

MA Political Communications

Programme Specification

Awarding Institution:

University of London (Interim Exit Awards made by Goldsmiths' College)

Teaching Institution: Goldsmiths, University of London

Name of Final Award and Programme Title: MA Political Communications

Name of Interim Exit Award(s):

Postgraduate Certificate in Political Communications

Postgraduate Diploma in Political Communications

Duration of Programme: 1 year full-time or 2 years part-time

UCAS Code(s): Not applicable

HECoS Code(s):

(100444) Media and Communication Studies (75%)

(100491) Politics (25%)

QAA Benchmark Group: Not applicable

FHEQ Level of Award: Level 7

Programme accredited by: Not applicable

Date Programme Specification last updated/approved: December 2020

Home Department: Media, Communications and Cultural Studies

Department(s) which will also be involved in teaching part of the programme:

Not applicable

Programme overview

This MA offers teaching that is critical, innovative and diverse. It combines theory with practical, applied elements, and draws on a range of research and contemporary examples.

These come from current work in politics, political science and media studies, and also from political sociology, cultural theory and journalism. The curriculum covers political communication, from the national and international down to the local and personal, from governments and parties to NGOs and local activist groups. It engages with cultural, alternative and digital, interactive communication as well as traditional mass media.

This dynamic programme, first and foremost, offers critical engagement. It asks difficult questions about politics, economic policy, society and the media. Taking this programme

will not just give you an understanding of the forms and impacts of political communications. It will also help you contextualise that knowledge in relation to the structures, institutions and actors that are at the heart of politics and media.

This programme is broadly conceptual in focus, but also offers several practical, applied options as well as skills-based components. All students take a research skills module and are supervised through a dissertation with a research component. There are options, such as Campaign Skills, Social Media Campaigning, Digital News Writing and Media Law, which are entirely practice-based and taught by professionals in the field. There are also several speaker series running each year with guests from the worlds of politics, journalism, business and campaigning coming to talk.

Programme entry requirements

Applicants will normally be expected to hold a good first degree in a relevant subject and (if a non-native speaker) possess IELTS of 6.5, or equivalent. However, consideration will be given to applicants without the necessary formal qualifications but who have professional experience in a related field and are able to demonstrate their commitment and ability to undertake a programme of rigorous academic study.

Aims of the programme

The MA in Political Communications aims to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the interactions between political actors, communication industries and the public in contemporary societies. Specifically, the programme will equip students with in-depth knowledge of the importance of communication in the political process and of how, in a democratic polity, political institutions and others seek to communicate with the public and vice-versa. For the main part, this will lead to a concentration on the role of the mass media but other forms of political communication - including the techniques of marketing, polling, face-face interaction and internet campaigning - will also be studied. However, the knowledge and skills acquired in such a study will have far broader applications. Students completing this programme will have at their disposal, a range of tools that will enable them to analyse social and communicative interactions in the public sphere and to make judgements about future modules of action based on this understanding.

The programme will provide students with:

- knowledge of the history and development of political communications with a international emphasis;
- an understanding of the theoretical debates that have informed the study of political communications;

- an awareness of both dominant and alternative models of interaction between political actors, communicators and the public;
- an overview and insight into current debates - both academic and professional - within the field.

In addition, the programme will also provide students with practical skills and insights that will enable them to:

- Undertake a range of tasks in relation to the planning and commissioning of political communications work from within various public and private bodies;
- Commission political communications work from within public and private sector bodies or on behalf of clients;
- Analyse political communications activity from an academic and journalistic perspectives.

What you will be expected to achieve

The programme's subject-specific learning outcomes require students to think critically about a range of issues concerning political communications and to be able to justify their views intellectually and theoretically. This in turn will help them to make their own the existing intellectual traditions which organise the current field of political communications. In addition, students will also develop a wide range of transferable skills necessary for employment in a variety of different contexts.

Students who exit the programme at the Postgraduate Certificate stage should be able to:

Knowledge and understanding

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
A1	Contribute to current debates – both academic and professional – within the field of political communications;	Compulsory modules
A2	Critically assess the practical and theoretical contexts in which political communications actors work.	Compulsory modules

Cognitive and thinking skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
B1	Utilise conceptual knowledge and critical reasoning skills in complex problem solving;	All modules
B2	Deploy a range of intellectual skills and linguistic tools to produce academic work of an appropriate level;	All modules
B3	Demonstrate an appropriate range of transferable skills such as 'communication skills, skills of initiative and personal responsibility', decision-making and 'the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development'.	All modules

Subject specific skills and professional behaviours and attitudes

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
C1	Interpret a variety of source material in the context of the analysis of political communications and associated fields.	Compulsory modules

Transferable skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
D1	Utilise conceptual knowledge and critical reasoning skills in complex problem solving;	All modules
D2	Deploy a range of intellectual skills and linguistic tools to produce academic work of an appropriate level;	All modules
D3	Demonstrate an appropriate range of transferable skills such as 'communication skills, skills of initiative and personal responsibility', decision-making and 'the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development'.	All modules

Students who exit the programme at the Postgraduate Diploma stage should be able to:

Knowledge and understanding

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
A1	Contribute to current debates – both academic and professional – within the field of political communications;	Compulsory modules
A2	Critically assess the practical and theoretical contexts in which political communications actors work;	Compulsory modules
A3	Identify alternative paradigms of interaction between political actors, communicators and the public;	Compulsory modules
A4	Demonstrate a high level of understanding of the history and development of political communications with a particular focus on the UK and US.	Compulsory modules

Cognitive and thinking skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
B1	Utilise conceptual knowledge and critical reasoning skills in complex problem solving;	All modules
B2	Deploy a range of intellectual skills and linguistic tools to produce academic work of an appropriate level;	All modules
B3	Demonstrate to a high level a range of transferable skills such as ‘communication skills, skills of initiative and personal responsibility’, decision-making and ‘the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development’.	All modules

Subject specific skills and professional behaviours and attitudes

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
C1	Interpret a broad variety of source material in the context of the analysis of	Compulsory modules

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
	political communications and associated fields;	
C2	Use and reflect on a range of communications skills from journalism, politics and public relations.	Compulsory modules

Transferable skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
D1	Utilise conceptual knowledge and critical reasoning skills in complex problem solving;	All modules
D2	Deploy a range of intellectual skills and linguistic tools to produce academic work of an appropriate level;	All modules
D3	Demonstrate to a high level a range of transferable skills such as 'communication skills, skills of initiative and personal responsibility', decision-making and 'the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development'.	All modules

By the end of the MA programme students should be able to:

Knowledge and understanding

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
A1	Demonstrate a high level of understanding of the history and development of political communications with a particular focus on the UK and US;	Compulsory modules
A2	Apply different perspectives on political communications in the evaluation of specific campaigns and controversies;	Compulsory modules
A3	Evaluate the significance of a range of theoretical debates that have informed the study of both politics and political communications;	Compulsory modules

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
A4	Contribute to current debates – both academic and professional – within the field of political communications;	Compulsory modules
A6	Critically assess the practical and theoretical contexts in which political communications actors work;	Compulsory modules
A7	Identify alternative paradigms of interaction between political actors, communicators and the public.	Compulsory modules

Cognitive and thinking skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
B1	Utilise conceptual knowledge and critical reasoning skills in complex problem solving;	All modules
B2	Deploy a range of intellectual skills and linguistic tools to produce academic work of an appropriate level;	All modules
B3	Demonstrate to a very high level a range of transferable skills such as ‘communication skills, skills of initiative and personal responsibility’, decision-making and ‘the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development’;	All modules
B4	Demonstrate the ability to work independently and critically in the production of an original research project.	All modules

Subject specific skills and professional behaviours and attitudes

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
C1	Interpret a broad variety of source material in the context of the analysis of political communications and associated fields;	Compulsory modules
C2	Use and reflect on a range of communications skills from journalism, politics and public relations.	Compulsory modules

Transferable skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
D1	Utilise conceptual knowledge and critical reasoning skills in complex problem solving;	All modules
D2	Deploy a range of intellectual skills and linguistic tools to produce academic work of an appropriate level;	All modules
D3	Demonstrate to a very high level a range of transferable skills such as 'communication skills, skills of initiative and personal responsibility', decision-making and 'the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development'.	All modules
D4	Demonstrate the ability to work independently and critically in the production of an original research project.	All modules

How you will learn

From the outset, students are guided to work independently and to think through the intellectual issues for themselves. Through seminars and a variety of tutorials (with personal tutors and module leaders) student progress is carefully monitored to ensure progression towards the achievement of the outcomes.

The acquisition of knowledge and understanding and cognitive learning outcomes is through weekly lectures, seminars and workshops so that core knowledge gained through reading and lectures may be reinforced through seminar participation, discussion and debate. Outside speakers with specialist knowledge of a particular topic will also give occasional lectures. All sessions will be complemented by the viewing/reading of relevant media texts that will feed into, and illuminate, the subject under consideration. Visits will also be arranged during the two modules to relevant media and political locations. These will include visits to both mainstream and non-mainstream media organisations as well as to Parliament and a local council meeting.

The acquisition of the second set of subject specific and transferable skills learning outcomes is achieved by students' full participation in the structured learning activities and the completion of examined and non-examined work that will involve considerable independent study. Students will also receive feedback from tutors throughout the

programme in seminars and in response to their examined work. Tutorial support is available to advise students on their progress in skill acquisition in both theoretical and more practical work.

In preparing for the dissertation, students will receive intensive one-to-one tutoring over a prolonged period, which allows them to devise their own original contribution to the field. Most, if not all of the learning outcomes – from the capacity to produce an original map of the field, to retrieve and evaluate information, to work to deadline – are condensed and applied in the process of preparing and delivering the dissertation with the guidance of tutors.

How you will be assessed

Assessment of the first set of outcomes is by a combination of coursework and examined essays, a dissertation and seminar participation. Students will also produce a practical project to a set brief as well as a research-led report that evaluates their understanding of a political communications campaign.

The second group of learning outcomes are primarily tested through examined work and, in particular, through a practical project – carried out in small groups – where students deploy their critical skills to produce campaign materials in response to a set brief. The development of effective interpersonal and other oral communications skills is encouraged by staff in all seminars and through tutorial support.

In sum, students will be required:

To write:

- Essays which evaluate not only students' broad grasp of the political communications field but also their ability to construct coherent written arguments concerning a wide range of theoretical issues. Essays are normally 5-6000 words on both the compulsory modules and optional modules in the Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies. Depending on the particular option, students may be required to produce research reports, campaign strategies or other forms of assessment that are equivalent to a 5-6,000-word essay.
- The dissertation (12-15,000 words, inclusive of foot-notes and bibliography) assesses something rather different: not so much breadth as depth, requiring sustained research and all the imaginative qualities which mark an original piece of intellectual inquiry.

To participate in:

- Seminars, presentations, workshops and visits that are designed to develop a range of critical, research and interpersonal skills.

Marking criteria

Mark	Descriptor	Specific Marking Criteria
80-100%	Distinction (Outstanding/ Exceptional)	Exceptional work of potentially publishable quality showing originality and based on extensive research and independent thought. Represents to the achievement of the learning outcomes to an outstanding level.
70-79%	Distinction	Awarded when the work demonstrates the application of appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills specified in the learning outcomes of the module to a very effective extent. The work will show evidence of extensive relevant reading and an impressive grasp of current major issues in the field. This knowledge will have been reviewed critically with insight and independence of thought. Arguments and the presentation of evidence will demonstrate sophisticated reasoning, with clear awareness of issues of methodology and evidence, and be particularly clear, well-focused and cogent.
60-69%	Merit	Awarded when candidates demonstrate the application of appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills specified in the module learning outcomes to an effective extent. The work will demonstrate sound analytical and critical abilities and will show consistency and fluency in discussing and evaluating evidence and theories drawn from a wide range of sources. It will demonstrate an ability to relate this reading to their topic, and will clearly have understood and assimilated the relevant literature.
50-59%	Pass	Awarded when the essay demonstrates the application of appropriate knowledge, understandings and skills specified in the learning outcomes of the module to a satisfactory extent. There is clear evidence of knowledge and understanding, but where there may be limited development of ideas, critical comment or methodology. Within these limitations there will be indication that the candidate has grasped fundamental concepts and procedures in the field.
30-49%	Fail	Indicates that a candidate has demonstrated an unsatisfactory application of appropriate knowledge, understandings and skills specified in the learning outcomes of the module. Such a

Mark	Descriptor	Specific Marking Criteria
		mark will be awarded to work that is based on inadequate knowledge and that fails to grasp essential concepts.
10-29%	Bad fail	Below 30 (Bad Fail): Scrappy and totally inadequate work that demonstrates a systematic failure to achieve the appropriate learning outcomes.
1-9%	Very bad fail	A submission that does not even attempt to address the specified learning outcomes.
0%	Non submission or plagiarised	A categorical mark representing either the failure to submit an assessment or a mark that is assigned to a plagiarised piece of work.

How the programme is structured

Attendance at all lectures, seminars and tutorials is mandatory. In order to gain an MA, students are required to gain a total of 180 CATS made up in the following way:

- Two compulsory modules in the Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies worth 60 CATS (30 CATS each)
- Option modules to the value of 60 CATS chosen from the Departments of Politics and Media, Communications and Cultural Studies (2 x 30 CATS or a combination of 30 and 15 CATS)
- The Dissertation is worth 60 CATS

Students are required to take two compulsory modules inside the Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies: The Structure of Contemporary Political Communications, and Critical Perspectives on Political Communications, taught by a mix of lecture, seminar, student presentations and tutorials. The first module is a foundational one introducing students to the standard literatures, debates, actors and communication processes in contemporary political communications. The second module goes into adjacent areas of literature and debates, and requires students to think critically about key critiques of political communications and to reflect on the relationship between political communications and theories of power, democracy, globalisation and policy. Students are also required to attend a Research Skills training module that is delivered in nine two-hour sessions across the Autumn and Spring terms and in which they are introduced to a range of methodological approaches that are relevant to the analysis of political communications.

Students are also required to take 60 CATs worth of module options chosen from either the Department of Politics or the Department of Media, Communications, and Cultural Studies. Modules currently on offer in Politics include: Risk in Contemporary Politics, Government and Politics of the European Union, Global Political Cultures 1: Knowledge Power and

Culture, Memory and Justice in Post-conflict Societies, Theories of International Relations, An Other China: Postcolonial Theory, Postmodern Concerns, Continental Political Theory, Global Political Cultures 2: The Body Gender and Politics, and Rhetoric and Political Speech. Those in Media, Communications, and Cultural Studies include: Political Economy of the Mass Media, Media Law and Ethics, Campaign Skills, Social Media Campaigning, Media Ritual and Contemporary Public Cultures, Branding 1: History, Contexts and Practice, Reconceptualising the Media Audience, Public Culture and Everyday Life, Strategies in World Cinema, Cinema and Society, Screen Cultures, Media, Ethnicity, Nation, Chinese Cinemas and Music as Communication and Creative Practice are some of the options offered in recent years.

30 CATS of the 60 CATS worth of optional modules may also be selected from the departments of Sociology, Anthropology, and English and Comparative Literature. Please note that the list of options available may change from year to year, because of staff research commitments and timetabling. By and large the options are taught by the familiar mix of lectures, seminars and tutorials, although there are some variations. Some options offer a greater input of workshop organisation.

All students are required to produce a Dissertation. Individual tutors are assigned by the penultimate week of the autumn term, so that students will be able to have a meeting with their dissertation supervisor before the end of that term. There then follows a scheduled progression of meetings, where accessing archives, methods of analysis, theoretical approach and (finally) drafts are discussed, one-to-one. This is complemented by the research skills module offered in the Autumn and Spring terms which introduces students to a range of methodological debates and approaches that are relevant to researching the political communications field.

Students are also encouraged to attend the Visiting Speakers Forum which is aimed in particular at postgraduate students on practice programmes in the Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies. This is series of workshops and speeches by leading figures across the media which, in 2009/10, featured lawyer Michael Mansfield, Jana Bennett, the Director of BBC Vision, political journalists Ann Leslie and Shaun Ley and the documentary filmmaker Paul Watson.

We recommend that full-time students take two modules per term while part-time students take the two compulsory modules in their first year and then the option modules in their second year and complete the dissertation.

Full-time students take the programme over one calendar year, part-time students over two years. Formal teaching takes place in the autumn term (eleven weeks) and spring term (eleven weeks). The summer term is designed in part for revision, assessment and for intensive dissertation preparation.

In order to proceed into their second year, part-time students need successfully to complete the two compulsory modules.

Module Title	Module Code	Credits	Level	Module Status	Term
The Structure of Contemporary Political Communications	MC71083A	30	7	Compulsory	1
Critical Perspectives on Political Communications	MC71084A	30	7	Compulsory	2
Module(s) to the value of 60 CATS within either the Media or the Politics department	Various	60	7	Optional	2
Dissertation	MC71140B	60	7	Compulsory	3

Academic support

Support for learning and wellbeing is provided in a number of ways by departments and College support services who work collaboratively to ensure students get the right help to reach their best potential both academically and personally.

All students are allocated a Personal Tutor (one in each department for joint programmes) who has overall responsibility for their individual progress and welfare. Personal Tutors meet with their student at least twice a year either face-to-face, as part of a group and/or electronically. The first meeting normally takes place within the first few weeks of the autumn term. Personal Tutors are also available to students throughout the year of study. These meetings aim to discuss progress on modules, discussion of the academic discipline and reports from previous years if available (for continuing students). This provides an opportunity for progress, attendance and assessment marks to be reviewed and an informed discussion to take place about how to strengthen individual learning and success.

All students are also allocated a Senior Tutor to enable them to speak to an experienced academic member of staff about any issues which are negatively impacting their academic study and which are beyond the normal scope of issues handled by Programme Convenors and Personal Tutors.

Students are provided with information about learning resources, the [Library](#) and information available on [Learn.gold \(VLE\)](#) so that they have access to department/ programme handbooks, programme information and support related information and guidance.

Taught sessions and lectures provide overviews of themes, which students are encouraged to complement with intensive reading for presentation and discussion with peers at seminars. Assessments build on lectures and seminars so students are expected to attend all taught sessions to build knowledge and their own understanding of their chosen discipline.

All assessed work is accompanied by some form of feedback to ensure that students' work is on the right track. It may come in a variety of forms ranging from written comments on a marked essay to oral and written feedback on developing projects and practice as they attend workshops.

Students may be referred to specialist student services by department staff or they may access support services independently. Information about support services is provided on the [Goldsmiths website](#) and for new students through new starter information and induction/Welcome Week. Any support recommendations that are made are agreed with the student and communicated to the department so that adjustments to learning and teaching are able to be implemented at a department level and students can be reassured that arrangements are in place. Opportunities are provided for students to review their support arrangements should their circumstances change. The [Disability](#) and [Wellbeing](#) Services maintain caseloads of students and provide on-going support.

The [Careers Service](#) provides central support for skills enhancement, running [The Gold Award](#) scheme and other co-curricular activities that are accredited via the Higher Education Achievement Report ([HEAR](#)).

The [Academic Skills Centre](#) works with academic departments offering bespoke academic literacy sessions. It also provides a programme of academic skills workshops and one-to-one provision for students throughout the year.

Links with employers, placement opportunities and career prospects

The Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies has a strong record of employment prospects for its graduates. Graduates from other postgraduate programme have won numerous awards for their practice work and have gone on to a wide variety of jobs: some in the media industries, some in professional fields only distantly related to the media, and - consistently - a small group from each annual intake go on to do further academic research. MA Political Communications graduates are likely to have a broad range of relevant careers within political consultancy and organising, advertising, marketing, journalism and research.

The requirements of a Goldsmiths degree

All taught postgraduate degrees have a minimum total value of 180 credits and involve one calendar year of full-time study. Some programmes may extend over more than one calendar year and, when this is the case, they have a higher total credit value. Programmes are composed of individual modules, each of which has its own credit value. Part-time students normally take modules to the value of 90 credits each year. If a programme has a part-time pathway, the structure will be set out in the section “How the programme is structured” above. Normally, all modules are at level 7 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

More detailed information about the structure and requirements of a Goldsmiths degree is provided in the [Goldsmiths Qualifications and Credit Framework](#).

Modules

Modules are defined as:

- “Optional” – which can be chosen from a group of modules
- “Compulsory” – which must be taken as part of the degree

Progression

Some programmes may require students to pass specific modules prior to completion of the dissertation/major project (or equivalent). Additionally, where a programme of study extends beyond one calendar year, students may be required to pass specific modules in their first year of study before progressing to the second year. Where this is the case, these requirements will be set out in this Programme Specification.

Award of the degree

In order to graduate, students must successfully complete all modules specified for the programme, as set out within the section “How the programme is structured” above.

Classification

Final degree classification is calculated on the basis of a student’s mean average mark (based on credit value) across all modules on the programme.

Masters degrees are awarded with the following classifications:

Distinction – 70%+

Merit – 60-69%

Pass – 50-59%

More detail on the [calculation of the final classification](#) is on our website.

Interim exit awards

Some programmes incorporate interim exit points of Postgraduate Certificate and/or Postgraduate Diploma, which may be awarded on the successful completion of modules to the minimum value of 60 credits or 120 credits respectively. The awards are made without classification.

When these awards are incorporated within the programme, the relevant learning outcomes and module requirements will be set out within the “What you will be expected to achieve” section above.

The above information is intended as a guide, with more detailed information available in the [Goldsmiths Academic Manual](#).

Programme-specific rules and facts

General programme costs

In addition to your tuition fees, you will be responsible for meeting standard costs associated with your study. Find out more information at gold.ac.uk/programme-costs.

Specific programme costs

In addition to these standard costs, you will also be expected to meet some costs which are specifically related to your programme, which are set out below:

You will need to print two copies of your MA dissertation. If you take any option modules with an audiovisual assessment, you may need to submit work on a USB drive, which you will need to provide, however it will be returned after marking. If you choose to take modules from other Departments, there may be additional costs - please check with the Department in question.

How teaching quality will be monitored

Goldsmiths employs a number of methods to ensure and enhance the quality of learning and teaching on its programmes.

Programmes and modules are formally approved against national standards and are monitored throughout the year, such as in departmental committees, a variety of student feedback mechanisms and through the completion of module evaluation questionnaires. Every programme has at least one External Examiner who reviews comments annually on the standards of awards and student achievement. External Examiner(s) attend Boards of Examiners meetings and submit an annual written report.

Modules, programmes and/or departments are also subject to annual and periodic review internally, as well as periodic external scrutiny.

Quality assurance processes aim to ensure Goldsmiths' academic provision remains current, that the procedures to maintain the standards of the awards are working effectively and the quality of the learning opportunities and information provided to students and applicants is appropriate.

Detailed information on all these procedures are published on the [Quality Office web pages](#).