A Brief Guide to the Distance Learning MA Programmes in the Department of Politics and International Relations

Your modules
Students registered for the MA complete four taught modules and a dissertation. The first module you complete is your compulsory Core Module. You then complete a following three Optional Modules which you select from a list of available modules. You should select modules that are relevant to your MA subject. Taught modules last approximately 14 weeks.

Your Dissertation
All MA Degrees require students to complete a 12,000 - 15,000 word dissertation. Each taught module is followed by a Dissertation Module which lasts approximately six weeks. Dissertation Modules are designed to support and facilitate your independent dissertation research. They are not credit-bearing but they are compulsory. You may progress to the dissertation writing up stage and dissertation submission once you have successfully completed your four taught modules.

How your modules are taught
Distance Learning modules in the Department of Politics and International Relations are taught entirely through our Virtual Learning Environment, Blackboard.

You are provided with a weekly reading list accompanied by questions or exercises designed by the Course Convenor to get you thinking and help you engage critically with that week’s literature.

The best way to make sense of what you read is to discuss it with others. Learning is a collaborative process and this is why the online forums accessed through Blackboard are central to our teaching. Each week you should use these forums to discuss your reading, ask questions, share ideas and debate arguments.

Contributing to forums isn’t compulsory but if you choose not to participate you miss out on an important part of your own learning process and deprive your classmates of a vibrant and engaging discussion. The Associate Tutor for your module is there to support and encourage these forum discussions although the responsibility for participating is your own.

Alongside your weekly reading and discussions you are expected to complete six E-tivities (or online activities). E-tivities are designed to build a supportive online community of students as well as develop your key scholarly skills. E-tivities take the form of a combination of formative (non-credit bearing) and summative (credit-bearing) assessments designed to complement and support the learning objectives for your particular module.
Your Associate Tutor will guide you through these E-tivities and the module as a whole. You can contact your Associate Tutor via the online forum or by email. Online feedback is provided after each E-tivity and continuous support is available throughout your studies from the DL Personal Tutor. Having completed the six E-tivities that comprise your core module (this is the first compulsory module you take) you should be able to:

- Contribute to forums
- Search for electronic library materials
- Identify and evaluate appropriate academic articles
- Compile and present a bibliography
- Understand why and how we reference in academic writing
- Understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it
- Plan an essay
- Critically engage with academic texts
- Produce an academic article review (1,200 words) worth 20% of the module mark
- Write a 5,000-word essay worth 80% of the module mark.

In addition the E-tivities of the optional modules (the three further modules you select) encourage you to:

- Reflect on your module choice and your interest in the subject matter
- Reflect on your previous learning experiences and develop your learning practice.
- Identify the over-all argument and supporting arguments made by another author
- Consider good structure in academic writing
- Develop your critical analysis skills (produce an article review of 1,200 words) worth 20% of the module mark.
- Develop your essay writing skills (write a 5,000 word essay worth 80% of the module mark).

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE SEE YOUR STUDENT HANDBOOK