

MA in Political Strategy and Communication

Overview

Politics is not merely about power. Sophisticated politics involves communication, strategy and manipulation of the political agenda. Whether it be a political leader motivating people to follow, a government seeking allies for a policy in the international arena, a campaigner mobilizing supporters, or a high-priced corporate lobbyist explaining a client's policy to legislators, all political ideas ultimately depend on them being communicated to an intended audience, with precision, efficiency and above all credibility. What are the appropriate forms of communication for a politician? What forms of 'spin' can work, and which do journalists see through? What are effective ways of framing a client's perspective for government officials, and what are the entry points in the decision-making cycle that makes their communication strategy most effective?

Brussels has emerged as the largest centre for international media, measured in the number of foreign correspondents, which has now exceeded the number in Washington DC. Brussels is also home to thousands of political lobbyists, engaged either as public relations specialists, political strategists, or corporate communications advisors. A recent study of graduates from BSIS who stay in Brussels shows that political communication is among their primary career destination.

An MA in Political Strategy and Communication engages students in the practical issues of political delivery. The areas of political communication, political leadership, strategy, crisis management, political branding, and public relations are all the leading vocational aspects of a developed academic understanding of politics and international relations, and it is an area of growing importance that distinguishes BSIS graduates as policy-relevant, engaged thinkers in the political arena.

Aims

The aims of the MA in Political Strategy and Communication are to:

- Provide students with a research-active teaching environment which provides a good grounding in the study of Social Science in general, in political strategy, and in the communication of political positions in particular;
- Offer a critical perspective of the interplay between International Relations and European Politics as they relate to the process of creating a strategy for dealing with political issues, and communicating effectively the issues and positions on the basis of that strategy, in order to influence outcomes at the European and national levels;

- Ensure that students acquire a solid understanding of methodologies for the study of Social Science in general, and in the application of those understandings to the study of political strategy in particular;
- Ensure that students acquire a solid understanding of major theoretical approaches to policy making and policy analysis, the historical development of the contemporary European policy landscape, and the application of theoretical and historical knowledge to the analysis and understanding of contemporary issues and cases in the field, with particular emphasis on the manner in which policies, positions, perspectives, and attitudes are communicated;
- Ensure that students acquire the necessary skills for advanced assessment of contemporary problems in European politics, society, and economy, and their solutions;
- Develop students' general research skills and personal skills (transferable skills), in particular through a substantial dissertation.

Programme

The MA in Political Strategy and Communication is offered on both a full-time and a part-time basis. Full-time students complete the programme in one year and part-time students normally in two years. Study on the programme is divided into a number of blocks called modules. Each module carries 20 credits (10 ECTS). The dissertation carries 60 credits (30 ECTS).

Candidates who complete 6 taught modules and the dissertation are eligible for the MA in Political Strategy and Communication (90 ECTS). Students who complete an additional three modules are eligible for the MA in Political Strategy and Communication (120 ECTS). Although most students prefer to remain in Brussels, some wish to divide their time between Canterbury and Brussels and this option is open to them.

Students have at least two hours a week classroom contact with their teachers per module and then spend a further 13 hours in private study for each course. As a student you will spend the balance of the hours attending a range of academic activities and working on your dissertation.

Structure

To be awarded an MA in Political Strategy and Communication, students must take 6 taught modules, the methodology module 'Fundamentals, Dissertation and Research' and then submit a dissertation on a topic in Political Strategy and Communication. The detailed structure is attached at Annex A.

Studying

The School operates the same teaching year as the main campus in Canterbury. That is one comprised of two 12-week teaching terms and one 6-week teaching term. The dates of the teaching terms are therefore harmonised, as are the terms in which particular courses are

taught. The intention of this is as much to facilitate the movement of staff between the centres, as it is to avoid any impediment to the mobility of students between the centres.

Full-time students

As a full-time student starting in September, your programme will last a full 12 months. You will be expected to take 3 taught modules in the September Term together with the methodology module Fundamentals Dissertation and Research (FDR). Then in January you will take a further three modules and the second part of the FDR module. In the May term you can attend workshops and conferences as well as consult your dissertation supervisor and in the Summer months you will prepare your dissertation.

Part-time students

Part-time students complete the normal curriculum over a period of 24 months with the dissertation being submitted at the second year. As a part-time student you are expected to take either 2, 3 or 4 modules in your first year and the remainder in your second year ensuring that you have taken 3 modules in the September term and three modules in the January term. Thus if you take 2 modules in the September term of Year 1 you would then take 1 module in the September term of Year 2. You are required to take the methodology module (FDR) at some time during your studies. As Part 1 of FDR focuses upon writing papers, it is suggested that part-time students take this during their first term. Part 2, which deals with the dissertation, can either be taken in Year 1 or Year 2.

There is considerable flexibility in teaching arrangements to accommodate students' particular needs and problems in trying to combine employment or other commitments with a part-time degree programme. However, as many modules take place during the day a flexible approach to study may be required.

January Students

To accommodate those students for whom starting their studies in September is not possible, the University offers students the opportunity of starting in January. For some starting in January might coincide with the end of a work contract whilst for others, who wish to take a few months away from their studies between the completion of the undergraduate degree and the commencement of graduate studies, a January start is a practical alternative. Part-time students may also find it convenient to begin in January.

Applicants considering a January start should note, however, that both the rhythm of the academic year, as well as the overall duration of the programme, is different. For instance, students who begin in January have more opportunity to undertake an internship over the summer recess without pressure of other programme commitments. For January starters the programme extends to 18 months in order to accommodate the examination cycle. January students start by taking 3 modules in the January term before working, planning their dissertation or undertaking an internship during the May term and the Summer recess. They then return in September to complete the remaining 3 modules before writing and then

submitting their Dissertation in March. For part-time January students the framework is the same although spread out over two years.

Students should also note that for purposes of some scholarships and loan schemes (for instance, Stafford) the period of registration will be from January to May followed by an unregistered period from June to September, followed by a second period of registration from September to March. Applicants should note that the months in which they are unregistered may be unsupported by their financial aid.

Teaching Methods

Teaching staff of the University employ a number of methods of instruction. Consistent with the University's quality assurance and enhancement practices, each method is designed to ensure that you derive maximum benefit from the lectures and seminars, and that you use independent study time to its full advantage.

Teaching on all MA and LLM programmes is by lecture/seminar format, small group work, and simulations as appropriate. For each module (course), there is a formal lecture each week for at least one hour's duration. Each lecture is intended to provide you with an introduction to a particular theme or topic, to make you aware of main issues through a structured summary of the current state of debate on a topic, and to provide you with navigation points through the main literature.

Each lecture is followed by a small group seminar (discussion group) for at least one further hour each week. The seminar is intended to provide you with the opportunity to engage with other students and with the course convenor for a structured discussion of substantive issues, and to clarify the designated reading material. Where appropriate, the seminar is a forum for students to present project work. Seminar presentations require students to formulate their views on the area under consideration, and provide important feedback to staff and fellow students. Assessment is through a combination of unseen written examinations, assessed coursework and project work.

Both full-time and part-time students attend the same lecture. It is normally the case that part-time students attend their seminars in the evenings, while full-time students attend their seminars during the day. However, it may also be the case that the groups are mixed for seminars, which adds an important dimension to the programme: full-time students benefit from the contributions of different types of practitioners of international studies, whether they are from diplomacy, the military, industry, or international organisations.

You will be encouraged to work both independently, and as part of a group. Independent study is vital to develop research skills: for the preparation of essays, term papers, and the dissertation. All of this written work is designed to help you develop the skills necessary to distil complex arguments and issues to their essential elements, and to express your own critical ideas succinctly, clearly, and in an organised manner. You will also be encouraged to work independently on presentations that you may be asked to make in seminars, perhaps by leading the discussion on a particular topic, and to contribute generally to seminar discussions to

develop oral communication skills. This is to develop the ability to organise and to think quickly about complex issues, and to develop skills necessary for reasoned argumentation.

However, you will also be encouraged to work in groups for the preparation specified projects to develop skills necessary for cooperation in group project work, as well as to develop entrepreneurial and leadership qualities.

The programme also requires you to research, write and submit a dissertation on an agreed topic relevant to the programme, under the supervision of a member of staff with expertise in the subject area. The dissertation module frames the exercise of researching and preparing a dissertation, providing you with a high level of research skills in finding and using diverse materials. It also provides an opportunity for independent work, under supervision from academic staff enabling you to design and carry out a research project. The supervision arrangements provide you with individual feedback on the progress of your work on a regular basis.

Annex:

A. MA in Political Strategy and Communication - Structure

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Structure 2012-13

September Term	January Term	May Term and Summer
Required	Required	Required
Political Communication	Political Strategy	Examinations if required
Fundamentals Dissertation and Research	Fundamentals Dissertation and Research	Dissertation on a topic in Political Strategy and Communication
Choice of one elective module from	Choice of one elective module from	
Negotiation and Mediation	European Foreign and Security Policy	
EU Politics and Governance	Foreign Policy Analysis	
Parties and Elections		
	Choice of one elective module from	
Choice of one elective module from	European Foreign and Security Policy	
Negotiation and Mediation	Foreign Policy Analysis	
EU Politics and Governance	Europe and Global Change	
Parties and Elections	Conflict and Security	
Gender and Conflict	International Diplomatic Law	
International Relations Theory	The Politics of Globalisation	
EU Constitutional and Institutional Law		
State, Market and Society		
Public Policy Analysis		