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Departmental Newsletter Autumn 2017

## News from the Head of Department



At the start of the new academic year, it has been a great pleasure to welcome, and welcome back, our undergraduate and graduate students to the 'Interpol' community.

It has been an important teaching time for us here at Aberystwyth. Not only has the department been recognized for the second consecutive year to be in the top ten of politics and international politics departments in the country (National Student Survey 2017) but the university as a whole has been awarded 'University of the Year for Teaching Quality' (Sunday Times Good University Guide). Both awards testify to the exceptional teaching environment offered here: research-led pedagogy, excellent infrastructure, innovative teaching methods and effective support for our undergraduate and graduate students.

As a research-led teaching department, we have already hosted two major events in the first two weeks of this semester: a roundtable on 'The Many Faces of Radicalisation Today' and the Annual EH Carr lecture, given this year by Professor Stephen Walt of Harvard University on post-Cold War American strategy. The two events were very well attended by students and faculty alike (thanks to you all!), and the diversity of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' themes across the roundtable and lecture testified to the pluralism of the department at the level of both public engagement and research interest. I have no doubt that other events of this semester and next will be attended with equal participation and political curiosity!

And there will be plenty of event to choose from. The department's Director of Research, Dr Bliesemann de Guevara, has told me that there are over 40 research/engagement events this semester in, or including, the department. This makes Interpol the distinctive and thriving intellectual community that it is.

The department is also gearing up to its centenary next year, following its foundation after the First World War with the appointment of a Woodrow Wilson Chair. Up to ten events are scheduled (public speakers, lectures, academic conference, conversations, alumni crisis games, function at the House of Lords, etc.), and Dr Jan Ruzicka, the newly appointed Director of Centenary Celebrations, will keep you updated on our preparations in the months to come. Given recent concern among students both here and in the US with the legacy of Woodrow Wilson, we will also discuss this legacy with the present holder of the chair, Professor Andrew Linklater.

It promises to be another excellent year for Interpol, and I hope you will have the opportunity of joining us and contributing to our activities.

Professor Richard Beardsworth,  
Head of Department.

## UNESCO



Professor Colin McInnes represented the UK at the UNESCO Executive Board in Paris in his capacity as Vice chair of the UK National Commission for UNESCO. Key items on the agenda included the preservation of historic monuments

in conflict zones, the situation in the Crimea, next stages in the fight against HIV/AIDS and promoting gender equality in the sciences.

## Contents

- ◆ News from Head of Department
- ◆ UNESCO
- ◆ Student of the Year Award
- ◆ Admissions and Recruitment
- ◆ Internship at the US House of Representatives
- ◆ Sixth Form Workshop
- ◆ Aberystwyth Summer School
- ◆ Research in Moscow
- ◆ Fieldtrip in Kosovo
- ◆ Performance and Politics Centre
- ◆ Knowledge Centre
- ◆ Command in the 21st Century Conference
- ◆ International network to transform thinking about language revitalisation
- ◆ Fieldwork in Japan
- ◆ 11th Pan-European Conference, Barcelona
- ◆ Book launch

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## Student of the Year Award

Dr Alexandros Koutsoukis has been nominated for the *Student of the Year Award*. Dr Koutsoukis attended a series of Lifelong Learning Courses on psychology to help him develop useful skills for teaching. These courses are part of the School Of Education & Lifelong Learning at Aberystwyth University.

## Admissions and Recruitment



It's been a busy start to the academic year for Interpol's Admissions and External Affairs team. A key aspect of our work involves supporting schools to deliver their curriculum, and early September saw us welcoming 150 students, from three different schools, to the department for a 'Welsh Baccalaureate experience' day. This event focuses on getting students thinking about the individual research projects that they do as part of this qualification. With contributions from the National Library for Wales and the Welsh Government, different sessions focused on deciding on a topic, how to gather data, and reference different sources correctly. It was very rewarding to hear students enthusiastically discussing and planning their project ideas.

Our staff have also been delivering politics workshops for schools in Aberystwyth, Cardiff and Abergavenny. These are always tailored to A-level syllabuses, and students have enjoyed the opportunity to discuss topics ranging from the impact of Donald Trump on US politics, to citizenship and immigration post-Brexit. A few of us also made it over to Staffordshire to run a day-long crisis game, where students get to work in teams to try to resolve an international crisis. We have also had lots of other opportunities to welcome people to Aberystwyth, and to Interpol. Open Days are always an opportunity to showcase our beautiful building, our fantastic staff and our great range of courses. In September, prospective students and their parents were impressed by Dr. Lucy Taylor's sample lecture on 'The truth about the US Mexico border'; other colleagues discussed the refugee crisis, communications in a global era, and intelligence gathering, in a roundtable discussion on 'Issues and Challenges in International Politics'. There are two more open days planned for this semester, with plenty more planned for prospective students.

Finally, our international activity has continued apace. A new exchange agreement has been signed with Westminster College, in Fulton, Missouri, and we hope to send our first students there very soon. We are also exploring new relationships with a range of other partners in the US and elsewhere. Several international delegations have also visited the University, and it has been a great pleasure to talk to higher-education representatives from Nigeria and the Philippines, about what makes Interpol such a unique place to study international politics.

## Amran Rabbouj's Internship at the US House of Representatives

Last summer I had the chance to spend two wonderful months in Washington D.C. as a congressional intern at the U.S. House of Representatives. As much as this experience was unique in many ways, it was also very hard work and physically and mentally demanding. But the sacrifices were worth the price. From answering constituents' enquiries to attending committee hearings, I was right in the centre of congressional affairs, with an unparalleled insight into the American legislative process. **Being** on the Hill not only allowed me to strengthen and sharpen my research, analysis, and writing skills altogether, but it has first and foremost enabled me to learn how to deal with high officials, lobbyists, or senior advisors. These important communication and presentation skills – which are very specific to Washington – eventually gave me access to the main actors that are on the Hill – Senators and Representatives.



As the only international student selected as a congressional intern, I had to deal with a high level of pressure. Indeed, I had to constantly prove myself alongside other interns coming from Ivy League Universities such as Harvard, Yale; or other high-flying institutions like Penn State University or the University of Florida.

Since Congress highly depends on interns for a number of tasks like answering phones, letter writing, or running errands to research and constituent assistance, interns are given a high level of responsibilities from day one. In fact, being a congressional intern is a mix of educational rigor and hard work and this is why they are expected to have a strong academic record, and demonstrate leadership skills and a high level of confidence.

While these highly competitive internships are often criticized because they remain primarily unpaid, I believe that not being paid allows the staff to be more flexible with interns who are largely inexperienced and can sometimes make mistakes. It is seen as a learning and training experience more than a typical paid position. For me, it has been a fantastic experience.

## Department organises Sixth form workshop on 'Contentious Issues in an Uncertain Political Era'



Sixth-form workshops entitled 'Contentious Issues in an Uncertain Political Era' were organised by the department this October, at the department itself and the second at the National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay. These were extremely popular attracting 140 pupils from ten Welsh-medium schools and colleges. Interactive sessions led by our academic staff covered themes such as the future of the UK, citizenship after Brexit and the implications of Trump's reign for US politics. Both events also included a panel discussion with external experts. One teacher commented: 'Pupils enjoyed the different sessions and discussing subjects that they don't usually cover without studying Politics. There were a range of

opportunities for them to share their ideas and build up confidence.' A cartoon was also commissioned to reflect the workshop's themes.

## Aberystwyth Summer School



In July Dr Alexandros Koutsoukis taught a two-week course on the fundamentals of International Politics at *Aberystwyth Summer University*. The sessions addressed cornerstone topics of the degrees of the Department of International Politics. The students had the chance to explore the critical distinction between what Professor Ken Booth calls the *statist* view of the world and the *normatively statist* view of the world. The course was unified by the underlying distinction between *we/they Identification balances* as Woodrow Wilson Professor Andrew Linklater argues. This led students to develop a more dynamic, processual and critical view of the world. The Summer University is supported by the Welsh Government and offers opportunities to students from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend without any charge. Students that were successful at this year's Summer University had the opportunity to secure a guaranteed place on our undergraduate degrees, and we are glad to have welcomed them to our 2017/18 InterPol cohort of first year undergraduates.



Katarzyna Kaczmarek continued her research project *Knowledge on IR* in St Petersburg, in early September. She organised a research trip to Moscow where she interviewed academics at several universities

*Kate in St Petersburg at the headquarters of the Russian Geographical Society*

In July, Dr Berit Bliesemann de Guevara presented her research on politicians' travel to conflict zones at the travel writing conference "Borders and Crossings" at Aberystwyth University. Her presentation discussed the notion of "authentic" or "on-the-ground knowledge" that politicians often resort to in order to justify their fleeting visits to political hot spots, and the expert authority they nonetheless derive from "being there" and "seeing with their own eyes". Her research on politicians' travel has been published, among others, in the *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*.



Political fieldtrips in conflict zones: Kosovo

**The Centre for International Politics of Knowledge** held its first colloquium on 11 October. Dr Berit Bliesemann de Guevara, the Centre's co-director, presented a talk entitled 'The Joys and Woes of Arts-based Research with Local Associates on Violent Conflict in Myanmar'. Dr Bliesemann de Guevara's presentation focused on her recent fieldwork in Myanmar. The fieldwork is part of a collaborative project, 'Raising Silent Voices: Harnessing local knowledge for communities, protection from violence in Myanmar', funded by the AHRC. The research takes a case study of local conflict knowledge in Karen and Mon areas of Myanmar, training local researchers to use storytelling, arts and craft approaches to enable local people to represent and share their knowledge in culturally appropriate ways, through which they share their understanding of the conflicts, violence and peace strategies. Dr Bliesemann de Guevara explained the methodological challenges she faced when working with local actors and offered reflections about power issues arising from interactions in between researchers and local associates performing the bulk of the work on the ground.

*Dr Berit Bliesemann de Guevara with civilian ceasefire monitors at a training session in Myitkina, Myanmar*



## Performance and Politics international (PPI)



Dr Claire Moon from the LSE Centre for Human Rights was our first Distinguished Speaker of the new session. Her provocative talk explored whether the dead have human rights. After taking us through the history of legal humanitarianism, transitions from conflict or to democracy, and the role of science, she argued that human remains could best be understood as 'boundary objects': objects that were seen in multiple ways by different groups: lawyers, politicians, forensics specialists and relatives. She then examined what those involved in the work that follows death see themselves as doing. Death work is a practice that restores social order, or 'domains the dead', bringing them back from the abject in Julia Kristeva's words, or restoring the dead as 'matter in place', to use Mary Douglas's terminology. Whether the dead have human rights is, for Moon, not a philosophical question, but rather one that can be examined by looking at practices: human rights exist because people believe they exist, so we should look at actions that confer rights on the dead, such as legal principles and forensic protocols. A fascinating seminar the following day unpacked some of these themes and drew out connections with theatricality and performance.

## Command in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conference

Dr Meighen McCrae, Lecturer in Military History, was invited to chair a panel entitled, 'World War I Command' at the conference *Command in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. This major international scholar-practitioner conference brought together leading figures in the fields of security studies, international relations, and military history alongside leading military figures. Scholars included Hew Strachan, Lawrence Freedman, and David Kilcullen. Military participants included: General Petraeus, among the most prominent U.S. military figures of the post 9/11 era; General Nick Carter, the current Chief of the General Staff of the British Army; and Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, EUCOM Commander. Together, the conference participants examined the question of military command with the purpose of improving command performance in light of future challenges.



*Photograph of Dr Meighen McCrae & Lieutenant General Sean MacFarland (former commander of the coalition against ISIS in Syria and Iraq).*

## International network to transform thinking about language revitalisation



Dr Huw Lewis and Dr Elin Royles are leading the Revitalise network, funded by the AHRC, with Prof. Wilson McLeod (Edinburgh University). The network aims to transform thinking about revitalising minority languages such as Welsh, Gaelic and Basque. Through a series of workshops, the project examines the implications of some of the major social, economic and political changes witnessed across Western societies for understanding how contemporary language revitalisation efforts should be designed and implemented. To date, two workshops examined the implications of mobility and the transformation of community (Aberystwyth, May 2017) and the transformation of family for language revitalisation (Edinburgh, September 2017). A further two workshops are planned and a conference will be organised in Brussels in 2019 to further disseminate the network's findings. See <http://revitalise.aber.ac.uk/> and @revitalise

Dr Jeff Bridoux conducted fieldwork in Japan in the summer 2017. The fieldwork is part of a research project that investigates the relationship between Japanese-American diaspora (*Issei* and *Nisei* – first and second generation Japanese-Americans) and their relatives who stayed in Japan in the context of the Pacific War and postwar reconstruction in Japan. Fieldwork involved archival data collection and interviews with individuals about their experiences during the Second World War and during postwar reconstruction. A second phase of fieldwork will be conducted in The United States in April 2018 and will focus on the Japanese-American community and particularly on the role of *Nisei* who joined the US Army Military Intelligence Service and were trained as linguists before being deployed in The Pacific from 1942 onwards. The overall objective of the project is to assess how historical events between 1941 and 1952 have impacted the identity and allegiance of both Japanese-Americans and their Japanese relatives entitled *From Los Angeles to Tokyo. Transpacific Blood Ties, the Pacific War, and Postwar Reconstruction in Japan*.



306<sup>th</sup> HQ Language Detachment, XXIV Corps, Leyte, Philippines, November 1, 1944



### 11<sup>th</sup> Pan-European Conference

The Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth was well-represented at the 11<sup>th</sup> Pan-European Conference on International Relations

(known as EISA) when it met in Barcelona on 13-16 September. The theme was “The Politics of International Studies in an Age of Crisis”, which turned out to be unexpectedly appropriate as the conference took place between two different examples of political crisis: the August terrorist attack in the city and the controversial referendum on Catalan independence which was held on 1 October. The strength of feeling about independence was very evident from the many Catalan flags hanging from houses and blocks of flats throughout Barcelona, along with banners that simply read “Si”.

The conference plenaries and round tables focussed on some of the big questions that face international politics, such as climate change, as well as practices that shape and are shaped by the international politics of the everyday – such as inequality, racism and militarism – and affect the way that we address such questions.

Academic staff and postgraduate research students from Aberystwyth made contributions to the conference in several areas. Head of Department Professor Richard Beardsworth's

paper (“Beyond the Realism/Liberalism Divide in International Relations”) was part of a panel on International Relations theory, as was Dr Kamila Stullerova's (“Realism Meets Liberalism, or Why We Need a Political Doctrine”). Dr Stullerova also contributed to a roundtable on reappraising realism as a European tradition in International Relations. Others presented papers that were focussed on specific cases, such as postgraduate student Charlotte Bottfield (“The Obfuscation of the East Africa Campaign: Controlling British Narratives and British Knowledge of the First World War”) and Dr Jenny Mathers (“The Crisis in Ukraine and Gendered Economic Insecurities”).

Several of the papers were from members of staff and postgraduate students working in the area of one of the newest research centres in the Department: the Centre for the International Politics of Knowledge which seeks to develop our understanding of how knowledge about international politics is produced. These papers included ones by Centre Director Dr Berit Bliesemann de Guevara (“The Fieldwork Industry” which was part of a panel on ethnographic approaches), Postdoctoral Fellow Dr Katarzyna Kaczmarek (“The Knowledge-Power Nexus in Contemporary International Relations Scholarship beyond the West”) and postgraduate students Philip Conway (“The History of Environmental Ideas”) and Alistair Markland (“The Extraction of Faraway Conflict Knowledge by Foreign Advocacy NGOs”).



On 25 September, the School of Oriental and African Studies in London hosted the official launch of *Taiwan Cinema: International Reception and Social Change* (Routledge). The book, edited by Interpol's Professor Gary Rawnsley, Dr Ming-yeh Rawnsley (editor of the *International Journal of Taiwan Studies*, located in Interpol) and Professor Kuei-fen Chiu (of National Chungshing University, Taiwan) is a study of the films of Taiwanese director, Wei Te-sheng. The contributors analyse how Wei's movies reflect modern Taiwan and its history especially, in *Seediq Bale*, resistance to Japanese colonialism by Taiwan's indigenous tribes. The book discusses the international flow of cultural products and seeks to understand how the distinction between the global and local is increasingly irrelevant.

Professor Gary Rawnsley and Dr Ming-yeh Rawnsley with one of the contributors to the book, Professor Valentina Vitali of East London University