



Advice on Study Choices: **PAIS** **Dissertation Information Session**

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Reassurance (1)

- ▶ You do not need to register for PAIS modules (including a dissertation) until September
- ▶ Ensures you can use your second year results to inform your study choices
- ▶ It means you have been able to focus on essays and revision this term
- ▶ Potentially expands module choice if new appointments are made over the summer



Reassurance (2)

- ▶ You do not have to find a supervisor or decide on a topic/title until next term
- ▶ If you like, you can start thinking things through now but nothing should be agreed until October



The basics

- ▶ 30 CATS (+ optional unless Pol QM)
- ▶ Year long module
- ▶ Replaces taught (optional) module
- ▶ 10,000 words long – about the length of an average journal article
- ▶ Check your course regulations/home department as to whether you can take a PAIS dissertation



What is a dissertation? (1)

- ▶ A very different beast to other modules.
- ▶ The dissertation provides students with a structured opportunity for independent learning – **you** take responsibility for the project and your learning. It is about *doing* social science, rather than just writing about it.



What is a dissertation (2)

- ▶ It is qualitatively different to writing an assessed essay – you will learn how to define a researchable problem, decide on appropriate sources and develop a sustained argument.
- ▶ While your supervisor can help you with these tasks it is ultimately your responsibility to define a researchable problem and decide what material to read – an experience in independent learning.



Why take a dissertation?

- ▶ Looks good on a CV (key skills/employability)
- ▶ An advantage if you are considering postgraduate study (or a job with a research dimension). But not essential.
- ▶ Allows you to study a topic you are passionate about in depth
- ▶ Still allows you to focus on a subject area if that module is not running
- ▶ Students typically do very well – an increasingly popular option (115 this year)



Key skills gained

- ▶ Written communication skills.
- ▶ Verbal communication skills (UDC).
- ▶ Research skills.
- ▶ Time-management – research and writing plan.
- ▶ IT skills – presentation and use of online resources.
- ▶ Capacity for independent work.
- ▶ Project management.



Do you have?

- ▶ High motivation
 - ▶ Good time management skills
 - ▶ Self-discipline
 - ▶ A topic you are passionate about
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- ▶ Remember it does replace a taught module so you free up time that way



Support available

- ▶ Module director – general information and advice about dissertation process
- ▶ Your supervisor – questions specific to your project
- ▶ A series of plenary sessions
- ▶ The Undergraduate Dissertations Conference



Key dates

- ▶ Module registration normally opens a week or so before the start of the Autumn term
- ▶ You can finalise module choices up until the Friday of week 3
- ▶ Typically you need to register a dissertation title (and submit the ethics form) by the Friday of week 5
- ▶ Submission of the dissertation is typically Wednesday of week 2 of term 3 (the same date as summative essays)



Choosing a topic (1)

- ▶ Could be an interest developed from taking a module in your first or second year
- ▶ Replace a taught module with a dissertation on one of the topics covered in a third year taught module
- ▶ Could be a topic that is not covered in any of the taught modules – ***but only if there is a member of staff in the department willing and able to supervise you***



- ▶ So in PAIS the dissertation does not necessarily have to be linked to one of your taught modules
- ▶ This gives more flexibility than may be the case in some other departments



Choosing a topic (3)

- ▶ Will the topic sustain your interest over the months to come?
- ▶ Is the topic one which you can approach with analytic distance?
- ▶ Is there an existing literature within which you can locate your work?
- ▶ Is the topic one that you can research with the time and resources available?
- ▶ Is there a PAIS member of staff who can supervise your project?



Choosing a topic (4)

- ▶ PAIS QM students will analyse an existing secondary data set
- ▶ A relevant question is whether there exists a data set that can be used to answer the question
- ▶ The UK Data Archive is a good place to start looking for data



- ▶ **Remember:** Avoid too broad a topic or one that is overly ambitious: it is better to provide a thoroughly researched and argued answer to a small question than to fail to find the answer to one which is too big or diffuse.



Ethics and your safety

- ▶ Ethics, student safety, the law
- ▶ Expectations (e.g. it is an undergraduate dissertation, not a PhD)
- ▶ A wealth of research resources that do not need ethical approval (e.g. databases, archives, etc.)



Choosing a supervisor (1)

- ▶ You can search our [staff pages](#) by cluster, region and topic
- ▶ Please ensure everything is unticked under 'role' so that the search facility works properly
- ▶ PAIS QM students will need to find a supervisor that can supervise a quantitative dissertation



Choosing a supervisor (2)

- ▶ When we have a clearer idea of who is available to supervise dissertations in 2019/20 we will produce a list (likely to be at the start of October)
- ▶ Good to have two or three people in mind, just in-case someone is not available
- ▶ You are responsible for choosing a supervisor



Choosing a supervisor (3)

- PhD students are not able to supervise
- Some staff may not be available to supervise
- Your supervisor must be a PAIS staff member (e.g. they will know what is expected in PAIS and be able to advise appropriately)
- You can get *informal* support from staff members outside the department if they are happy to do so



Typical pattern of supervision (1)

▶ Term One

– Week 2 or 3

– *session to consider the overall research topic – set a broad area for consideration*

– Week 4 or 5

– *session to discuss and agree a final title for the dissertation and point towards a possible structure*

▶ After reading week - **Week 7-10**

– *Third session to consider an outline plan of the dissertation that the student has already completed*



Typical pattern of supervision (2)

▶ Term Two

- **Before Reading Week - Week 1-5**

- *Fourth session to consider written work up to a maximum of 2500 words that has been submitted in advance to the supervisor*

▶ Week 8, 9 or 10

- *Fifth and final session to consider a revised outline plan of the dissertation to ensure that it is all coming together as a whole and to finalise plans for completion.*



Plenary sessions this year

- ▶ Getting started
- ▶ Researching the dissertation
- ▶ The writing process
- ▶ Completing the dissertation



Undergraduate Dissertation Conference

- ▶ A chance for you to have an academic conference experience
- ▶ Typically held in second or third week of January
- ▶ A chance to present your research to staff and students
- ▶ A chance to receive feedback from staff and peers on your research
- ▶ A chance to learn from other students research



Dissertation Conference (2)

- ▶ Staff talks on aspects of the dissertation process (theory, methods etc.)
- ▶ Free lunch, refreshments and Dirty Duck vouchers



- ▶ Lots of helpful information and questions answered on the dissertations module website(s)
- ▶ [PAIS Dissertations Moodle site](#)
- ▶ [PAIS QM Dissertations Moodle site](#)
- ▶ Current module director(s), [Dr Tatiana Coutto](#) and [Andreas Murr](#) (QM)



General modules advice

- ▶ Do what interests you
- ▶ If you are interested in a module you are more likely to do well
- ▶ By all means consider future careers/studies in your choices
- ▶ However, don't compromise your overall degree classification in the process



Advice on your study choices (1)

- ▶ You can access our [PAIS module websites 18/19](#)
- ▶ Content may change slightly from year to year
- ▶ Remember that optional modules are not guaranteed to run in any given year
- ▶ We will announce modules running for 19/20 in due course



Advice on your study choices

- ▶ Module directors
- ▶ Your personal tutor
- ▶ Me (DSEP)
- ▶ Course directors on joint degrees
- ▶ Our (PAIS) online [study choices guide](#)



▶ THANK YOU

▶ ANY QUESTIONS?