

POLI72021 Borders, Identities, Citizenship

We obtained Diversifying the Curriculum funding in 2024/25 for expanding and revising the content and accessibility of course materials for POLI72021 Borders, Identities, Citizenship. This is an elective MA module designed to foster critical examination of political, social and cultural construction of borders in international relations. Students gain theoretically and empirically informed understanding of how political power works at borders and marginal sites through exclusion/inclusion along markers of ethnicity, gender, class, race, religion, and culture. Students explore conceptual links between borders and identities, borders and citizenship, and concrete processes of immigration, diasporic formations, border-crossing, and internal migration. The course is taught through enquiry-based learning in workshops and assessed via a mid-term assessment and a research essay.

What was the rationale/aim of the project?

The subject matter of the course, its salience, and associated literature develop rapidly, as do the demographics and bordering experiences of students taking the module. The general aim of the project was to research and develop new teaching resources, with a particular focus on critical and decolonial research methodologies in border studies, in order to broaden the curriculum and make critical approaches to border studies more accessible to students. At the same time, all course materials were revised for accessibility with considerations of good practice in general, dyslexic students, neurodivergence and sensory impairments.

What was the output of the project? How was it delivered to students or included in the curriculum/syllabus?

The reading list was updated to incorporate selected latest literature on decolonial and indigenous approaches in critical border studies, along with new case studies and critical perspectives including 'modern slavery', human trafficking and the intersection of disability and citizenship. These additions provide both empirical contexts in which bordering and citizenship practices take place *and* frameworks for distinct critical perspectives and intersection with wider critiques.

Examples of new content include works on disabled EU migrants in the UK (pre and post-Brexit), intersectional research narratives, and the intersections between migration and disability, both as lived experiences and as areas of academic focus. Core critical texts on human trafficking and the biopolitics of migration were added for their substantive content and as entry points to wider scholarship. Additional readings on performativity and ethics drawing on Derridean concept of 'hospitality' were added as optional tools for critical engagement.

Along with lecture slides, the course guide was substantially revised for accessibility and overall quality, including all sans serif fonts, more spaced out and visibly structured/screen reader-friendly separation of content, alt-text where applicable, and consistent formatting, highlighting and making live hyperlinks for all online material.

How was this received by students? Any evaluation? First impressions?

The immediate noticeable effect of the above changes was a wider range of sources used in assignments, including many of the newly introduced materials. This contributed to more complex and nuanced analyses of bordering practices and a broader thematic and conceptual range of student work. The assignments showed a deeper understanding of bordering practices and a greater breadth of topics and topic intersections in student work.

Did you encounter any difficulties/challenges?

Although impressions shared by students in person and direct correspondence were positive, there was limited volume and detail of formal student feedback. Course Unit Survey responses did not meet the threshold for written feedback to be returned.

What are the next steps/plans?

The course is on hiatus for 2025/2026 academic year, but these changes and resources remain available for future delivery and as a foundation for further development. It would be ideal to engage students directly in a future iteration of such revisions or co-production of course materials. Conducting a focus group or anonymous free text survey could help assess the perceived value of the changes. It would be especially helpful to identify patterns in which students find most benefit, and how such decisions about course content feed into students' experiences, interests and degree of engagement with topics.

Ultimately, this work contributes to creating a learning environment where all students can feel recognised, represented and able to speak. Assessing this would require carefully planned research.

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