

Politics and International Relations

Guide to Dissertations 2023-24

Choosing a dissertation, a topic and a supervisor

Your decision to write a dissertation in Politics and International Relations for Part IIB may turn on what you have gained from writing a long essay for assessment for POL 5 if you took that paper. A third year dissertation, however, will address a question that you will have devised by yourself or in discussion with a supervisor and others, and in this respect, is more than just a longer long essay. This is at once a promise and a threat. You are free to choose the field as long as it can be supervised. But a good part of the art of succeeding with a dissertation lies in settling on the right kind of question. This should be sufficiently arresting to make someone want to read 10,000 words in answer to it. It should equally be sufficiently compelling to keep you interested in providing the answer. You are expected to work on your dissertation from the summer preceding your final year, and so you will be spending about 10 months working in a systematic and focused way upon what may be a quite specific topic. If you do not have the confidence that you will be able to maintain your enthusiasm for your topic over this period, then it is worthwhile to consider if this is really the right option for you. You are entitled to take four papers by examination, instead of completing a dissertation, or you can take three papers by examination, and one paper by two long essays. If you choose to do a dissertation, you cannot take another paper by two long essays.

If you do select to do a dissertation, you need to choose a question. This should be one that you can actually answer, or at least, a question that allows you to go some way towards explaining what an answer might and might not be. Many of the more successful dissertations set their questions so as to draw upon broader theoretical, argumentative or historical frameworks, but ask questions that are themselves quite specific in their form. A certain political process, event or author, or a comparison between a relatively small number of them, may serve usefully as the focus of a dissertation; the open-ended explanation of a broad range of theories or the politics of a particular region generally does not. When selecting a question, it can be helpful from the start to delineate what an answer may look like. One way to do this is to draw up a formal hypothesis and to ask what it would take to either

confirm or disconfirm this hypothesis. Even if this is not the way you envision the dissertation eventually being written, it can be useful means of testing out whether you have a suitable question from the outset.

As with a long essay for assessment, a dissertation for the Tripos does not have to be original, but it should go beyond anything to which you can easily find answers in the standard literature. It should in large part consist of your own material, and your own arguments. 'Your own material' can be facts that are new. Or, more usually, it can be facts which, although known, have been scattered across a range of sources, and not previously brought together, or at least, not brought together in the way that you will have done. 'Your own arguments' can likewise be new. Or they can be arguments which have not previously been put, pressed, connected or supported in the ways that you will do. They can, for example, be evaluations or applications of existing arguments, showing how an established approach helps or fails to explain a specific process.

You may choose a question for which your work for one or more of the Part II papers has prepared you, or will; alternatively, you may choose a question that enables you to explore an issue that the Tripos does not otherwise give you an opportunity to consider. It is important to draw upon your intellectual strengths as well as your interests: if you embark upon a whole new field of study from scratch for your dissertation, it is unlikely that by the end of the year you will be able to produce a piece of work that demonstrates the advanced characteristics of argument and understanding that is sought in such work.

One crucial requirement to take a dissertation is a supervisor: you cannot write a dissertation without a supervisor. You should remember that you will not be able to find a supervisor for all conceivable topics in the field of politics and international relations. The Department has a list of its staff, together with a brief account of their research interests, at: http://www.polis.cam.ac.uk/Staff_and_Students/academic-staff

It is the responsibility of your Director of Studies to approve a supervisor for you. You may also ask your Director of Studies to approach someone in particular. In some cases, you may decide that you would like to be supervised by somebody

outside the Department. There are academics in other university departments who have a lot of experience in supervising dissertations in Politics and International Relations, and so this is not necessarily discouraged. Do be aware, however, that dissertations in other Triposes often have quite different requirements and expectations to those in Politics & International Relations, and so some measure of caution is needed. Supervisors for dissertations cannot be graduate students either from inside or outside the department. Your eventual choice of supervisor will need to be confirmed by the Department before you can be registered for the dissertation; in most cases, such as those involving supervision by staff members, this will be straightforward. But if you have doubts, please ask your Director of Studies to contact the Dissertation Coordinator. The dissertation coordinator for 2023-24 is Dr Glen Rangwala (gr10009@cam.ac.uk).

It is often helpful to send your Director of Studies a short, perhaps half-page, summary of what you would like to your dissertation to be about which they can send to a potential supervisor. If you approach a potential supervisor directly, you should keep your Director of Studies informed.

The process

You do not have formally to decide to submit a dissertation for Part IIB until the beginning of the Michaelmas Term in your third year. The deadline to receive dissertation titles is **9am on Wednesday 11th October 2023**. Your Director of Studies must sign the dissertation form. To leave the actual decision to write a dissertation until this time, however, would be foolish and almost certainly self-defeating. You are strongly advised to settle on the idea of a dissertation and a question, or at least, the shape of a question, and also to find a supervisor for the work, before the end of the Easter Term in your second year. You will find it difficult to secure the agreement of a suitable supervisor for the dissertation if you leave it much later than that.

There is a formal process for seeking ethical approval for dissertations. Ethical approval is not required for some dissertations in Politics and International Relations, but ethical approval is required if you will be conducting interviews with elites or members of the public, or if your dissertation involves work with vulnerable

groups (such as children or prisoners), or research work that may involve breaches of the applicable law (such as participant observation with certain protest or dissident movements). If such approval is needed, please contact the Undergraduate Secretary (ugradadmin@polis.cam.ac.uk) well before such research is conducted; for research conducted over the summer, this means before the end of the preceding Easter term.

Ethical approval applications will need to present not only a form outlining the parameters of the research, but accompanying documentation. For example, if you are planning to carry out interviews, the ethics committee will need to see a proposed outline of the interview schedule, as well as a draft of the information sheet that you will be providing to participants, and a draft of the consent you will be soliciting from individuals involved. These documents are standard research tools, and samples are widely available on the Internet.

<https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/learning-hub/research-data-management/ethical-issues/consent-for-data-sharing/>

You have the opportunity to change your dissertation title up to Lent term, as the focus of the work develops over the course of the first part of the year. It is not advisable to submit a formal request for a change of title every time your focus shifts. Instead, use the deadline for title changes as a point at which you can reflect with your supervisor upon what exactly the dissertation can aspire to do. It is advisable that your title be a topic, not a question. The deadline for title changes is **12 noon on Thursday 22nd February 2024**. By this date, send your formal request for a change of title to the Undergraduate Secretary on ugradadmin@polis.cam.ac.uk.

Dissertation workshops

Students may wish to attend several information workshops, as well as other opportunities for discussion and questions. The first is a workshop at the end of the examination period in students' second year. This workshop is coordinated by Dr Glen Rangwala (gr10009@cam.ac.uk). All students considering doing a POLIS dissertation are welcome to attend, and the workshop will cover issues such as how to choose a topic and supervisor, what are some of the good (and bad) reasons for doing a dissertation, and how to prepare for it.

There will be other workshops and opportunities for questions and discussion in Michaelmas and Lent terms. In early Michaelmas term, there will be a workshop to discuss research questions, how to frame the projects, how to situate the projects in relevant bodies of literature, sources and data, argumentation styles, and writing strategies. Later in Michaelmas there will be a session for you to ask specific questions relating to your particular project, and to discuss strategies for writing up. In early Lent there will be an opportunity to ask any remaining questions and concerns.

Submission and Penalties that may be imposed

Dissertations must be submitted by 12 noon on **Thursday 02nd May 2023**. Submission takes place electronically, via a Moodle page with a Turnitin plagiarism detection function. A completed cover sheet will also be submitted as a separate document to ensure that the dissertation itself remains anonymous. You will be enrolled on the Moodle page and provided with information before the start of Easter Term. If you have any questions, please ask the Undergraduate admin team on ugradadmin@polis.cam.ac.uk. **Dissertations must be received by 12.00 noon in order for the work to be considered as submitted.**

Penalties for Late Submission:

- (a) 1 point per hour or part thereof - up to 3 points (1 point per the first hour, another point for the second hour, and the third point for any further delay up to 12 noon the next day)
- (b) Next 10 days or part thereof - 3 points per day
- (c) Any work submitted after 10 days is marked 0
- (d) Electronic submission is mandatory

(e) Handing-in times are standardised as 12 NOON on the due date (this applies also to deadline extensions), with penalties applied every 24 hours from the due time

If you have good reason to request an extension (e.g., serious health problem, major family difficulty), you should contact your College as soon as possible, as all requests must go through the University's Examination Access and Mitigation Committee <https://www.student-registry.admin.cam.ac.uk/about-us/EAMC>. All requests must be accompanied by appropriate evidence. You should also ensure that you allow appropriate time to format and present your work before the deadline. Problems with computers or printing facilities will not be accepted as reasons for late submission. A completed cover sheet must be submitted online, and will be supplied before the submission.

Concerns about plagiarism are taken very seriously and students should ensure that they are familiar with the Department's guidance (see section on Plagiarism below). Cases of suspected unfair practice will be investigated by the Senior Examiner on a case-by-case basis; this investigatory meeting may involve your examiners, supervisor, College Tutor(s) and the University Proctors. Following the investigatory meeting, the Chair may recommend that penalties be applied to the final mark. All penalties to be applied will be agreed at the final Examiners' meeting. Students should read the University's Guidance on Plagiarism at <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/plagiarism/students/statement.html> For further guidance on plagiarism see pp. 14-17.

Word limit

The word limit is 10,000 words for Dissertations. There is no leeway. Students exceeding the word limit will be penalised. The word limit must be written on the coversheet for your dissertation at submission and the Department will carry out checks. At the final Examiners' meeting in June, the Examiners will discuss all cases of over- length work and agree a penalty scale.

The word limit includes all text except the bibliography; this means that the main text, all data in tables or figures, appendices, captions, the table of contents, footnotes, endnotes, the front page including the title and all prefatory material at the start of the dissertation will be counted. As a general rule, any content that the Examiners must read in order to assess your work should be included in the main body and not in an appendix; overuse of appendices or footnotes may be penalised if it impairs the understanding of your work.

Dissertations that fall under 6,000 words will also be penalised.

Research and writing

A dissertation is an opportunity to develop detailed knowledge about a specialist field. It requires you to go well beyond the four or five sources that you might use for a supervision essay, or the dozen or fifteen that you might consult for a long essay for assessment. It should however not lead you into time-consuming research during your third year that could interfere with your work for the other papers in Part IIB. (The conjunction in Part IIB of an excellent dissertation and indifferent examination scripts is not, unfortunately, uncommon.)

You are expected to have a thorough grasp of the various debates about the issue on which you are writing. This will commonly be conveyed through a sense of argument and counterargument in the dissertation itself. Some dissertations contain formal literature reviews; this is not always required, but ask yourself whether it would help as a way to start the argument that you are making. (Do not include it just to show that you have read a lot). You will need to go well beyond the texts recommended to you by your supervisor: often this will require you to conduct searches through bibliographic databases such as jstor.org and the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (Google Scholar may also be useful, although its results are often less well-sorted than the other databases: scholar.google.co.uk).

A dissertation should not be polemical, although you may of course wish to write about a matter that concerns you, and even at the end of a relatively dispassionate empirical piece, to use the substance of what you say to make a political point. You

will need to be confident in doing so, however, that you understand and appreciate arguments that are opposed to the position you are taking as well as you understand your own.

Also avoid the temptation to insert discursive footnotes. If a sentence or paragraph is necessary for an argument to make sense, it should go into the main text; if it is not necessary, it should not be in the dissertation at all. On occasion, side-points or qualifications are tolerable in footnotes – but any more than a few of these quickly becomes distracting for the reader.

As dissertations are substantial pieces of work, they require you to work out, with your supervisor, a fairly precise timetable if you are to be able to complete it to your satisfaction. In general, it is difficult to set aside significant periods of time during the term for the purposes of writing your dissertation, without it causing significant detriment to your taught papers. Vacations often end up being the best time to do the research and writing, although you should make sure that you can keep the Easter vacation at least in part for preparation for the examinations. You can expect up to six supervisions during your final year on the dissertation. Please be aware that supervisors will not be able to look at your work during vacations.

A suggested timetable would be:

- Easter term, 2nd year, after the exams: choosing a question, drawing up a short account of what the dissertation would cover, and formulating a strategy for researching the dissertation. Securing the agreement of a supervisor, and an initial meeting with the supervisor to discuss the topic, research and reading. Drawing up a reading list and research strategy at this stage is important.
- Long vacation: conducting the bulk of the reading and research, and coming to a final decision about whether to continue with the dissertation, and if so, its scope.
- Michaelmas term, 3rd year: to have two or three meetings with your supervisor. A first meeting should end with a good idea of what you will be saying in the dissertation, and will often generate further suggestions for

reading. A second supervision can often be oriented around a dissertation plan that you have drawn up. It may be possible to write introductory sections or a literature review for a third supervision.

- Winter vacation: you should aim to prepare a full or near-full draft over this vacation. As you do so, you may well find that parts of the dissertation need more research or that their arguments require rethinking. If you can, however, end the vacation with a reasonably full draft, you will be in a position to evaluate what remains to be done over the subsequent months.
- Lent term: a first supervision can go over the draft. The structure from here, and over the Easter vacation, depends upon your and your supervisor's opinions on that draft. Sometimes quite substantial new research or rewriting is needed. If so, your supervisor may want to discuss new section plans with you. In the middle of this term, you will need to decide whether to revise your title: if so, a new title should be discussed with your supervisor and submitted by the deadline (see the preceding section). You should aim by the end of this term to have a clear sense of what still is needed for the dissertation to be completed.
- Easter vacation: it is important to move to the stage of polishing the dissertation in this vacation. You need to make sure that the language is fully appropriate and consistent, the referencing and bibliography is precise, and you have a robust conclusion that is supported by the arguments and evidence presented in the dissertation. Importantly, make sure that you have stayed within the word limit: often, quite a substantial amount of editing is required to bring the dissertation down to 10,000 words. Try not to leave this until the term, as you will need to make sure that the language of the final draft flows well before you submit it to your supervisor.
- Easter term: often a final meeting with a supervisor is to check that the full draft is in an appropriate condition. If you are unsure, verify that the

referencing and bibliography is correct. Make sure you proof read the final version at least twice before submitting it; it is also often useful to recruit a friend to do this as well. If the dissertation contains a significant number of typographical errors, has many grammatical errors, or does not have a proper system of referencing and a bibliography, it will not ordinarily receive a higher class than a 2.2. This process of proof reading takes time and requires a clear mind.

Layout

Dissertations must be word-processed, use double line-spacing, have a font size of 11 or 12, have right and left margins of at least 2.5 cm, include page numbers and a bibliography, and provide references for all quotations.

For a dissertation, it is often useful to have sections or chapters. If you do use them, it may then be helpful to have a contents page at the front. If you use a considerable number of specialist acronyms, abbreviations or non-English terms, a list of these at the start may also be helpful. It's worth repeating that these items are all included in the word count, as is everything except the bibliography.

You should **NOT** include your name or college anywhere on your dissertation. The department will supply a coversheet for completion which will include a declaration on plagiarism (see section below) - only one is needed per submission.

References and bibliographies

There are two common conventions for references: **(1)** full references in notes at the foot of the page or the end of the document, with a bibliography at the end of the work; or **(2)** 'author-date' citations in the text, with a bibliography at the end of the work. Follow just one of these, and in whichever you use, make sure that your referencing is complete and consistent.

1. The full referencing convention. If using this approach, references are included in the notes, which should be numbered serially from 1 from the start of the dissertation. For references in notes, give full details at the first mention in the chapter, and at subsequent mentions in the dissertation, a brief citation will do.

Notwithstanding their widespread use, avoid op. cit., loc. cit., and ibid.; these can confuse. The bibliography should include the full references in alphabetical order.

Examples:

For books –

Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, p.36.

Thereafter: *Putnam, Making Democracy Work*, pp 12-13.

For journals –

Sidney Tarrow, 'Making social science work across space and time: a critical reflection on Putnam's "Making Democracy Work"', *American Political Science Review* 90 (1996), pp.389-98.

Thereafter: Tarrow, 'Making social science work', pp.389-98.

For chapters in edited volumes –

Maud Eduards 'Sweden', in Joni Lovenduski and Jill Hills (eds), *The Politics of the Second Electorate: Women and Public Participation*, Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, pp.208-27.

Thereafter: Eduards, 'Sweden', pp. 208-27.

For corporate authors –

Economist, 'Between the Caudillo and the Democrat', 17 April 1999, pp.39-40.

Thereafter: *Economist*, 'Between the Caudillo and the Democrat', pp.39-40.

For edited and/or translated volumes –

Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the uses and disadvantages of history for life', in *Untimely Meditations*, edited by Daniel Breazeale, translated by R. J. Hollingdale,

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1874], pp.57-123.

Thereafter: Nietzsche, 'On the uses and disadvantages', pp.57-123.

For internet links –

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (DNB), 'Keynes, John Maynard', Sept 2004, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34310, accessed 26 July 2013.

Thereafter: Oxford DNB, 'Keynes, John Maynard'.

2. The author-date system. Footnotes and endnotes, including the references in such notes, count towards the total number of words in long essays and dissertations in Politics and International Relations; references in a bibliography at the end of the work do not. For this reason, you may prefer to adopt the second convention - the 'author-date' or 'Harvard' style. In this, references are included in the text or the notes. There should then be a complete list of references at the end of the dissertation, in which the items should be arranged alphabetically by author's surname (or where there is no author listed, by corporate author).

Examples:

For books –

In text: ... elite political culture in Italy changed dramatically over the course of the 1970s (Putnam 1993: 33) ...

or: Putnam (1993:33) argues that elite political culture in Italy changed dramatically over the course of the 1970s...

In bibliography:

Putnam, R. D. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

For journals –

In text: ... although others have questioned his measurements of institutional performance (e.g., Tarrow 1996: 389-98) ...

or: Tarrow (1996: 389-98) is critical of the measurements of institutional performance that are used...

In bibliography:

Tarrow, S. 1996. Making social science work across space and time: A critical reflection on Putnam's 'Making democracy work'. *American Political Science Review* 90: 389-98.

For chapters in edited volumes –

In text: ... whereas in Sweden, female parliamentarians had a significant role in raising the profile of distinctively women's issues in debates about legislation (Eduards 1981) ...

In bibliography:

Eduards, M. 1981. Sweden. In Joni Lovenduski and Jill Hills (eds) *The Politics of the Second Electorate: Women and Public Participation*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

For corporate authors -

In text: (Economist 1999: 39-40)

In bibliography: *Economist*. 1999. Between the Caudillo and the Democrat. 17 April, 39-40.

For edited and/or translated volumes -

In text: (Nietzsche 1994: 176-86)

In bibliography: Nietzsche, F. 1994. The Greek State. In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. K. Ansell-Pearson, trans. C. Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 176-86

For internet links –

In text: (Oxford Dictionary of National Biography 2004)

In bibliography:

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. 2004. Keynes, John Maynard,
www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34310

With the full referencing system (1), it may be useful to have separate lists of primary (archival and unpublished texts, interviews) and secondary (including those on the web, which are counted as 'publications') sources in the bibliography. With the author-date system (2), a single bibliography is usually to be preferred. It is never advisable to divide bibliographies between types of secondary sources (eg separate list of books, articles, items on the web etc.). With both systems, bibliographies should only include items cited in the main text.

Plagiarism¹

Plagiarism is presenting, as your own, words and thoughts that are not your own. Plagiarism is a form of cheating and regarded as such by the University's Ordinances. At the beginning of each academic year you must sign a form saying that you have read the Faculty's document on the matter and fully understand what plagiarism is. If you are in any doubt, ask your Director of Studies to talk you through the issue.

Below, three different forms of plagiarism are explained. Most students will be aware that the first two are wrongful. The third form, involving copying text that is otherwise referenced from a book or article, still generates confusion in some students, and therefore it is important to read this section, even if you are confident that you know what plagiarism is.

What Constitutes Plagiarism

1. Copying text from unpublished sources. Submitting work that has been obtained in whole or in part from Internet sites or from other students is plagiarism. There are no grey lines. This always constitutes a deliberate attempt to deceive and shows a wilful disregard for the point of a university education. Each piece of work is

¹ This section draws upon Faculty and University guidance on plagiarism. Students should ensure that they read and understand the HSPS Faculty Guidance at <http://www.hsp.cam.ac.uk/current-students/course-materials> and the University- wide statement on plagiarism, <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/plagiarism/students/statement.html>.

expected to be the original, independent work of the student, and so if this is not the case it must be declared in the dissertation.

Proofreading, reading drafts, and suggesting general improvements to other students' work, and receiving such help from others, is not collusion, and is often helpful. However, if for example another student carried out detailed redrafting of the entire conclusion of a dissertation, this would be considered collusion. If this is not acknowledged in the dissertation, it is considered a form of plagiarism. Reproducing the thoughts of lecturers and the advice from a supervisor is not regarded as plagiarism. Merely reproducing lecture notes, however, is always obvious and takes away the purpose of writing your own work.

2. Copying from published literature without acknowledgement. This applies, without distinction, to material from the internet and from printed sources. Work that is drawn upon in your dissertations must be referenced appropriately. If you quote from a source, or draw from a particular section of a text, you should reference the relevant page numbers. Avoiding plagiarism means getting into the habit of careful referencing.

3. Copying text without using quotation marks. This is a form of plagiarism even if you acknowledge the source of the text. That is, if you are including text that is not in quotation marks, you are asserting that you have written these words yourself; if this is not so, it is passing off someone else's words as your own.

This is the most common form of plagiarism found in this university, and so requires a few more words of explanation. Take the following passage from the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB):

'For two years from the autumn of 1941 Keynes was mainly occupied with proposals for the post-war international monetary system. In the immediate post-war years the existing system of exchange controls and bilateral payments agreements would have to continue, but in the long term these arrangements should be superseded by a multilateral scheme with currencies freely convertible. Keynes prepared a plan for an international clearing union to supersede the gold standard and put forward a set of rules for balance of payments adjustment that required

creditor countries to take the main initiative. His plan underwent many revisions before being submitted to the Americans, who had prepared a plan of their own—the White plan—for a stabilization fund and (in the initial version) an international bank for reconstruction and development.’

If you quote from any part of this, you must put it in quotation marks and attribute it as: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34310 If you paraphrase any part, you must reference it in the same way.

To write something like what follows is plagiarism:

‘From 1941 to 1943 Keynes was mainly occupied with proposals for the post-war international monetary system (Oxford Dictionary of National Biography 2004). Immediately after the Second World War, the existing system of exchange controls and bilateral payments agreements by necessity had to endure, but ultimately these arrangements would be superseded by a multilateral scheme with currencies freely convertible. The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004) relates how Keynes’ plan underwent many revisions before being given to Washington, where White had devised his own plan for a stabilization fund and in the initial version an international bank for reconstruction and development.’

In this text, there are five phrases that are repeated word-for-word from the original source, or with only tiny amendments: ‘Keynes was mainly occupied...’, ‘the existing system of exchange controls and bilateral payments agreements’, ‘superseded by a multilateral scheme...’, ‘underwent many revisions before’, and ‘for a stabilization fund and in the initial version...’. Even though the ODNB is referred to twice in the text, these words are not in quotation marks, and therefore this would constitute plagiarism. One could put each of these phrases in quotation marks, but of course much better would be to put the text in your own words.

This form of plagiarism may sometimes occur due to poor note-taking. If you are reading a book or article and taking notes on paper or on your computer, you may sometimes find yourself copying out apt sentences or paragraphs mechanically. When it comes to turning your reading into a piece of work for submission, students

may in a hurry string their notes together. The result is an unintentional, but serious, form of plagiarism. It is important to guard against this, and to develop a way to distinguish in your own notes the legitimate paraphrase from the quotation, for example by including quotation marks in your own notes or by highlighting such text.

This form of plagiarism is often from texts that have technical language, and students may take someone else's words because they are unsure of their precise meaning. In the hypothetical example above, students who are not quite sure what exactly is meant by 'the existing system of exchange controls and bilateral payments agreements' in the ODNB entry may be tempted just to copy the entire clause. with language in it that continues to mystify, it is worthwhile to read around the topic, to make an effort to put it into your own words, and to use a supervision to discuss the terms themselves until you are satisfied that your understanding is solid.

Use of originality checking software

The University subscribes to a service named 'Turnitin' that provides an electronic means of checking student work against a very large database of material from the internet, published sources and other student essays. This service also helps to protect the work submitted by students from future plagiarism and thereby maintain the integrity of any qualifications you are awarded by the University. The copyright of the material remains entirely with the author, and no personal data will be uploaded with the work.

Any examiner who finds evidence of plagiarism in a dissertation will contact the Chair of Examiners, who will liaise with the University Proctors. This will lead to an investigative meeting. If the Senior Proctor believes that there is a case to answer, s/he will then inform the University Advocate who can take the student before the University's Court of Discipline. The Court of Discipline has the power to deprive any student found guilty of plagiarism of membership of the University and to strip them of any degrees awarded by it. A case may be made irrespective of the student's intent to deceive.

Marking criteria for dissertations for 2023-24

80 +

Identifies a clear question and states its importance cogently; shows a very clear understanding of a wide range of material relevant to that question; develops an original argument based on research or theoretical innovation or synthesis that is very well supported by evidence and/or texts, displaying a very high degree of insight; impeccable accuracy; faultlessly written and presented, and meticulously referenced. To fall into this range, a dissertation has to display all of these qualities.

70-79

Identifies a clear question; shows a very good understanding of a wide range of material relevant to that question; develops an intelligent and persuasive argument based on research or theoretical innovation or synthesis that is well supported by evidence and/or texts, displaying clear indications of insight and/or originality; a high level of accuracy; well written and presented and meticulous referenced. To fall into this range, a dissertation has to display all of these qualities.

60-69

Identifies a clear question; shows a good understanding of a wide range of material relevant to that question; develops a clear argument that is generally based on research, or theoretical analysis or synthesis and supported by evidence and/or texts; a good level of accuracy; well written and presented; well referenced. To fall into this range, a dissertation has to display all of these qualities and should not show decisively any of the weaknesses listed under the criteria for a lower second. Dissertations where there is some evidence of the negative qualities listed under the criteria for 50-59 will receive a mark between 60 and 64.

50-59

Identifies a question and generally pursues it through the dissertation but is weak in at least one of the following respects: clarity of the question posed; degree of understanding of relevant material; coherence of the overall argument or the absence of one; accuracy; the support of the evidence and/or texts for the conclusions drawn; writing, presentation and bibliographical material. To fall into this range, a dissertation has to display both positive qualities. Dissertations that

are in whole or in part not well written or presented will receive a mark in this range regardless of their positive qualities.

40-49

A clear subject and some attempt to develop a piece of work over the length of the dissertation but either lacking a question or extremely weak in at least one of the following other respects: degree of understanding of relevant material; coherence of the overall argument or the absence of one; accuracy; the support of the evidence and/or texts for the conclusions drawn; writing, presentation and bibliographical material for a significant part of the essay. To fall into this range, a dissertation has to display both positive qualities.

21-39

A stated subject for study and a discernible attempt to offer a discussion of that subject over the length of the dissertation but either a dissertation that is poorly written, or poorly structured for the length of the dissertation, or makes a large number of mistakes of fact, or demonstrates acute failures of understanding.

1-20

A dissertation that either shows a complete failure of understanding of the subject, or that is radically incomplete.

0

No dissertation submitted, or a dissertation submitted more than ten days after the deadline.

Prizes

The Department awards an annual John Dunn Prize for the best dissertation in Politics and International Relations. This dissertation may also be entered for the cross-faculty Gladstone Prize.