

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS

POLITICS DISSERTATION: MODULE SELECTION FAQs

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Mode of assessment: Dissertation. Due in April 2021. Between 11,000 and 12,000 words (40 credit) or between 6,500 and 7,000 words (20 credit)

Taster/introductory session: Thursday 1st October, 14.00 on Zoom – watch out for the Zoom link when we send out the ‘Welcome Back’ information. We will have ex-students who completed dissertation last year presenting their research live, and the opportunity to ask lots of questions. The convenor will be on hand to say more about the module.

Q1. Can I do 20 credit dissertation in one semester?

No. Both 20 and 40 credit dissertations are full year modules.

Q2. Do I have to pick a topic linked to one of my modules?

No. You can pick any topic you like that you feel would make a high quality Politics and IR piece of work. It can be linked to a module if you want – that can help give a grounding in the subject area, but it is not required to be linked.

Q3. Does the Politics dissertation have to be about politics?

No. It is not limited to party politics, political ideology, political regimes or electoral politics. Dissertations have covered hugely diverse topics from AI (artificial intelligence), to grime music, to cannibalism. They *do* need to be linked to ‘big ideas’ or theories from related disciplines. These disciplines include political science, analytical political theory, critical global politics, comparative politics, British politics, policy-making studies, gender studies, cultural studies, international relations, international politics, human rights, area studies, electoral studies, and political sociology.

Q4. How do I decide whether to take 20 or 40 credits?

Some of you do not have a choice – check your degree programme structure and ask your degree programme administrator (Luke, or Rabia, or Sarah, or Shau, or Chantel for SoSS, general SALC email for PMH/PMEL) if you are unsure. However if you do have a choice, then

In terms of getting a good mark, generally, there are no significant differences in the proportions of 1sts by 20 or 40 credit. Think about academic journal articles, which are typically between 6,000 to 8,000 words max, and that includes the bibliography. So it is possible to do high quality work in 20 credit as much as 40 credit. 40 credit obviously gives you more room to go into detail, depth and cover more angles.

It depends where your strengths are – e.g. in writing very concise pieces, or writing longer pieces in more detail. What matters really is the quality of your argument, and the depth of your reading.

In terms of the amount of work, I would estimate that students typically do two-thirds (ie slightly over half) of the work for a 20 credit as for a 40 credit just in terms of

reading and editing. But the 40 credit is still around 5,000 more actual words to write, so it is a lot more work on actual writing.

Q5. What are the deadlines? Have I missed one already?!

No-one has missed a deadline. You do not complete your topic form until the module has started. There is only one 'official' deadline for graded work, which is the final hand-in date in April 2021. There are two deadlines for non-assessed work in 1st semester, one very quick (ethics checker takes 3 minutes), and the other is the annotated bibliography and topic form. The topic form needs some work, and helps the convenor to allocate supervisors. You will then need to set yourself a series of deadlines, in conversation with your supervisor. The timetable and deadlines for the independent research in dissertation are self-created and self-managed.

First semester involves the introductory lectures, deciding on your topic, and doing lots of reading, and some initial writing, as well as your timetable and outlines. We always recommend getting some writing done in first semester. In reality, many students do the bulk of their writing in second semester (and regret it!). So the balance of work between semesters is up to each individual student.

Q6. How can I get started?

Students are *not* required to start work before semester starts. However, if you would like to do some work, please do. You could start by working on the annotated bibliography and topic form, which will be due in the first few weeks of semester. Make notes on the following:

- Describe your current broad area of interest in two to three sentences, in your own words.
- In roughly 50-75 words, say why you personally feel passionate about your broad topic. For example, think about what about this area makes you angry, sad, happy or hopeful? Why does it matter to you as a human being?
- What is your basic hunch about what your answer or argument might be by the end? Be bold in answering this question.
- Find a handful (between three and seven) of initial references that look promising. Make notes on the following areas: a short summary of the core ideas, arguments and/or results; brief assessment of your own thoughts about what is good or not so good about the piece; any reflections about how it might relate to your own questions, thoughts and ideas.