

# CAREER VIEW

## POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Politics defines the world and drives our lives. Political activity is basically about the exercise of power. Power itself comes in many forms, including the power to control other people, the power to allocate resources, and the power to manipulate consequences. Power can be blatantly obvious or very, very invisible. It can be unsettling, exciting, and deeply compelling. So can politics.

Political Science and International Relations are complementary and inter-related disciplines that explore power and politics in many different contexts. They provide concepts with which to explain, justify and critique the modern world. They examine ideologies such as colonisation and socialism. They explore systems of ideas like the new right, religious fundamentalism, and postmodernism. They analyse social movements that call for justice, development, gender equality or environmental protection. They help us to understand processes of electoral competition, government, and policy-making in New Zealand and a range of other countries across the world. They uncover the structures and motivations behind cooperation, conflict and war in the international system. They dig into issues of power, conflict, diplomacy, arms control, democracy, revolution, terrorism, developmental politics, civil society, human rights, foreign policy, humanitarian aid, and the international political economy.

Globalisation links people, cultures and countries much more closely than they have ever been. International Relations studies the relationships among countries and the roles of governmental and non-governmental organisations and multi-nationals. In an increasingly inter-connected world, people who understand and can work with these complex relationships have a significant advantage.

### WHY STUDY POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS?

Studying these disciplines brings many benefits. There is the personal satisfaction and social confidence that comes from training your brain and raising your understanding of not only world events but also the events of daily life. Being able to step back and see a



larger (political) process at work is very empowering at an individual level. It can take the sting out of tense or emotional situations and provide you with strategies that enable you to behave constructively and proactively. Being able to rise above difficulties and move on is enormously valuable in any work environment, particularly when professional issues or competing interests are involved.

Political Science and International Relations are embedded not only in social processes and group dynamics, but also different cultural realities. This raises your sensitivity to the taken-for-granted aspects of cultural experience, making you more open to different points of view and value systems.

*Topical coverage of career related issues brought to you by Victoria University Careers and Employment.*

*Areas covered include how degrees and courses relate to employment opportunities, to life/work planning, graduate destination information and current issues or material relevant to the employment scene. Your comments and suggestions always welcomed.*

The ability to move comfortably within and between different cultures and political systems is fundamental to international business and trade activities, development support, humanitarian aid and peacekeeping missions. People with this kind of understanding are more likely to be successful in multi-national corporations and professional practices, non-government organisations (NGOs) such as aid agencies, and government agencies including diplomatic services and defence forces. They are also valuable 'at home' working in organisations where cultural or ethnic identity has a relationship with other social or political processes.

Both Political Science and International Relations are linked to the media and public perceptions and these connections are studied specifically. Those able to work with spin, impression management, and damage control techniques, either for the purpose of debunking them or doing them convincingly, are also dealing with deeper issues of truth, accuracy and the right to know. These issues underpin many political, social, and educational institutions, business enterprises, and systems of justice, particularly where public accountability is a requirement.

## WHAT SKILLS DO POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS STUDENTS DEVELOP?

Political Science and International Relations students have a great toolkit of skills to take to work. These include:

**Conceptual analysis.** Students learn to get their heads around the big issues, including models of government, cultural imperatives, false equivalents, the effects of war, historical intentions, and complex current realities. Working productively with this range of information develops skills of abstract thinking and in-depth analysis, which transfer well to many jobs, especially those that deal in conceptual models and/or strategic planning. These include policy analysis, management roles, professional roles in law and economics, technical writing, and promotion of the arts.

**Consequential thinking.** To a large extent Political Science and International Relations is about intentions, decisions, and their various consequences. Students become adept at identifying the consequential effects of decisions and actions taken historically and in the present. They learn to make connections and formulate arguments. They learn to look for the hidden detail that changes everything. They become quite astute at predicting outcomes.



Jobs that draw on these skills include all levels of management, particularly human resources, financial service roles, customer service positions, and any job that involves decision-making and problem solving.

**Influencing and persuading skills.** When it comes to getting what you want, students develop an excellent understanding of what works and what doesn't, studying political agendas throughout the world and throughout history. It comes back to the element of power that underpins political business everywhere. Many job roles contain an expectation that you will be able to implement decisions, mobilise resources, or motivate others. These outcomes require influencing and persuading skills and are particularly relevant in management roles, but also come into play in roles that involve interviewing for information, such as immigration officer or human resources consultant. Influencing skills make all the difference to sales, marketing, and journalism roles, and work well for court lawyers and politicians.

**Language skills.** These skills encompass the biggies – written and verbal communication. Employers are always delighted to find people who write effectively and express their thoughts clearly. International Relations and Political Science students have these skills – partly from having to think big political ideas through to a logical conclusion, and partly because they are encouraged to write clear, lively well-argued assignments, and also argue their understanding of issues in tutorials with peers. Most work roles are enhanced by good language skills, and all positions of authority and leadership require them.

**Relationship management skills.** All political activity happens in the context of some sort of relationship, involving various mixes of individuals, institutions, factions, nations, opponents and allies. Effective

politics means effective management of relationships. Students eventually have a trained eye when it comes to tracking the quality of relationships. They understand the dynamics of giving and receiving, and the strategic benefits of pushing forward or falling back. Many organisational issues are basically issues of relationship. Consumer confidence (advertising and marketing) involves a relationship of trust between supplier and consumer. Professional ethics (psychology, social work) assume a relationship of confidentiality between client and professional. Law and order (lawyers, probation officers) depend on a relationship of acceptance between the justice system and the public. These are excellent skills to acquire and develop, and are strongly connected to the cluster of skills that comprise communication skills.

**Conflict resolution skills.** People get into conflicts with one another. Students gain an in-depth understanding of large-scale conflicts and their resolution through the framework of diplomacy and international relations. This understanding is useful in its own right, but also transfers easily to smaller-scale issues and the processes of negotiation and mediation. Every workplace has the potential for misunderstandings, unfair decisions, and grumpy Mondays. Those who handle tricky situations with tact and diplomacy are invaluable and are generally given a lot of respect. For others, such as lawyers, consumer protection agencies, mediation officers, and

security personnel, conflict resolution is a core work skill.

**Research skills.** International Relations and Political Science students study both subjects through its protocols of research design and methodology. This includes defining key research questions, tracking down and interpreting official documents, practising stringent internet research techniques, and for some, learning to write research proposals and make submissions to select committees. Many job roles, including policy analysts and advisors, journalists, managers, community liaison officers, and social researchers, are highly dependent on superior research skills.

## WHERE DO POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS GRADUATES WORK?

Political Science and International Relations graduates have skills that transfer well to many work environments. However, like many graduates, they may be applying for a job which only specifies a relevant tertiary qualification. This means that understanding how their skills work in the context of a specific job description is important. Adding another degree, such as Law, or doing a double major, can increase their options considerably. For some





professional roles such as journalism, a further course of training is usually required.

There are, however, a range of organisations for which the particular mix of skills and knowledge acquired by Political Science and International Relations graduates is uniquely relevant, even if in some cases additional qualifications or experience are also required. These include:

**Parliament.** A complex organisation requiring hundreds of permanent staff to carry out its various functions including clerks, tour guides, messengers, journalists, librarians, researchers and administration staff. The Parliamentary Service is the largest employer in the parliamentary complex providing administrative and support services, which include research services and policy advice. Political Science graduates, with their superior understanding of parliamentary functions and processes, will have a competitive edge over many other applicants for a range of positions especially if they have done a Parliamentary internship. Research units are possibilities for those with an interest in research and ideally a postgraduate degree or a double or conjoint law and arts degree.

**Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies.**

All these organisations are functional arms of the government of the day and are required to implement its political decisions. Graduates will have developed a pragmatic level of understanding that enables them to function well in political bureaucracies. Government organisations with an affinity for Political Science and International Relations include the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade* (requires an excellent postgraduate degree and/or Law or Economics), *New Zealand Trade and Enterprise* (especially with Law, Economics or International Business), *Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment* (policy roles), the Treasury (requires excellent postgraduate or outstanding undergraduate

degree), the *State Services Commission*, *Immigration New Zealand* and *New Zealand Customs Service*.

International Relations are also important to the *Defence* and *Police* forces and intelligence services.

**Local Authorities – City, District and Regional Councils** have policy and/or strategy units, which require the skills that graduates possess, especially if combined with commerce or environmental planning.

NGOs (Non-Government Organisations) include aid organisations such as World Vision, Red Cross and Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA). Political Science graduates, particularly those with International Relations have an understanding of the political underpinnings of aid programmes. A degree together with relevant life and work experience could lead to work in these types of organisations.

**Community Organisations** are many and varied. They include Forest & Bird, Women's Refuge, Amnesty International, and the New Zealand Aids Foundation. Where such organisations have paid positions, one or two people may combine administration, education, fundraising and policy development roles. Not only are Political Science and International Relations graduates well equipped to deal with these tasks should a job be advertised, voluntary involvement in such organisations can provide a wealth of practical experience to complement the degree and lead on to other career options.

**Unions** are inevitably about power differentials between employers and employees and have a large political component.

**Media and Communications** encompasses public relations consultancies, media intelligence groups, communications units in government departments, external relations people in large organisations, press secretaries, spokespeople, speech writers, liaison officers, journalists, political commentators, media

## GRADUATE PROFILES

analysts and sundry persons who may be required to represent their organisation to 'outsiders'. Whether these roles are formal or informal, graduates are going to bring a lot of understanding to the best way of getting the right message across and are likely to perform well. **Media intelligence companies** monitor and analyse how their clients are perceived in the media and decide what information will be useful to them. An understanding of current affairs, politics and business is a huge asset in this work. Clients are across the spectrum from corporates and political parties to government and not-for-profit organisations.

### Corporates and Multinational Organisations

often recruit through university careers services for management trainees and other roles. Selection is highly competitive especially when open to all degree disciplines. Political Science and International Relations graduates, however, have valuable skills and knowledge to offer, particularly by focussing on any 'international' aspects of their degree. In **banks** there are varied graduate opportunities in international and institutional operations and global wealth that may lead to positions overseas.

**Universities** are excellent places to work for graduates who enjoy transmitting knowledge and skills at an academic level and who wish to continue research. Graduates considering an academic career require a PhD and a record of publication to be competitive for lecturer positions.

**Secondary school** teaching in, for example, subjects such as history, political and social studies requires a teaching qualification.

### JOB TITLES

The following is a sample of job titles taken from our graduate destination surveys. Some roles may require postgraduate qualifications and training.

Account manager • archivist • campaign manager/organiser • diplomat • external relations adviser • immigration officer • intelligence analyst • intelligence agency officer • marketing research analyst • media analyst • policy analyst • political analyst • political commentator • political journalist/editor • press secretary • politician's assistant • public affairs research analyst • public opinion analyst • public relations adviser • research adviser • social media analyst • teacher • university tutor/lecturer.

### Hannah van Voorthuysen

Senior Policy Officer  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade



I first became interested in international issues when, as an impressionable 15 year old, I moved to Brasilia, Brazil for a one year exchange. This opened my eyes to a different culture, an interesting new language, and exposed me to some of the challenges faced by developing countries. I decided that a career working on New Zealand's foreign policy was for me, and subsequently started a degree in International Relations, ending up with a Master of Arts (MA) focussing on New Zealand's relationship with Israel.

The great thing about studying Political Science and International Relations is that you're given a lot of free range to develop your academic interests in a supportive teaching department. As an academic field, international relations remains fairly new and is so multifaceted that you could find yourself working on issues involving economic theory, politics, international law, conflict, security, migration, climate change, regionalism, 'big man syndrome', and trade, all within the same 2,000-word paper.

I found myself studying with people of really diverse backgrounds and experiences (and consequently a huge variety of opinions) who challenged my own worldview and allowed me to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the global political system. This is especially the case in the Honours programme, as you're studying with students doing Master's degrees in International Relations who are typically mid-career professionals and bring a degree of realism and experience that I certainly wasn't used to factoring in to my thinking.

I'm currently working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade as a Senior Policy Officer in the International Security and Disarmament Division, where I work mainly on irregular migration issues. Previously, I have worked on our relationships with Latin American countries, done a stint on secondment at the Ministry of Defence, and was posted to Timor-Leste for three years as the Deputy Head of Mission.

Being part of a small foreign service means a diversity of experience and plenty of opportunities. The skills I learned through my IR degree are essential to my job now: being able to quickly understand murky issues in an information vacuum, critical thinking, research, negotiation, and joining dots.

### Christopher Foulkes

*Project Development Officer,  
Northern Syria Cross-border  
Operations  
International Organization for  
Migration, Gaziantep, Turkey*



The mix of my experiences growing up overseas, my desire to work internationally, and what I had excelled in at school – History, Classics, English and Debating – made Political Science and International Relations at Victoria obvious choices for me.

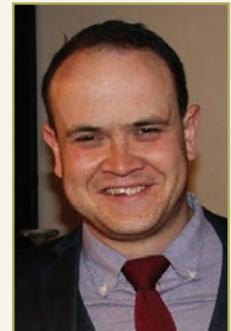
While I completed a broad range of courses, Political Science and International Relations courses always stood out for me. Both the faculty and the subject matter offer the chance to explore ideas in a unique way. I loved the freedom I was given to select topics and perspectives that suited me, and pursue them as far as I could. It was through being given this freedom that I realised my passion for understanding all aspects of human migration.

I gained three major sets of skills from my degree. First, the knowledge and specific content about international relations and political processes. The faculty gave me an excellent, broad understanding of the field but also encouraged me to specialise and become ‘expert’ in specific topics of interest, such as migration. Second, the practical skills of how to present an argument, organise my thoughts, study and write clearly. Finally, and most importantly, the more abstract skills such as how to analyse scenarios, apply theories and to think critically.

Since graduating, each year has offered me new and exciting opportunities to use these skills. In the two years after graduating I completed a fellowship in Hawai’i, undertook an internship in Washington DC, and worked as a consultant with the UN in Bangkok. Since 2013 I have worked for the International Organization for Migration – the UN Migration Agency, first in the Regional Office in Bangkok, then in Afghanistan, and currently in Turkey. While each of my previous roles was very different they have all required a holistic understanding of the social, political, cultural and economic dynamics of migration. In between my stints in Afghanistan and Turkey I also undertook a Master’s Degree in Migration Studies at the University of Oxford in the UK. I found my academic background was a perfect basis for what was a hugely inter-disciplinary course and served me well in one of the toughest academic environments in the world.

### Troy Simms

*Product Owner: Business  
Intelligence  
Vector Ltd.*



I enrolled in an undergraduate degree in Political Science and International Relations as a blank canvas, albeit a canvas woven with questions. Why do I vote the way I do? Why do I support particular causes and disapprove of others? Why do states behave in a certain way? And why are my beliefs different to the beliefs of others? I soon realised that politics runs far deeper than just page two of the Dominion Post.

It is impossible to study politics without drawing on and appreciating everything else it touches upon – economics, psychology, sociology and history. It is the study of people and of their motivations. Transitioning into my career, I have found that my study supplied me with far more than just meaningful, politically laced banter around the water cooler – although this has been pretty helpful, too. Trying to grasp diverse motivations, to understand power and the interactions between actors has helped me to analyse and respond to workplace dynamics. Which situations require candour over pragmatism? When should I listen instead of direct?

The passions drawn out of you while exploring historical conflicts and questionable policies has translated into a drive to always look for improvements, to find an alternative answer. Tangible skills such as effective writing and critical thinking have helped me to back my own ideas, to make recommendations rather than suggestions and to take the lead when it is required. Exposure to alternate opinions and contrary sentiments has allowed me to accept the views of others and to test the validity of my own views against these, both within my career as I work toward a solution, or through meaningful discussion with my peers.

I’m lucky in that I worked for my current employer both before and after my study. I found that the way I approached the role changed significantly in line with how I had changed throughout my study. It gave me a unique perspective on the less tangible changes that come from study in general. I found myself far more driven and ambitious, ready to approach situations in a positive new light, and the rewards have followed in kind.

When I signed up to study Political Science and International Relations, I had big questions which

I hoped to have answered. At the other end of my degree, I found myself with far more questions and that is probably what I value most. I learned to keep questioning, to keep discussing. Nothing is more important.

### **Kate Stone**

*Crown Counsel  
Crown Law Office*



When I finished high school I knew that I was interested in New Zealand and social change but I didn't know what that would look like as a career or a degree. I spoke to people at my school, to family and friends, and it was suggested that I might enjoy studying for a conjoint degree in law and arts. I ultimately finished with a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) and a Bachelor of Arts (BA) with a combined major of Political Science and International Relations. However, I experimented along the way with a number of other subjects such as History, Spanish, Māori Studies and Religious Studies.

I really relished the opportunity to engage in discussions in lectures and tutorials about the material we were learning – trying to formulate an argument on your feet and being challenged to consider alternative perspectives on an issue.

I learned how to research and write academic papers, but I think the most important skills I gained were critical analysis and the ability to develop a structured, logical and well-founded position. Through Political Science studies I had the opportunity to study Chinese politics in China on a field study, and I also undertook an internship in Parliament as part of my Honours programme. Both of these experiences gave me first hand insight into the working of government.

When I finished university I worked as a junior lecturer in Law for a year and had intended to remain in academia. However my research in youth justice led to a desire to work at the coalface, so to speak. I juniored for an experienced barrister, which led me to a job as a criminal defence lawyer with the Public Defence Service in Manukau, Auckland. After two years I have now moved to Crown Law where I get to work on a wide array of public interest litigation.

Political Science studies and the opportunities they afforded me gave me the background that was instrumental in my decision to practice law in an area that interacts with the political realm.

### **Caroline McDonald**

*Adjunct Research Fellow  
School of History, Philosophy,  
Political Science and International  
Relations*



I returned to university to undertake a PhD in International Relations. My background was in Anthropology and Economics, but extensive experience in international relations and policy led me to take this direction academically. Since graduating I had over thirty years' experience in the New Zealand foreign service, including working on New Zealand's relationships with the Pacific.

New Zealand sees itself as a liberal colonial power, exemplified by the unique decolonisation arrangements entered into with the Cook Islands and Niue. Yet today those relationships can be depicted in a negative light, and are marked by disagreement and disputes. Had those arrangements failed to live up to expectations? That was what my research explored.

I wanted to draw on my career experience, and address a real life problem. Keen interest in the project among politicians, officials and many others in the Cook Islands, Niue and New Zealand provided an extra incentive. PhD enrolment provided academic guidance, a sound scholarly framework for my research, and the excellent resources of the university, including financial support. I discovered that what is of interest to governments is not necessarily of interest to scholars, and vice versa. My major challenge was bridging the difference between the approach of policy makers to problems, and the aims of academic enquiry. I hope I achieved this to the benefit of both.

It all came together. Having completed my thesis, I am keen to publish and report back my findings. There is a lot of interest, invitations to share my views and submit articles, and ideas coming my way for new projects. I hope my research can make a difference to perceptions of the relationships between New Zealand and its Pacific neighbours.

## POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AT VICTORIA

Victoria has a large and successful Political Science and International Relations programme. Our staff have strong links with prestigious institutions worldwide, collaborate with international colleagues, and introduce students in New Zealand's capital city to the cutting edge of international political debate. Our staff produce world class research and regularly engage in media commentary and public policy debate, including advising the New Zealand government and other governments in the Asia Pacific region. Victoria's unique position, located in the nation's capital, offers students the opportunity to observe policy-making and meet with policy-makers in Parliament and the public service.

The Political Science and International Relations programme at Victoria offers a particularly wide range of expertise in politics and international relations. It is also the only programme in New Zealand offering a separate undergraduate major in International Relations. The programme offers around 30 undergraduate courses in Political Science and International Relations a year. Our courses provide diverse perspectives on domestic and international politics, including political ideas (capitalism, multiculturalism, socialism, justice, freedom), the politics of particular countries and regions around the world (New Zealand, the US, Europe, China, Japan, the Pacific, East and Southeast Asia), and important political issues (dictatorship and democracy, human rights, politics and the media, managing ethnic conflict, building new states, war, peace and security, civil war and humanitarian intervention, the UN and international institutions, the politics of the international economy).

Our 100 level courses offer a broad grounding in New Zealand politics, International Relations, political ideas and comparative politics. Our 200 and 300 level courses offer opportunities for greater specialisation. Courses in Political Science and International Relations are open to all students irrespective of their majoring subject and fit well with other disciplines including History, Philosophy, Law, Sociology, Economics, Geography, Anthropology, Commerce and Public Policy.

We also offer a full range of postgraduate degrees. For Bachelor of Arts (BA) graduates looking to enhance their academic qualifications or mature students looking for a change in career direction, we offer 12-month taught Master's degrees in International Relations, Political Science, and Strategic Studies. These courses allow students to gain Master's level expertise through an intensive taught programme, without completing a BA(Honours) in Political Science or International Relations. They recruit a mixture of talented students who have just completed their BA and mature students with wide-ranging career experience in New Zealand and overseas (including in the public sector, military, NGOs and international organisations).

We also offer a BA(Hons) degree, research MA and PhD. A course within the Honours programme includes a Parliamentary Internship, where students selected will have the opportunity to learn about the parliamentary process by working at Parliament during their Honours year. The School of History, Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations also contributes to other taught Master's programmes, the Master of Migration Studies (MMigS) and the Master of Philosophy, Politics and Economics (MPPE).

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