14.
- The revision arrangements for the paper will change for 2014-15. There will be a revision class for each of the general section and the case studies.

Pol 6 (Political Philosophy and the History of political thought post-1890)

- The paper organiser will revise the paper guide for 2014-15 with a clearer statement about the content and structure of the paper and new direction as to how students should work through it.
- To create more coherence in the lectures, there will be a new general lecture series for 2014-15 concentrating on the themes of the paper as a whole.

Pol 7 (Conflict and Peace-Building)

- This paper will not be taught next year because of academic leave. For 2015-16 the paper organiser will work to ensure that all Ph.D students teaching on the paper have as good an understanding of the material as possible.

Pol 8 (The Politics of Europe)

- The comparative west European politics section of the paper will be extended from 8 to 12 lectures for 2014-15.

Pol 9 (The Politics of Africa)

- The Department acknowledges that there were some issues with supervision and the provision of timely feedback that arose from having only one person supervising for the paper. If in 2014-15 there is a relatively large number of students taking the paper the Department will ensure there are more supervisors so this situation does not reoccur.

Pol 11 (The Politics of East Asia)

- The paper guide for the China part of the paper will be restructured for 2014-15 to ensure that the reading material for essays is clearly listed and directly relevant to the questions set.

Pol 12 (The Politics of the International Economy)

- Students should note that there is a guide to economic question published on CAMTOOLS for this paper. The paper organiser will review the document to consider ways it can be improved.

Pol 13 (Conceptual Issues and Texts in Modern Politics)

- The teaching personnel for the classes will be changed for next year. The paper organiser will make sure that all those teaching the classes have an initial meeting to ensure consistency and that the value of all the classes is seen by the students as equal.
- The general advice – in particular about repetition issues with other papers –given in the classes will also be included in the paper guide.

Int 8 (The History and Politics of South Asia)

- The Department accepts that the paper guide for this paper was poor. The teaching for 2013-14 for the paper, which is not done by the Department, was for reasons of individuals leaving and new appointments put together very late in the summer, and insufficient work was done on the paper guide to reflect the changes to the teaching from the previous year. The paper guide for 2014-15 will be revised to match properly the teaching offered.

Dissertations

- Whilst all the comments about supervisors were very positive, some students expressed a desire for classes as well especially at the end of the previous academic year. The Department has in the past put on a dissertation workshop for students at the end of Part IIA, but this did not work particularly well. It is also difficult to give good generic advice about dissertations. The supervision system for dissertation is designed to tailor advice to individual students' needs and seems in itself to work well.
- The Department will put some first-class dissertations on the POLIS website for 2014-15.