Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Department of Political Science

YEAR LONG RESEARCH PROJECT
"CAPSTONE" 2019-20

"We welcome students to the new Capstone Year Long Research Project module, offering a new and exciting opportunity for individual research projects with the support of others working within a themed group.
This document sets out the arrangements for the year ahead, including the Capstone Themes on offer in 2019-20, and students are asked to read it carefully."

Guidelines for Students and Supervisors Concerning the Research Project Module

20 Credit Module

A.   THE MODULE DESCRIPTOR

Rationale and Aims

This research project module is designed to allow students to develop research, teamwork and communication skills, and to engage in meta-learning (learning about learning). It seeks to provide students with an opportunity to engage in self-directed, independent research with the support of a theme instructor and peers. It will facilitate students to engage in a critical and in-depth analysis of a topic in political science, and to communicate their findings to specialist and non-specialist audiences. Students will also be supported to work with their peers and to take responsibility for various tasks within a group setting. A core rationale of the module is to facilitate students in the development of skills of life-long learning, to apply

research skills to various contexts and to reflect on their learning, both individually and as a group. Through engaging in an in-depth piece of research, working collaboratively, taking responsibility for tasks, communicating effectively and responding to the needs of research-users, students will be facilitated to develop the graduate attributes promoted throughout the School's programmes.

Learning Outcomes

Having completed this module, students should be able to:

1. Execute a demanding political science research project;

2. Collaborate with peers and act in leadership roles;

3. Constructively evaluate and the work of others;

4. Synthesise and evaluate a variety of research methods, sources, findings and analysis.

5. Critically analyse of an area of political science through independent research;

6. Effectively communicate research findings.

Module Content

Each group will be organised around a broad research theme, with each student preparing a research project on a particular topic within that theme under the supervision of a theme instructor (academic staff member).

The topics for research will vary from year to year, but the skills employed will be similar.

Research Theme

Students will work on an individual piece of research which fits within a theme. The process of discussion and selection of individual projects will happen during the timetabled workshops period. All supervision will be conducted during the timetabled workshops.

Each student will work with the theme instructor to select a topic which is both suitable for a research project and aligns with the common theme.

Themes may vary as to whether they offer an "open-ended" choice of projects within the overall theme, subject to approval by the Theme instructor, or whether the Theme instructor will provide a more or less defined list of projects from which Capstone projects can be selected.

Students will work on their dissertation individually, but will meet with other students and the theme instructor in a group setting for a series of workshops. These workshops will provide an opportunity for students to discuss their progress, explore emerging themes in their work, examine the structure of their work, present their research, engage in reflection on their learning, and offer and receive feedback from the theme instructor, as well as their peers.

Groups will comprise no more than twelve students. The number and nature of research themes available each year will depend on available staff resources.

Capstone themes for the year ahead are set out at the end of this document.

Methods of Teaching and Student Learning

The research themes will be settled prior to the academic year in which the students take the dissertation module.

Students will be invited to identify several research themes to which they could be assigned, at the same as their module selection in March.

The assignment of students within the module to research groups will take place in April or May.

A series of <u>lectures for all Capstone students</u> (whichever theme they are pursuing) will commence at the start of Michaelmas Term, at which attendance will be taken. These will cover topics of common interest such as basic research design principles and time management.

Theme based workshops will take place every second week for each group from the start of Michaelmas Term. Each workshop will last up to two hours. Students will be encouraged to meet with each other outside of the workshop format on a more regular basis; these meetings will not be supervised by the theme instructor. One-on-one supervision is **not** provided in this module.

The deadline for submission of all research projects will be the week after reading week in Hilary Term.

A large portion of the work will be conducted by students working independently, outside of the workshops.

Methods of Assessment

Students will be assigned an individual mark for their dissertation. This will be worth 65% of the overall mark.

Students will present their research at a poster session at the end of Hilary Term, after the submission of Capstone projects. This will be worth 10% of the overall mark. Guidance on poster requirements will be set out at a later stage.

Students will be assigned an individual mark for their ongoing participation. Ongoing participation will be worth 10% of the overall mark. The participation mark will be reduced

commensurate to any unexcused absences from classes. Students who fail to attend at least 2 workshops will not be permitted to submit a research project. The Theme instructor may require response papers, presentations, readings, discussions of others work in progress, and so on as part of this participation grade.

Students will submit 4-5 other pieces of assessed work 400-500 words each. This written component will be worth 15% of the overall mark.

Students must also submit a 1500 word research proposal in November on which they will receive detailed feedback.

The upper word limit for the dissertation will be 8,000 words.

The theme instructor will assess students' work, subject to moderation within the Political Science Department and by the External Examiner.

Constant attendance and independent work throughout the year (including independent work over the winter break) is an essential requirement of the Capstone research project. Late work will be penalized at a rate of 5 marks per day. All requests for excuses from submission penalties, whether justified by a medical certificate, a LENS report, or other reason, must be submitted in advance of the deadline to the Theme instructor by the student's college Tutor. Late or *ex post* requests to submit written materials without penalties will not be accepted.

Evaluation

Capstone students will be surveyed during and at the end of the academic year for feedback on the Capstone project experience.

B.   APPLYING FOR YOUR CHOSEN RESEARCH THEME

The research themes will be notified to all students prior to the academic year in which the students take the dissertation module.

It may not be possible to assign students to their first or second choice research theme due to constraints concerning the size of the groups.

Students will be required to identify several research themes to which they could be assigned, at the same as their module selection in March. The method for identification will be communicated to students by the Department of Political Science.

The assignment of students within the module to research groups will take place in April or May.

C.   OBTAINING ETHICAL APPROVAL

When undertaking your research project, you might wish to include research methods that involve the participation of humans. For example, this would be the case if you wanted to conduct interviews or if you decided to hold an online survey. In the first instance, you should discuss any plans for research involving human participants with your Theme instructor.

Conducting research with human participants requires permission in advance from the Department of Political Science. Authorisation can only be granted prior to undertaking the research; the College procedures do not permit retrospective authorisation.

After having discussed this with the theme instructor for your research theme, if you decide that you do wish to undertake such research methods, then you will need to apply for permission. Relevant information will be provided to students in 2019-20.

D. WORKING IN A RESEARCH GROUP: EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS AND THEME INSTRUCTOR

The research project module involves working with your peers and the theme instructor in a group setting.

Role of the Student

Students will be contacted by their allocated Theme instructor before the end of May of the previous year, after the module choices have been submitted, with suggestions and advice for independent summer reading and preparation for the research project in the year ahead.

Students are asked to respect that theme instructors may not be available to provide advice on the research project module in response to email during the summer and before the start of the academic year. Workshops where theme instructors and students work together on the research project will be timetabled. Theme instructors will also be available to students during their office hours each week.

The role of the student is:

- To consider the appropriate subject-matter for their research project, which must be agreed with the theme instructor and fall within the research theme to which the student has been assigned;

- To participate constructively and actively in workshops;

- To take on roles appropriate to the activities of the group;

- To produce spell-checked, referenced work required in the schedule of work outlined below and to send such work to the theme instructor;

- To provide feedback to their peers in a constructive and supportive manner;

- To receive feedback from their peers and theme instructor in a constructive way and to implement an action plan arising out of that feedback;

- To engage in self-directed research and writing;

- To manage their timetable to ensure that their research is completed and submitted on time.

It is a student's responsibility to ensure that research sources are properly acknowledged; **plagiarism is a serious academic offence**. For more information on academic integrity and good research and writing practices to avoid plagiarism see:

http://tcd-ie.libguides.com/plagiarism

Role of the Theme Instructor

The primary role of the theme instructor is to provide advice and feedback to the student on relevant sources, writing style, structure and layout in relation to the research project and:

- To facilitate workshops and thereby assist students to commence their research with appropriate research questions and an appropriate structure;

- To assign introductory reading and suggest suitable sources to students;

- To encourage the development of good research and writing habits;

- To provide written and oral feedback on the student's written work in a timely fashion;

- To record attendance and review the quality of student participation;

- To lead workshops and support group discussion and interaction;

- Promote constructive and active group engagement;

- Assess each student's work in coordination with others in the Political Science department.

The research project module is based on group discussion and feedback. The workshops are the primary mechanism for seeking and receiving feedback. One on one, individual supervision will not be provided by the theme instructor. Students will receive written feedback on their work at the times indicated in the timetable below. Outside of these times, theme instructors will not be in a position to provide responses to individual requests for feedback, whether through email or requests for individual meetings. Students can attend at lecturer's weekly office hours.

Should a situation arise where a student is dissatisfied with the quality of the supervision they are receiving, a student should make immediate contact with the <u>Departmental Capstone Coordinator</u>, Jesse Dillon-Savage.

Working in groups

Working with peers and the theme instructor is a feature of the research project module.

Students will give each other feedback in workshops and receive feedback from the theme instructor in this setting also. This is designed to ensure that students have the benefit of a wide variety of perspectives on their work and to learn from others. Students and the theme instructor will be obliged to abide by these values in group work and giving and receiving feedback:

1. To participate actively in the group;
2. To fulfil the responsibilities they have agreed to take on;
3. To provide feedback and support to others;

4. To be respectful and considerate in providing feedback;

5. To acknowledge appropriately the contributions made by others to their work;

6. To work collaboratively for the benefit of everyone in the group and the research as a whole.

Theme instructor will decide with students the appropriate ways to acknowledge contributions in a situation where any work arising out of the research project module is published.

E.   PRESENTATION

The presentation of final research projects must conform to the below requirements.

House Style

All research projects should include:

(i)   title page;

(ii)   abstract;

(iii)   table of contents;

(iv)   bibliography (sources should be presented in alphabetical order in order of author surname);

(v)   an indication of the precise final word count,

Physical Presentation

Research projects must be typed and printed. They need not be hard-bound, providing that the binding is secure. Printing may be on single or double-sided paper, provided that the print is legible. They should be double-spaced and in 12 point font.

Word Limits

The word limits for research projects are as follows:

Individual Capstone research project: maximum 8,000 words.

These are hard limits **(no exceptions are possible)**. These limits **includes text and footnotes** but excludes title page, tables, appendices and bibliography.

Research projects which exceed the maximum length will have 10 marks deducted.

The word limit should be regarded as a recommended **maximum** but students are recommended that a successful project is likely to be not shorter than 7,500 words. Students should write concisely, and with rigour and structure.

F.   SUBMISSION

Submission Date

The deadline for submission of research projects is **4pm Wednesday of week 8** [the week after Reading Week] **of Hilary Term 2019-20**. Printed research projects must be submitted to the Department of Political Science <u>and</u> an electronic submission made to Turnitin by this deadline. Research projects submitted at any point after this time will be regarded as late submissions and will be subject to penalties of 5 grade points per day. Extensions will only be authorized when backed by a medical certificate or similar documentation.

Method of Submission

Essays must be submitted in both hard copy form and through Turnitin.

(i)   Hard Copy Submission to Department of Political Science

Students should submit two printed copies with a signed Plagiarism Declaration cover page, neither of which will be returned.

(ii)   Submission to Turnitin

Students submitting an essay must also electronically submit a copy of their essay through Turnitin, the College's anti-plagiarism software. The theme instructor will provide students with details on how to submit their research projects.

For details on how to use Turnitin see

http://www.tcd.ie/CAPSL/students/integrity-plagarism/

G.   ASSESSMENT

Research projects, written assignments, poster sessions, participation in class will be assessed by the Theme instructor, in coordination with the Departmental Capstone coordinator, and subject to moderation by the Political Science Department and the External Examiner.

Materials may be sent for review to an external examiner. in exceptional cases, an oral examination of the candidate may be required by the examiner(s).

Capstone research projects will be expected to include basic features of research in political science, such as defining a research question in terms of a "variation to be explained", an assessment of previous scholarship, the elaboration of an explanation, an empirical test, and the drawing of conclusions from the project.

If different / more specific grading criteria are appropriate for a particular Capstone theme, (for example, there is a greater focus on historical research, or computer programming, or a political theory topic) these will be made clear to students at the start of the academic year.

The research projects will also be assessed on how well-written, well-structured and well-presented the research project is.

Overall standards for the assessment of student's work are set out in the Political Science Department Handbook.

CAPSTONE THEMES FOR 2019-20

Five Political Science Capstone Themes may be on offer in 2019-20:

(1) Irish Politics (Liam Kneafsey)

(2) Forecasting Conflict (Quantitative Theme – Thomas Chadefaux)

(3) Great Powers in International Politics (Jesse Dillon-Savage)

(4) Media Politics (Liam Kneafsey)

(5) Political Violence (Liam Kneafsey)

More information on each of these themes is set out in the pages that follow.

Please note:

You must select at least <u>three</u> themes on your "Capstone Theme Choice Form" to be submitted directly to the Political Science department on polsci@tcd.ie at the same time that Module Choice forms are returned to course administrators.

While the Department will do its best to meet students' preferences admission to your first or second choice of themes is not guaranteed, and you must be prepared to complete a Capstone project on any theme that you have indicated as a "top 3" preference.

Not all Themes listed above may be offered, and the instructors of various themes are subject to change.

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Capstone 2019/20 Political Science: Irish Politics Theme

Instructor: Liam Kneafsey

This research theme allows students the opportunity to develop a research project that seeks to answer a critical question in our understanding of Irish Politics broadly conceived. This project could involve questions regarding changes in Irish political culture, electoral politics in Ireland, governmental and legislative processes, constitutional issues and referendums, Irish political parties, interest group politics, the social basis of politics in Ireland, issues of public policy development in Ireland, or the issue of conflict and post-conflict in Northern Ireland. Students can engage with a broad range of topics in Politics in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland that can form the basis for a research project.

Students are <u>free to choose and develop their own research project</u> in consultation with the theme instructor. The project can employ any appropriate methodological approach of the student's choosing, again in consultation with the theme instructor. The module will discuss questions of research design and the advantages and disadvantages of particular methodological approaches as relevant to the study of Irish Politics to guide students throughout the course and as they work on their project.

There are several substantive topics from the study of Irish Politics literature to consider. A research question related to any of these topics could form the basis for a Capstone project. If you are interested in any of these topics and a related research question, then you should consider a project within this theme.

The first broad strand to consider are political institutions in Ireland with a number of potentially interesting questions. How exceptional or otherwise is voting behaviour and the party political system in Ireland? Is there evidence that Ireland is moving more towards other comparable industrialised democracies over time along these various dimensions? What are the major structural divisions in Irish politics and how might these be changing? What are the social bases for politics in Ireland in the 21st century? How and to what extent do recent referendum results illustrate growing social liberalism in Ireland and what are the causes of this? How are Irish political parties organised in the 21st Century? How do we explain the absence of an

15

organised right wing populist movement in Ireland? What are the causes of the weakness of the Left in Irish politics and how relevant are these today? How important are the media as political actors in Irish politics?

Second, you could consider a question regarding the development of Irish public policy. What is the nature of the relationship between public opinion and public policy in Ireland? Have new political arrangements altered the role of the Opposition in policy development? How powerful are organised interests in shaping public policy development in Ireland, and what are the primary mechanics of interest group influence? How does Ireland's membership of the European Union link to the domestic policy-making process?

Third, you can consider questions regarding conflict and post-conflict in Northern Ireland. Is there evidence of political transformation in Northern Ireland? How important are the traditional divisions in explaining the policy process and/or trends in public opinion in Northern Ireland? Is there evidence for the emergence of alternative forms of political competition? How successful has the 'consociatonal' power-sharing solution been in Northern Ireland? What are the political, social and economic legacies of conflict and/or how successful have peacebuilding policies been in addressing these legacies? How can we best explain the Brexit vote in Northern Ireland, and is it illustrative of broader political trends going forward?

Capstone 2019/20 Political Science: Forecasting Conflict Theme

Instructor: Thomas Chadefaux

This research theme allows students the opportunity to develop a forecasting project. Forecasting political processes has become an increasingly central area of political science and social sciences in general, and has important practical implications. Governments, businesses, finance companies, all have an interest in predicting social phenomena. Conflicts have an major impact on economic, social, and political structures, and therefore, their anticipation is key to preventing them or at least to adjusting governments' or businesses' behaviour to their expected occurrence.[1]

In this module, we will focus on predicting events related to the onset, unfolding, or termination of political violence (or the consequences thereof), such as terrorist attacks, interstate conflicts, civil wars, refugee flows, or human rights violations. Our goal will be to apply existing statistical methods (or develop new ones) to data on these processes, with the goal to anticipate their occurrence. The Research Methods skills taught in Junior Sophister (Research Methods A and B) are sufficient methodological training and background for students to take this Capstone theme. The skills acquired in this module can in turn be broadly applied beyond this class and are highly sought after by employers.

Students are free to choose and develop their own research project in consultation with the theme instructor. The project can employ any appropriate methodological approach of the student's choosing, again in consultation with and advice from the instructor. The module will discuss methodological issues, available data, and the advantages and disadvantages of particular approaches.

Possible projects will mostly include combinations of:

---

[1] Students interested may wish to read the following article for a general introduction to forecasting in international relations: Schneider, Gerald, Nils Petter Gleditsch, and Sabine Carey. "Forecasting in International Relations: One Quest, Three Approaches." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28.1 (2011): 5–14.

1. A **substantive event** to forecast (interstate wars; civil wars; one-sided government violence; human rights violations; genocide; ethnic conflict; terrorist attacks; etc.)

2. A particular **unit of analysis**. Mainly, students may wish to forecast either the *timing* of an event (e.g., onset, attack, etc.) or its *geographical location* (e.g., predicting where terrorist attacks will occur).

3. A **process** to predict. This could be the onset, termination, incidence, recurrence, etc., of the substantive event.

Students will need to identify a gap in the literature (e.g, a new type of event, unit of analysis, or process to predict) and a method that is adequate for their particular topic, with the help of the instructor. They will aim to identify important predictors and to improve upon existing forecasts. This module should be a very exciting opportunity for students who want to know more about war, conflict, and using data to forecast political events.

Capstone 2019/20 Political Science: Great Powers in International Politics

Instructor: Jesse Dillon Savage

This research theme allows students the opportunity to develop a research project that seeks to answer questions related to great powers in international politics broadly conceived. Power politics involves the struggle for influence among political communities. Great powers are the central actors for understanding how this plays out in international politics. Great powers shape the institutions that govern the system, help determine when cooperation is more or less feasible, and their conflicts remake global orders. As China rises and the US declines in a relative sense, the issues related to great power politics have taken on a new urgency and this capstone will provide students, through their research project, an opportunity to improve their understanding of a key question related to these problems.

The research theme will draw on historical and contemporary cases in order to understand how great powers have shaped the world we live in today. The module will ask what we can learn from the past to understand the present. For example, what can we learn different strategies adopted by the US and Germany during their rise during the 19th century that can help explain or predict China's rise in the present? And what can we learn from how the US and Soviets managed the decline of the European powers after WWII about the possible outcomes of US decline in the current era?

The theme instructor will provide students with a choice of research questions and areas related to contemporary developments in the study of great power politics from which a research project can be selected. The selected topics allow students to answer a question of immediate relevance to understanding contemporary international politics. Among these topics students can examine how great powers establish international order and provide structure and governance in international relations; how great powers manage their rise and decline; conflict among great powers; and how great powers influence the domestic politics of other states. These areas of research will provide students will a broad range of subjects to explore.

The project can employ any appropriate methodological approach of the student's choosing, in consultation with the theme instructor. The module will discuss questions of research design and

the advantages and disadvantages of particular methodological approaches as relevant to the study of international politics to guide students throughout the course and as they work on their project.

Capstone 2019/20 Political Science: Media Politics Theme

Instructor: Liam Kneafsey

This research theme allows students the opportunity to develop a research project that seeks to investigate the role and impact of the media on political and social outcomes. The mass media is the primary means by which citizens learn about political issues, events, and actors. It is therefore important to understand how and to what extent the mass media shape, influence, and reflect political attitudes and political behaviour. Students can engage with a broad range of topics in political communication and media politics that can form the basis for a research project.

Students are <u>free to choose and develop their own research project</u> in consultation with the theme instructor. The project can employ any appropriate methodological approach of the student's choosing, again in consultation with the theme instructor. The module will discuss questions of research design and the advantages and disadvantages of particular methodological approaches as relevant to the media politics literature to guide students throughout the course and as they work on their project.

There are several substantive topics from the media politics literature to consider. A research question related to any of these topics could form the basis for a Capstone project. If you are interested in any of these topics, then you should consider a project within this theme.

The first topic concerns how media content is produced and how, and under what conditions, structural factors may influence it. How does the practice and routines of journalism affect news? Do media outlets have a left wing or right wing bias? If there is bias, where does it come from? How do journalists' political beliefs and identities influence this? What are the impacts of organisational pressures? Does media ownership matter? If so, how and when do owners influence content? Alternatively, do media outlets simply give audiences what they want? How do media audiences' preferences influence media content?

Second, you could consider the effects of the media on public opinion and political behaviour. If the media influences the public then how? Does the media persuade people to vote a particular way? Does the media tell the public what to think about by setting the agenda? Does it instead

tell the public how to think about issues by how it frames them? What explains patterns of framing and agenda setting?

Third, there is a variety of contemporary political issues where many commentators argue that media coverage matters both at home in Ireland and elsewhere. These include the rise of populism, the impact of traditional and digital media in contentious elections, immigration, climate change, terrorism, welfare policy, and issues of representation and social identity. Projects could consider how the media coverage of these issues is shaped as well as the potential effects of this coverage on the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of the citizens who consume it. Finally, many would argue that technological innovation and the rise of online/social media has revolutionised the mass media landscape to the extent that our understanding of political communication has fundamentally changed. Projects could engage with questions arising from critical changes to the media taking place today such as the rise of soft news, eroding trust in media and journalism, social media and polarisation, and the rise (and meaning) of fake news and the online information wars.

Capstone 2019/20 Political Science: Political Violence Theme

Instructor: Liam Kneafsey

This research theme provides students with the opportunity to develop a project that seeks to answer a central question arising from the study of one of the biggest and oldest questions in comparative politics: how, and to what ends, violence is practiced in pursuit of political ends? We will engage with a broad range of topics in the study of violence that can form the basis for a research project.

Students are <u>free to choose and develop their own research project</u> in consultation with the theme instructor. The project can employ any appropriate methodological approach of the student's choosing, again in consultation with the theme instructor. The module will discuss questions of research design and the advantages and disadvantages of particular methodological approaches as relevant to the political violence literature to guide students throughout the course and as they work on their project.

There are four broad substantive strands in the political violence literature to consider. A research topic within any of these four broad strands can form a basis for the Capstone project. If you are interested in any of these strands and a related research question, then you should consider a project within this theme.

The first strand concerns the causes of political violence. We will deal with the question of why some societies are prone to civil conflict, while others are not. How does the nature of the state affect the likelihood of political violence? What is the role of poverty, economic inequality, and ethnic and religious identity in explaining political violence? When do political actors resort to violence over a peaceful solution to conflict?

The second strand concerns the logics of the organisation and production of violence. How is violence mobilised and structured? What are the major differences in the social organisation of violent groups? How does this affect the patterns of violence we observe? What is the role of ideology or identity in the organisation of violence? Is violence effective in the pursuit of distinct

political goals? What is the role of socialisation in the organisation and production of collective violence?

The third strand that you may be interested in concerns the psychology of political violence. What accounts for individual and mass participation in violence? How do the perpetrators of political violence justify and motivate their actions? What are the psychological effects of violence?

The final strand engages with the question of how violence can be brought to an end, and the prospects for peacebuilding in post-conflict societies. What impact does foreign intervention have? When does it succeed and when does it fail? How and when can extreme actors undermine peace processes? What are the conditions under which conflict resolution is most likely? What types of institutions are most successful in embedding peace? What are the social, economic and political legacies of violence in post-conflict societies?