It’s been a busy time for the department over the months since our last newsletter.

We were delighted to welcome another great group of new undergraduate and postgraduate students to the department in September, and we look forward to working with them during their time in the Department of Politics and International Relations (PIR).

We also welcomed a number of new staff to the team: Dr Jinghan Zeng, an expert on Chinese domestic and international politics, joined us at the start of the academic year as Lecturer in International Relations, as did Mr Alistair Brisbourne, Dr David Hughes, Dr Alexis Papazoglou and Dr Tim Stevens as Teaching Fellows. Meanwhile, James Heath and Laura Law have joined the department’s administrative team.

Another new member of the team is Dr Joanna Szostek, our new Marie Sklodowska-Curie Fellow, who is funded by the European Union. Marie has begun working on the nature and role of strategic narratives in Ukraine.

In more news, we had the great pleasure to award an honorary doctorate to Dr Anne-Marie Slaughter in our 2015 summer graduation ceremony. Anne-Marie has had a distinguished academic and policy career, serving as Dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton, before becoming the first female Director of Policy Planning at the U.S. State Department. She is currently President and CEO of the New America Foundation and was voted one of the ‘Women of 2015’ by the Financial Times for her contribution to debates on work and family life.

I hope you enjoy reading about our recent activities. For regular updates on what’s going on in PIR, please follow us on Twitter and Facebook, and also visit our website.

Dr Alister Miskimmon
Head of Department of Politics and International Relations

New PIRSoc Executive

The Politics and International Relations Society (PIRSoc) started the 2015-16 academic year with their own ‘Welcome Week’, which included a careers talk and a ‘students vs. staff’ pub quiz.

The new executive committee (pictured right) also hosted a number of guest speakers over the course of the autumn term, including representatives from the Women’s Refugee Charity and the Israeli Embassy in London.

In the New Year, PIRSoc will be sending delegations to the London and New York Model United Nations conferences.
Former Attorney General visits PIR

Former Attorney General the Rt Hon Dominic Grieve MP (pictured left, chatting to staff) visited PIR in September as the guest speaker for the first departmental seminar of the new academic year. His chosen topic was Britain’s Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights.

PIR’s departmental seminar is a weekly event in which invited speakers present original political research or talk about significant current affairs. Other topics covered over the autumn term included US-Chinese relations, the International Criminal Court, and the 2015 British general election.

PIR visits JFK Memorial

Early in the autumn term, first-year PIR students visited the political memorials in and around Runnymede, including the John F. Kennedy Memorial (pictured right).

Students also visited The Jurors, a set of twelve bronze chairs that were commissioned to mark the 800th Anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta.

The trip was rounded off with pizza and drinks back in the department.

Human Rights Film Series

The Human Rights and Conflict Film Series kicked off in October with a screening of Amazing Grace (2006), an award-winning film that charts William Wilberforce’s effort to abolish the slave trade in the UK. Other planned screenings this year include Shooting Dogs (2005), about the Rwandan Genocide, and Terror’s Advocate (2008), which chronicles the life of controversial lawyer Jacques Verges who defended Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie. The Film Series was created by PIR’s Dr Lara Nettelfield to provide an additional way for students to learn about the issues covered in class through the medium of film.

ALUMNA PROFILE: Yvonne Jeffery

Yvonne Jeffery (pictured above) graduated from Royal Holloway in 2010 with a first-class degree in BA Politics and International Relations. Here she talks about her involvement with the New York National Model United Nations (NMUN):

In my first year at Royal Holloway, I became part of the delegation for the NMUN conference in New York. I had no idea how much it would benefit me academically or professionally. Gaining ‘practical experience’ of international relations at NMUN helped me to achieve a first-class degree, developed my interest in public policy, and led me to my current job at Save the Children.

I was part of the Royal Holloway NMUN delegation for two years, after which I joined NMUN’s volunteer staff, finally serving as Deputy Secretary-General for the 2015 conference. During this time I honed my research, writing, editing and public-speaking skills; I learned about leadership, management, mentoring, negotiation and problem solving; and I developed a far better knowledge and understanding of the UN and international affairs.

The NMUN’s youth-led focus and the experience that came from coordinating NMUN staff based all across the world undoubtedly helped me to gain roles with Restless Development in Zimbabwe, Tomorrow’s Youth Organization in Palestine and, most recently, at Save the Children. It’s safe to say that I would not have had the personal journey I have enjoyed were it not for NMUN: the experiences and skills from NMUN were the ones that came up most often in all of my interviews and persuaded people to take me on.

I have now been involved with NMUN for almost 8 years, and I am still benefitting and developing with it, whether as a member of the Advisory Group for the New York conference or a staff member for the recent international conference in the Czech Republic.

The chance to attend an NMUN conference opens up a vast range of opportunities for students, and I believe it is one of the best ways in which students can pursue academic and professional development.
I joined the Department of Politics and International Relations in September 2013. I was never one of those people who always dreamed of an academic career; my first degree was in journalism, and I worked for a daily newspaper in the Netherlands for several years. One day I received a letter telling me it would be another 44 years before I could retire. At that point I decided to resume my studies, first at the VU University in Amsterdam and then at the European University Institute in Florence, where I completed my PhD. I also spent a further four years at the University of Siena.

Politics is related to almost everything we deal with in our everyday lives, from supermarket opening hours to traffic regulation, and from the global events we read about in the newspapers to the amount of tax we pay. I am interested in all issues that have real-world significance.

My current research focuses on why people participate in politics and how patterns of political participation change over time. Since the behaviour of young people seems to be most affected by new patterns of political participation, much of my work presently focuses on young people’s politics.

As my own research shows, young adults are often less likely to vote because they are in higher education, are occupied with finding a partner or are trying to establish a career. They also tend to be more mobile. At the same time, key events in individuals’ transition to adulthood boost engagement. Leaving education, beginning a first job, buying a house, getting married, starting a family; all these things are positively associated with voting in elections.

I also currently teach courses in political behaviour and research methods. Many students seem to fear research methods and especially quantitative methods, but we all deal with numbers on a daily basis, and it is so important to be able to make sense of them. Knowing how to do research is also vital if you want to answer important questions, such as why many people seem disengaged from traditional politics.

Royal Holloway is a very international university, and I like working with students from very diverse backgrounds. It gives me great satisfaction to guide students and to see them achieve their goals.

#RHWomenInspire

The autumn saw the launch of a Royal Holloway campaign to celebrate inspirational women and their achievements. Prompted by the ‘Women Inspire’ campaign, a number of PIR staff identified the different women who had inspired them:

Mark Limbert, Faculty Administrator: ‘I would have to choose Aung San Suu Kyi, for her stoical resistance to military dictatorship and her commitment to democracy while under various forms of detention in Myanmar.’

Julia Gallagher, Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations: ‘I am inspired by Hannah Arendt because of her enormously creative thinking (her work remains difficult to categorise), her commitment to the key political issues of her day (totalitarianism, nuclear technology and the arms race) and the way she remained passionate about politics without suggesting that there were solutions to the problems she posed.’

Nicholas Allen, Reader in Politics: ‘I would have to choose Margaret Thatcher, who dominated the political scene when I was growing up. Her style of leadership was remarkable, and her premiership remains a fascinating case study in prime ministerial power.’

David Hughes, Teaching Fellow in International Relations: ‘I would choose Rosa Luxemburg, the German communist revolutionary who was nevertheless critical of Bolshevism. She aimed for nothing less than “the abolition of the rule of capital [and] the realization of a socialist social order.” She would not have thought very much of Margaret Thatcher!’

Sandra Halperin, Professor of International Relations: ‘I would nominate an academic, Janet Abu-Lughod, whose ground-breaking book, Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350, represented a long-overdue effort to de-centre traditional area studies and the ostensibly new field of globalization studies. She raised a host of questions concerning the nature of knowledge itself and the value of interdisciplinary research.’
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Legacies of Empire: Imperial Roots of the Contemporary Global Order (2015)
Sandra Halperin

This new book edited by Professor Sandra Halperin (with Ronen Palan) explores the imprint that imperial institutions, organisational principles, practices, and logics have left on the modern world. It shows that many features of the contemporary world—modern armies, multiculturalism, globalised finance, modern city-states, the United Nations—have been profoundly shaped by past empires. It also applies insights about the impact of past empires to contemporary politics and considers the long-term institutional legacies of the American ‘empire’.

Tim Stevens

‘Cyber security’ is variously concerned with protecting states and citizens from the misuse of computer networks for war, terrorism, economic espionage and criminal gain. Dr Tim Stevens’ new book, Cyber Security and the Politics of Time, draws on critical literature in international relations, security studies, political theory and social theory, to show how these different visions of cyber security are sustained in the communities that articulate them. More specifically, it shows that conceptions of time and temporality are foundational to the politics of cyber security. It explores how cyber security communities understand the past, present and future, thereby shaping cyber security as a political practice.

Our Recent Publications

Jinghan Zeng

Dr Jinghan Zeng’s new book, published by Palgrave Macmillan, explores the survival strategies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and how ideological reform and the institutionalization of power succession account for the party’s retention of power. At the heart of the analysis are the problems created by China’s economic success: if a communist party does not deliver communism and class victory, why is it there at all? The book shows how the apparent contradiction between the goal of delivering a communist society and the means of using quasi-capitalism has generated a crisis of beliefs in Chinese society and ideological battles within the party. This book further shows how the CCP has remained in power by continually revising the ideological programme that justifies its rule.

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Royal Holloway, University of London
Egham, Surrey, TW20 0EX
T: +44 (0)1784 434455
royalholloway.ac.uk