Ali Lewis (Third-year undergraduate)
Studying Politics and International Relations at Cambridge has been the most rewarding and fascinating time of my life. The depth and breadth of the course, the invitation to think independently, and – what Cambridge perhaps does better than anywhere else – the regular contact with brilliant and inspiring supervisors have combined to make studying here one of the best decisions I ever made. On top of that, the sheer number of available papers and the option to study matters of personal interest in a dissertation mean that, as well as studying in a brilliant department, you really do study what interests you.

Alexa Zeitz (Third-year undergraduate)
The supervision system is what teaches you the 'Cambridge' approach to Politics and International Relations – be sceptical about the assumption, challenge the fundamental concepts.

Equipped from your lectures and reading, you’ll arrive at a supervision thinking you know exactly what the issues are. Then, your supervisor will turn the whole picture around as they begin to illuminate ways that the political realities don’t conform to the neat picture presented, or how a more critical engagement reveals consequences, interests or influences that were overlooked. Soon you learn to do it yourself: seeing the bias, challenging the underlying theories and recognising the frameworks, and having to defend those ideas to your supervisor makes you really good at it. I haven’t looked at the news the same way since.

Ahir Shah (Third-year undergraduate)
Studying Politics and International Relations at Cambridge has been a continually challenging, occasionally stressful but always hugely rewarding experience. The course is initially broad – during my first year I studied Politics, Sociology, Psychology, and Biological Anthropology – giving you the time and the options to realise for yourself where your interests and strengths lie.

As a third-year specialising in the Politics and IR track, I am taking papers in Political Philosophy and Social Theory as well as writing a dissertation, but the options exist to study a wide range of subjects, from political economy to the politics of a particular country or region. I think that this combination of initial breadth followed by the potential to undertake in-depth study means the course provides a fantastically well-rounded, yet still targeted, education in politics.

Key facts
- There are no specific subject requirements to study HSPS, and Politics and International Relations within it.
- You do not need to have studied Politics or International Relations before.
- The standard offer is A*A at A Level.
- All the Colleges except Peterhouse accept students to study HSPS.

More information can be found at www.polis.cam.ac.uk or by contacting the POLIS office, tel: 01223 767255; email: ugadmissions@polis.cam.ac.uk.

Scan this with a QR reader to find out more
Politics and International Relations as part of the HSPS degree

If you want to study Politics and International Relations at Cambridge you need to apply through the Human, Social, and Political Sciences degree. In the first year you can spend up to 50 per cent of your time on Politics and International Relations. In the second and third year, you can concentrate exclusively on Politics and International Relations.

The course in Politics and International Relations at Cambridge rests on the conviction that the political and international worlds need to be understood together and historically. We seek to explain how the political and international worlds in which we live came to be.

In the first year, we look at the foundations of modern politics and international relations. In politics we examine the nature of the state, democracy, and consider how far there are alternatives in the modern world to these practices and the political ideas and arguments that lie behind them. In international relations we examine the nature of international society, the state system, the tides of war and peace, and the ethical questions that living in the international world generate.

First year

Students interested in Politics and International Relations will take papers on:
- Introduction to Politics
- Introduction to International Relations.

Students take a further two papers chosen from a list of optional papers including:
- Sociology
- Social Anthropology
- Biological Anthropology
- Archaeology
- Cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia
- Egyptian language
- Akkadian language
- Psychology.

Second year

- A paper in the History of Political Thought (either the Greeks up to 1700 or the 18th and 19th centuries)
- Ethics and World Politics
- Comparative Politics
- Either an essay paper in Politics and International Relations or a paper from another department

It is also possible to take a joint track in either Politics and Sociology or Politics and Social Anthropology, where two papers are taken in each subject. For more information on these options please visit our website.

Third year

- One general paper in Politics and International Relations.
- An optional 10,000-word dissertation on any topic OR a paper in Politics or International Relations.
- Two more papers chosen from a long list of options including: a paper in political thought, the politics of a particular region such as Europe, East Asia, Africa and South Asia, a paper on the politics of the international economy, a paper on the politics of conflict and peacebuilding. Alternatively students can opt to take papers from other subjects, such as Sociology and Social Anthropology.

If students have chosen the joint track they take two papers in Politics and two in Sociology or replace one of these papers with a dissertation.

Teaching

One of the main strengths of the Politics and International Relations course at Cambridge is the quality of the teaching. At Cambridge you will be learning from the best in the field. The Department of POLIS is a medium-sized department with about 30 academics with a huge range of specialisms. Because of the way the course is designed, students also have the opportunity to take papers from other departments which means you will have the chance to access an even wider pool of world-class academics.

For each paper within the course, lectures, classes or seminars are provided. In addition to this there are ‘supervisions’, for which students write essays which they discuss usually in groups of two or three with a supervisor. This is a wonderful opportunity for students to receive feedback on their work and discuss the problems and ideas thrown up by the lectures and further reading. Students are expected to write between eight and twelve essays in each of the first two terms, and will receive supervision on each of these. Students preparing long essays for assessment or a dissertation will usually be supervised individually.

Facilities

The facilities in Cambridge are first rate. The Department has a state-of-the-art new building. All students have access to the University Library which, as a copyright library, has over eight million books and a wealth of e-resources. In addition to this, students have access to College libraries and specialist Faculty libraries. HSPS makes use of online learning platforms where lecture handouts, reading lists and other electronic resources are hosted. Cambridge provides students with plenty of opportunities outside of their course; for example, students can improve their language skills at the Language Centre or join one of a wealth of sports and social clubs.