**What's it like to study... Politics**

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Politics students are frequently accused of being a politician in training. Ignore those people who level such charges - doing politics at university opens up so many doors to a rich variety of careers, from the media through to charitable work.

Politics is emphatically far more than the study of boring men in boring suits; politics is the study of power – the what, who, where, why and when of that universal phenomenon. Lurking under its umbrella are fields as diverse as international relations theory, environmental protection and legislative studies.

I came to the University of Hull in 2007 to read a BA in Politics and International Relations; since finishing that, I’ve completed an MA at the same institution and now am writing my PhD here as well. I was state educated, I come from a Northern city and my ancestry features Durham miners and men in the Grantham workhouse (though that offers little reliable guide to my, or their, political beliefs). In other words, you do not have to be of esteemed stock to get into the study of politics - many of my friends here have similarly diverse if ordinary backgrounds. From this start, I have churned through most of the steps on the academic ladder thus far, and I have come to love what I do with a great passion.

Politics may not seem to initially grant you the field experience of other degrees – there are no lab conditions for international relations theorists, for example, as university ethics boards are often reluctant to grant permission to start wars. Yet my institution and other offer a wide array of internships, from Parliament through museums and into the private sector. These give you more than just glowing references and a longer CV; they often enable you to see how the sausage is made, how what you have learnt in the lecture theatre influences the making and breaking of agendas and policies.

I have friends who interned for MPs during the 2010 general election campaign; they had a heady mixture of Westminster, Whitehall and electoral duties. I know people who’ve completed semesters in overseas universities from the United States to Hong Kong. Of course, we bring those with power to the university and haul them over the coals as well; both as a department and through the political societies that grow up in and around departments.

On top of this, you have the teaching and learning done on the campus as well. The sheer variety of fields under politics enables you to either spread yourself across many areas or focus down on a particular sector. You can specialise in - for example - globalisation, during your degree. I personally chose a wide-shot approach, and covered modules on sea power, financial crises and the UN security system to name but three. I have also found my interests have drifted and refined as I have progressed to an MA and then onto the PhD. I have focused down on one particular concept of international relations - the idea of a “Great Power” and I have drifted into British politics, an area I had otherwise mostly and consciously avoided earlier in my studies.

So now I am writing on Britain’s status in the world in the 21 Century; where do our leaders think we belong, and what relationship does that have with the idea of a Great Power? Without wishing to sound too ostentatious, such research brings with it heavy consequences – Britain’s world position has been the source of fitful yet often emotive debate since at least 1945, and a serious appraisal needs to take into account ideas of how certain types of states should behave in the international environment.

Those who I share an office building with are pushing out the boundaries of knowledge elsewhere – on the relationship between Islam and the West, on the burgeoning economic powers of South East Asia and on military ethics, to name just three. We are at the coal face of politics; and our research feeds into our institutions and the way they teach and interact with undergraduates.

I’ve won scholarships and I’ve given papers to people far wiser than myself at conferences. I’m working on my first journal article, and I’ve written for magazines and blogs. Many of my friends have exceeded this – from work in Ghana with charities, to teaching English in South Korea through to MPs offices and Lego, they are a clear demonstration of the power of a politics degree to open so many doors and give you access to so many fascinating possibilities. I don’t think less of other degrees, but I do think that this is a great degree for those interested in how the world works, and how we can make it work so much better.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/student/whats-it-like-to-study-politics-8045910.html>