Master of Studies in International Relations

Syllabus Information: Year 2: The Dissertation

In the second year, candidates who have performed satisfactorily in the examinations will research and write a dissertation of 25,000 words (including tables, footnotes, and appendices, but excluding bibliography), on a topic approved by the Degree Committee. Each dissertation candidate will be supervised individually. Depending upon the topic, the dissertation supervisor will be either a member or affiliated member of the POLIS, or a member of such Faculties as Law, History or Economics. Candidates will meet their dissertation supervisor on several occasions during Year 1, to discuss the area of research and the approach to be taken in Year 2.

Throughout Year 2 candidates are expected to maintain close contact with their supervisor. Candidates are also required to attend two one-week periods of residence to discuss and present on the progress on their research. The dates of these sessions are:

24 – 28 September 2018
7 – 11 January 2019

The dissertation will be submitted by 1st July 2019 and will be assessed by two examiners. Candidates may be required to attend an oral examination in Cambridge.

The dissertation is the core element of the MSt, and the examination process and criteria for assessment of the dissertation are rather more stringent than on many Master’s programmes. In particular, there is a requirement for originality, which must be met either by research using primary sources (documents, interviews, official publications or the like) or else by developing an original approach to an existing debate or literature. This all supports the general aim of the dissertation, which is to develop advanced skills of research and expression.

A candidate must pass both the Year 1 subject examinations and the Year 2 dissertation examination in order to be awarded the M.St. In some circumstances, exceptional performance in one component may compensate for marginal failure in the other.

By the end of the course participants will have developed a critical view the contribution made by International Relations as a whole and of some of its related disciplines, to social science more broadly conceived and to practice. They will have become familiar with some of the main themes of contemporary analysis in their respective fields of study. In addition, they will have tested their ability to produce a piece of advanced scholarship in conformity with the scientific method, research techniques, standards of argument and accepted style of presentation of an academic discipline.