

POL42090

ENGAGING BRUSSELS

2023

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Office: G314, ART

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30pm - 3:30pm

Module Description

The European Union (EU) has a huge impact on the lives of EU citizens, yet it is often seen as distant, opaque, and difficult to engage with. This module aims to engage students directly with EU governance through interactions with the institutions and political and legal processes that define the union. Students will learn about the inputs, processes, and outputs that shape EU governance and put this knowledge to use by engaging with EU institutions like the Commission, European Parliament, and European Court of Justice, as well as national-level institutions like Parliament, the civil service, and the ecosystem of NGOs and lobbyists engaged with EU affairs in member state capitals. Under the guidance of the module coordinator, the group will develop an engagement project. The aim of the project is to identify avenues through which ordinary citizens can engage with EU governance, and the opportunities and challenges associated with doing so. Examples of possible projects include preparing policy dossiers on ongoing legislative proposals, lobbying EU institutions, or exploring how citizens engage with the European legal system. The project can be applied in nature or targeted at understanding engagement processes from an outside perspective. Upon completion of the module, students will have developed an in-depth understanding of EU governance processes, and the ways in which citizens can directly involve themselves in EU politics.

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this module, students should have an enhanced understanding of how to:

- Explain how the three main legislative institutions of the EU function together and produce policy;
- Organise and partake in meetings with EU representatives;
- Prepare policy briefs, meeting agendas, and meeting content for discussion;

- Engage with policy makers and other stakeholders in a professional manner, both verbally and in writing;
- Discuss different EU policy areas and the manner in which the EU functions in these areas;
- Complete a capstone project reflecting on engagement strategies;
- Reflect upon what has been learned from the field trip experience and distil this into content for future jobs.

Module Structure

This module is structured around active student-led learning and group research. It aims to provide students with the opportunity to develop and present an engagement project based on their own interests in EU politics. There are no assigned readings or textbooks, as the learning process and materials are determined by the way in which the group project develops. There are 4 main components to the module.

1: Project development seminars

The module is based upon a series of seminars in which the module goals are explained and problem definition, idea development, and project planning takes place. These seminars are designed to identify topics of interest around which the engagement project can be developed and to develop strategies for executing the project. The project should address some aspect of the 'Engaging with Brussels' theme, but beyond this it is up to the students to choose what they study. The project team will develop their project independently under the guidance of the module coordinator. The seminars will be held on **Thursdays 12pm-2pm in 102-CNFI** (Confucius Institute).

2: Engagement project

The module is structured around the theme of 'Engaging with Brussels', but which aspects of engagement the group chooses to focus on is up to you. There are many options here. Engagement projects can be more hands-on in nature, attempting to identify and implement methods to increase engagement with Brussels in any given context, or can be more academic in nature, attempting to increase our understanding of some aspect of engagement with Brussels. Innovation and thinking outside the box is encouraged, as is ambition.

Past projects have included:

- Team Ireland's contribution to the EUandI Voter Advice Application - <https://euandi2019.eu/survey/default/EN>.
- A candidate survey conducted ahead of the 2019 European Parliament elections with the aim of seeing how close election candidates are to Irish voters in terms of policy positions.
- A project examining cross-language variation in legislative transparency to determine if there are language-based barriers to engaging with Brussels that differ across different jurisdictions.
- The Brussels Insider podcast: <https://europedebate.ie/podcast/>.

3: Field trip to Brussels

A field trip to Brussels during reading week has been planned as part of the module (**Monday 13 - Thursday 16th March**, inclusive). The aim of the field trip is to provide students with the opportunity to engage with EU policy makers on issues that arise as part of their engagement project. Details shall be provided in due course.

Note: Fees apply for attending the field trip for those not on the MSc European Governance. A limited number of scholarships are available to cover these expenses.

4: Public event - Engaging Brussels

Given that the project is related to engagement with Brussels, students will also be tasked with organising a public event around the theme of 'Engaging Brussels', at which their project will be presented. Students will invite outside speakers, stakeholders, and officials to contribute to this event, and will be tasked with advertising the event to relevant audiences. Who students wish to invite, and what form of event they would like to hold, will inevitably depend on what the focus of the project is. This public event serves the purpose of promoting the students' work and building engagement with stakeholders involved in EU politics. This event will be held in the **final week of term** (the 24th to 28th April, inclusive), although the precise scheduling will be decided by the students and it need not take place during the allocated seminar times.

Additional Contact Hours and Information

Office hours will be held every Tuesday, for the period 1:30pm to 3:30pm. Please contact me prior to office hours, so that I can allocate you a precise time, depending on how busy office hours are, and your own schedule. If there is something very specific you would like to discuss then it might be useful to send me an email a little in advance, so that I have the material to hand.

If you have any questions or concerns, this syllabus should be your first port of call. It should contain most of the information that you need for the module, and additional information will also be posted on Brightspace as and when required, so you should keep an eye on it. If you cannot find the answer to your question in the syllabus, then feel free to get in touch!

Whenever emailing me with regards to this module, please include the module code (**POL42090**) in the subject line.

Assessment

All assignments in this module are graded on a **pass/fail** basis. Students taking this module are evaluated using three different components:

1. Reflection Papers (10%)
2. Presentations (20%)
3. Project Report (70%)

Reflection Papers (10%)

When it comes to the development of an innovative and ambitious engagement project, there are two main hurdles: developing an idea that solves a particular problem with EU engagement; and developing and implementing that project. Consequently, each student will be required to submit two reflection papers over the course of the term, corresponding to these two challenges. The **first** reflection paper (due over **weeks 2-4**) is idea-centred as students will be required to reflect on what different problems may exist with EU engagement and what possible projects could be developed to mitigate those problems. The **second** reflection paper (due over **weeks 10-12**), is progress-centred as students will be required to reflect on the progress that their team is making in developing the project and any other ideas they have for its design and implementation.

Given that each set of reflection papers will entail discussions over a three week period, I will randomly allocate students to particular weeks for submitting reflection papers. Each reflection paper should be **no more than 500 words**. Each reflection paper should be **emailed to me by 1pm that Wednesday** as the ideas in these papers will serve as the basis for discussion in the seminar.

Presentations (20%)

Presenting ideas, ongoing work, and finished projects is an important part of this module. As part of the project development process, students will need to pitch project ideas and give project progress reports. Consequently, for the week that students have been allocated to submit a reflection paper, they will also need to present their paper in the seminar, resulting in each student being required to give **two presentations** over the course of the term. Presentations should be a maximum of **10 minutes**. If you want to use slides, please email them to me before the beginning of the seminar. Since the purpose of these presentations is to help the class select an idea and then develop the resulting project, all students should be prepared to **discuss and engage with** the presentations.

Project Report (70%)

At the end of the engagement project, an independently written project report should be submitted to **Brightspace** by each student. The report should be **no longer than 3,000 words** and it is due by **23:59 on Friday 12th May**. The report should include the following sections:

1. Cover page with project title and student ID
2. Project objectives:
 - What was the overall purpose of the project?
 - What were you trying to achieve and/or what difference were you trying to make?
 - Please also share your own motivation and rationale for picking this engagement topic
3. Creativity: what was the novel aspect of the project in terms of engagement with Brussels?
4. Increasing engagement:
 - Context - what needs and/or opportunities did your project address (and for whom?)
 - What was your proposed approach and/or solution?
 - What was the value-added of the project and for whom? What were the benefits of the project?
 - What external barriers or obstacles did you face in undertaking the project?
 - Were there any regulatory/institutional requirements to which you had to adhere?
 - What personal or internal barriers might you face in implementing the project?
 - What were the risks associated with the chosen approach?
 - How did you pilot/prototype/test your proposed solution?
5. Success:
 - What was the vision for the project?
 - How did you measure success and/or show evidence of the outcomes?
6. Feedback and support: who were the key people/resources, inside or outside your organisation, who offered you support and helped you to overcome the obstacles/barriers?
7. Sharing learning: how did you share your new approach and lessons learnt with your colleagues, peers, and the wider community?

Module Schedule

The module structure below is indicative but might evolve depending on the direction the engagement project takes.

Week 1 (23 - 27th January): Introduction

- Ice-breaker exercise
- Module overview
- Tools for defining a problem: PEST analysis & 5 Whys

Week 2 (30th January - 3rd February): Defining the Problem

- Presentations of reflection papers
- Locating and defining issues or problems associated with engaging with Brussels

Week 3 (6th - 10th February): Project Brainstorming

- Presentations of reflection papers
- Refining problem statements and identifying solutions:
 - Backwards brainstorming templates
 - Impact/effort matrices

Week 4 (13th - 17th February): Project Selection

- Presentations of reflection papers
- Project selection
- Resource review: internal resources; stakeholder identification

Week 5 (20th - 24th February): Team Development

- Project structure:
 - Format and content
 - Deliverables?
 - Task identification and allocation
- Team contracting & commitment whiteboard

Week 6 (27th February - 3rd March): Planning Engagement

- Public event planning
 - What do we want to achieve?
 - Identifying contributors
 - Draft schedule

Week 7 (6th - 10th March): Brussels Planning

- What do we want to get out of this field trip?
 - Is there any information in particular that needs to be acquired?
 - Are there particular individuals you want to try to talk to?

Week 8 (13th - 16th March): Brussels Field Trip

Week 9 (20th - 24th March): Reading Week

Week 10 (27th - 31st March): Progress I

- Presentations of reflection papers
- Discussion of project and public event progress: is satisfactory progress being made; what else can be done?

Week 11 (3rd - 7th April): Progress II

- Presentations of reflection papers
- Discussion of project and public event progress: is satisfactory progress being made; what else can be done?

Week 12 (10th - 14th April): Progress III

- Presentations of reflection papers
- Discussion of project and public event progress: is satisfactory progress being made; what else can be done?

Week 13 (17th - 21st April): Event Preparation

- Practice project presentation;
- Discussion of any issues that need resolved with either the project or the event;
- Check that everything is in place for the event.

Week 14 (24th - 28th April): Public event

Schedule to be determined by students