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The Open
University

SSGS MAGAZINE

Introducing the School of Social Sciences and Global Studies (SSGS), our new staff, our teaching and research highlights, and more...



RESEARCH-LED, CUTTING EDGE CURRICULUM, ADDRESSING SOME OF THE MAJOR NATIONAL AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES FACING THE WORLD TODAY

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PHOTO: Declarations of Love. The fence between the trains and the pedestrians on a Cologne bridge has become a place to make a declaration of love with a padlock. Cologne, Germany – August 10 2016.

Welcome

Welcome to the **first issue of the *SSGS Magazine*** – a new publication that aims to incorporate some of the key areas of research driving the School and informing our evolving curriculum.

The School of Social Sciences and Global Studies (SSGS) was formed in 2019 and is one of three Schools in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS). FASS has over 53,000 students, making it the largest Faculty in the UK. This academic year alone (Oct 2020), we are welcoming 13,500 new students to SSGS, so if that's you, you're in great company!

In bringing together Disciplines from the social sciences and humanities, the School offers a deliberately unconventional combination of disciplinary traditions. The eight Disciplines in the School – Economics, Development, Geography, Philosophy, Politics, Religious Studies, Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology (SPC) – are engaged in an extensive range of teaching and research, some of which is covered in this issue.

To have such a collection of Disciplines, each with their own intellectual traditions in one place, enables us to offer invigorating and engaging qualifications. Our undergraduate offerings include International Studies, Criminology, Politics, Philosophy and Economics through to joint degrees such as Philosophy, Religion and Ethics. At present we have postgraduate degrees in Philosophy, Global Development, and Crime and Justice. Our range of Disciplines and the curiosity they cultivate feeds our plans for new and exciting qualifications. The new Sociology and Geography undergraduate degrees are currently in production and you can read about these on [page 10](#). Meanwhile, work is underway on our postgraduate degrees in International Relations and Economics, so watch this space. Lastly, new Level 1 modules are in the pipeline, and we're excited to see our interdisciplinary approach to some of the key 'global challenges' we face inform the content of those modules. The modules will cover

some of the most pressing global issues of today, including growing urbanisation, climate change, migration...and now 'global pandemics' – we're living in times of remarkable change.

Of course, the production and presentation of these modules needs staffing and there's a huge amount of work that goes on behind the scenes. In this first issue, we're delighted to welcome new staff who have recently joined, and who will strengthen our academic community, one that includes over four hundred Associates Lecturers. There are several Q&As dotted throughout the magazine, so you can become familiar with our academics and their areas of research. In our 'A day in the life of...' features we offer an opportunity to get to know key support staff in SSGS, some new and some 'old hands', who help ensure that the School runs smoothly.

As you might expect, research plays an important part in the life of SSGS. [Dr Agnes Czajka](#), the School's Director of Research, and [Prof Umut Erel](#), Associate Director of Research, introduce some of the key areas of research taking place at present. We're also linked with two prestigious Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTP) – the 'Grand Union' (with Oxford and Brunel Universities) funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Open-Oxford-Cambridge Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Involvement in both DTP's reflect the School's national and international research strengths.

While the links between our research and teaching may not always be explicit, colleagues' active and continual involvement in research is key to the quality of our teaching materials. Through participation in ongoing research conversations and taking part in national and international workshops and conferences, colleagues are able to anticipate where debates are heading in their respective Disciplines. All this research activity helps to ensure that our teaching materials are at the 'cutting edge' of their respective disciplines. We're confident that when it comes to curriculum development, we lead rather than follow.

One of the celebrated and distinctive features of The Open University is our links with the BBC. In the last section of the magazine, we hear from our Media Fellows who provide a glimpse of some BBC/OU collaborations in the making. Many of these programmes involve input from SSGS colleagues who act as academic consultants throughout the production process. In the last section we also highlight some of the recent short courses developed for the FutureLearn platform by several Disciplines in the School.

We very much hope that you enjoy reading this first issue of the *SSGS Magazine* and that it gives you an insight into the breadth of fantastic work taking place across the School. SSGS is very much your School, as much as it is ours, so we hope it serves to welcome you to the SSGS academic community.



Shonil Bhagwat

Professor of Environment and Development and Head of SSGS

Shonil's research interests sit at the cross-section between natural and social sciences and centre on the links between environment and development.

See full profile for [Shonil](#)



Michael Pryke

Professor of Economic Geography and the founding Head of SSGS

Michael's present research lies at the intersection of geographies of money and finance and cultural economy.

See full profile for [Michael](#)

New staff in the School of SSGS

It is a real pleasure to welcome those colleagues who have joined the School over the past couple of years, some as recently as October this year.

Coming to us from Universities across the UK and as far afield as Brazil, our newest colleagues bring the total number of academics in the School to over 130. Each of the eight Disciplines in the School has been strengthened by this investment. Our research and teaching will be extended by their interests that range from global media, maritime heritage, philosophy of the mind, politics of health and care, climate activism, geopolitics of water, contemporary Gnosticism and Chinese investment in African countries, to international relations of South Asia, modern slavery, intra-human and intra-species

relations... the list is long and truly fascinating. Our new colleagues will deepen and broaden the School's current and future curriculum as they join module teams, as well as enrich the research culture across SSGS. You can find out more about our new staff by clicking on the links against their names below. In this issue of the *SSGS Magazine*, we are pleased to feature articles on three of the new recruits, Dr. Precious Chatterje-Doody, Dr Mark Pinder and Dr. Edward Wigley, who share their teaching and research interests.

Our eight Disciplines



Economics

[Visit this Discipline](#)

Dr. Stephen Boddy ▶
Staff Tutor

Dr. Lorraine Mitchell ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Cristina Laskaridis ▶
Lecturer

Professor Susan Newman ▶
Professor and Head of Discipline



Development

[Visit this Discipline](#)

Dr. Astrid Jamar ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Mark Lamont ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Frangton Chiyemura ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Emil Dauncey ▶
Lecturer



Philosophy

[Visit this Discipline](#)

Dr. Dan Cavedon-Taylor ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Mark Pinder ▶
Lecturer



Politics and International Studies

[Visit this Discipline](#)

Dr. Filippo Boni ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Precious Chatterje-Doody ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Dan Taylor ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Thomas Martin ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Brigitte Weiffen ▶
Senior Lecturer

Dr. Claire Malcolm ▶
Staff Tutor



Social Policy and Criminology

[Visit this Discipline](#)

Dr. Carly Speed ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Matthew Cole ▶
Lecturer

Tony Murphy ▶
Staff Tutor

Dr. Avi Boukli ▶
Senior Lecturer

Dr. Lystra Hagley-Dickinson ▶
Staff Tutor

Dr. Karen Sharpe ▶
Staff Tutor

Dr. David Turner ▶
Staff Tutor



Geography

[Visit this Discipline](#)

Dr. Benjamin Newman ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Edward Wigley ▶
Staff Tutor

Dr. Colin Lorne ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Carry Van Lieshout ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Sonja Rewhorn ▶
Staff Tutor

Dr. Anna Gawlewicz ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Marion Ernwein ▶
Lecturer



Sociology

[Visit this Discipline](#)

Dr. Kathryn Medien ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Ece Kocabicak ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Kevin McSorley ▶
Senior Lecturer



Religious Studies

[Visit this Discipline](#)

Dr. David Robertson ▶
Lecturer

Dr. Suzanne Newcombe ▶
Senior Lecturer

Dr. Maria Nita ▶
Lecturer

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Philosophy and me



Dr Mark Pinder

Lecturer in Philosophy

Mark's most recent teaching contribution is to the Level 1 module A113 *Revolutions*. He's a Santander mobility fellow at St Andrews University and a Visiting Researcher at Ruhr Universität Bochum. Mark is the principal investigator on the British Society of Aesthetics 'A Connections' grant entitled 'Conceptual engineering and aesthetics'.

See full profile for [Mark](#)

Q What sparked your interest in philosophy?

It's difficult to pick out one thing that sparked my interest, as I've always enjoyed thinking about the 'big' questions. I remember chatting over packed lunches in the school canteen about whether time was real, whether God existed, and whether there was such thing as morality. Looking back, I'm glad that some of my answers to those questions have changed. It's important to have an open mind in Philosophy; you can learn a lot from the realisation that you were wrong.

Q One of the areas you're interested in researching is 'conceptual engineering'. That sounds intriguing. Can you tell us something more about that area of philosophy and the questions you're exploring?

Conceptual engineering is the process of evaluating, designing and improving the meanings of words. It happens regularly on a small scale – clarifying terms at the beginning of essays or legal contracts, for example. But it also happens on a much larger scale.

In 2006, astronomers redefined 'planet' so that it excluded Pluto. 'Fake news' was recently introduced as a label for counterfeit news articles, then co-opted by some as a derogatory label for recognised media outlets. There's the reclamation of 'gay' and 'queer' by the LGBTQ+ community, and the application of 'marriage' to same-sex couples. When you start looking, examples are everywhere.

Conceptual engineering is a hot topic in Philosophy, there's quite a buzz about it. This is because, despite playing an important role in Philosophy and other disciplines, as well as in driving social change, there has been little study of the processes until recently. I want to know how conceptual engineering works.

My approach shifts attention away from words and concepts and onto people. In my view, conceptual engineering does not drive change in abstract specifications of 'word meaning' or 'concepts'; rather, it drives positive change in how people communicate, think and act. Which, ultimately, is what matters.

Q How do you contribute to teaching within the School of Social Sciences and Global Studies (SSGS)?

Teaching is a big part of academic life and I always enjoy it. I lectured for three years before joining the OU in 2018 and during lockdown I've missed getting to know students. However, module production is a rewarding task – there's so much to learn – and I've enjoyed my first opportunity to get involved.

I'm currently writing a unit for a new interdisciplinary Level 1 module, A113 *Revolutions*. The unit asks whether there are different moral rules during revolutions. For example, is lethal violence justified if it leads to overthrowing an oppressive regime? What if there is no immediate threat of violence to the oppressed?

And last year I co-developed a free, four-week online course, [Global Ethics: An Introduction](#). I wrote material on the ethics of migration, critically examining the popular assumption that it's morally permissible for countries to control their borders. This assumption, it turns out, isn't easy to justify.

In addition, I've also been on the module team for A222 *Exploring Philosophy*, A333 *Key Questions in Philosophy* and A853/4 *MA Philosophy*, and I oversee Q43 *Philosophy and Psychological Studies* and our popular F30 MA in Philosophy.

Social media, perception and politics



Dr Precious Chatterje-Doody

Lecturer in Politics and International Studies

Precious's work centres on questions of communication, perception and security, with a particular focus on Russia in international relations. Her monographs, 'The Russian identity riddle: Unwrapping Russia's security policy,' and 'Russia Today and Conspiracy Theory' (with Dr Ilya Yablokov, Leeds University) are due to be published by Routledge in 2021.

See full profile for [Precious](#)

Q You've recently joined POLIS as a Lecturer in Politics and International Studies. For those who don't know, what is International Studies?

Politics and International Studies can encompass anything relating to the social world we live in. This includes formal International Relations, the study of how states and international organisations interact with one another, and forging the structures and decisions that shape our world from above. At the other end of the spectrum are the issues that shape our everyday experiences: poverty and privilege, access to healthcare and education, and social media and how it influences what we view as being important. Studying Politics and International Studies is like putting a magnifying glass up to today's world, examining where we are and how we got here.

Q Your research focuses communication, perception and security, and you have a particular interest in Russia. Can you tell us about this?

In the past 20 years, the term 'New Cold War' in relation to Russia has been mentioned numerous times. This shows how particular patterns of thinking come to condition how we perceive threat, in ways that blind us to realities and can really undermine our strategic responses. That's a key theme in my work: how states go about conceptualising and addressing what they see as 'threats'. Much of my recent work concerns Russia's state-aligned international broadcaster, Russia Today (RT). The network has been accused of spreading 'fake news' and conspiracy theories, and UK and US politicians have expressed concern about its potentially negative social effects.

Q What do you think that we need to know about Russia's activities in the global news media environment?

In today's interactive global media environment, politicised news content is increasingly packaged as entertainment – this is a notable feature of Russian state-aligned broadcasting. Russia's international broadcaster, RT, has a much smaller impact upon audiences than Western politicians tend to assume: it spectacularly misfired with global audiences in its coverage of the 2018 poisonings in Salisbury, and in the UK, OFCOM regulates it pretty effectively.

Mainstream media agendas are actually shifting in response to partisan media outlets' coverage, and disproportionately platforming figures and perspectives on the extreme political right. This is a pathology of how the media environment as a whole functions, rather than an outcome of Russian media manipulation, but they are well-branded to capitalise on long-term trends of declining trust in established political and media institutions. As with any partisan media, kneejerk government reactions can be repackaged as 'evidence' that they are speaking uncomfortable truths to power.

Q Do you have any tips for how we can avoid making kneejerk reactions like this?

You can't effectively address biased media content without engaging in deeper questions about people's habits and perceptions: where we get our information from, which sources we trust, and how we actually react to emotive content online. It's crucial to understand the relationship between (social) media, perception and politics, and I'm very excited about contributing to some projects we have in the pipeline in POLIS, which will allow us to engage with these kind of themes at both short course and Masters level. Watch this space!

Ancient customs to smart cities



Dr Edward Wigley

Staff Tutor in Geography

Ed is a social and cultural geographer who has recently been involved in 'Smart Cities' – a ESRC funded research project. A graduate of The Open University, he has previously held posts at the Universities of Reading, Winchester and West of England, Bristol.

See full profile for [Edward](#)

Q Before joining the School as a Staff Tutor you were involved in a major research project 'Smart Cities' funded by the ESRC and based in the OU Geography Discipline. Tell us something about that project...

'Smart cities' has become a very popular term that cities, governments and large companies like IBM and Microsoft use to attract investment and innovation in urban areas, often using data and sensors to make things like traffic, emergency responses and businesses run more smoothly. The ESRC-funded project wanted to explore how this worked in the case study of Milton Keynes. My particular focus looked at how the smart city was depicted in visual terms, for example who is represented in images of [autonomous vehicles](#) and how images became central to communication of smart city projects.

Q Looking through the abstracts of a few of your publications my eye was caught by the term 'wassailing'. What's that all about?

The tradition of wassailing takes on various forms. The form I'm particularly interested in is the ceremony of waking the (usually) apple trees up out of their winter slumber by decorating them, singing to them, making a lot of noise to scare off malicious spirits and offering the fruit of last year, often in the form of cider – much of which is consumed by the wassailers themselves! It was practiced for centuries, usually in rural areas and particularly in the West Country where the economy centred around agriculture. Socially it's seen as a moment in the year for the community to renew their relationships – particularly between the employers and labourers of the village. As Britain urbanised, the

ceremony was performed less and less. However over the last 10–20 years, there has been a resurgence of wassailing – and often in urban areas – where there is little fruit-production. [My research](#) focused on these urban events in city farms, orchards and community centres to consider how the tradition was somewhat re-made and the significance of wassailing to the organisers.

Q You're now a Staff Tutor in Geography. What does that role involve and what are the challenges?

It's a wide-ranging role that involves contributing to module production such as writing book chapters, working on ongoing modules and managing the delivery of tuition on our Level 1 social science modules DD102 and DD103. This involves co-ordinating tutors and tutorial sessions and making academic judgements on issues such as TMA extensions, plagiarism cases and so on. Needless to say, it can be quite busy at times!

Q What teaching are you involved in now?

I'm busy writing a chapter for the forthcoming *Human Geography* module D225 on mobilities. It's quite a lengthy process as it involves drafting and then receiving extensive (but very supportive) feedback from colleagues – like a PT3 but longer! I'm also teaching on the Level 1 module DD102 which is very rewarding indeed.



Study with us

An overview of our curriculum,
by the Director of Teaching

Written by Matt Staples

As Director of Studies for SSGS, it's my job to ensure we are creating new opportunities for our students, responding to the ever-shifting global landscape with new modules and qualifications to reflect social change, and ensuring our School's curriculum offering is accessible to all.

SSGS is home to a diverse range of teaching that spans core subjects in the Social Sciences and Arts. We champion the fact that our approach to teaching is interdisciplinary, particularly at Level 1, and this exceptional standard of teaching is informed by established and internationally acclaimed research. Research is at the core of our work, because without research it is impossible to examine and solve some of the world's greatest challenges.

So, what does the School of Social Sciences & Global Studies offer at present? In a nutshell, our School covers [Politics & International Studies](#), [Economics](#), [Sociology](#), [Development](#), [Geography](#), [Philosophy](#), [Social Policy & Criminology](#), and [Religious Studies](#). Our undergraduate qualifications include [Environmental Studies](#), [International Studies](#) and [Criminology](#), as well as joint degrees such as [Politics, Philosophy and Economics](#), [Religion, Philosophy and Ethics](#), [Economics and Mathematical Sciences](#) and [Geography and Environmental Science](#).

We have several qualifications in development at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, including our MA in International Politics and MA/MSc in Economics.

Closer to completion and currently in production are the single honours Sociology and single honours Geography courses, both of which we anticipate being popular. Two Disciplines in the School, Religious Studies and Philosophy, contribute the School of Arts and Humanities' Level 1 modules, A111 [Discovering Arts and Humanities](#) and A113 [Revolutions](#).

We are currently working on remakes of two key Level 1 modules, DD103 [Investigating the Social World](#) and DD102 [Introducing the Social Sciences](#). The remake of both modules, but particularly of DD103, will provide a great opportunity to involve all Disciplines in the School as we provide an introduction not only to our key qualifications but offer an interdisciplinary driven approach to key 'global challenges'. The expectation is that these new modules will follow the real success of DD105 [Introduction to Criminology](#), highlighted in the next section.

In September 2020, almost 20,000 students enrolled with us. Broken down, this figure encompasses 13,571 (Level 1), 3055 (Level 2), 2290 (Level 3) and 690 postgraduate students. Our wide range of courses and qualifications reflect the breadth of Disciplines in the School. We are always looking ahead at what we could do differently, speaking with our students and keeping the dialogue going. We remain open to our students always, and this is essential, especially now as society navigates an uncertain future as a result of the pandemic.

The Student Experience on a Module data (SEaM) for the School has seen a rise of 0.5% from 2017/18 to 2018/19 (82.5% to 83%), which is higher than the FASS average and University average (81.8% and 82% respectively). We are monitoring these numbers closely, as they remain a strong indicator of overall student satisfaction. We also know that it's important students can align their studies with their career aspirations. We are continuing to review our curriculum offering to ensure that our students graduate with the best possible opportunities to excel in their chosen field. Much of our research looks at current movements and trends in society, our behaviour as individuals and consumers, our role as global citizens, and our relationship with the past and how this influences the present. Our aim remains to bring the insights from this research into our teaching and curriculum development as we develop cutting-edge modules and degrees.



Matt Staples

Director of Teaching for the School of SSGS.

He has a degree in Politics and History and an MSc in Politics and Governance.

[Full Profile.](#)



OU Class of 2020

Join our Vice Chancellor Tim Blackman, Sir Lenny Henry, Dame Mary Beard, Joan Armatrading, Prue Leith and Benjamin Zephaniah in congratulating the OU Class of 2020!

[WATCH VIDEO](#)



PHOTO: Chequebook Vandalism Banksy.

Introduction to Criminology: what to expect



Dr Deborah Drake

Head of Discipline in Social Policy and Criminology.

Her research focuses on prisons and secure settings for children.

See [full profile](#)

Q DD105 allows students to explore thought-provoking questions, from whether graffiti is art or a crime, to the role of the media shaping public response to crime. How did you arrive at these questions and determine what you wanted this particular module to deliver?

It was a team effort. Together, with the Chair and Deputy Chair, plus input from the module team, we worked out the questions we wanted to explore in the early stages of producing the module. Both the Chair and Deputy Chair have lots of experience when it comes to teaching Criminology (with more than 40 years combined experience of teaching it at undergraduate and postgraduate levels), and as a result, the 'narrative of the module' came together relatively quickly.

DD105's overall approach, in simplest terms, asks students to explore the ways they themselves (and people in general) tend to form ideas about crime and justice, and then asks them to reimagine how these problems can be thought about and tackled. As a team, we were excited by the prospect of encouraging students to question their own assumptions and helping them learn to do this in systematic ways, in systematic ways, by using evidence and social science principles. We wanted students to explore a variety of topics in imaginative ways – so not just learning about how crime and justice 'is' but encouraging them to think about how it might be different by thinking through different contradictions and examples.

Q What type of topics are explored across the module?

The module covers a wide range of topics, including graffiti, murder and other avoidable deaths, youth crime, policing, prisons, gendered violence and many others. The selection of topics explored across the module were a team-wide effort, chosen to work alongside the 'criminological inquiry', which encourages students to explore questions, claims and evidence, and develop their understanding of a criminological idea or topic. This circuit of inquiry was partially built on the work of DD102 *Introducing the Social Sciences*.

On DD105, we also wanted to lead students towards developing a 'criminological imagination', supporting and encouraging them to learn to reimagine problems of crime and justice. We introduced the aim of 'understanding' in DD105 as part of 'criminological inquiry', because once something is really understood it is easier to reimagine how it might be different. At the same time, we didn't want to shy away from some of the harder-to-grasp elements associated with criminology. The module themes are 'state, power, crime' – and each of these terms can be challenging to teach and learn about at any level of study. We chose them because of the very clear linkages between them and because, if grasped together, they form a strong foundation for what students will go on to study in our criminology curriculum. A crime is defined by the state, and a state reflects given configurations of power – the three inevitably work together, and understanding this at the very early stage of one's criminological career is important.

Q What was your collective vision for DD105 and how will students benefit from taking the module?

We always envisaged DD105 to be the start of the criminological journey rather than being a final destination in its own right. This meant that it had to cover the ground well but not try and do too much (and thus not really do anything well or in sufficient detail). We wanted to create a module that provided students with a solid foundation in social science principles and criminological content but, most of all, we wanted to stimulate their curiosity, enthusiasm, passion and their drive so that, hopefully, they will continue on to successful higher-level study.

Q DD105 is the introduction to the new Criminology qualification. Tell us something about that qualification, what do students get to study and how does the narrative develop from Level 1 to 3?

R21 Single Honours Criminology at the OU aims to deliver a criminology programme that is 'recognisable' amongst commensurate criminology programmes throughout the country, but which is in keeping with what might be termed the 'OU brand' of criminology – taking a critical thinking approach to the study of problems of crime and justice and incorporating a social harm approach. Our qualification is fully compliant with the QAA Criminology Subject Benchmarks. All six of the modules in R21 are 60-point modules and, once all of the modules within the qualification are produced, can be studied at part-time or full-time intensity. At Level 1, students complete one generic social sciences module – DD102 *Introducing the Social Sciences* and one criminology-specific module – DD105 *Introduction to Criminology*.

DD105 *Introduction to Criminology* aims to provide students with necessary Level 1 academic skills, including essay writing, referencing, digital literacy, reflective learning and so on. From a criminological perspective, DD105 aims to pique the curiosity of students. It encourages them to ask more questions, to puzzle over problems and to fundamentally question any preconceived ideas they may have about what crime is, what makes a criminal, what makes a victim and whether commonly used policing and criminal justice processes (as they are often conceived of in the West) are really the best way to respond to crime and deliver justice.

At Level 2, students encounter two criminology modules that, in keeping with subject benchmarking requirements, explore both theoretical and methodological ideas and how to apply them in studies of crime and justice. DD212: *Understanding Criminology* aims to introduce the many ways criminologists seek to explain crime, victims of crime and the role of criminal justice. Through the use of engaging topics, each study week begins with examples of crimes or criminal justice problems. It introduces different criminological concepts and theories that actively engage students to explore these through VLE activities. It equips students with the skills needed to understand theories and concepts about crime, and develop an understanding of everyday social issues that may influence crime and victims of crime.

DD215 *Social Research: Crime, Justice and Society* encourages students to think critically about the nature, scope and value of social research. Concrete examples are used throughout the module to illustrate the different ways in which people conduct social research and how people use social research to make a difference in the world around them. The module not only teaches students about the social research process, but also provides an insight into various societal inequalities by utilising the themes of gender, race and social class.

Two modules at Level 3 introduce students to cutting edge criminological concerns, debates and frontiers. DD311 *Crime, Harm and the State* explores the central question of why some events which cause harm, of various kinds, are formally labelled and treated as crimes when others are not. It focuses on constructions of 'harm' or 'social harm', not least as these are intimately linked to the state, as the key source of definitions of crime through law, and a key concept in understanding the process of criminalisation and definitions of crime, harm and justice. It also critically considers the role and function of criminological theory and its proximity to state power, allowing students to further develop their own criminological imaginations and identities.

DD315 *Current Issues in Criminology*, a Level 3 module that is currently in production, aims to cover topics that are carefully chosen to support students' eventual independent work by first introducing study material that examines the 'criminological and sociological conundrums' associated with recurring social problems. Throughout the module, students will be provided with selections of questions and problems and asked to creatively develop new solutions and approaches that might reimagine society, criminology and criminal justice within an increasingly globalised world. Independent study components will be integral to the design of the module.

Q What would you say makes 'OU Criminology' distinctive?

We began teaching Criminology at the OU in 1981 with our very first criminology 'course' (as our modules were then called) D335 *Issues in Crime and Society*. Produced alongside this module were a number of high-quality books and other learning materials that proved to be key resources for, and began to establish the OU name as a distinctive 'brand' amongst teachers and students of criminology around the country. Our books and learning materials produced since then have further solidified our reputation in the field of criminology and this has continually attracted students and staff to the OU.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of our teaching and research is that our form of criminology is founded on critical thinking and is heavily inflected with broader social science concerns; we consistently consistently draw upon (and in turn problematise) aspects of Disciplines such as law, politics, psychology, social policy, sociology, history and economics when we teach. Additionally, we research issues of crime, criminal justice and criminalisation. Latterly, criminology at the

OU has been at the forefront of the development of an increasingly widely accepted 'social harm perspective' – which further allows us to question 'crime' and criminalisation, whilst broadening the range of topics that we research, explore and teach, and to which we may apply a critical, interdisciplinary lens.

Q Can you share some of the awards you've received in recent years?

Four of the films conceived and produced for DD105 *Introduction to Criminology* have received formal recognition and acclaim on several different occasions. 'Policing Anti-Fracking Direct Action' was shortlisted by the MEDEA awards; 'Advertising, Brandalism and Subvertising' was shortlisted for the Best Teaching Film category at the 2019 British Film and Video Council's Learning on Screen Awards; 'Why We should Abolish Imprisonment for Children and Young People' was adopted by leading penal reform campaigners in April 2019 to make calls for ending child prisons; and lastly, 'Grenfell Tower and Social Murder' has been nominated for awards on nine occasions and was awarded the 'life changing award' by the British Documentary Film Festival in 2018. It also received two gold awards at the EVCOM film awards in 2019 and the World Gold Medal Award from the New York Film and TV Awards in May 2020. The film helped to popularise the term 'social murder' in the public domain – it frequently appears in newspaper articles where Grenfell is discussed and is used in conjunction with similar disasters.

One of our previous criminology, original film productions: 'Opium: Cultures, Wars, Markets' produced for DD301 *Crime and Justice* won the 2010 British Universities film and Video Council Award for Teaching on Screen and went on to be re-versioned, sold and distributed commercially as 'Opium: A Blessing and a Curse'.



PHOTO: Loyalist Protest, Belfast, Northern Ireland: Riot police march in unison, following the trail of loyalists flooding back into East Belfast in 2013.

What it's like to be... an Associate Lecturer



Mark Ingall

Associate Lecturer

Mark has worked at The Open University for over 20 years. He is interested in aspects of the developing field of Environmental Psychology, primarily the ways in which high quality public open space can contribute to positive mental health. Mark has an MA in Education and a postgraduate conversion course in Psychology with the OU.

Q How long have you been an AL with the OU and what made you apply for the role?

For quite a long time – well, over 20 years – with a gradual increase in my work with the OU since then. In simple terms, I first applied because I needed a job! I had been teaching A Level at a College in Singapore and then returned to the UK, but to no fixed work. Luckily for me a vacancy for the Geography module D215 *The Shape of the World* was advertised, actually in the local newspaper, which I happened to see. I had already made use of some of the videos for the module which had been broadcast by the BBC as part of their wider education provision and had previously studied for my MA with the OU, which I think helped to give me confidence about how the systems worked.

My interview was with Martin Higginson, in an otherwise deserted OU Bristol office over the Christmas holidays. I learnt that I got the job on our return from visiting my wife's family in the USA over Christmas. Quite a welcome back! Whilst I understand the move in the new contract towards rather fuller appointments than just those associated with single modules, I do think it important that a variety of entry routes into working with the OU should be preserved and that in addition there is value in ALs having roles, of a variety of types, beyond their OU work.

For a number of years, I have combined my OU work with A Level teaching and roles as a senior examiner for several A Level exam boards. I think there's benefit in the elements of cross fertilisation that this allows, I know that other colleagues also have a variety of such wider links and perspectives.

Q For those students new to studying with the OU, how would you describe the role of an AL?

The role of an AL varies, depending on the particular circumstances and approach of the individual student. A central part of the role involves marking and giving feedback on TMAs. Providing a reasonably accurate mark is obviously important, but giving feedback which reflects and highlights what the student has achieved and with guidance about how to develop their work in the future is invaluable.

The wider and most crucial part of the role is to act as a coach for the students, supporting them and answering questions as they develop both an understanding of the specific module and also aspects of their wider academic confidence. There are also the more formal tutorial elements – either face-to-face or online – which give a chance to highlight aspects of the module and the context of a TMA question and to develop wider thinking skills.

Q How does your role contribute to the distinctive way the OU provides online higher education?

I've studied both at a conventional university and with the OU, both for my MA and then while an AL for what was then the Psychology 'conversion course for graduates'. On a personal basis I'm aware of the distinctive aspects of the OU. A key aspect relates to the fact that the modules (and indeed the entire OU approach) were designed for distance, and now online learning, from the start. I tend to think of the module books and associated online materials as the equivalent of lectures at a conventional university, but in a format which can be studied more effectively than just 'sitting in a lecture'.

Another important aspect is the detail with which TMAs are marked. This is regularly highlighted in external assessor comments and I think it really helps to develop the individual skills of students. The fact that students have a named point of contact in their tutor for each module is important and helps to provide an individualised source of support. Most modules link to a wider number of students through tutor group or national online forums and tutorials, which are hugely beneficial to students learning remotely.

Q Your most recent involvement has been tutoring on DD213 *Environment and Society*. What is that module about and why do you like teaching on it?

The central focus of DD213 is a consideration of the relationship between the environment and society and thinking about what this relationship could and should be. It's a social science module, so in other words, it has a clear theoretical basis and a chance to use ideas – such as those associated with the concept of entanglement and the Geographical Imagination – to better understand this relationship. My original degree was in Geography, so many of these elements are central to my interests. I have an interest in 'other' places, circumstances and cultures – part of the Geographical Imagination – and the module has a wide variety of such examples, held together by the concepts and skills developed through the virtual fieldwork elements of the module.

Overall, this module reflects many of my own interests. I also like the module as I have moderated the national student forum, so this gives me an even clearer indication about the ways in which students develop their knowledge and confidence during the module.

Q When you're not tutoring for the OU what do you do to 'switch off'?

Well, of course the official answer is to spend time with my family, and yes, I do enjoy this! Beyond that, most of my own 'spare time' interests reflect my interests in our relationship with the environment. I'm fascinated by Environmental Psychology, which reflects more the individual relationships that we have with the environment.

I also love cooking – our house backs on to some woods, and although trivial, a great joy in the spring is being able to have an element of foraging for some ingredients – as well as sailing and cycling. I'm starting to minimise my travel – I'm aware of the need to offset the carbon impacts of flights and other travel – but when I do travel, the bike comes with me as checked baggage on the plane. As soon as I'm off the plane, I put the wheels on at the other end and I'm off and away. I've got as far as Rome so far, and am keen to venture further!



PHOTO: A palm oil plantation in Sulawesi, Indonesia: photo from 'Imagining Indonesian plantation fires geographically' a chapter in DD213 'Environment and Society'.

Our research

Understanding the world around us through timely and imaginative research

As a School our strength lies in bringing together a range of different disciplinary orientations, each with their own methods and topics. We all share a commitment to working across disciplines and this can lead to innovative, exciting ways of approaching research topics.

The School of SSGS has a thriving research culture. To give you a glimpse of this, our recent and current projects include: [‘Religious Toleration and Peace’](#) by John Wolffe; Maureen McIntosh’s economics project on [‘How to link industrial and social innovation for inclusive development: lessons from tackling cancer care in Africa’](#); ‘Working the Playground: Urban Gardens and Sustainable Future?’ by [Dr Jan van Duppen](#), and many, many more.

SSGS staff are also involved with events as wide ranging as the festival on [‘Eco-creativity: Music, Religion, Activism’](#) organised by Maria Nita and Mark Porter, with support from colleagues in Religious Studies and the Politics and International Studies Event ‘1984, new authoritarianism and the media’.

The School is also centrally involved in shaping the University-wide Strategic Research Areas (SRAs). The School co-leads the two SRAs on [International Development and Inclusive Innovation](#), and on [Citizenship and Governance](#). The School also houses the [Innogen Research Centre](#), [OpenSpace Research Centre](#), the [Harm and Evidence Research Collaborative](#), as well as [research in Philosophy](#).

As researchers, we are committed to contributing to the OU’s mission of promoting social justice by undertaking research that matters and improves people’s lives. Our top priority is that students benefit from the research expertise in the School, and that our teaching is informed by cutting-edge research. Our research also forms the basis for impact in wider society, for example through the OpenLearn free learning programmes, such as the recent [Refugee Week](#) programme, and our numerous BBC collaborations. (see pages 41–45).

Recently the School also launched a series of [blog posts](#) to reflect on the contribution social sciences can make to understanding the current COVID-19 crisis. The series serves as an example of the type of SSGS research that engages with issues that are relevant to people’s everyday lives through dialogue across disciplines and research topics.



PHOTO: Panama City, Panama, Skyline, inequality.

PHOTO: Las Vegas, USA, festival, crowd, people, lights, nightlife.



Agnes Czajka

Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Studies and Director of Research.

Agnes’s interests include continental political philosophy, democracy and citizenship.

See [full profile](#)



Umut Erel

Professor of Sociology and Associate Director of Research.

Umut’s interests cover migration, ethnicity, racism, gender and citizenship.

See [full profile](#)



Which do we damage – buildings or people?

Exploring the philosophical issues
surrounding cultural heritage

Written by Prof Derek Matravers



PHOTO: Bombing Palmyra 2015, pic released by "ISIL", "ISIS",
"Islamic State", "Daish" – officially known as Islamic State

Following WWII efforts were made to make the world a better and safer place. Part of this was an attempt to reverse the practice of centuries and to try to stop armies destroying – intentionally or otherwise – cultural heritage. This took a few years; it was not until 1954 that UNESCO published a convention for the ‘protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict’. Recent events in the Middle East focussed the minds and the UK finally ratified the convention in December 2017 (the last major military power to do so). It is now part of the laws of armed conflict that, unless there is a ‘feasible alternative’, the damage or destruction of heritage is a war crime.



PHOTO: Darul Amel Palace, Kabul, Afghanistan

Cultural heritage: the philosophical argument

‘Just War Theory’ is the branch of philosophy that deals with what soldiers are permitted or not permitted to do. The basic idea is that if people must fight wars, it is better that they do so justly rather than unjustly. This is an ancient and distinguished field of enquiry, with contributions from the likes of Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and Grotius. One branch of it is concerned with ‘proportionality’: does any particular action make a great enough contribution to victory to be worth the death and destruction that is likely to result?

The military are used to weighing contributions to victory against, for example, lives of soldiers and collateral damage to civilians and infrastructure. The 1954 Convention requires the military to include damage to heritage in their calculations; only if a certain cost in terms of lives and infrastructure is exceeded, will the alternative to destroying heritage cease to be feasible. However, no clue is given as to how many lives could be lost or how much damage to infrastructure sustained in order to preserve a building.

The reaction to this has been for people to bury their heads in the sand and deny that lives and heritage ever need to be compared. Irena Bokhova, when Director General of UNESCO, said ‘There is no need to choose between saving lives and preserving cultural heritage: the two are inseparable’. The UK Committee of the Blue Shield (the NGO who look after heritage in warzones) hold that ‘The Convention does not place cultural property above people, as it exists within a wider framework of laws designed to protect civilians and their property in a conflict situation.’

I teamed up with Helen Frowe (a leading authority in just war theory and director of The Stockholm Centre for the Ethics of War and Peace) on an [AHRC-funded project](#) to argue that this is simply wrong; that the Convention implies proportionality calculations concerning cultural heritage.

The future of heritage protection: what next?

Helen and I have spent the past few years looking at the problem from the perspective of moral philosophy, while talking to the British Army, the United States Army and participating in various policy initiatives. Pointing out that the protection of heritage does need to be thought about in terms of an increased risk to life has not made us popular. For understandable reasons, it is not something people concerned with convincing politicians about the need for ‘cultural property protection’ like talking about. Working out the philosophy behind it all has also been tricky; moral theory usually accords supreme value to human welfare which does leave us stymied in circumstances where it seems that it might not be. At the moment we are writing a book together (a challenge in itself) and have joined the debate with a rather spirited article. I have really enjoyed working with Helen; amongst other things, we have had the opportunity to argue with the UNESCO hierarchy in Los Angeles, question NATO Generals in Brussels, exchange views with America’s future military leaders at West Point, and teach the British Army at General Eisenhower’s old HQ at Fareham. The fundamental problem of working out and account of how to weigh damage to buildings against damage to people is, at time of writing, still unsolved.



Derek Matravers Professor of Philosophy

Derek is interested in supervising graduate students in aesthetics as well as in the philosophical issues around heritage and conservation.

See [full profile](#)

What it's like to be... a Senior Manager



Carole Barnett

Senior Manager for the School

Carole is the Senior Manager for the School with nearly 30 years of experience working and studying at The Open University, achieving her BA Degree in Social Science. Carole specialises in providing extensive support to the Head of School and senior-level managers to develop and deliver the school business and strategy plans. When not working Carole enjoys weightlifting and spending time with her two teenage boys.

Q You've been working at the OU for quite some time, most recently as Senior Manager (Academic Support). Tell us something about that role.

My current role as Senior Manager involves supporting three Heads of Schools and School Management Teams with their School planning, resource cases and recruitment activities. I also lead a team of School Coordinators and their teams. It's a very busy role which I enjoy but often there is not enough time in the day to be as proactive as I would like to be! A positive of working across three Schools is that it enables me to have a holistic overview of all activities.

Q How do you see your role developing over the next year?

Over the next year, I will move from supporting three Schools to become the Senior Manager for SSGS. As a result of this, I will have more capacity to work closely with the Head of School and School Management Team to deliver a more proactive approach to School planning and resourcing activities. I will also monitor and review the School business plans to ensure they are developed in line with the Faculty priorities, and to fulfil the FASS Business Plan. I'll also be providing leadership to the administrative team to ensure consistent practice wherever appropriate and deliver a high level of service across the School; working collaboratively with the other Senior Managers to ensure consistency across the three FASS Schools.

Q How are you and your team managing with the new working arrangements brought about by the pandemic?

At first it was a challenge as most of the team had never worked from home before and required suitable IT and specialist equipment to do so. This was quickly resolved, and I think once we established

our new routines of fitting work around family life, we all adapted well. We've become more flexible in our working practices and have even moved some of our legacy paper-based systems completely online within a matter of weeks. We have regular virtual team meetings to keep in touch and try to make sure there is always a social aspect, the latest must-see Netflix programme seems to be a hot topic of discussion!

Q At the time of this interview the campus is still effectively closed. What do you miss about working at Walton Hall and what are you looking forward to when we return?

I miss being able to pop along the corridor to speak to colleagues or have a quick chat in the kitchen. I like being able to ask a 'quick question' without having to send emails or pick up the phone. You find out all sorts of interesting things in the corridors/kitchens. I also miss the view from my office. I'm very lucky that just outside I have the 'walled garden' which changes colour across the seasons and usually at this time of year it would be in full bloom. There is also a conveniently placed bench under my windowsill which is a great place to sit and have lunch or a cup of tea with colleagues.

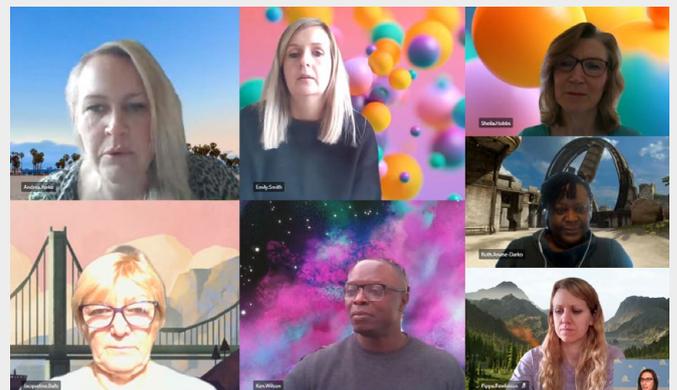


PHOTO: Screenshot of online School support team meeting, Oct 2020, working remotely.



PHOTO: A Beach At Tower Bridge. People on the beach by the River Thames next to Tower Bridge at the Tower of London, London, England.

City water matters

Cultures, practices and entanglements of urban water

Written by Prof Sophie Watson

I became interested in thinking about water in the city during my research on public space, which has been a strand of my work for more than a decade. As with all my urban ethnographic research, I was prompted to think about water through everyday rituals and activities, such as swimming in our local ponds on Hampstead Heath. I've also been actively campaigning against the excavation of a large area on the Heath to make a dam, supposedly needed to stop the ponds flooding the local area in the event of a high level of rainfall.

Having my interest piqued, I started to research water in the city in geographical and sociological texts. I found remarkably little about the cultures and material practices, of water, which for me was an interesting avenue to pursue. The research, and the book which followed, grew from there in a serendipitous and meandering way over several years, as one idea sparked another, and one case study informed the one that followed, underpinned as they all were by contemporary social, urban and geographical thinking.

In my book I argue for the importance of water as a cultural object, and as a source of complex meanings and practices in everyday life, embedded in the socio-economics of local water provision. What I am interested in therefore are human-organised systems, meanings and practices, in a way that does not neglect the materiality of water and water-ecological-relations, but which does not take these as its primary focus. Water, in some sense, resists definition, because of its fluidity. However many human infrastructures and representations strive to contain and channel water; water continually 'leaks' out of this containment. Because it is a highly fluid substance that is difficult to contain, physically, and because it is so essential to all life, particular cultural representations can never quite monopolise it. Water is thus difficult to encapsulate, connected in different ways and spaces to unwanted fluidities – of migrants in the case of crisis, of gender or sex, of bodies and identities.

The book itself is thus also fluid – breaking out of traditional categories and exploring, in a serendipitous way, different aspects of water as it settles or is

unsettled in cities. Water makes and unmakes cities across the ages, enabling and disabling daily life as it ebbs and flows into domestic and public spaces. Each chapter aims to capture one element of water's fluid existence in the world, as material object, cultural representation, as movement, as actor, as practice and as ritual. I explore the embodied and material practices associated with laundry, washing and toilets – historically and to the present day. Another strand is water's capacity to assemble publics.

During the nineteenth century some 40,000 men – and a few women – were drawn to the Thames to earn a living

During the nineteenth century some 40,000 men – and a few women – were drawn to the Thames to earn a living: lightermen to carry passengers, dockers to unload the ships, watermen to carry the goods ashore, mudlarkners sifting the banks to find treasures, sewer hunters delving in the drainage for old coins, bargemen to carry large loads along the river, whisky men to quench the worker's thirst. This is a story that repeats itself in urban rivers everywhere, illustrated in my research by the Thames. Not only does water assemble working people, through its capacity to provide embodied pleasures, as a site of immersion, relaxation and exercise, water everywhere engages people in aquatic pursuits, enabling healthy and happy bodies, soothing troubled souls and connecting individuals across their differences, as they share spaces in often unexpected and unplanned encounters.

My book, *Public waters: the passions, pleasures and politics of bathing in the city*, provides a window onto the multiple publics that use lidos, ponds and baths in cities. In a similar vein, public water features in the city bring together urban designers, water engineers, and multiple publics to gaze and more recently to actively engage, as I also explore. Publics, I argue, are heterogeneous. This is very clear when considering how water is imbued with religious meanings and symbols and core to a plethora of religious practices and rituals, which often go unnoticed until they are contested. Finally understanding the practices and habits associated with consumption which are differentiated by age, gender and ethnicity, is crucial in strategies to reduce household use of water; this forms the basis of another aspect of the research.

The specificity of water sites and water practices are core to my concerns. Several key themes underpin each of these. First is the interconnectedness of humans and non-humans, of nature and culture, and the complex entanglements of water in all its many forms. The second argument is that water constitutes multiple differences which are themselves not fixed, but which shift and change across time and place. Third, that water is implicated in relations of power, often invisible, but present nevertheless in the workings of daily life in all its rhythms and forms. Thus



PHOTO: Washing and folding and ready for pick up – water's essential for NYC's many 'Wash and Fold' laundry service outlets

also, differences are themselves connected to power, and water sites and resources mark boundaries and borders, and are political and contested. And finally, water has the capacity to assemble a multiplicity of publics and constitute new socialities and connections. As the history of Angkor Wat attests so vividly, cities, and their inhabitants, will die without water, and so will their cultures.

Finally, you might be wondering how this research connects to my teaching. I hope that in the new [Sociology degree](#) that we are currently producing, I can use some of these ideas to inform how to conduct research in our project module, or as a lens on how to think about social theory through material, cultural and social practices, in this case, through water in the city.

Further resources

Thinking Allowed An interview with Laurie Taylor

City Water Matters Sophie Watson in conversation with Les Back CUCR Goldsmiths



Sophie Watson

Head of Sociology

Sophie is former co-director of CRESO and her research spans multiculturalism, feminist urban theory, and water.

See [full profile](#)

Building a safe, non-violent society



Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers

Lecturer in Criminology

Keir is currently conducting an ESRC-funded research project exploring public health approaches to violence reduction. He is studying part-time with The Open University for a BSc in Economics & Maths. His current research concerns the happiness, health and wellbeing of children and young people, with a particular focus on reducing various forms of social harm and interpersonal violence.

See full profile for [Keir](#)

Q You joined the OU in 2017. What attracted you to the OU and SPC in particular?

The Department of Social Policy and Criminology encourages a particular approach to criminology that resonates with my values and intellectual outlook. I was craving a working environment that would allow me to think and write freely, ideally with a healthy dose of support (and challenge) from colleagues – that's precisely what the department offers. The Open University is an incredible institution, which I knew I would feel fortunate and privileged to work for. I'm proud to be part of a university that strives to extend the joy and benefits of Higher Education to all.

Q Your research covers the 'happiness, health and wellbeing of children and young people'. What got you interested in this area of work? Where do the questions that drive your research come from?

My work and research before joining The Open University involved spending a lot of time with young people who had been excluded from mainstream education, or who had become embroiled in the youth justice system. I was appalled and angry at the levels of pain and suffering these young people had been subjected to, often from very early ages and in many different forms. So, for example, significant numbers of young people are either subjected to or witness serious domestic violence and abuse on a daily basis, alarming numbers are being excluded from mainstream schools, and funding for youth services is being brutally cut. I wanted to understand why all of this is happening and think about how we can build a society where it doesn't – these are issues which shape the questions I pose and try to answer in my research.



PHOTO: Taken following an expert evidence session held on the Parliamentary Estate, April 2018.

Q Over recent years you've been the lead criminologist to the cross-party Youth Violence Commission. This was a prestigious invitation leading to a major report. What's it like to work at the interface between policy formulation and academic research? How do you think that experience will shape your future research and teaching?

I've studied both at a conventional university and working with the cross-party Youth Violence Commission has been a rapid learning curve. I'm fortunate to have had the opportunity to be involved, but it's been quite challenging. The cross-party nature of the work entails compromise, which to some extent has been constructive and necessary, but almost invariably uncomfortable.

As part of this work, I've attended meetings at Number 10 Downing Street, the Home Office, and the Headquarters of Google and Facebook, presented at London's City Hall and a [Labour Party Conference](#), and spoken to thousands of children and young people across the country. Trying to shape policy through

political channels such as [Select Committees](#) and short meetings with government ministers has been exceptionally challenging, owing primarily to the intense pressure to condense complex arguments about nuanced subjects into short statements and soundbites.

The Commission will wrap up a large part of its work this year. I think this will be a good time to reflect on what has been achieved and to ask some important questions about the nature, quality and utility of the Commission's work – to what extent are initiatives like these worthwhile channels for people's energy and resources, what are the alternatives, and so on. Regardless of the answers to those questions, the experience will fundamentally have served to support and improve my future research and teaching.

Q You were recently awarded a grant from the ESRC as part of its Research Grants Open Call. Can you tell us a bit about the project and what it will involve?

The project has two distinct albeit related aims. First, it will look to better understand and explain the significant reduction of violence in Scotland in recent years. Second, it will analyse the on-going development of a public health approach to violence reduction in London, based in part on the perceived success of a public health model adopted in Glasgow.

Overall, the aim of the project is to shape policy, guide best practice and inform public debate around the causes of serious violence and appropriate responses to it. The project has received funding for three years and is set to commence in December 2020. Between now and the start of the project, we intend to think carefully about how to adapt its scope, aims and methodology in the context of the impact of COVID-19.

Q There are clear crossovers between your research and your teaching. Why are those crossovers important to you?

From my perspective, if you're teaching a subject that you're also researching, this can significantly improve the quality of both your teaching and research. I hope that my passion for the research I'm conducting spills over into my teaching, whether that's through face-to-face learning events, online seminars, or written materials. But I think teaching has also helped to improve my research – translating arguments from my research into teaching materials, for example, has helped to distil and clarify key ideas. I think that maintaining a healthy balance between teaching and research is vitally important in safeguarding the quality of work emanating from HE institutions.

Q You're currently studying with the OU for a for a BSc in Economics & Maths. How's that going and what's it like to be an OU teacher and an OU student?!

I love studying with the OU. I began the qualification before I joined SPC as a lecturer, so I knew beforehand just how wonderful and special the institution is from a student's perspective. I enjoy studying economics and maths, and the statistics element of some of the modules in particular helps to improve the scope and quality of my research.

Being a student serves as a constant reminder of how little I understand about the world. When I came to appreciate that learning more entailed being aware of knowing less, that ignited a passion for and a pleasure in studying that I hope never goes away.



PHOTO: Expert evidence session, parliamentary estate, April 2018



PHOTO: Gender, IT and economic growth': researching how the labour driving many 'Rising Powers' is gendered.

Peace, conflict and positive change

On 'breaking the glass ceiling' and finding meaningful work

Written by Prof Parvati Raghuram

I am where no one, not even I, expected to be. I followed my husband to the UK and juggled studies with full-time work and two children. Fast forward many years later, here I am. The first non-white woman to ever receive one of the **highest prizes in Geography**, an executive board member of the European Migration group, **IMISCOE**, an editor of a journal and book series, and most importantly, a professor in one of the most illustrious geography departments in the world.

Looking back, it's remarkable to see how far I've come, but it's not been without its obstacles. My determination to continue has been based on some good mentors who gave me an intellectual and political commitment, excellent academic friendships which have sustained me, a pinch of curiosity and, of course, a realisation that even with a scholarship, I paid more for two years of PhD fees at the University of Newcastle than my father saved over his entire 40 year-career.

My first job was in Third World studies teaching development, a subject I knew nothing about. I had studied Economic Geography, including that of India; I did not have the external objectifying view that Third

World Studies required. Recognising how to be a subject and object of study simultaneously is the most important resource I cultivated then and it has stood me in good stead ever since.

When I moved to migration studies, the challenge was even greater. Migration is political and full of binaries. Through my work I try to encourage other academics to move beyond the binary divides in which migration is understood. It's about asking the right questions... How do we conceptualise migration in ways that open up better political possibilities? How do we unsettle received wisdom by inserting unfamiliar figures into migration debates? These are crucial political questions.

My latest project 'Decolonising Peace Education in Africa' aims to explore local meanings of peace. Through meaningful, co-produced and co-designed education. The aim is to embed the learning into teacher education in partner countries and then to bring this back to frame teaching amongst, for instance, UN peacekeepers. We will undertake four proof-of-concept projects in Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe. I have received over £2m from

the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for this GCRF [Network Plus](#) project. We will then commission at least 15 further projects. Finally, material from across these 19 projects will be used to produce a framework for peace education which will be offered as an Open Educational Resource in Africa in local languages. It is ambitious in scope and very demanding, especially in COVID times. My previous grant on international distance education students at UNISA, South Africa, was foundational in helping me to get this grant.

Reading transcripts of life stories with women who have escaped the Boko Haram and who now live in camps in Abuja is very sobering. It reminds me that this project goes well beyond finances and contracts, which sometimes seems to engulf our research time! I've been thinking about ways we can use these lived experiences to strengthen both positional and hermeneutic justice.

My research is shaped and infused by my politics. A colleague once said to me 'every paper of yours is

a manifesto.' Students are a captive audience for a different version of that manifesto. Teaching is the most political thing we can do. I learn from debating (some might even say argue!) what to teach and how to teach. I learn new things all the time, but I also learn that I have to explain why I need to know them. Because my research is on teaching, I am also able to use my research to enhance OU teaching. For instance, my work in Africa is teaching me the limits of learning design at the OU, which is focused on individual learning, not on how individuals are embedded in learning communities. I hope my project will tell me more about how we can best approach communal learning and peer-to-peer groups to prevent dropouts

Academic achievement can be one way out of poverty! People globally are still invested in study. Researching education enables and strengthens this, I hope, not only for me, but for others who follow in my footsteps.

Read more about Parvati's work and being an 'academic outsider' in [Times Higher Education](#).



PHOTO: Recent work explored the relationship between gender and skilled migration in the IT industry in the UK and India.



Parvati Raghuram

Professor of Geography and Migration.

Parvati Raghuram, is among the 51 leading UK social scientists to have been awarded Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. Parvati completed her MA in India and her PhD at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. She joined The Open University in 2005. Co-editor of the journals *South Asian Diaspora* (Sage) and *The Geographical Journal*, Parvati shares her thoughts on migration, being an academic outsider and her latest project on decolonising peace education in Africa.

See full profile for [Parvati](#)

On love, intimacy and enduring relationships



Jacqui Gabb

Professor of Sociology and Intimacy, Social Policy and Criminology

Jacqui's interdisciplinary research centres on the fields of family, gender and sexuality studies, and her past research projects include an [award-winning study](#) on long-term couple partnerships. In 2014 she was winner of the Open University Engaging Research Award (2014) for impact and public engagement research excellence and was the winner of the Evelyn Gillian Research Impact Award in 2016.

See full profile for [Jacqui](#)

Q You describe your research as developing interdisciplinary approaches for theorising and exploring intimacy and personal relationships. How did you come up with the questions to make that research 'doable'?

In the first instance, I took a step back from research questions. I've been studying personal and family relationships for over 20 years. The more research I did the more I became interested in how people relate to each other through everyday interactions and unspoken communication. Research hasn't been very good at including that level of communication. It's often invisible to researchers. Research questions on how people relate to one another tend to generate rehearsed responses or examples which focus on big events rather than the everyday things that people do.

So, in my studies of family and couple relationships, I've been designing research devising methods that drill down into the everydayness of how we interact and communicate, to explore the minutia of relationships. I use multiple qualitative methods that focus on daily interactions and the emotionality of encounters – this combines diaries, emotion maps and interviews.

Q That sounds fascinating. Can you give us an example?

In a study of family relationships, I was talking with a young single dad about how he expressed affection with his children. We were discussing his emotion map and the emojis used – there were lots of hearts. He described telling his children that he loved them, multiple times a day. Talking about his relationship with his dad, he stated they never say, 'I love you'. Theirs was not a loveless relationship though. His dad helped

him out with things around the house and he spent a bit more on his dad's Christmas present. This unspoken form of communication was how father and son communicated, but he wanted to do things differently with his children. Talking through his emotion map, then, enabled me to get the story behind the story. To see how this family operated and what lay behind how they communicated.

Q In recent years, one of the major research projects you've been involved in is 'Enduring Love?' Tell us something about the project.

The 'Enduring Love?' study examines how couples sustain, experience and understand long-term relationships. Like my earlier research on families, it deployed multiple (qualitative) methods that focused on everyday life. There was also a large scale survey.

There is longstanding knowledge on the 'stressors' that may contribute to relationship breakdown. Our research uniquely provided new insight into the meanings and practices of relationship quality and stability, and the positive factors that enable couples to sustain their relationships over time.

For example, what connects two people together and makes a relationship work is often perceived as silent agreements or chemistry. Emotions were thus situated at the conceptual, methodological and analytical heart of the psycho-social research design.

Routine interactions are at the core of how couple relationships function, more so than big gestures or culturally-valued dates such as Valentine's Day. Our focus on everyday practices was therefore crucial to investigate living relationships. Qualitative methods

shed light on everyday 'moments' and this generated rich insight into the personal meanings of routine gestures in relationships, such as bringing a partner a cup of tea in bed.

Q Your research speaks to the pressures placed on families and relationships in the UK and far beyond during the current pandemic. What does your research suggest about how we should approach and cope with such pressures?

The removal of routines and the four walls of the home can make it feel like we're living on top of one another, literally. Add children to the mix and it can begin to feel rather crowded! The easing of 'lockdown' has provided a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel, but we're a long way from returning to 'normal' life. It's important, then, to focus on matters close to home as well as looking forward to 'time out'.

Working couples, for example, typically only spend about 150 minutes together per day while they're awake, and 50 minutes of this is spent watching TV. This 'TV time' is often portrayed as something negative, wasted time. But the things that couples do together don't always need to be deep and meaningful. Research findings from the 'Enduring Love?' study shows that watching TV together can have positive impacts on a relationship. It can build 'couple memories' as couples invest in the characters or plot, over time. So, there are good reasons to value the positives of time spent on the sofa. Perhaps set up a regular 'date night' around a favourite programme. This could be a romcom, action thriller, or the replay of that

final, when 'your team' spectacularly won the cup! It's not the type of film or programme that's important, but its personal meaning. So, given that entertainment venues are unlikely to reopen any time soon, now is probably a good moment to bond over the box sets or check out the performances that are being streamed on YouTube.

One of the few exceptions to the 'Stay at Home' guidance was exercise and dog walking. Notwithstanding quips around #pimpmydog and hitherto one-short-walk routines being extended to long schleps across the countryside and parks, many pooches are now getting more exercise than ever before. This reconnection with nature may yet instil an appreciation of nature that has lasting benefits for the mind, body and soul. Importantly, for many single people, human-animal connections are providing a much-needed source of comfort and companionship that may help to sustain them over periods of social and/or self-isolation.

Q What's your next big research project?

I've just finished a small scale Wellcome Trust project that explored the impact of families on the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ young people. With colleagues at the OU and other universities, we're hoping to build this into a large project that could extend its reach and impact. I'm also working with a team of researchers to develop a project on the socio-economic cost and cultural significance of school proms and their psychosocial impact on young people. But it's still 'watch this space' for both of these projects as funding has yet to be secured.

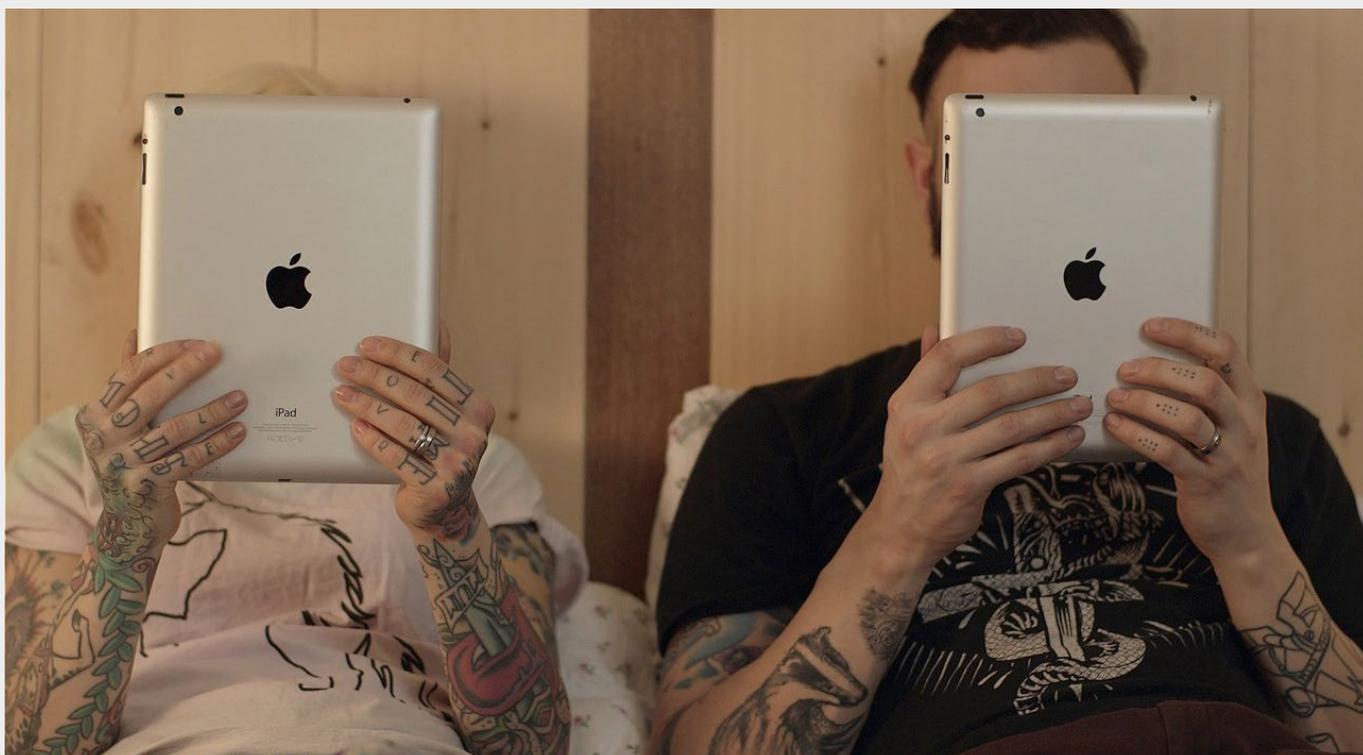


PHOTO: Couple using iPads to Google 'How to make relationships last?'

What it's like to be... a Team Assistant



Gary Beevers

Team Assistant working with Staff Tutors in the School of SSGS

What attracted me to the OU was its ethos of education for everyone, regardless of background and previous study. That, and the fact that Milton Keynes is an easier commute than London!

So far, everyone in SSGS has been very friendly and helpful, as well as willing to answer my questions. That's a real plus.

I'm not sure I know what a typical day looks like yet. As a Team Assistant, I work closely with Staff Tutors, so it requires a fair amount of communication which I enjoy.

I began my job at the beginning of lockdown, when everyone at the OU started working from home. Luckily, I have a nice view of my back garden, which may or may not be a better view than the one from our actual office at Walton Hall (one day I hope to find out!).

When I have some spare time, I like cycling – the first few weeks of lockdown were great as there was so little traffic on the roads. I also like to go to the theatre and watch live music (hopefully this can begin again before all the theatres and music venues go bust!).



Andrea Yorke

School Assistant
(Academic Support)

My first job out of school was for the OU and it was a great start to my career. After 5 years I left to go travelling around the world for 18 months and on my return ended up taking a job in the corporate world of Abbey National as it was known back then! I always regretted not returning to the OU so when the opportunity came up to apply for another job, I jumped at the chance. I could never get enthusiastic over banking and love being part of an organisation that does such good work and really changes people's lives.

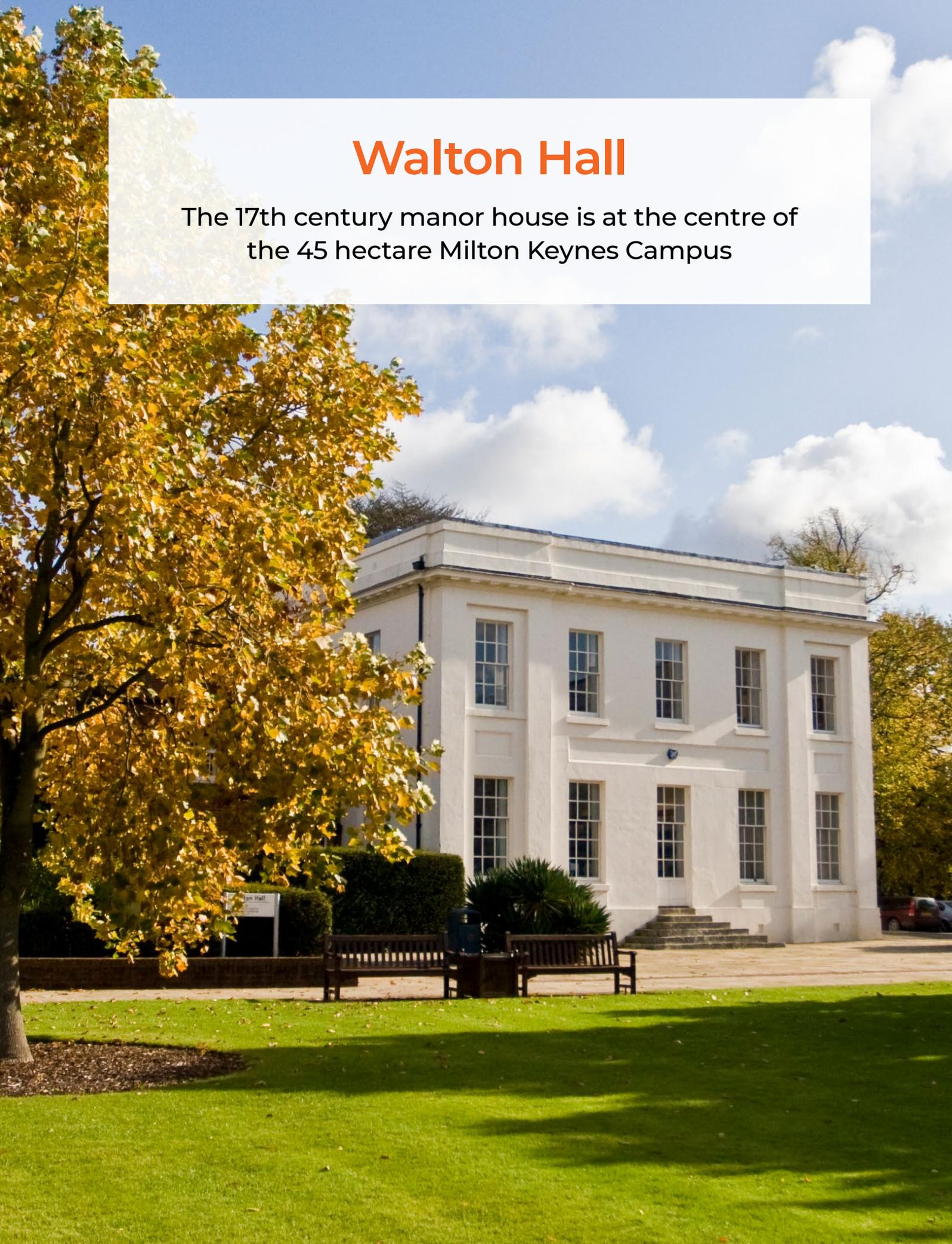
The best part of my job is working with people who share a real team spirit and deep-rooted passion for what they do. It's hugely inspiring and motivating. As an Academic Assistant to the Geography Discipline my main role is to provide administrative support and guidance to the Head of Discipline, central academics, Staff Tutors, PhD students, Emeritus Professors, and honorary and visiting fellows.

No two days are the same and can range from organising travel to monitoring budget spend – even after three years in the role, I still find things challenging.

My passions are travelling and photography. Being a mum of two also keeps me busy! I love anything live from theatre and concerts to sports events. I love music and dancing. Equally happy with a girl's night out, cooking for family and friends or simply watching a movie with the kids and our cockapoo – with a large G&T in hand of course!

Walton Hall

The 17th century manor house is at the centre of the 45 hectare Milton Keynes Campus



In conversation with Prof Smita Srinivas, Professorial Research Fellow



Smita Srinivas

SSGS Professorial Research Fellow in Economics and DPP

Professor Smita Srinivas is the EAEPE Myrdal Prize author of 'Market Menagerie: Health and Development in Late Industrial States' (Stanford University Press, Economics and Finance, 2012). She is Professorial Research Fellow in Economics and Development Policy and Practice at The Open University that leads the ICCA project, and Visiting Professor at the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) India, leading the ICCA India team.

See full profile for [Smita](#)

Q Congratulations on your recently appointed position of Professorial Research Fellow in Economics and Development. How did the opportunity come about?

Around 2012, soon after I published my book *Market Menagerie: Health and Development in Late Industrial States* (Stanford University Press, 2012), I crossed paths with Professor Theo Papaioannou and Professor Maureen Mackintosh. The OU has a strong intellectual community and I eventually forged a close working relationship with the two professors through Theo's work on innovation and development and Maureen's work on local health systems. Collectively, our project assesses how industry and innovation dynamics can be integrated into the heart of health systems and healthcare priorities. We hadn't anticipated how prescient this work would be in the time of COVID-19.

Q Why were you drawn to The Open University in particular, and what, in your opinion, sets it apart from other universities?

The School for Social Science and Global Studies (SGSS) has one of the strongest global faculties in crucial expertise areas. Some of the world's leading thinkers in industry and innovation, and the UK's scholars at many other universities have come from the OU. Since my position as Research Fellow, intellectual life has been incredibly rewarding. For the last 50 years, The Open University has led the world in major respects but unfortunately is still hiding its light under a bushel. This is a moment to showcase why its strengths matter, perhaps an Open secret waiting to be shared? Lastly, the OU Economics department is remarkably pluralist with high concentrations of industrial policy experts.

DPP also has an especially rich mix, unique in my view, of STEM-trained and methodologically diverse development experts studying innovation and health.

Q How has the COVID-19 pandemic shaped your work? Is there an added level of immediacy as a result?

Professor Dave Wield, Dr Peter Robbins and myself are advancing some joint research on innovation of medical equipment and the systemic care/chronic care issues in COVID-19. I'm particularly interested in exploring innovation under emergency conditions. The pandemic has brought into sharp focus the rapid shifts required for how equipment is designed, adapted, repaired, procured, and improved in conditions that are far from optimal. We're focusing our attention on the economic theories of technological learning, as well as the development plans and priority-setting agenda of global health, aid, and international governance.

Q Can you tell us a bit about your work with the Innovation for Cancer Care in Africa (ICCA) project?

I act as the India Lead for the ESRC-funded ICCA project, led by Professor Maureen Mackintosh. With the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) in India, several UK universities (all populated by former OU colleagues!) are focused on advancing and improving cancer care, as well as technological capabilities and local production across Kenya, Tanzania, the UK, and India. COVID-19 has shown how important mixed and representative teams can be for research, rapid assessment and response, and an interface with policy stakeholders.



PHOTO: Professor Smita Srinivas in discussion with other experts on economic development and urbanisation at the World Resources Institute meeting in Delhi, 2019

Q You recently made a case for ‘interdisciplinary cohesion in the time of Coronavirus’ – can you tell us more about this?

One of the strengths of the School is the opportunity to collaborate across Disciplines and perspectives. I recently co-authored a short discussion piece on COVID-19 for the OU’s Innogen Institute, in which myself and Research Fellow Pritika Rao made the case for an alternative approach to economics and public health. My past research on technological innovation and vaccine history shows us that there is not a single R&D model with the best health outcomes, and evolutionary-institutional methods can help economics address complex systems. This was the topic of our OU plenary at the AHE 2020 conference. History and context have showed us why and how vaccine markets and procurement design work as they do.

Q In your opinion, how is the future of health economics likely to change as a result of COVID-19?

The public health crisis has pushed economics into new directions. In a book chapter now published, ‘A New Economics for Health’, I lay out some wider arguments for why health economics needs updating with innovation and industry dynamics. I’m also digging deeper into philosophical traditions that study inference and judgement that can shape economics in new ways. The Open Access article, ‘Institutional Variety and the Future of Economics’, in the *Review of Evolutionary Political Economy* focuses on how we make inferences about the various institutional paths to technological capabilities in economic development. This institutional variety may represent different types

of firms, but also the norms, customs, standards, and laws, by which we frame industrial policy and, say, intellectual property rules or technical standards for safety, or quality of production.

There’s much greater need for speaking with other disciplines since only in some historical and epistemic traditions have economics, the natural sciences, and the other humanities and social sciences split as they have. Given my mathematics and physics training, you might anticipate that it’s an opportunity to revisit areas of logic, reasoning, and judgement which may be more predictable to the sciences – and that’s exactly what I do in the paper.

Frankly, the philosophical basis of an overly narrow economics is difficult to sustain on scientific or political grounds. It also risks dangerous over-simplification of how religion and culture are viewed, something critical in global engagement. For example, in some cultures –there is no too-easy distinction between science and spiritual quest since the latter is seen to have systematic philosophy and rational experimental traditions of seeking, empiricism, practices and observation, with the goal being self-inquiry or behaviour and group ethics. In those societies, you could say that many natural scientists or engineers are seekers in both traditions, they see no particular Enlightenment-style contradiction. Another reason to focus on institutional variety and method of reasoning is how policy is designed. Values ‘for’ innovation and ‘steering’ with industrial policy are often discussed, but there are important differences among innovation approaches that must be noted.

In January 2021 'in' Chicago, my paper in response to the 2021 Clarence E. Ayres Scholar recognition, will focus on the unresolved relationship between institutional variety (many combinations and paths and why it matters for development) and American institutionalism, especially the Veblen-Ayres idea of institutional 'lag'. There are several theory-methods gaps to address.

Q Your research covers economic development, technological innovation, and industrial policy and engages debates on local production and health economics. You use the term 'comparative development' – can you tell us more about this?

My own interests are the study of technological change, its theory and methods, and its origin philosophies and histories. I work across many industries, but right now, it's health all day long! A focus on why societies do seemingly the same things differently (institutional variety), has very practical implications on, say, COVID-19 diagnostic kits or food, energy, or skill systems.

Our ESRC-GCRF ICCA project generated some of my ongoing papers: on evaluation methods for screen-and-treat cervical cancer technologies versus HPV vaccines in India and Kenya, and complex challenges such as morphine demand estimates and the problem of under-availability in some parts of the world for palliative care for cancer patients. Our project focuses on conceptual and policy integration of technology and industrial issues into health systems and cancer care design. We're especially interested in looking at the way firms can improve microeconomics and policy engagements.

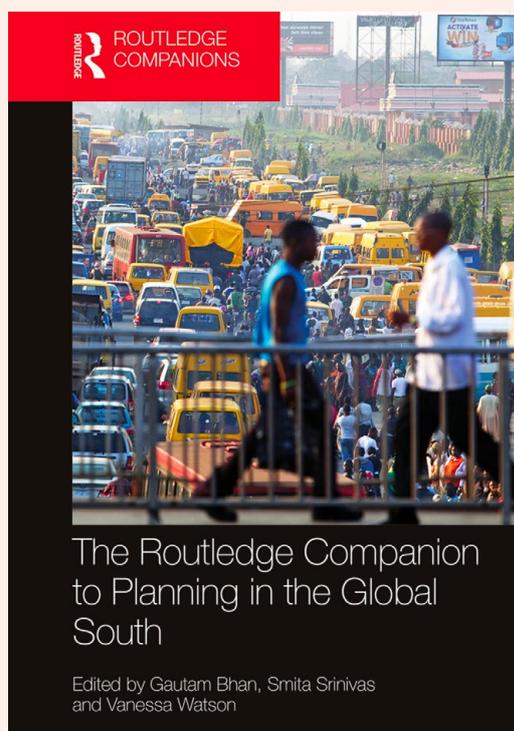
What the 20th and 21st centuries tell us, is that many different types of industrialising pathways exist which are not easily bracketed as 'development' of the same type. In our ICCA project for instance, the important issues are supporting local responses to production and innovation capabilities and building robust health systems around this. During COVID-19, we are all discovering that many 'developing' country contexts, such as some Indian states, Vietnam, or some Caribbean small island nations, have shown remarkable local planning capabilities, and policy and public administration tenacity, perhaps different and more effective than wealthier, more industrialised, nations including those in Europe or the North America. Traditional indicators of development and technological innovation and industrial development require continuous debate. Comparative development is also worth a closer look both across and within larger countries and has presented great opportunities to work more closely with political scientists and geographers. I have argued that there is increasingly limited use for the term the 'Global South' especially if we seriously consider the different industrial pathways taken after the Bandung Conference of 1955. For economic development history the term serves poorly as an intellectual placeholder for complex processes of technological innovation and industrial dynamics.

Q Based on your area of expertise, what connections should we be forging across Disciplines and international organisations to better place us to deal with future pandemics?'

We should see this as an opportunity to shift or deepen our research and teaching perspectives. An example is the TCLab Health-Industry-Ecology (HIE) initiative whose goal is integrated perspectives for analysis and policy. I hope to continue to strengthen a conversation about multilateral governance that can update a Bretton Woods design. A recent WHO-focused webinar debate with diplomats and doctors in which I participated, took on the complex issues of what is missing in COVID-19 times and the need for WHO reform.

Q Finally, in your view what does the OU's future look like?

The OU has a critical open-architecture and certain unique teaching privileges such as tutors combined with flexible learning arrangements for students and wide, inclusive, social goals. As the struggles of higher education to adapt to online learning demonstrate, the OU also has an ahead-of-curve strategy for inclusive education and development. We are in a critical moment for how we discuss fundamental ideas of economics and development around technology and knowledge systems. This is an opportunity to convey both the major global contributions of OU research and help attract the next generation of undergraduate learners, young professionals and scholars.



BOOK COVER: Addressing 21st century challenges: Cover of the co-edited collection 'The Routledge Companion to Planning in the Global South'.

China's internationalisation: From Africa to Europe

Chinese state-owned enterprises are investing in big infrastructure projects that will help European economies flourish – but at what cost?’

Written by Prof Giles Mohan

Tracking development from Africa to Europe

I have been at The Open University for almost 20 years and became Professor of International Development in 2011. I am particularly interested in African development, especially what ‘new’ or ‘below the radar’ actors are doing. For example, in my work on rural Ghana I noticed many overseas Ghanaians – the so-called diaspora – were supporting projects in these villages. This took me to researching the Ghanaian diaspora in Milton Keynes. This interest in migration continued when it became apparent around 2005 that many more Chinese business migrants were walking the streets of Accra, Ghana’s capital, than I had ever seen before. I then undertook a number of projects on China’s growing relations with Africa, focusing on the infrastructure projects that the Chinese paid for and were building. Over the past few years China’s internationalisation has brought its firms into Europe and I was interested in whether there were parallels between these trade and investment flows and those that I had studied in Africa. It was here that my latest project was born.

I was recently awarded a European Research Council Advanced Grant for a study of Chinese investment in European infrastructure. Called *Re-orienting development: the dynamics and effects of Chinese infrastructure investment in Europe* – or REDEFINE – it seeks to examine the different ways in which Chinese firms engage in financing and building major infrastructure, such as roads, railways, and ports. Crucially, it seeks to find out what impacts these projects are having on local, national and regional societies.

China in Africa

I’ve been interested in the role of China in Africa for over a decade now. Here the big debate has been whether Chinese firms behave as ‘imperialists’ on the continent or whether they are more benevolent. On the positive side, it is argued, one thing China does

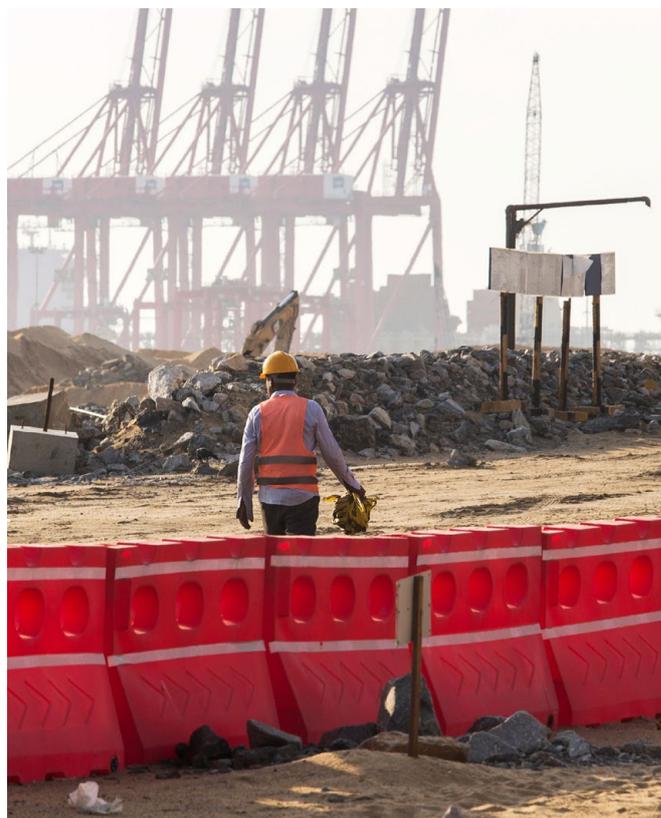


PHOTO: A worker walks through the construction site for the Chinese-financed Colombo Port City development in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

with its aid and lending is to provide much-needed infrastructure to African countries. This is true and although I was interested in the broad area of China’s development impacts on Africa, I ended up getting interested in infrastructure projects.

One of these projects in Ghana, where I’ve worked for 30 years, was a large hydropower dam at Bui in the north of the country. The dam was financed by a big Chinese bank and the construction was by Sinohydro, a leading dam builder. Some of the loan repayment was through exports of cocoa, one of Ghana’s main commercial crops, and reveals how much of China’s engagement with Africa has been about securing access to commodities and providing overseas

contracts for its large companies. These Chinese companies are 'state-owned' so there are complex links between China's politics and these commercial entities.

The Belt and Road Initiative

Projects such as the ones in Ghana are not isolated. Since around 2013 the Chinese state has been pursuing a grand project known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which links China to other parts of East Asia, East Africa, Central Asia and Europe. It is a hugely ambitious plan involving the creation of transport linkages and other economic infrastructure that will boost trade and investment between China and the rest of the world. At a time when established world powers like the USA and UK are promoting rather defensive and protective economic policies, the Chinese have gone large with the BRI. Their vision is all about connectivity and mobility.

While some question the coherence of the BRI as a 'grand strategy' it will be an important global phenomenon, even though COVID-19 is likely to dent the appetite for deals with China and reduce the amount of capital that China has to invest. My work on China in Africa was about the first wave of Chinese external investment, but as China's economy has matured it is seeking different ways to invest beyond simply trying to secure natural resources and commodities from countries like Ghana.

REDEFINE

It is this combination of factors that led me to develop REDEFINE, which seeks to understand how China structures its deals with Europe, what sorts of projects Chinese firms focus on, and what the outcomes are for the local, national and regional economies where these projects are located. While the BRI is about using Chinese capital productively and laying the foundations for future economic linkages, many European economies have stagnated following the 2008 financial crisis, with governments cutting infrastructure investment and seeking alternative sources of finance. Now entering a deeper recession on the back of COVID-19, China sees Europe as fertile ground for new infrastructure investment. Yet many European firms and governments are ill-equipped to deal with these political and economic changes. The most high-profile of these has been around Huawei, the Chinese telecommunications giant. Huawei's involvement in the UK's 5G infrastructure has excited debate around cybersecurity with parallel debates in the US leading to a banning of the company.

Even though the BRI appears as a grand strategy, it is in fact quite messy and uncoordinated. As such REDEFINE will take a disaggregated approach to unpack project-by-project effects. Through comparative, ethnographic case studies in the UK, Germany, Greece and Hungary, REDEFINE will produce



PHOTO: Ghana's Bui Dam in Northern part of the country under construction.

fine-grained analysis to understand the rationales for Chinese investment in Europe, the geopolitical dynamics surrounding these financing streams, the structuring of projects, and how they interface with national and local development policy. By better understanding how investment deals operate, REDEFINE hopes to connect Chinese and European government and corporate actors in order to influence their strategies and practices.

In my earlier work on China and Africa, I used insights from my rather eclectic home disciplines of geography and development studies to understand this first phase of Chinese internationalisation. In the current phase of this internationalisation, China's move westwards radically questions the meanings and loci of development. REDEFINE's innovation is to use insights from international development to interrogate Chinese engagement in the heart of Europe and by doing so re-orient the Eurocentric debates in the social sciences around how we define and delimit development, who drives these processes, and what it means for societies affected by such investments.

Starting in Autumn 2020, REDEFINE is a 5-year, £2 million project that will bring new post-doctoral researchers and PhD students to the School. In SSGS we already have a number of great colleagues working on BRI and so REDEFINE is an exciting opportunity to build up the School's expertise in this area.



Giles Mohan

Giles is a Professor of International Development

In 2018, Giles was awarded the OU's prize for Outstanding Contributions to Research.

See [full profile](#)

Spotlight on...



Dr Martin Higginson

Director of the Social Sciences Student Support Team

Martin's teaching focuses on undergraduate economics and personal finance. His most recent scholarship explores widening access and reducing inequalities in Higher Education. Martin is also the lead for the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences 'Widening Access' group and is a member of the University's 'Widening Access Steering Group'.

See full profile for [Martin](#)

Q As the School's 'Director of Student Support', what does this role involve?

There are several aspects to it, but the underlying focus is helping students achieve their academic aspirations. SSGS has a huge number of students – this October (2020) we will end up with just under 20,000 students starting our modules, over half of whom will be starting our Level 1 modules. Part of my role is to make sure students are allocated to the Associate Lecturers (ALs) who deliver the teaching materials and support their students. I also liaise with Staff Tutors, who manage ALs and provide an essential link between the student and faculty.

Students face all sorts of challenges and some of these go beyond the academic. The Student Support Team (SST) provide a wide range of support services to students who may need extra advice and guidance on an issue that is troubling them. Part of my role is to bridge the gap between academics in the School and the SST so academics get to hear about common issues students are raising. We then work together to try and prevent some of these issues from coming up in the future.

I also work with the SST on more proactive work to support students. For example, advisors may contact students pre-module to help guide them through what to expect, or for students who seem to be struggling with a module, contact them to see what can be offered to help support them, usually linking this with their tutor (the AL).

Useful link

[Support and the OU Community](#)

Q Who do you work with to ensure that all of students are best supported?

I work most closely with Staff Tutors as described previously, but I also work with various colleagues in the School and Faculty to try and make sure things are joined up. This might involve module teams, Associate Deans and the School's management team where I raise student-related matters. I also contribute to various School and Faculty committees where I raise points from the perspective of students, ALs and Staff Tutors who work so closely together.

Q Supporting students through a pandemic can't be easy. For you and your colleagues what is proving to be the most difficult aspect of supporting students?

An interesting question. The most challenging aspect is we know many of our students have faced enormous physical and mental challenges working through the pandemic whether it is being ill, caring for loved ones, financial hardship or the horrible uncertainty we have all faced.

The virus has also shone a light on many of the inequalities that we have in this country – social, economic, digital, health – you name it. Students will inevitably be impacted by some of these things and ALs have to support them with this, but they themselves are facing many of the same challenges. For me, trying to support Staff Tutors who are a key link between ALs and students has been (and continues to be) key.

Q That's a lot to deal with. How do you relax?

Outside of the academic world I like to play various sports – mostly six-a-side and golf – and try and grow vegetables!



Zoe Doye

Development Policy and Practice (DPP) Staff Tutor and Lecturer

Zoe is Chair of DD102, *Introducing the Social Sciences*. She is currently the SSGS Scholarship Lead, Donna's successor. See [full profile](#)



Donna Smith

Politics Staff Tutor and Lecturer

Donna was the first SSGS Scholarship Lead (until July 2020), and is currently FASS Deputy Associate Dean in Teaching and Students.

See [full profile](#)

Scholarship opportunities in SSGS

Scholarship in SSGS has gone from strength to strength over the last few years – here are some of the opportunities at present

Written by Zoe Doye and Donna Smith

FASS Teaching Excellence and Scholarship of Teaching (FASSTEST) supports the critical, scholarly evaluation of approaches to open and distance teaching and learning in the Arts and Social Sciences, with the aim of providing an evidence base for policies and good practice. Providing an evidence base is key: we now have a way of innovating, supporting and tracking scholarship to make sure we use the results to inform our teaching and learning.

Over the last few years, SSGS colleagues have completed lots of scholarship projects, many contributing to the recent FASS assessment and tuition review and thus having an instrumental impact on policy and ways of working.

In SSGS we have seen a big increase in engagement with scholarship by staff (funding applications

and general interest), better School and Faculty engagement with scholarship (its importance, embedding into Academic Workload Management, links between scholarship/teaching/research), and better understanding of the importance of impact (faculty/institutional plus personal/professional).

So, what next? We'd like to see more school level/ Board of Study led projects (this is on the agenda), more work on impact (identifying key themes across all three schools, working together), and improved dissemination (internal and external, including utilising social media).

Here are examples of current projects colleagues are working on. If you are interested in scholarship within FASS, or putting forward a project application, then please visit the [FASSTEST](#) website.

Current scholarship projects



Comparing performances of students who started with alternative modules (DD102/3) on Q45 to assist resolution of its L1 retention/progression problem

PEOPLE: Alan Shipman, Roberto Simonetti

Comparison of Students who had to start on DD102 whilst DD103 was in production.

Supporting DD102 students to develop the 'Reflection on and Articulation of Employability Skills'

PEOPLE: Ieman Hassan

To draw on employability guidance to enable ALs through a practitioner enquiry to 'make the components of employability explicit to students' in order to further 'support students in articulating their skills, values and behaviours gained and developed through their study at the OU' (Employability Framework Draft, November 2017).



Personal and empathetic dialogue: An investigation into the role of correspondence tuition in supporting student progression and retention

PEOPLE: Zoe Doye, Judith Wilson-Hughes, Lucy Rumney

The project consists of:

- Literature review of research conducted on the role of tutor/student relationship in retention and the role of feedback on assignments.
- Analysis of PT3 forms and script feedback on 2x Level 1 and 2x Level 2 modules (the Chairs of DD102, DD103, TD223 and DD206 have given their agreement to be included in the project). This would consist of 10 scripts at TMA 01, TMA 03 and TMA 05 from different tutors = 120 scripts in total. The same tutors' feedback will be selected at each stage in order to get a sense of tutor/student rapport and dialogue.
- Questionnaires sent to students at the end of the module to survey their experience and expectations of feedback = 40 questionnaires.
- Interviews with ALs at the end of module to survey what they themselves expect/want from correspondence tuition = a selection on interviews from the 40 tutors surveyed via assignment feedback.

Current scholarship projects



Exploring the use of WhatsApp in a distance learning context

PEOPLE: Matt Staples

The project will take an exploratory focus to investigate the potential use of WhatsApp as learning communities in a distance learning context. It will be exploratory in investigating advantages and disadvantages analysing the perspectives of both tutors and students.

An investigation into the use of peer observation as a tool for professional development and an aid to developing a professional evaluative culture among ALs

PEOPLE: Judith Wilson-Hughes, Tatiana Blackmore, Liz Wright

This project will consider how collaborative peer observation in an online synchronous context can work as informal professional development to enable ALs to share good practice, develop greater confidence in online tuition and develop more effective reflective practice.



Understanding and assessing the impact of targeted study skills support, on academic achievement and retention, among Level 1 FASS students

PEOPLE: Claire Malcolm, Alison Green, Sharon Davis

The purpose of the project is to critically evaluate the extent to which an interdisciplinary workshop focused on academic writing skills, coupled with Discipline-specific skills, can improve academic performance and retention among level one students in social sciences and psychology.

Towards Emotional Resilience: Supporting student learning of emotive and sensitive content

PEOPLE: Julia Downes, Ruth Wall, Anne Alvaer

This project will complement the existing project 'Teaching Sensitive Topics' led by Tracey Gormally and Simon Harrison that focuses on developing training for tutors to teach sensitive topics in psychology (such as self-harm and sexual abuse). This project will focus on improving current support and understanding of how students learn sensitive and emotive topics in distance learning materials.



Current scholarship projects



Challenges of Distance Teaching Masters in International Relations

PEOPLE: William Brown

The purpose of this project is to synthesise key insights from existing scholarship and research into distance masters teaching, and any specific literatures on masters teaching of politics and international relations specifically, to inform the learning outcomes, pedagogic methods and media choices of a new (proposed) masters in International Relations.

An enquiry into the impact of TMA extensions: Stage 1

PEOPLE: Zoe Doye and Ieman Hassan

This project aims to explore whether the granting of extensions to TMA cut off dates has any impact on student retention and whether there is a relationship between TMAs and extensions in relation to different student groups at Level 1.



Understanding how social anxiety affects participation in online tutorials

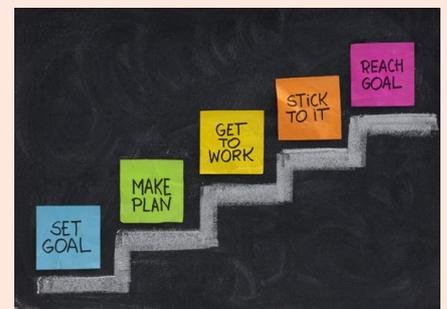
PEOPLE: Janet Hunter

The purpose of the project is to gain a greater understanding of student social anxiety in relation to joining and participating in online tutorials.

Making the link between personal development sessions and retention on DD870

PEOPLE: Martha Knight

This project seeks to assess whether the insertion of three personal development sessions into the tuition strategy will help to enhance motivation and retention of students on DD870. There are three planned sessions at the beginning (Week 1) midway through the module (Week 13) and end of module (Week 30). Each session is a one-to-one conversation between student and tutor and templates for each conversation are provided to help shape each session.





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Explore some of the exciting new programmes
and courses in development



PHOTOS: The Open University working in Partnership, Cornwall: *This Fishing Life* © Folk Films, *Inside the Supermarket* © Paul Husband/BBC, *What Britain Buys and Sells in a Day* © Darlow Smith Productions.

A unique partnership with the BBC...

The Open University and the BBC have a long and distinguished history of working together. Indeed, the link is unique and 2021 marks the 50th anniversary of The Open University's partnership with the BBC. The range, quality and popularity of programmes that colleagues from across The Open University have worked on over the years is breathtaking.

You can find out more about the [BBC/OU partnership here](#).

In the following piece Dr. Alison Penn and Dr. Joanna Paul introduce us to the job that academics do in helping to give shape to a programme's content; they also provide a taste of recent programmes that colleagues in SSGS have been involved in making, as well as ones to look out for in the year ahead.

...and new opportunities with FutureLearn

A more recent working relationship has been struck between The Open University and [FutureLearn](#). FutureLearn provides a national and international platform for some of our teaching materials, particularly 'short courses'. The School has already made two short courses. Colleagues in Philosophy produced [Global Ethics](#) which explores key ethical theories surrounding global challenges and how philosophy can be used to address these problems, and [Why religion matters](#), a course produced by colleagues in Religious Studies, puts religious literacy and diversity at the core of our understanding of global challenges. Both are currently available on FutureLearn.

In the final short piece, Dr Martha Knight from Development Policy and Practice, provides some highlights of School's latest offering on FutureLearn, a Postgraduate Certificate in [Global Development management](#).



PHOTOS: OU/BBC co-productions 2018/19 © BBC

SSGS Media Fellows

Media Fellows, Dr Alison Penn and Dr Jo Paul, share some of the School's most successful OU and BBC programmes to date

The Open University and the BBC have a long and distinguished history of working together. The range, quality and popularity of programmes that colleagues from across the OU have worked on over the years is vast and continues to grow.

In this interview, Alison and Jo talk us through the process, from initial concept through to finished programme. They explain how academics often work as programme consultants, giving the programme shape through offering their knowledge and insight, and they provide a taste of recent programmes that colleagues in SSGS have been involved with, as well as ones to look out for in the year ahead.



Dr Jo Paul

Senior Lecturer in Classical Studies and a Media Fellow

Jo's research is concerned with the different ways in which the modern world receives, engages with, and uses the classical past. [Full Profile](#)



Dr Alison Penn

Senior Lecturer and Staff Tutor currently working in Social Policy and Criminology

Alison is the FASS Media Fellow (Social Sciences) seconded into Broadcast & Partnerships. [Full Profile](#)

Q Tell us something about yourselves...

Alison: I've been a [Staff Tutor](#) in Social Policy and Criminology since 2016, helping with the development of the new curriculum in Criminology. Prior to that from 2009, I was a Staff Tutor in Health and Social Care, and since 1994 a Tutor in Social Sciences. My research interests are social history, social policy and voluntary organisations. I'm currently Chair of the Voluntary Action History Society which runs seminars and conferences.

Joanne: I recently took over the role of [Media Fellow](#) for Arts and Humanities from Chris Williams and am a Senior Lecturer in Classical Studies. I've been at the OU since 2011, and have been involved in the production and presentation of a wide range of modules, including chairing our Level 2 Latin module. I'm currently a team member of our new Level 1 module, *Cultures*, which has its first presentation in 2021. My research specialism is in the modern reception of classical antiquity, with a particular focus on contemporary popular culture, including cinema.

Q What does the role of Media Fellow involve?

Media Fellows are seconded from the Faculty into Broadcast & Partnerships for two days a week and work closely with the OU's Head of Broadcast & Partnerships, Caroline Ogilvie. We also report to the AD Curriculum and Heads of Schools.

A key objective is to maximise the ways that broadcast (video, audio and digital) material can promote the curriculum and enhance the student experience, whilst showcasing our range of free learning on OpenLearn.

We work to the FASS Priorities document, reviewed annually, which details the priorities around both formal curriculum and informal learning. Media Fellows use these priorities to advise the Head of Broadcast & Partnerships about which projects (tv, radio, online, digital) align with Faculty priorities and have the best potential for re-use of programmes in our teaching.

Media Fellows also advise on the best way to use archive broadcast material for module production and student retention via [Learning on Screen](#). The latter has now been incorporated in the new SSGS subject sites which went live in May. Students and staff have access to all the co-production programmes going back over the last 10 years.

Q You've initiated and promoted several successful programmes over the years – how are the ideas developed?

Every year there are 4–5 commissions per Faculty (covering all three schools), although sometimes there is opportunity to be involved in another Faculty's broadcast commission, in a supporting role. The Head of Broadcast & Partnerships has monthly meetings at the BBC. At these meetings a range of proposed broadcasts are presented, mostly by independent producers but occasionally by BBC in-house



PHOTO: *Inside the Foreign Office* © BBC

producers. The Head of Broadcast and Partnerships uses the FASS Priorities document to help identify potential co-productions and passes these to the Media Fellows for consideration.

Usually we would consult with the Head of School and/or the Head of Discipline to gauge whether it's a potential production to join, and whether it fits with curriculum especially new curriculum and whether there is a member of staff with the expertise and time to join as a Nominated Academic. We also work to ensure that access to opportunities are shared equitably across discipline areas. If the timing of a commission coincides with the development of a new module there is the potential to generate additional content through the filming or recording process for use in the module. For example, content clips from all twelve episodes of [Hugh's Wild West](#) were re-used in [DD213 Environment and Society](#). The section from [Why Slavery](#) on slavery and the prison system was used in [DD804 Crime and Global Justice](#).

Q What does a Nominated Academic (NA) do?

Firstly, they attend the project meeting, chaired by one of us. This is where we meet and discuss the commission with the production company. It's an opportunity to shape the plans for the programmes and also to identify the potential for additional content for new modules. The NA also advises on any scripts being produced; views the rough cuts and fine cuts of the programmes, checks facts and comments on content.



PHOTO: *Autumnwatch 2019* © BBC

OpenLearn organises the landing page for the co-production and the NA contributes a short piece of writing, video or occasionally an interactive. Sometimes there is budget for a print item to which the nominated academic contributes and advises.

In addition, OpenLearn has a budget allocated to each Faculty to support the direct commissioning of material undertaken by academics; as well as support for Module Teams to produce module-related courses, which showcase bitesize elements of new modules. Media Fellows are responsible for overseeing this work.

Q Are there any new projects, OpenLearn courses and co-productions we should look out for?

Yes! There's plenty to look out for, some of which we will share below.

Examples of recent projects:

- Article: [Exploring how migration changes the places where we live](#) by [Prof Umut Erel](#)
- Video: [Why we should abolish imprisonment for children and young people](#) by [Dr David Scott](#)
- Course: [Coping in Isolation: Time to Think](#) by [Gabi Kent](#) and [Dr Philip O'Sullivan](#)

Examples of recent Module-related courses:

- DD319 *Fishing: can it be sustainably managed?*
- DD316 *Democracy in Catalonia*
- DD212 *Critical Criminology and the Social Sciences*
- DB125 *Rent or buy? The challenge of access to housing*

Examples of co-productions for the year ahead:

- *Trump on the World Stage* – [Dr Filippo Boni](#) and [Dr Precious Chatterje-Doody](#) (January 2021)
- *Gold Town*, (an examination of the impact of the opening of a gold mine on a small village, Tyndrum, in southwest Highlands in Scotland) – [Dr Gerry Mooney](#) (December 2020)
- *Parole Board* – [Dr Deborah Drake](#) and [Dr Catriona Havard](#), jointly with FBL, (Spring 2022)
- *This Fishing Life 2* – (a follow up to the successful one aired earlier in the year), [Dr Vicky Johnson](#) (January 2021)
- *Patrick Kielty: Ireland, Partition and Me* – [Dr Philip O'Sullivan](#) (April/May 2021)
- *BBC Ideas, forthcoming: How to be flexible when times are tough* – [Dr Volker Patent](#), [Dr Naomi Moller](#) and [Professor Jo Phoenix](#)

Global Development Management

Our new postgraduate course that tackles global issues head on

Written by Martha Knight

The spread of COVID-19 has connected us to every corner of the world and to each other. It is a timely reminder that many of the huge challenges we face in the 21st century – poverty, inequality, migration, climate change, health pandemics – are global in scope; we are all affected, and we can all be part of the solution.

D890 *Global Development Management* is a new qualification and is one of two routes to the MSc in Global Development which takes these global issues head on. It is being presented on FutureLearn for the first time this October 2020.

My name's Martha and I've been leading the team writing and producing D890 which has been exciting as it's a new venture for SSGS. The module has been written by a team of development practitioners and academics who are passionate about their subject and about the future of the development industry. They bring up-to-date knowledge and expertise to help students discover development, understand the context in which development managers work, plan interventions that are sustainable, and look forward to how development managers can help bring about change that is both transformatory and sustainable. On top of this, students will learn the practical skills that are required to be Development Managers meaning that this module scores highly on the employability scale!

Learning on FutureLearn looks and feels slightly different to OU modules. The full weight and expertise of e-learning educationalists and OU specialists have produced a module that is fit for the platform and provides an interactive experience for students. All content is online and uses the full spectrum of resources to bring topics alive. Real life case studies, videos, audios and articles enhance the student's knowledge of a topic, and opportunities are provided



PHOTO: Traditional Indian young married women working in traditional kitchen on laptop.

to practice the skills needed to be an effective Development Manager. Space is given to students to allow for networking opportunities wherever they are in the globe – this is crucial to learning and growth.

Global development has always sparked plenty of debates and different viewpoints and we wanted to make sure this was reflected in the module materials. Equally, it was important we created enough space for students to reflect on and share their own experiences and knowledge about development wherever they are geographically located.

Open University students will have a personal tutor and full access to the library, a timetable of tutorials and the Student Support Team of advisors.

Global Development Management is about social justice and social change. If you are deeply passionate about these topics and would like to pursue a career in Development Management, this is the qualification for you.

To find out more go [FutureLearn](#), or watch this [short film](#). You can also try it out with this [free taster course](#). I look forward to welcoming you onto the module.



Martha Knight

Qualification Lead, Lecturer and Staff Tutor for Development Policy and Practice.

Martha is Module Chair for D890 *Global Development in Practice* and has interests in gender and sustainability as well as exploring innovative pedagogies to bring subjects alive on different platforms. See [Full Profile](#)

Glen Darby – Magazine Designer (Corporate and Commercial)
Michael Pryke – Founding Head of SSGS
Natalie Baker – Magazine Editor
Rachel Lowes – Assistant Editor (Corporate and Commercial)
Roseanne Collins – Visual Resources Project Officer
Alison Kirkbright – Senior Manager (Communications and Online Services)
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