

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Politics is one of the big conceptual constructs which defines the world and drives our lives. Political processes could be thought of as higher-order versions of the family and group dynamics which condition us as individuals to issues of dominance and dependence, reward and punishment, having and not having, and the experience of 'us' and 'them'. To this extent we are all 'born political' and proceed to live our lives in the context of a variety of political systems.

Political activity is basically about the exercise of power. Power itself comes in many forms, including the power to control other people, the power to allocate resources, and the power to manipulate consequences. Power can be blatantly obvious or very, very invisible. It can be unsettling, exciting, and deeply compelling. So can politics.

Political Science and International Relations are complementary and inter-related disciplines that take hold of the political dimension and pull it into focus. They provide language and concepts with which to explain, justify and criticise the modern world. They examine ideologies such as colonization and socialism. They explore systems of ideas like the new right, religious fundamentalism, and postmodernism. They analyse social movements that are organised around sexuality and gender. They identify the principle concepts, issues and theoretical debates within the fields of international relations. They dig into issues of power, conflict, diplomacy, arms control, terrorism, developmental politics, civil society, foreign policy, humanitarian aid, and the international political economy.

WHY STUDY POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS?

Studying these disciplines carries a range of benefits.

There is the *personal satisfaction* and *social confidence* that comes from training your brain and raising your understanding of not only world events but also the many episodes that comprise daily life. Being able to step back and see a larger (political) process at work is very empowering at an individual level. It can take the sting out of tense or emotional situations and provide you with strategies that enable you to behave constructively and proactively. Being able to rise above difficulties and

move on is enormously valuable in any work environment, particularly when professional issues or competing interests are involved.

Political Science and International Relations are embedded not only in social processes and group dynamics, but also *different cultural realities*. This raises your sensitivity to the taken-for-granted aspects of cultural and ethnic experience, making you more open to different points of view and value systems, including those which are emergent properties of different political regimes. The ability to move comfortably within and between different cultures and political systems is fundamental to international business and trade activities; development support; humanitarian aid, and peace-keeping missions. Those with this kind of understanding are more likely to be successful in multi-national corporations and professional practices, non-government organisations (NGOs) such as aid agencies, and government agencies including diplomatic services and defence forces. They are also valuable 'at home' working in organisations where cultural or ethnic identity has a relationship with other social or political processes.

Both Political Science and International Relations are intrinsically linked to the media and public perceptions, and these connections are studied specifically. Those able to work with spin, impression management, and damage control techniques, either for the purpose of debunking them or doing them convincingly, are also dealing

Topical coverage of career related issues brought to you by Victoria University Career Development and Employment.

Areas covered include how degrees and courses relate to employment opportunities, to life/work planning, graduate destination information and current issues or material relevant to the employment scene. Your comments and suggestions always welcomed.

with deeper issues of *truth, accuracy and the right to know*. These issues underpin many political, social, and educational institutions, business enterprises, and systems of justice, particularly where public accountability is a requirement.

SKILLS

It follows from this that Political Science and International Relations graduates (hereafter, in the interests of brevity, called Politics graduates) have a pleasantly full bag of skills to take to work. These include:

Conceptual analysis: Politics graduates have to get their heads around the big issues, including models of government, cultural imperatives, false equivalents, the effects of war, historical intentions, and muddy current realities. Working productively with this range of information develops skills of abstract thinking and in-depth analysis which transfer well to many jobs, especially those which deal in conceptual models and/or strategic planning. These include policy analysis, management roles, professional roles in law and economics, technical writing, and promotion of the arts.

Consequential thinking: To a large extent Politics is about intentions, decisions, and their various consequences. Politics graduates are adept at identifying the consequential effects of decisions and actions taken historically and in the present. They learn to make connections and formulate arguments. They learn to look for the hidden detail that changes everything. They become quite astute at predicting outcomes. Jobs which draw on these skills include all levels of management, particularly human resources, financial service roles, customer service positions, and any job which involves decision making and problem solving.

Influencing and persuading skills: When it comes to getting what you want, Politics graduates have an excellent understanding of what works and what doesn't, having studied political agendas throughout the world and throughout history. It comes back to the element of power that underpins political business everywhere. Many job roles contain an expectation that you will be able to implement decisions, mobilise resources, or motivate others. These outcomes require influencing and persuading skills and are particularly relevant in supervisory roles, but also come into play in roles that involve interviewing for information, such as immigration officer

or HR consultant. Influencing skills make all the difference to sales, marketing, and journalism roles, and work well for court lawyers and politicians.

Language skills: These skills encompass the biggies - written and verbal communication. Employers are always delighted to find people who write effectively and express their thoughts clearly. Politics graduates have these skills. Partly from having to think big political ideas through to some logical conclusion, and partly because they are encouraged to write assignments with clarity and vigour, and, in a primitive form of peer review, argue their understanding of issues in tutorials. There is almost no job role which is not enhanced by someone with good language skills, and all positions of authority and leadership require them.

Relationship management skills: All political activity happens in the context of some sort of relationship involving various mixes of individuals, institutions, factions, nations, opponents and allies. Effective politics means effective management of relationships. Politics graduates have a trained eye when it comes to tracking the quality of relationships. They understand the dynamics of giving and receiving, and the strategic benefits of pushing forward or falling back. Many organisational issues are basically issues of relationship. Consumer confidence (advertising and marketing) involves a relationship of trust between supplier and consumer. Professional ethics (psychology, social work) assume a relationship of confidentiality between client and professional. Law and order (lawyers, probation officers) depend on a relationship of acceptance between the justice system and the public. It's an excellent skill to acquire and develop, and is strongly connected to the cluster of skills that comprise communication skills.

Conflict resolution skills: The fact is people get into conflicts with each other. Politics graduates have an in-depth understanding of large-scale conflicts and their resolution through the framework of diplomacy and international relations. This understanding is useful in its own right, but also transfers easily to smaller-scale issues and the processes of negotiation and mediation. Every workplace is infested with the potential for misunderstandings, unfair decisions, and grumpy Mondays. Those who handle tricky situations with tact and diplomacy are invaluable and are generally given a lot of respect. For others, such as lawyers, consumer protection agencies,

mediation officers, and security personnel, conflict resolution is a core work skill.

Research skills: The term political *science* is not used casually. Politics graduates have studied their subject through its protocols of research design and methodology. This includes defining key research questions, tracking down and interpreting official documents, practising stringent internet research techniques, and for some, learning to write research proposals and make submissions to select committees. Many job roles, including policy analysts and advisors, journalists, managers, community liaison officers, and social researchers, are highly dependent on superior research skills.

WHERE DO POLITICS GRADUATES WORK?

Politics graduates have skills that transfer well to many work environments. However, like many graduates they may be applying for a job which only specifies a *relevant tertiary qualification*. This means that understanding how your skills work in the context of a specific job description is important. Adding another degree, such as Law, or doing a double major, can enhance your prospects considerably, and may even be necessary. And for some professional roles, such as journalism, a further course of training is usually required.

There are however a range of organisations for which the particular mix of skills and knowledge acquired by Politics graduates is uniquely relevant, even if in some cases additional qualifications or experience are also required. These include:

Parliament: A complex organisation requiring hundreds of permanent staff to carry out its various functions including clerks, tour guides, messengers, journalists, librarians, researchers, and administration staff. The Parliamentary Service is the largest employer in the parliamentary complex providing administrative and support services, which include research services and policy advice. Politics graduates clearly have a superior understanding of parliamentary functions and processes and will have a competitive edge over many other applicants for a range of positions, especially if they have participated in the Parliamentary Internship scheme offered by Victoria University. Research Units are possibilities for those with an interest in research and ideally a postgraduate or law degree. A degree in Politics may even be the

first step towards becoming a Member of Parliament.

Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies: All these organisations are functional arms of the government of the day and are required to implement its political decisions. Fortunately Politics graduates will have developed a pragmatic level of understanding that enables them to function well in political bureaucracies. Government organisations with an affinity for Political Science and International Relations include the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade* (requires an excellent postgraduate degree and/or Law or Economics); *New Zealand Trade and Enterprise* (especially with Law, Economics, or International Business); *NZAID* (NZ's international aid and development agency); *The Treasury* (requires excellent postgraduate or outstanding undergraduate degree); the *State Services Commission*; *Immigration New Zealand*; and *New Zealand Customs Service*.

Local Authorities - City, District, and Regional Councils are generally politically loaded organisations with a range of accountabilities. Most contain policy and/or strategy units which require the skills that Politics graduates typically possess, especially if combined with commerce or environmental planning.

NGOs (Non-Government Organisations) include aid organisations such as World Vision, Red Cross and Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA). Politics graduates, particularly those with International Relations have an understanding of the political underpinnings of aid programmes. A Politics degree together with relevant life and work experience could lead to work in this sort of organisation.

Community Organisations are many and varied. They include the Forest and Bird Protection Society, Women's Refuge, Agender New Zealand, Amnesty International, and the Aids Foundation (some names are abbreviated). Where such organisations have paid positions, one or two people may combine administration, education, fundraising, and policy development roles. Not only are Politics graduates well equipped to deal with these tasks should a job be advertised, voluntary involvement in such organisations can provide a wealth of practical experience to complement the degree and lead on to other career options.

Unions are inevitably about power differentials between employers and employees and have a large political

component. At least one union, the PSA, lists 'politically astute unionist' at the top of its core competencies for prospective staff.

Media and Communications encompasses Public Relations consultancies, communications units in Government Departments, external relations people in large organisations, press secretaries, spokespeople, speech writers, liaison officers, journalists, political commentators, and sundry persons who may be required to represent their organisation to 'outsiders'. Whether these roles are formal or informal, a Politics graduate is going to bring a lot of understanding to the best way of getting the right message across and is likely to perform well.

Corporates and Multinational Organisations often recruit through university careers services for management trainees and other roles. Selection is highly competitive especially when open to all degree disciplines. Politics graduates however have valuable skills and knowledge to offer, particularly by focussing on any 'international' aspects of their degree.

CAREER PLANNING

Although being a student can seem like an end in itself and absorb a great deal of time and energy, it's a good idea to start laying the groundwork for a career in Political Science or International Relations while you are still studying. There are some basic things you can do which will build up your confidence and focus your mind on the next phase of your career. These include two big strategies:

Networking: This simply means putting yourself in an environment which has some connection to your career interests and talking to people. Mention what you're studying at present and what you hope to achieve in the future. As well, ask these other people about what they do and how they got to where they are. These conversations achieve a great deal. Not only are you learning to introduce yourself confidently to complete strangers, you are meeting people who are already involved in what you want to be involved with. These people may have inside information on activities or opportunities that are coming up. They will also know other people who know other people, and so on.

For students with an interest in the political system, simply visiting Parliament is a good start. Introduce yourself to the person next to you and exchange 'stories'

about why you're there. If your interests lie in the media side of things, take a big breath and introduce yourself to the journalists working in the press gallery. Even well-known people can be very approachable and friendly. If you're active politically, think about becoming a member of your favourite political party. If you are interested in particular issues, for example, the environment, health and disability, or women's welfare, look in your local authority's Community Directory for organisations that are associated with your interest. Often people are in paid work which is connected with their spare time interests. It's all about making connections and building links with people who can offer just a little bit more than you could do on your own.

Information Interviewing: This is a more focussed form of networking and involves targeting specific people or organisations with the purpose of gathering particular information. It's still working on the same basic strategy. That is, you need information to make good career choices and other people are often the holders of that information. It's a good idea to write down what you're going to say when you talk to the person you want. Usually this is a phone call. Have a few specific questions prepared and stick to your time limit. If you asked for ten minutes, don't take twenty without checking if the other person can give you that extra time.

Students with an interest in working in local government, for example, checking out the relevant web site is the place to start. You can see the range of the operation and often you get the names of divisional managers. If you are interested in, say, the community development aspect of the organisation, check out any relevant reports, upcoming activities, or recent job vacancies. Think about what you would like to know that isn't covered. For example, do they have a volunteer network? Could you be involved in canvassing local people for their opinion on an issue? Is there any opportunity for casual work, perhaps in connection with an upcoming event? What are the core skills for, say, a media-related role? Are there ways you can build up practical experience apart from your studies?

The more practice you have introducing yourself to people and asking questions; the more comfortable you will be about doing it. Check with your careers office for any job-seeking workshops or resources. Take advantage of these and get a head start on your career planning.

GRADUATE PROFILES

Alexandra Grace

*Language trainee, pending posting as:
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Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade



Although I started University in 1998 with no clear idea as to what areas of study I wanted to pursue, it didn't take me long to realise that my interests lay in international relations (IR) – an area that seemed “tangible” to me – alliances, resource wars, the role not only of governments, but of international organisations and non-State actors. I subsequently graduated in 2004 with a BA (Hons) in IR, and an LLB that focused on international law.

My enthusiasm for IR and international law led me to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), where I have now been for almost three years. The opportunity to participate first-hand in the conduct of IR is hugely exciting, and my IR training continues to stand me in excellent stead for the challenges – and there are many – that a job of this kind presents.

I started off in the MFAT's Legal Division, as a Legal Adviser on Oceans and Antarctic Law. In my first year I was part of the New Zealand delegation to Antarctic-related international meetings in Cape Town and Hobart. As part of the MFAT's skill development programme, I was also sent to Greece for one month to take part in an expert course on Oceans Law, taught by judges from the International Law of the Sea Tribunal, a United Nations body.

In late 2004 I spent two months seconded to the New Zealand Mission to the United Nations in New York during the General Assembly. I arrived in time for the two week “General Debate” where Heads of State, Government and Foreign Ministers deliver speeches. I saw numerous world figures, including Bush, Koizumi, and Mugabe, in person.

My second rotation was into the United Nations, Human Rights and Commonwealth Division, where my desk covered civil and political rights, and the negotiation of a new United Nations treaty on the rights of people with disabilities. I attended several negotiations at the United Nations on this exciting and groundbreaking treaty.

I spent a year in this Division, before finding out that my application for a posting to the New Zealand Consulate-General in Shanghai – via two years' of Mandarin language training in Taipei – had been accepted. I am therefore writing this from Taipei. I started language training in May, after a brief stint in the Ministry's North Asia Division, where I helped to organise Premier Wen Jiabao's recent visit.

Amber Walters

*Programme Manager,
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Kia orana kotou katoatoa,
Ko Takitumu toku vaka,
Ko Rarotonga toku enua,
Ko Tupapa-Maraerenga toku tapere,
Ko Tetupuariki toku kopu tangata,

Kia orana! My name is Amber Walters and I have graduated with two degrees from VUW: - a Bachelor of Arts in History (1995); and a Master of International Relations with Merit (2001).

After my first degree, I was fortunate to go on the JET (Japan Exchange Teaching) program in 1996. This decision changed the whole direction of my life and I ended up living in Japan twice for a total of five years. I then returned to New Zealand and worked at the newly opened Te Papa in museum education before taking the highly intensive Cambridge University CELTA qualification in 1999. After some time teaching again in a private training establishment, I decided I needed to up-skill and go back to University.

The Master of International Relations degree at VUW was an applied, intensive, full calendar year course that appealed to me. It had an excellent reputation and fulfilled many of my interests in Politics but especially the chance to explore international relations issues between Asia, where I had spent a large portion of my time, and also the Pacific, my heritage. I was the youngest in my MIR year and it was the most intensive and difficult study program I had ever taken. I had to do a lot of background reading on political theory because I had come from a different discipline. The professors, lecturers and fellow students really helped me to look at ‘world affairs’

in a completely different light. Pettman's¹ matrix taught me to appreciate the differing perspectives that everyone brings to international relations and place them in an understandable context. It held me in good stead for the future.

After finishing my second degree, I returned to Japan for three and a half years on the Hutt-Minoh Sister City Exchange Teaching program. This time I was living in Osaka where I discovered a big Latin community and as well as improving my Japanese language ability, learned Spanish!

I have since travelled all over the world visiting many of my MIR classmates in different countries. I returned to NZ in 2004 and now find myself back at VUW. My overseas experiences and qualifications helped me to work with Victoria International as an International Student Advisor for a year. And just recently I was made Programme Manager (International) at the Centre for Continuing Education and Executive Development. I look forward to the new challenges and the future!

Jason Knauf

*Press Secretary to Health Minister
Pete Hodgson
Parliament, Wellington*

Here are three good reasons to study politics at Victoria:

- The Vic politics programme is New Zealand's finest,
- the lecturers are world-class,
- and the courses are engaging and interesting.



Some would say reason enough, but for me these weren't reasons – they were bonuses.

I chose politics because I couldn't imagine doing anything else – politics is what I do, what I'm interested in, and what I'm about. Call it alarming, call it slightly sad (I might even agree), but that's the story.

What struck me about the Vic politics programme after having first studied overseas was that I wasn't alone – politics junkies seemed to abound. Students came to

lectures, contributed to discussions, and kept debates going after class.

As an undergraduate what I appreciated most was the choice available in course options. My focus was international relations – I took courses in European politics, international political economy, revolutions, dictatorships and conflict. Along the way I was able to get a grounding in political research; a useful bridge to my postgraduate work.

After finishing my BA, I enrolled in Honours. The politics Honours programme is big – lots of courses, lots of students and lots of work. Students are expected to attend four lectures and read several hundred pages a week, complete a number of seminar presentations and write four 10,000 word essays based on original research. It was daunting, but absolutely rewarding – since leaving university, I've yet to face a single project that pushed me as hard as the last month of my Honours degree.

For one of my Honours papers I enrolled in the parliamentary internship programme. Students who work as interns attend a weekly seminar and work for one day a week in the office of a Member of Parliament. My internship was with then Speaker Jonathan Hunt – I'll always be grateful for the opportunity to work for one of New Zealand's longest-serving parliamentarians. It's the sort of experience that sets the Vic politics programme apart from the rest.

A week after finishing Honours I was hired as a Media Assistant by Cabinet Minister Steve Maharey. My job saw me put my knowledge of politics and the parliamentary process that I had gained at Vic to the test right away. After working in that role through the 2005 election, I was appointed to the role of Press Secretary to the Minister of Health, Pete Hodgson. My job sees me writing press releases, dealing with journalists, organising press conferences and preparing the Minister for Parliamentary Question Time. It's demanding, but rewarding – and exactly the sort of role my politics degree prepared me for.

¹ Ralph Pettman.

Hannah Malloch

*Graduate Policy Analyst
Office for Senior Citizens
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I studied Political Science and Gender and Women's Studies at Victoria University. At the end of my third year at University I participated in the Summer Internship programme 2005/2006 run by the State Services Commission. I was placed at the Ministry of Social Development where I worked as a Policy Analyst for three months.

The internship was great work experience. My main body of work was to write a literature review about the interaction between government agencies and non-government organisations in the provision of social services. I had to quickly learn the writing style used in government which is quite different from academic writing. My university skills of researching and analysing material helped me to produce a review that met the quality standard for government documents.

I found that I enjoyed the working environment so much so that I didn't want to leave! After the internship I applied for graduate positions at the Ministry of Social Development and was offered a full time job as a graduate policy analyst in the Office for Senior Citizens team. Working at the Ministry is great because the work is so topical. I am working on policy that deals with the social issues presented by our ageing population.

My university education is invaluable to my daily work as it has equipped me with clear writing and analytical skills. I regularly write reports for the Minister of Senior Citizens about national issues affecting older people and I work with a senior policy analyst on policy development projects. I provide comments to other government departments on how their policy papers may affect older people and keep up to date with current issues to consider how older people are affected by national events. The work that I do each day varies depending on the constantly changing political environment.

There are many opportunities for career advancement in the public service and policy analysts seem to hopscotch between government departments quite regularly. In 2007, I will begin studying towards my Honours degree

part time with support from the Ministry. I intend to complete a Masters in Public Policy in the future.

Jessica Tully

*Advisory Officer, National
Operations
Ministry of Education*



When I started my studies, I had no intention of majoring in Political Science. But, as I had always been interested in politics, I decided to take two Political Science classes in the second trimester. It was a decision that changed the direction of my life.

In Political Science, I found a subject that was relevant and thought-provoking. In particular, I will never forget my lecturer walking into class on 12 September 2001 and declaring that everything we had learnt in the previous lectures had literally changed overnight. There was just something so fascinating about the way Political Science seemed to respond almost instantly to a transformed world.

In many ways, Political Science is the study of political life. It encourages you to recognise that politics affects everyone and everything, and to be interested in what is happening in the world and your local community. It also gives you an understanding and appreciation of the process that goes into the most basic decisions through to the most controversial. In particular, the aspect of Political Science that attracted me was the study of power – what is power, who has or should have power, and how power is structured and exercised.

I was accepted into the parliamentary internship programme during my Honours year. This was a fantastic way to gain practical experience while at university – something Arts students often miss out on. The internship gave me so many opportunities to develop skills that have been invaluable in my job. I was also able to gain invaluable insight into the policy-making process and parliamentary procedure.

A common misperception is that if you study Political Science, you want to be a politician. The reality is that many Political Science graduates gravitate towards the public service. In my case, I have been at the Ministry of Education for the last 20 months working

on the effective management of the schooling network. While that sounds extremely bureaucratic, it has been a constantly changing, fast paced job with lots of interaction with the Minister's Office, the education sector, and occasionally the public.

The skills I developed through studying Political Science have prepared me well for life in a ministry. I constantly find myself considering all the possible impacts when an issue arises or a new process is being developed. The ability to think critically and clearly, especially under pressure, is absolutely vital. It is also important to be able to communicate effectively whether you are writing a speech for the Minister or a letter to a member of the public.

My advice: give Political Science a go.

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AT VICTORIA

Political Science and/or International Relations courses can be taken for a variety of degrees: either or both can be taken as major subjects for the BA (Bachelor of Arts), as joint/double majors for the BA, as non-majoring subjects for the BA (at 100, 200 and even 300 level), as BA majors for the BA/LLB course of study, and as a Humanities and Social Sciences subject in the Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Commerce and Administration, Bachelor of Architectural Studies and a range of other degrees.

The Programme of Political Science and International

Relations offers a range of courses at 100, 200, and 300 level as well as advanced study in postgraduate degrees. Three broad streams exist within Political Science – political theory, New Zealand politics and comparative politics. International Relations used to be a fourth stream, but now stands alone as a separate major. 100 level courses are introductory and offer a strong grounding in political analysis, political theory and international relations. Courses at 200 and 300 level tend to be more specialised and students are offered a great variety of choice including topics such as human rights, conflict analysis and politics and the media. Victoria's unique position, located in the nation's capital, offers students the opportunity to observe policy-making and, at times, meet with policy-makers in Parliament and the public service.

The BA(Hons) degree can be done full-time in one year, or part-time over two years. Four year-long courses can be chosen from a considerable range of offerings. The MA and PhD by thesis offer students of Political Science or International Relations the opportunity to undertake a major piece of original research. Additionally, the International Relations Programme offers the Master of International Relations Degree which is a 12 month intensive taught programme. The MIR degree is intended for mature students and attracts many international students.

Courses in Political Science and International Relations are open to all students irrespective of their majoring subject and fit easily with other disciplines including History, Philosophy, Sociology, Economics, Geography, Anthropology, Law, Public Policy, Gender and Women's Studies, Commerce and Education.

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