

**'Important Issues in Contemporary Politics'  
POU44010**

**Course Director**

**Dr Jacqueline Hayden**

Room 4.05

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\*\*\*This seminar will be recorded and podcast. It will be possible to download each session thus allowing students to review all presentations\*\*\*

**One x two-hour seminar a week in Room 3131**

Plus One to One scheduled meetings  
(Online during Covid-19 restrictions)

**Group 1 meets at 2-4pm on Tuesday**

**Group 2 – meets at 11-1pm on Friday**

**Course Objectives**

In this seminar students learn how to tackle issues of real-world importance in an analytical and self-consciously critical fashion. The course aims to enhance students' ability to communicate their ideas and research in an effective and engaging manner. The course encourages students to utilise good research practice which will give them cutting-edge advantage when they enter the work-place. The overall aims are twofold.

- 1) Developing students' ability to marshal and present their ideas in a clear, coherent and cogent way, particularly in the context of presentations.
- 2) Developing students' ability to produce research project proposals of a kind and standard suitable for academic political science. This training acts as a preparation for careers in fields directly related to politics as well as journalism, teaching, policy-making, and business. It also prepares students for postgraduate study.

To achieve these aims the course is structured around a small-group seminar programme dedicated to the analysis of issues in contemporary politics. Premised on the notion that there is (almost) never a simple answer to any important political question, the course is designed to promote critical thinking and the ability to interpret, understand, and explain issues and problems in politics.

The programme of seminars will be divided between topics in Irish and international politics and will enable students to integrate and use the knowledge they have acquired across a range of courses and apply this to substantive issues.

- **This course does not involve traditional lectures.**

The topics for presentation will be **selected and researched by students themselves under the supervision of Dr Hayden.**

## **Schedule**

### **Week 1 – Introduction and orientation meeting**

### **Week 2 – Let's talk about your research proposal and how a good one might get you a job or a postgrad!**

Moving beyond essay writing – and designing a research proposal.

We will cover the key methodological issues students need to understand in order to design a research proposal. Students are encouraged to think through potential research proposal topics in advance of the seminar in order to get the best out of this session.

**Week 3 – Using the ICP module to advance your career – former class members advise on the good, the bad and the ugly!**

**Week 4 Student presentations commence for Group 1**

**Week 5 – Student presentations commence for Group 2**

The rest of the programme will consist of student-centred seminars where the chosen topics are presented and discussed in an analytical and methodologically rigorous manner. **Topics will be selected by students and developed in conjunction with the course director prior to presentation.**

### **Seminar structure**

Each student is required to attend a single weekly two-hour seminar during term time as well as one to one meetings focused on preparing the research proposal (worth 45% of the overall grade). Each student will be required to research and deliver **4 presentations** over two semesters.

- **2 x individual 15-minute** presentations – topic selected by the student.
- **1 X joint or team** presentation – student selected topic.
  - The duration of the joint presentation is dependent on numbers participating in each collective effort.
- **1 X 10 minute** – news report style presentation on a topic selected from the previous 72 hour's headlines

In addition, each presenter will arrange two '**discussants**' (from within the class) for each presentation. The discussants will aim to generate debate and ensure a lively and rigorous treatment of the subject matter. Notwithstanding this, all class members will be expected to contribute on each topic by joining in the discussion.

## **Course Content**

While there are no formal lectures, the following areas will nevertheless be addressed throughout the year in the context of the coursework and one to one meetings:

- Research methodology and techniques
- Explanation in the social sciences
- Scientific and journalistic styles of research and writing
- Empirical vs. Theoretical/Critical research
- Use of research material in an ethical fashion
- Referencing and sources

## **Participation, Assessment, and Course Evaluation**

Students are required to attend a single weekly two-hour seminar and **one-to-one** meetings on the research proposal (compulsory) as well as other informal meetings to discuss upcoming presentations and to review feedback.

As there is **no final examination** for this course, students are continuously assessed based on the calibre of the following:

Individual 15-minute presentations (x2)	20%
10-minute news report OR report to the Board (x 1)	10%
Group presentation (x1)	15%
Discussant roles (4 best of 6)	10%
Final research proposal	45%

PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL PRESENTATIONS ARE RECORDED/PODCAST AND ARE THUS AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW BY THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND ITS EXTERNAL EXAMINER

Student presentations will be assessed according to the following criteria

Content	Clarity of the puzzle or problem being addressed; Quality of argument that is presented; Structure of presentation; Coherent conclusion (25 %)
Research skills	Evidence of research and use of sources; Interpretation of evidence and analysis (25 %)
Discussion Skills	Responsiveness to class comments/questions; Listening and engaging class in discussion (25 %)
Presentation skills	Fluency; Familiarity with own material; Use of audio-visual aids or handouts (25 %)

In the case of joint presentations each presenter will be **jointly marked on content and research skills but receive an individual mark for discussion and presentation skills**

**Research proposals** will be graded by the course director. The proposals are also made available to the external examiner for review. The

department will conduct regular assessments of the functioning and progress of the course. As with all courses under the aegis of the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy, students will also evaluate the course and comment on how well it fits their own educational objectives.

### **Role of the course coordinator**

The seminar series is a student-centred learning experience. The course director (Dr Hayden) will be available for one-to-one meetings with students outside class hours to assist students in the selection of seminar topics, and to advise on literature and research methods, discussant roles, or any other matters of class concern. Students are encouraged to avail of this facility prior to the initiation of course related projects. A key feature of this course is that **students will receive a brief written assessment within 5-7 days of their presentation**. The coordinator will timetable the series and moderate and evaluate student contributions and papers.

### **Issue/Topic Selection**

Students have wide discretion to choose the subject of their presentations. Needless to say, it is worth bearing in mind that how a subject is approached is often more important than the nature of the subject itself.

### **Attendance, participation and penalties**

The success of ICP depends on the commitment of its students. As a consequence, all students are required to attend all seminars unless prior notification and a certified excuse is provided. There will be a roll call at each seminar. **Failure to attend on the day of one's own presentation, or the day where a student performs the role of**

**discussant, without proper and agreed notification will involve the loss of marks associated with the role of presenter or discussant. All late written work (research proposal), unless excused in advance by the course lecturer, or justified by medical certificate or tutor's note, will be penalised at a rate of 5 marks per working day. Under no circumstances will work be accepted after the set work has been marked and handed back to other students, or after the end of Trinity lecture term.**

### **Scheduling of seminars and written work**

After the introductory meeting the course coordinator will draw up a preliminary **presentation schedule** with the aim of allowing students to select dates which work best for their diary.

**10 minute news report or a Report to the Board:** students will select a current topic from the previous 72 hour's headlines OR select a controversial or difficult issue about which they have been asked to brief their company/NGO/governors – Board of Directors.

### **The research proposal**

**The final paper should be no longer than 5,000 words** and should propose an issue of importance in contemporary Irish or international politics which merits academic research. No student will be allowed to write a research proposal on a topic directly related to one on which he/she has already presented. The goal of this paper should be to present a strategy according to which the student would set about researching the topic, comprising a clear question, a justification for researching it, and a framework of theory and methodology by means of which the question may be addressed. The analysis should be original and should include an evaluation of approaches to understanding, resolving or further

investigating the question. **This paper is not a literature review** and marks will be awarded for applying original ideas or approaches to established thought on the issue.

### **Preparing your research proposal**

It is important that you begin work on the research proposal very early on in Semester 1. A meeting will be scheduled with each student in order to discuss the selection of a research topic and the subsequent development of the proposal.

A **1000 word outline should be submitted by email to**

**[jahayden@tcd.ie](mailto:jahayden@tcd.ie) by Friday November 26<sup>th</sup>** . Students will then receive feedback on how to complete the proposal for submission by **Friday April 8<sup>th</sup>**.

Important dates:

**Friday November 26<sup>th</sup> 2021**

**Friday, April 8<sup>th</sup> 2022**

The research proposal will be submitted in **through Turnitin.com**

### **Guidelines for student presentations and discussants**

#### **What is a good presentation?**

An effective presenter is able to deliver a clear and concise summary of their investigation into an important political issue. While the style of any particular presentation will depend heavily on the subject matter under review, all presentations contain a number of important components.

1. *Review of the literature.* A well-prepared presenter will have an understanding of their subject including why it is important; how it is



generally approached; where reliable sources of information can be found on it; and the principal conclusions emanating from research in this area. Needless to say, the final presentation will not include all of the material read by the student. A good presentation distills and organizes the most important issues and conclusions for the benefit of the audience.

2. *Clear and lucid style.* If a student is to communicate effectively she must gain and hold the attention of her audience. It is important that a student *present* her work. When one reads from a prepared text it is very difficult to persuade others as to the merits of an argument, or indeed to achieve any clarity of emphasis, or dynamic intonation. It is generally advisable to prepare an outline of your key points and to cover them in your presentation in natural, conversational speech. It is also advisable for students to speak slowly and clearly, avoiding colloquialisms. It is vital that a student does not exceed the time allotted for the presentation.

3. *Foregrounding of interest or theoretical perspective:* It is fundamental to the course that students should take seriously the fact that in the analysis of political issues there are almost always either competing political/ideological positions, or theoretical approaches. Where students have an "interest" they should declare it, and acknowledge the alternatives. Evidence bearing on these should be used in a fair-minded and unprejudiced way.

4. *Appropriate use of visual aids.* It is strongly advised that students use PowerPoint (or other visual aids). Visual aids offer a good way of underlining and clarifying a verbal presentation. Here are a few tips to help you use slides or transparencies effectively:

- Limit the number of slides. A good rule of thumb is to allow at least 1-2 minutes per slides. If you go beyond 8 slides, you are likely to lose your audience.

- Don't overload the slides with information. Limit each slide to 3-5 points.
- Avoid visual clutter - don't over-use fancy graphics which might distract your audience and diminish the impact of the slide.
- Have a good reason for showing each slide. If you are properly prepared, your slides should give you the cues you need to keep your presentation on track (without memorization or without reading it).

### **Presentation Format**

The duration of each student presentation should be kept to within the allotted time. A big part of the skill is being able to present your ideas, no matter how complex, in the time given. The following format is recommended, as it is particularly suitable for an academic presentation of 10 or 15 minutes length:

- Introduction: Begin with a one-minute overview of your investigation that includes the central question addressed and the major conclusions drawn.
- Justification: Why is this question important?
- Theory: Is there a body of academic work to inform and direct your study? What is the standard approach to puzzles in your research area?
- Data and Methodology: What kind of evidence can you marshal in defence of your theory? Where did you source this information? How was it collected? Is it reliable? How are you going to use your data?
- Findings: What have you discovered? Evaluate the merits of your argument; raise any policy implications; mention points worthy of future discussion, unaddressed issues, or possible future research.

Of course presenters can use other formats and if they want they can adopt a case for the prosecution or defence model of delivery or indeed chose to present both sides of an issue for audience evaluation.

**The main thing is to be absolutely clear about what style you are adopting and why.**

In addition to the presentation, the student will be evaluated on her ability to interact with the audience. Often, handling questions raised by the discussants or other members of the class is the trickiest part of a presentation. This is where the depth of a students' knowledge is easily discernible.

### **What does a good discussant do?**

For each presentation, two students will be assigned as discussants. The role of the discussant is not to criticize aimlessly. Rather, a discussant has focused responsibilities. In general, the aim of the discussant is to generate discussion following the presentation. However, in particular, a good discussant will typically do (at least some) of the following:

- Provide the presenter with critical and constructive feedback on strengths, weaknesses and suggestions on their work.
- Evaluate the presentation's contribution to the literature.
- Critically assess the presentation by offering alternative viewpoints.
- Put the work in perspective by introducing additional relevant material.
- Spur general discussion by posing relevant questions.

Each discussant will have two minutes to deliver their 'verdict' on the preceding presentation. In addition, discussants will be expected to offer **three** specific questions to shape the following discussion.

**I look forward to working with you all during the 2021-22 academic year.**

**Office Hours and contact details:  
Dr Jacqueline Hayden**

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Extension 1100**

**During Covid-19 restrictions -  
Please email to make an appointment for a Zoom or F2F meeting  
on Tuesday between 11am -1pm and Friday 1-2pm**

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