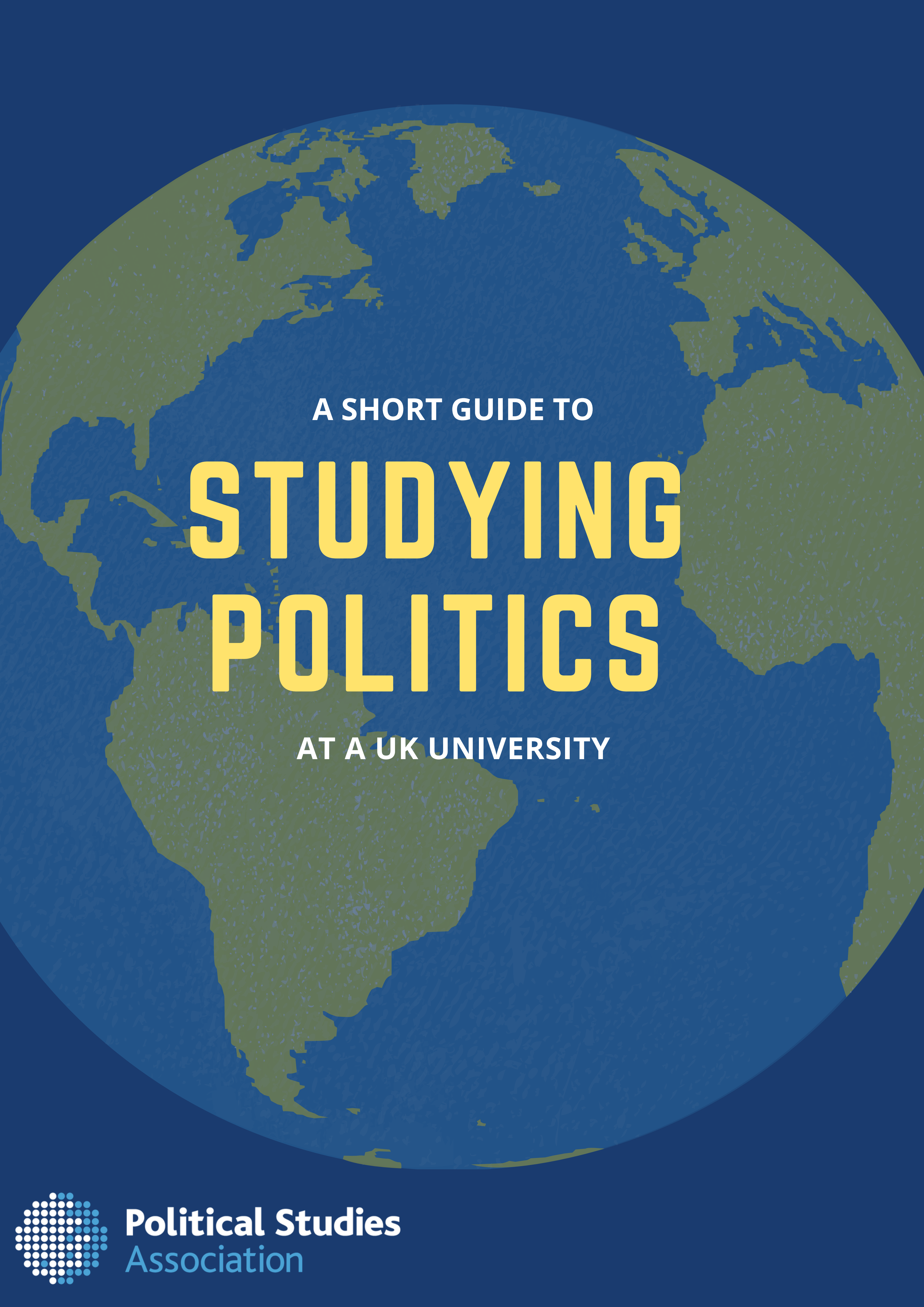




A SHORT GUIDE TO

STUDYING POLITICS

AT A UK UNIVERSITY



Political Studies
Association

Introduction

The purpose of this booklet is to introduce you to what is involved in the study of Politics at university as well as the really important skills that you will acquire as a result. It offers case studies of current Politics students from a variety of institutions who are currently studying politics and want to share their experiences.

It's important to highlight that you do not have to have studied Politics, at school, before applying. To study Politics at university you do not need any prior knowledge but it will help your application, to university, if you can demonstrate that you've done some research, further reading and have a real passion for the subject!

So what is politics? If you do a quick google of the word 'politics' most definitions will refer to 'the way a country is governed, or the job of those in a position of power in government. In reality the study of politics is more about decision-making, transfers/constructs of power, and the ideas that have shaped our society.

The politics curriculum at university can be very broad. It can include subjects such as; British Government, or different types of government across the globe; or comparative politics, where you will compare and contrast how different political systems work. Most courses explore political ideas including different competing ideologies and the way in which they have evolved over time. You may well, also, explore global political issues - such as tackling climate change, poverty, and the ways in which states interact on a global scale.

Politics is of vital importance to all of us in our daily lives. With a 24-hour news cycle and new ways of communication, people around the world are facing an information overload! As a politics student it will be your job to critically analyse the information you're given and analyse the actions of government, nation-states and non-state actors.

Political education has never been more important than it is today. We hope that after reading this booklet you will apply to study Politics at university.

If you have any questions feel free to get in touch with the Political Studies Association via info@psa.ac.uk



5 reasons to study Politics

Challenge yourself with a dynamic subject

Politics courses in the UK are constantly changing; you will learn something new every day. You'll be expected to keep up with current affairs and use the most up to date examples in your work. In a time of constitutional change, globalisation and political uncertainty; you're kept on your toes as a politics student!



Have the opportunity to study abroad



Politics is arguably the most international subject area. Most UK politics departments offer an integrated or additional year abroad as part of your Politics degree. Why not try a different style of education whilst also gaining an invaluable life experience?

Gain invaluable transferable skills

The skills gained studying a Politics degree are in high demand. You'll develop skills such as; excellent communication, problem-solving, a critical approach to research and analysis, and political, economical & cultural awareness.



Learn how to never lose an argument!



Learn how to develop your debate skills, know your facts: a politics degree will give you plenty of practice on how to get your point across. Make sure you have your *mic drop* moment! Being a confident public speaker will make class presentations and job interviews a breeze.

Set yourself up for a successful career - maybe one day you'll work here?

Politics graduates are in high demand and go into a variety of career paths. Including: the civil service, journalism, elected office, social research, charity sector roles, diplomatic services and MORE!



Writing your University application: Top Tips

Writing your university application, particularly the personal statement, can seem like a daunting task. When applying to university, we won't lie, grades matter; so why not make use of your five choices? Make sure you apply to courses with a range of grade requirements. This means, in a worst case scenario, you have a back-up if things don't go to plan with your exams.

If exam results are the most important part of getting into university then your personal statement is second. This is your chance to tell an admissions tutor exactly why you want to study politics and why you'd be a great addition to their department. You have 4,000 characters, that's roughly 500 words, to stand out!

So what are our top tips for writing a personal statement?

Think about your audience!

You can only write one statement, make sure you don't name a university specifically. If you're applying for different variations of a politics course, i.e. Politics and History and Politics and IR, don't refer to the specific course title!

If you use a quote, make it count!

We all know that Dr Martin Luther King Jr. 'had a dream' or that Aristotle thought of humans as 'political animals' - so what? Opening or using a quote within your personal statement can demonstrate further reading and can be a strong addition to your writing but relate it to what you're saying or challenge the premise of the quote. Don't just throw it in for decoration.

Check it once? Check it twice, check it again!

Proof read your work, read it out loud and don't make any silly spelling mistakes. Why not ask someone to read over your work and get some constructive feedback? You'll be writing a lot of essays at a Politics student so get in the habit of giving yourself enough time to really pay attention to detail.

Talk to your referee!

Your reference matters. So, find out who's writing your reference! Is it your head of year, your form tutor or your Politics teacher? Once you've found that out make sure they know why you want to study politics and ask them to read your personal statement. It's obvious to an admissions tutor when they're reading a reference from a teacher who clearly doesn't know who the student is or what they're applying for!

Plan, structure and prioritise!

You're excited about applying to university, you've got the work experience, you've done some reading, you have so much to say but only 500 words to say it in. Keep your statement relevant, to the point and well structure. Only include information that demonstrates how you'll be a fantastic politics student. Start drafting early; make a list of points you want to include and then rank them from important to least. Don't cram ten different examples of 'why you'd like to study politics' in when you only need two or three really good ones!

Politics Students Case Studies



Dan, Politics, University of Exeter

What subjects did you take at Sixth Form or College?

Politics, Business Studies, Sociology, Extended Project Qualification and Electronics (AS)

Why did you choose to study Politics?

I chose politics because I'm interested in what/why and how governments choose to do, or indeed what not to do. This, I would later discover is known academically as public policy! I really enjoy understanding how and why governments and policies work (or don't!) Primarily, my research interests in public policy are focused on sex education, disability and the British context.

What do you hope to learn from your undergraduate degree?

I hope to either go into the Civil Service, where I will use my knowledge of public policy to engage in the creation of better policy, or remain in academic and work towards my PHD so that I can support undergraduate students while advising government and contributing to the field.



Kim, History, Open University

What are the three key things you factored into making your choice of University?

Three important aspects for me included: location, flexibility, and course content. Because I had two young children at school, and a husband and a home on the outskirts of Cambridge, I was limited to where and how I could study. The HE institution that I chose had to be either local or able to offer distance/part-time learning. I considered Anglia Ruskin (Cambridge) but the course that I was interested in was taught from their Chelmsford campus. I had considered studying with the OU in the past and it was realistically my only option at that time. However, the course content had to be right.

Why did you choose to study Politics?

I was excited about the fact that I could combine pure history modules with other inter-disciplinary areas such as politics and religion. These were my three key interest areas before I started my degree and they continue to be so. I took history modules but was intrigued by the political philosophy course offered by the OU. I wanted to understand the political thinking behind world events and the OU politics course linked political history and ideas to the world today to show how political ideas continue to 'live' on in different ways. It was my favourite course and inspired me to join a political party.

What would you like to do post-university?

My history and politics modules inspired me to continue with academic study. I was intending to go down the teaching route but my interest in intellectual/cultural history, politics and religion inspired me to undertake further research instead. I applied to study for an MPhil at the University of Cambridge and was offered a place to research Huguenots, education, and identity in eighteenth century England. I completed the MPhil in 2018 and I am now working in academic publishing specifically marketing chemistry publications and information services. I am undertaking research in my spare time and hope to continue with a PhD soon. Politics alongside history studies was most definitely the right combination for me.

Politics Students Case Studies



Valeria, Politics and International Studies, University of Kent

Why did you choose to study Politics?

I chose to study politics because I was interested in international affairs primarily as a result of my participation in Model United Nations conferences in different countries. Furthermore, as an Italian growing up in Zambia and now living in the United Kingdom, I thought this was the ideal degree to be more open-minded and aware of various issues affecting all four corners of the globe.

Why did you choose to study at the University of Kent?

I was drawn to my undergraduate course at the University of Kent because of its reputation, vibrant international community but also its wide range of modules offered enabling me to cater my degree to my interests: conflict analysis, languages and regional politics. It was also these factors that led me to staying at Kent to complete a two-year MA in International Relations with International Law, which has enabled me to widen my horizons and offer me new career possibilities.

What would you like to do post-university?

During my time as a university student, I have undertaken several internships with the most recent being with the Conflict Analysis Research Centre at the University of Kent, which have given me a valuable set of skills for the workplace. I will complete my MA in September 2019 and hope to move into a career in political journalism/analysis in the United Kingdom or abroad.



Heather, Social Sciences, University of Manchester

What subjects did you take at Sixth Form or College?

While completing my A-Levels at college I took Sociology, English Language/Literature, and Creative Writing; Sociology gave me a really thorough understanding of social and political theory and my other two subjects really improved my writing and language skills, which I'm still grateful for, especially when writing my dissertation!

Why did you choose to study at the University of Manchester?

The three key things I factored into my choice for University was the research strength of the department, the quality of teaching at the University and also its location - I couldn't imagine not living in a city! Thankfully, all of my expectations have been exceeded and I've really enjoyed studying politics here.

What do you hope to learn from your undergraduate degree?

I'm hoping my undergraduate course will give me a robust understanding of political theory and the global issues that need to be tackled, as well as giving me great critical thinking and analysis skills going forwards after education. I'm especially interested in international relations and am glad to have been given an in-depth understanding about it.



What to expect from a Politics course:

Most Undergraduate Politics courses are 3 years long, with many universities offering optional years abroad that can be integrated into or add a year to your course length.

Your course structure will consist, mostly, of lectures and seminars. A lecture can be between 1-2 hours long and will usually involve a member of academic teaching staff presenting themes and concepts related to the topic of the week. A seminar, on the other hand, is more interactive; led by a member of teaching staff this is a chance to discuss and challenge the ideas presented during the lecture as well as reflect on the further reading you've done.

On average a UK Politics course will involve between 8-14 contact hours per week. Doesn't sound much right? Don't worry, you'll be kept pretty busy and expected to work autonomously throughout your three years. For your course you'll be expected to read a number of resources in preparation for your seminars and essays.

When you're applying to a university make sure you check out the variety of modules on offer and the different teaching methods. Some Politics departments in the UK ask students to undertake work-placements, write policy briefs or participate in group presentations. Think about your learning style and what you'll enjoy the most!

So what sorts of things will you study on a Politics course?

- **British Politics:** Not surprisingly this features in most politics degrees. You'll explore the pomp and ceremony of traditional UK politics as well as modern controversies and politics within an arguably dis-united kingdom.
- **Security Studies:** An increasingly important branch of political enquiry is that of security studies. You'll be introduced to the study of warfare, security actors and peace, as well as considering how we might think about/do security differently?
- **Political Philosophy:** Philosophers throughout history have wrestled with key issues and ideas, so why not have a go? What's the best way to think about human nature? Are humans innately good/bad? What are the responsibilities of citizenship? But also, how does political theory help us answer questions surrounding gender equality, environmentalism and cultural diversity?
- **Global Politics:** Arguably the most dynamic stream of political science, analysing the political changes that are sweeping across the globe. You'll look at overarching themes of relations between states as well as issues that face the global community such as climate change, poverty and humanitarian crises.

Pre-University Reading List

Going to University is a big change! Not just in terms of academic demands but it's a whole lifestyle change. Heading into your first lecture or seminar can be daunting and you might be thinking that you don't know enough or that other people know more; but don't worry, everyone is in the same boat! Most UK Politics courses don't require you to do any reading before the start of your course but sometimes wider reading can help you when you're writing your personal statement and also be a way to prepare for your classes.

Here's some of the classics to get you started:

- Crick (2002) *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction*
- Hobbes (1651) *Leviathan*
- Beard (2017) *Women and Power: A Manifesto*
- Rawls (1971) *A Theory of Justice*
- Putnam (2000) *Bowling Alone*
- Wollstonecraft (1792) *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*
- Garner and Ferdinand (2016) *Introduction to Politics*
- Baylis and Smith (2016) *The Globalization of World Politics*
- Bate (2018) *The Periodic Table of Feminism*

Fancy something a little different?

- Hayden (2011) *You Kant Make it Up!*
- Curtis (2018) *Feminists Don't Wear Pink (and other lies)*
- Marshall (2016) *Prisoners of Geography*
- Chang (2011) *23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism*
- Smith and Bueno de Mesquita (2011) *The Dictator's Handbook*
- Rivoli (2005) *The travels of a T-Shirt in the global economy*

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Political Studies
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Political Studies Association
Elizabeth Meehan Suite
Regent House, Pratt Mews
London
NW10AD

T: 02073212545
E: info@psa.ac.uk

www.psa.ac.uk

