Welcome to our departmental newsletter

The department has had a very busy year so far, thanks to the General Election and the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta.

The Magna Carta anniversary celebrations culminated with a ceremonial event at the site of the signing of the great charter at Runnymede, a short distance from campus. Attended by the Queen, Prince Philip, Princess Anne, Prince William, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, and the U.S. Attorney General, it was a fantastic occasion to mark the event. The college also hosted former Home Secretary Jack Straw, who gave the final lecture in our annual Magna Carta series, which has run for the past 10 years.

Our students continue to excel both in their studies and in their wider activities. We have had another very successful team take part in the National Model United Nations at the U.N. headquarters in New York and we have just celebrated our students’ academic success at graduation. Our students have performed brilliantly and the graduation ceremony is an excellent opportunity to celebrate their success and wish them very success in this next steps.

We’ve had more good news with Professor Andrew Bowie and Dr Tom Dyson winning prestigious grants from the Leverhulme Trust and the Gerda Henkel Foundation respectively, as well as both winning teaching prizes in recognition of the quality of their teaching.

I hope you enjoy our latest newsletter. For regular updates on what’s on in the department please follow us on Twitter and Facebook and look out for updates on the website.

Dr Alister Miskimmon
Head, Department of Politics and International Relations and Philosophy

Ending the Year in Style

PIR staff and students celebrated the end of the academic year in style with a riverboat shuffle on the Thames. Over 100 students attended the boat party, which departed from Runnymede near where Magna Carta was sealed.

Students enjoy the end-of-year celebration
Students from the Politics and International Relations Society (PIRSoc) won a Distinguished Delegation Award after competing in the 2015 National Model United Nations in New York. Each year, the NMUN gives young people a chance to simulate the work of the United Nations. Over 5,000 delegates from universities across the world participated in this year’s conference. Royal Holloway’s team, headed by Charlotte Anstey and Edward Jackson, represented the Russian Federation. The latest award continues an impressive run of success for PIRSoc. Students from Royal Holloway have now received Outstanding or Distinguished Delegation Awards in each of the last four years. Several members of the 2015 team also received individual ‘Position Paper’ or ‘Outstanding Delegate’ prizes.

Speaking after the conference, Charlotte Anstey said: ‘We had a very successful conference and members of the team should be incredibly proud of themselves. The trip was an invaluable experience for all the delegates, whether they had participated before or were experiencing international diplomacy and the United Nations for the first time.’

The department has been involved in Royal Holloway’s ‘#votebecause’ social-media campaign to encourage students to exercise their right to vote. The campaign focused on persuading students to register ahead of the May 2015 General Election. A large number of students were photographed holding up a hand-written placard about why it’s important to vote. The pictures were then tweeted using the hashtag #votebecause.

Speaking at the launch of the initiative, Dr Kaat Smets said: ‘It is very simple. If you are not registered, you cannot vote. Why deny yourself the right to vote in the general elections and be part of the democratic process?’

As Britain went to the polls earlier this year, staff were on hand to provide expert analysis. The election was also marked by an all-night election vigil, when around 70 students stayed up to watch the results come in. There were shocks galore, from the surprise exit-poll results, through the SNP ‘yellow-wash’ in Scotland and the collapse in the Liberal Democrat vote-share, to David Cameron’s return to Downing Street with a majority Conservative government. The event was rounded off with a hot breakfast and plenty of coffee.

Dr Nicholas Allen, who organised the event, said: ‘This was one of the most exciting and surprising elections in living memory, and it was fantastic to be able to share the experience with so many students. Whether they were happy or disappointed at the results, they’re unlikely to forget what was a truly remarkable night!’

Dr Nicholas Allen in a BBC broadcasting tent on College Green
Research in Africa

Dr Julia Gallagher

Dr Julia Gallagher, Senior Lecturer in International Relations, tells Founders West what it’s like to carry our research abroad:

My research is about how Zimbabweans see the wider world, and themselves in it. It’s a controversial subject since Robert Mugabe’s stand-off with the West, and Britain in particular. Mugabe made political capital out of calling Britain a ‘sea monster’ and Tony Blair a ‘toilet’ and ‘would-be coloniser’, while British ministers took to calling Mugabe’s regime ‘uncivilised’ and a ‘basket-case’, before imposing sanctions on its members. So it’s not always easy, as a white British researcher, to talk to Zimbabweans about what they make of Britain.

Many political scientists argue that it is vital to be neutral when conducting research so as not to influence what people say to you. That is simply impossible in my research. The people I interview know that I am British, and they shape what they say accordingly.

Instead of worrying about this, I try to use the relationship created in the interview to gain insight into the wider relationships I’m researching. That means that when the interview gets personal – when people get angry with me, for example, or when they ask what I am going to do to help them – I try to pursue the line of discussion and think about what the interview dynamics reveal about the Britain-Zimbabwe relationship.

For example, during an interview with a group of elderly civil society activists in a Bulawayo hotel over tea, one of the group suddenly turned on me, asking why I was suffocating the country and killing babies with my sanctions. I was shocked, and I could tell that others in the group were too – several quickly stepped in to reassure me that he didn’t mean me, that I was really Zimbabwean. The man’s outburst revealed the anger and betrayal that many Zimbabweans feel about Britain’s actions in Zimbabwe, while the rest of the group’s anxiety about it also suggested their ambivalent feelings about Britain – they needed to reassure me, make me feel part of the group again, but they also agreed with their colleague and wanted to see how I answered. The idea that I was ‘really Zimbabwean’ highlighted the degree to which many felt that they and the country are still shaped by Britain and find the bad relations between the two countries unsettling.

I often find my research very uncomfortable. Incidents like this would not occur if I were from a less contentious part of the world. But they have helped me enormously to understand the complexities of the relationship between Britain and Zimbabwe.

Students enrolled in the Politics of Human Rights and War and its Aftermath went on a study trip to The Hague to see the international institutions they have been studying in class. They also made a trip to one of the city’s most impressive cultural icons: the recently reopened Mauritshuis Museum. Here is what one the students – Bulkies Abeidah – had to say about their visit:

We attended the trial of Ratko Mladic, a former Bosnian Serb military leader, accused of committing crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes. He was accused of being the mastermind behind the Siege of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica massacre, both which occurred during the Bosnian war from 1992 to 1995.

The experience was extremely enlightening, as it allowed us to watch a live trial and enabled us to understand the formal procedures of the courtroom. The opportunity to become acquainted with legal terminology and the questioning style of the prosecutors was also hugely beneficial and helped substantiate what we had learned in lectures. Further, the trial gave us an idea of how witnesses are required to give information and the extreme attention to detail that is required. It was surprising to see that the courtrooms did not resemble the typical British courts we had in mind. Instead, the rooms were equipped with computers on every desk to reduce the amount of physical evidence and documents needed inside the courtroom and to make the proceeding more efficient and timely.

Following this we had the pleasure of listening to Dr. William Tomljanovic who has worked on the court’s Leadership Research Team. He gave a highly informative presentation on the history of the Yugoslav wars and the origins of the ICTY. At the end of the day, we watched a screening of a documentary made by the SENSE News Agency, Red Roses: Terror in 12 Pictures, which demonstrated the work of the ICTY and linked the legal proceedings and jurisprudence to the actual crimes committed on the ground during the Bosnian war.
Being a researcher of international relations gives you a backseat view of history in the making, car-crashes and all. As a student, there’s a point when you’re past the stage of writing essays in the library and you can actually go and talk to politicians, activists and journalists about what on earth they think it is that they’re doing. At Royal Holloway, with London and Heathrow a stone’s throw away, it is possible to be teaching and researching world affairs in the same day.

In the last year two things have come together in my research. I published a book, *Strategic Narratives* (with Alister Miskimmon and Laura Roselle) explaining how states use the new media ecology to try to control how people around the world respond to immediate crises and long-term shifts in power and wealth.

The publication of *Strategic Narratives* coincided with a decision by the British government to set up a Parliamentary committee on ‘Soft Power and UK Influence’ in the summer of 2013. I was asked to advise this committee and work out how Britain can bolster its influence while China, India and others seem to be roaring ahead. Every Monday I’d run down the hill after teaching and catch a train in time for our 4pm committee hearings, where we would grill the heads of the BBC, the Premier League, the Foreign Office – as well as diplomats from the US, Japan, Germany and other great rivals – about how Britain is seen abroad.

What I take from these experiences is that there’s a time to do research of policymakers and a time to do research with policymakers. Its easy to criticise them from the outside without knowing what is really motivating them or what information they have. But at the same time, we have a duty to interrogate them, keep them honest, and put things in a broader perspective. James C. Scott wrote about “seeing like a state”; a state sees everything as a problem to be solved, as a muddle to be cleared up. As researchers we can see inside the state, see how the state sees, then get the hell out, stand back and build theories about how power and influence work. What happens if the state then wants to apply our theories to actually increase its power and influence? We step through the looking glass and the coming years will be very interesting for those of us in Founders West.

**RECENT PUBLICATIONS**

**Srebrenica nakon genocida (2015)**

*Dr Lara Nettelfield*

On 16 June, Dr. Lara Nettelfield launched the Bosnian language version of her co-authored book (with Dr. Sarah Wagner), *Srebrenica in the Aftermath of Genocide*, in Sarajevo. The book covers the fall of the United Nations ‘safe area’ of Srebrenica in July 1995 to Bosnian Serb and Serbian forces stands out as the international community’s most egregious failure to intervene during the Bosnian war. Using more than a decade of fieldwork in five countries, the book reveals how interactions between local, national and international interventions - from refugee return and resettlement to commemorations, war crimes trials, immigration proceedings and election reform - have led to subtle, positive effects of social repair, despite persistent attempts at denial. The original English version – published with Cambridge University Press – recently won an Honorable Mention in the Ethnicity, Migration and Nationalism Distinguished Book Award from the International Studies Association. The Association for the Study of Nationalities also listed it for the Rothchild Prize.

**Cosmopolitan Borders (2014)**

*Professor Chris Rumford*

*Cosmopolitan Borders* makes the case for processes of bordering being better understood through the lens of cosmopolitanism. Rather than ‘world citizenship’ an alternative understanding of cosmopolitanism is offered, emerging from a critique of the idea of ‘openness’, and founded on a different understanding of the relationship between globalization and cosmopolitanism. The core argument is that borders are ‘cosmopolitan workshops’ where ‘cultural encounters of a cosmopolitan kind’ take place and where entrepreneurial cosmopolitans advance new forms of sociality in the face of ‘global closure’. The book outlines four cosmopolitan dimensions of borders: vernacularization, multiperspectivalism, fixity/unfixity, and connectivity.