

Department of Social Policy and Intervention
Transcripts of videos in e-brochure

Contents

Welcome to the department - Professor M Seeleib-Kaiser.....	2
Comparative Social Policy - Professor Mary Daly	3
Evidence-Based Social Intervention and Policy Evaluation.....	4
Teaching and supervision - Dr R Surender	6
Fieldwork - Dr L Cluver	7
MPhil Comparative Social Policy - Amanda Shriwise.....	8
MPhil in Evidence-Based Social Intervention and Policy Evaluation - Gerardo Melendez-Torres.....	9
DPhil in Social Policy - Thorn Pitidol.....	11
Ali Naghieh – DPhil in Social Intervention.....	12
Fees and funding.....	13
Life in Oxford – Antonia Santalova	14

Welcome to the department – Professor M Seeleib-Kaiser

Page 2 of e-brochure

This department was founded in 1914 to analyse important social, economic and political questions. It, for a long time, trained social workers before it moved on into international leading research in comparative social policy and evidence-based social interventions.

We continue to focus on the current social problems and questions of today, ranging from things such as the wellbeing of AIDS orphans in Africa, education policy, demography and demographic change, substance abuse, family policy, family change, welfare state transformations, as well as poverty and shame.

We hope to offer you a unique learning experience, with close supervision that will enable you to make the optimum of your education here at Oxford. Our aim is not to teach you in what to think, but how to think, and enable you to analyse the problems of the future, and then search for solutions.

The department is a really interesting place to be in terms of the cross-fertilisation of various disciplines reaching from psychology to sociology to political science, and demography obviously. Most departments might be routed in political science and sociology but here the real added-value of the Department of Social Policy and Intervention is that we are an interdisciplinary department with a lot of cross-fertilisation between the various disciplines, addressing key problems and social issues of today.

Much of our work goes beyond academia; it engages with real problems and real issues. So we have a tremendous impact on policy formation at national government level and international level. So it's not only that, should you choose to study here at Oxford, you will get an excellent academic education, you will be connected to real world problems.

It is a very international place. Colleagues at this department come from four continents, ten different countries, and the student intake is truly global. They study here for a year or two on our various Masters programmes, or they do a DPhil, which is the Oxford PhD. Our students go on to become leaders in their professional life or in academia. They have gone on to work for government institutions such as in the United Kingdom, the Department for Work and Pensions. Some of them have gone to work for international organisations, like the World Health Organisation, UNICEF, or the European Union. And, what we try to do here is to enable you to acquire the skills to develop your potential and become a world leader of the future.

Comparative Social Policy - Professor Mary Daly

Pull up from page 3 of e-brochure

The course is about the key elements of social policy; the values underlying social policy, the institutions, the principles. It's a very unique course in what it teaches and how it teaches. There are very few like it available in England, and also internationally, and this is because of the focus primarily on comparative social policy, so we look at variations within countries, but we're also concerned about variations across different regions of the world, so comparing the older industrialised countries to the new industrialising countries, for example, comparing Australia and America, or parts of Africa with Europe. So, if one wants to learn about the latest developments, if one wants to learn in an interdisciplinary environment and in a comparative environment, this is the place to do so. Here students will learn not just about social policy and the intricacies of social policy in different settings, but how to understand, study and critique social policy developments in different parts of the world.

Studying here brings significant advantages. One has, first of all, the reputation of Oxford. One also has access to the resources made available by Oxford, for example the college system, wherein students get support not just in the department, but also in the colleges, but also the library and other learning facilities, the many lecturers and guest lecturers that there are, and I'd like to say also that in this department we're very concerned to develop the students and to make students part of our community here. The international environment here is very attractive, and the fact that we consciously recruit and we consciously organise our teaching around an international set of themes, so we want students from different parts of the world. We see our community here as being international by definition and students are attracted to that, and we try to ensure that they learn from other students, as well as of course from the course teachers –many of whom are also international and many are from different parts of the world.

With this course we are actually developing the discipline of social policy, because we get very good students and we encourage our students really do the best that they can, and we very much believe that students can develop a discipline as much as practitioners or people who have worked in it for many years, and I feel we are pushing out the frontiers all the time in what we do.

Evidence-Based Social Intervention and Policy Evaluation

Pull up from page 3 of e-brochure

Professor Frances Gardner

Our course is called Evidence Based Social Intervention and Policy Evaluation, and it's a course for people who are passionate about social problems and how they can solve those problems. Governments, cities, NGO's, individuals, spend enormous amounts of money on all kinds of social programs and social policies, but do we know whether all of that investment is actually making a difference, and is actually helping the people it is meant to, and do we even know whether it may be doing them harm?

If people want to study social interventions and social policies, and they want to learn about the very best techniques for rigorously evaluating these interventions then this is very much the course for them.

Professor Paul Montgomery

We study all sorts of programs in psychology, in social work and similar disciplines, and we're interested in understanding complex social interventions, whether certain programs are effective. And among our group, we have experts who are doing trials in HIV, in parenting, I've been doing work recently in looking at the effect of nutrition on behaviour with Alex Richardson. I'm currently doing work looking at how we can improve the reporting of studies as well. A great range of work is being done with some really great students. Over the last several years students publish a large amount of the work they do here and make real differences to policy and to practice.

The Master's course takes about 30 students a year and it has an MSc level and MPhil level. The MSc course is a one year course and the MPhil is over two years. The main distinction between the two is that the thesis for the Master's course is only 10,000 words (I say only!), and the MPhil is a 30,000 word dissertation.

Professor Robert Walker

We try to provide our students with the tools that they need in order to build policy, to question policy, and to implement policy. We bring all our students together and teach them about method: teach them about the way you ask questions and the way that you answer those questions – whether you do it statistically, or whether you do it in a qualitative fashion.

But we also have two pathways; a social interventions pathway which is focused on how you make a difference in individuals' lives, focusing them on detailed interventions, which work head on with individuals; but we're also thinking at a macro level about how we make policies to change the levels of unemployment, to encourage people into work, broadly speaking to increase the levels of education in our society.

We think it's really important that students get the opportunity to use the techniques that they get taught about during the year or the two years that they are with us. So, we focus all our training, all our teaching on a research project.

Professor Paul Montgomery

The students that we get here tend to be great. Some of them come fairly recently off their first degrees, whereas others have worked in practice for a number of years, perhaps as psychologists, perhaps as social workers, or many of them from the non-governmental organisations of a range of kinds – they have perhaps been doing volunteer work here and there, and want to find out what is the effectiveness of what they've been doing. They come from a range of countries; some from the UK, but many from the USA, from China, from India, and we get a really rich source of students.

Professor Robert Walker

But it's a two way learning process. As a teacher at Oxford I learn enormously from the students who come here. They come from around the world, bringing different experiences, and different perspectives on the issue that we are studying together. It's a joint enterprise; we are all committed to making the world better.

The other point about Oxford is that it's incredibly rich – rich in tradition, but rich in opportunities. Nowhere else, would I argue, do students have as much time with faculty as they have in Oxford. Oxford cares; it cares and selects the very best students, and then invests resources to make them even better.

Professor Frances Gardner

Some of our students go on to do a doctorate, and then into an academic career, but many of them go into policy organisations and NGOs. Some of them work on running randomised trials of social interventions and policies, some of them go to organisations such as the World Bank or WHO, to work on their kind of policy evaluation programs, and it's a really quite a unique course for training people for those kind of positions; they really learn the kind of skills that many NGO's and governments want.

Teaching and supervision - Dr R Surender

Page 5 of e-brochure

Oxford is almost unique, not just in the United Kingdom, but internationally in offering students teaching by world-class researchers. To be taught by the people whose books they are reading, who conducted the research in the areas they're going to be studying, and to be taught by them in an individualised, personalised setting is a tremendous advantage obviously.

You provide us with a lot of information in your application form in terms of what your particular interests are; whether you're interested in welfare state formation, or whether you're interested in poverty in South Africa, or health systems, we will have that information, and we will try to match a supervisor as closely as we can.

Your supervisor will teach you and mark essays, and will typically supervise your thesis. Your supervisor is also there to give you general support and guidance across your whole trajectory of the course. The supervisor will get to know you personally. They will know what your background educational interests and training has been, what your professional interests and training has been, and what you're aiming for after you leave the course. They can guide you to get the most out of your time at Oxford. It means they can give you advice on which option papers might be helpful or relevant; they will know if there are other lectures and seminars going on in other parts of the University; they will know which other academics in other parts of the University are working in areas that might be relevant or of interest.

You will typically see your supervisor for no less than three times a term, so for about an hour per meeting; but the advantage of a department such as ours is that students have lots of points of access and informal meetings with supervisors on a regular basis also. There are very few institutions of higher education that actually devote that level of resources to personalised, individualised teaching. The system really means that students are stretched in a way that they just wouldn't be in a lecture setting or in a seminar setting.

They have to defend their argument; they have to engage with a tutor to discuss ideas at a level of depth that isn't possible simply in a group setting and not only is this very useful in terms of substantive learning, it also is enormously useful in giving students confidence in how to articulate and express their thoughts, and most importantly actually, how to think for themselves, and I think that's one of the real strengths of the system. Employers are always telling us that Oxford graduates simply are extremely skilled in these areas, precisely because of this training.

Students sometimes worry that you have to be a certain personality or certain type of person to benefit from the system; perhaps you have to be confident, or like talking. I would say that actually the system works regardless of what your particular style and strengths are and in fact what it allows us to do is to tailor the teaching to your particular style and strength.

From the tutor's point of view, it helps keep things fresh. You might have taught a course or a particular paper for several years, but you never quite know what a student is going to say about a particular issue, how they might engage with a topic, and so it means things are always very interesting and always very different.

Fieldwork - Dr L Cluver

Page 5 of e-brochure

All of our PhD students go and do at least a year of fieldwork overseas, and I actually think it's essential for the kind of research that we do. To be a good researcher, and to provide research which is going to support policy and programming, you need to understand the context of what you are researching. It's not enough to open a database and look at a whole set of numbers, because those numbers only mean something if you've walked the streets, and been into people's homes, and understand what these people's lives are like, what these numbers actually mean, and how they work with each other.

Some students prefer to stay in Oxford and work on book-based work or data-based work and some really want to go out and experience the field, and for many of them it's an enormous learning experience, independent of the research that they produce. You live away from home, for up to a year, you often live in a completely new country, doing research in deep rural areas with no electricity.

They also learn about the complexities of research. It's a hugely invaluable experience that anyone who is either going to do research, or be in the kind of position where you judge research. So many of our students end up working for in the UN, end up working in government, end up working in NGOs, need to be able to look at research that other people have done and say "how was this done?", and "was this done ethically, and was this done in a way that was realistic and fit with that community?"

You know, we do lots of training, but I think it's still a shock for many. I think that the complexity and enormity of what you're doing and the way that you touch people's lives and the way that research touches people's lives is a new learning experience for all of them. And it was for me when I did my own fieldwork, it was a huge – my own first fieldwork for my masters and then for my PhD, you know, I don't think I expected the reality of it at all, but you learn.

MPhil Comparative Social Policy - Amanda Shriwise

Page 9 of e-brochure

I read for an MPhil in Comparative Social Policy. It was a very conscious decision for me to choose to come to Oxford and to choose to look at health policy from the angle that I did. I wanted to take a look at the way societies and groups of people address social problems and I didn't want to look at that from strictly an economic perspective, or just a political perspective, I really wanted both, and Oxford allowed me to take a broader look at the way that social policies have developed, what they're designed to do, whether they work, whether they don't, and I really appreciated being able to take that bigger perspective, and that was really what this course offered for me.

I've loved it. I've grown immensely from being an international student here and I think that's the most important thing. If you come from another country you should expect things to change and expect yourself to change, really, and in a new environment and I found that really exciting and I feel like I had a great training, and that if I move on to continue to look at these issues, that I'll be capable to do that. There's a strong community of international students here, so while you find yourself in a new country, it's very easy to make yourself at home and Oxford provides a lot of support to do that. The collegiate system at the University is very helpful in that way, so you have a chance to make College your home, to have accommodation, to make friends quickly, and that makes a big impact I think, on the student experience here.

I think the best bits were really the people and the teaching. The lectures are very helpful; our professors were around very often to answer questions and to really just give us extra information in any area that we wish to have it. They're extremely accessible and I really appreciated that about the department and the students were wonderful as well. It was not uncommon that we would have study groups or do group work. I found getting to know my course mates a huge part of the academic experience here and something that I can't imagine not having.

The other portion of the experience is the relationship that you develop with your supervisor, and that's more of an individual relationship that you have with a supervisor here, that will oversee your work and specifically oversee your thesis and dissertations as you start to write. Oxford is a very unique academic setting, and one in which you're allowed to live a fully intellectual lifestyle, so you get to learn about really anything. You're welcome to go to lectures in several different departments; it's a very enriching experience. It's really changed my perspective as a person, not just as an academic. I certainly learned a lot on my course, but I had the opportunity to grow a lot as a young person here in a very well-rounded way, which is something I really appreciate.

The most important message I would give to incoming students and especially to incoming international students would be, you know, just to be sure that you really soak all the time in while you're here, because it goes by very, very quickly. So, just to come and feel very confident to jump right in. There are loads of international students here, loads of people with all kinds of backgrounds, and with all kinds of training, and everyone's here because they want to be, and I think that's one thing that makes Oxford a really exciting place.

MPhil in Evidence-Based Social Intervention and Policy Evaluation - Gerardo Melendez-Torres

Page 10 of e-brochure

My background was in nursing and health economics, so I read both of those subjects to degree level, and I qualified as a nurse before coming here. But what I found was that while I felt very comfortable with the idea of using evidence-based practise in my own work as a registered nurse, I didn't know how to make the evidence base for that practise. I decided to look for a course that would help me to better understand and appreciate what evidence-based practise was, especially as that mapped on to social policy. I think this was the only course I was able to find. It goes from understanding the problem, to developing and creating new ways of addressing this problem, to aggregating the evidence that we have on these ways of addressing these problems into systematic reviews and to disseminating that information and bringing that information into policy.

I think this course is very special in the sense that it's really at the frontier of health and social care and social policy; in terms of the way that they integrate understandings from public health, from psychology, from education, from nursing and medicine, from social work, and how they bring all of those together, I think, into a very important and very consequential body of knowledge.

If you look at the people who are teaching on this course, if you look at the professors who are in this department, I think you'll find that each of them is extremely distinguished in a different area of that process or in several areas of that process. So, to have that kind of breadth and depth in the teaching staff, in the professorial staff, I think is extremely, extremely unusual, and it adds a tremendous amount of breadth and depth to the course, especially when they are able to bring examples of their own research, of their own work, into lectures and into the classroom.

Working with my supervisor was a really great experience, in the sense that I felt like I developed and grew a lot in terms of how I understood the materials that we were being presented in class. We had people from Eastern Europe, we had people who were coming from the United States, we had people who were coming from the UK from different areas, and so I think in that regard, it didn't feel very isolating to be from the United States in this course, or generally to be a foreign student in this department.

If you want to make a change, I think, if you want to make a change on the individual level, on the group level, on the community level, on the national level – if you want to change something, if you want to change a social problem, it's essential to be informed about the evidence; to understand how to collect that evidence, how to critically appraise that evidence, how to create that evidence, how to put that evidence into practise. If you want to make that kind of change then I think it's essential that you understand how to marshal that evidence. I think in that regard that's why this course is so important, because I think it gives us the skills and the ability and the experience to know how to do that.

I feel more empowered than I did before to address social problem; I feel more empowered than I did before to be a constructive change agent; and I feel more empowered than I did

before to go out and to change a problem that a community finds upsetting, that I find frustrating, in a way that's informed and that's effective and I think because of all of that, I think that's why I'm very glad that I came to Oxford to do this course.

DPhil in Social Policy - Thorn Pitidol

Page 11 of e-brochure

I got a scholarship from the Thai Government, and I got it because I was already working as a University Lecturer before I came. The Thai Government is willing to invest in further education, invest for them to go and do their PhD.

I think I couldn't really have proceeded to this point without the guidance of my supervisor. He knows, I would say, the art of crafting research.

I do my study on examining community participation in Thailand. When I go to Thailand, I conduct, like, 10 months fieldwork, looking at one of the specific development programmes and looking at how it actually functions on the ground. Research, I think it sounds like it is a small issue, but the niche of it is because, you know, all of the knowledge to be able to be a PhD it needs to create something at the boundary; it needs to develop some new knowledge.

I think for people from developing countries that do not use English as their main language, people can interact better in English, which is a huge plus because it really is like a door that opens their life to more or less the international environment and international community.

The more I'm here the better feeling I get from being here. There are a lot of stories in Oxford and there are always interesting people and interesting pieces of history everywhere here for you to really experience.

The department has been like a family. There are obviously other departments in Oxford that are larger but I feel like I am in a small, but very friendly family in this department.

Ali Naghieh – DPhil in Social Intervention

Page 11 of e-brochure

I have a health background. I am a pharmacist by profession and I have experience in both primary and secondary care. I've also done an MBA in the past, and also a Masters in Social Policy. For some time I decided that I wanted to pursue an academic career and I wanted to make sure that I actually enjoyed the three year process, three year DPhil process, as well as it being meaningful on its own right, rather than just being a means to an end.

Social interventions are evidence-based solutions for social problems, issues of social determinants of health, issues of delinquency, substance abuse, so social problems in the wider sense and what we effectively do here at the Centre for Evidence-Based Intervention is to gather and synthesise the evidence for effective interventions in the form of systematic reviews and also to develop the evidence base by conducting social experiments.

My project focuses on organisational interventions for employee wellbeing. Organisational interventions are social interventions that the organisations perform and they aim to change the structure or the context of organisations, to influence the health, welfare, wellbeing of the individuals. My project is an interdisciplinary project so I can utilize my health background and also my background and my learning in management studies and social policy, and we have collaboration with the Saïd Business School here, for the project as well as with the Department of Education.

What I have found in this department and the Centre for Evidence-Based Intervention, is there's more of an evaluative and applied focus to the research, whereas in other public health or epidemiology, or social research departments I tend to see more observational and exploratory studies, and that's one of the reasons which I became attracted to this department, and to this research team, for its applied and evaluative nature.

I would like to pursue an academic career, and I think that with this DPhil in Social Intervention there are areas within social policy, within public health, within epidemiology, within departments of social sciences, I could apply this, and be value adding in such atmospheres.

Fees and funding

Page 12 of e-brochure

Gerardo Melendez-Torres

The Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission stipends me, as well as pays for my fees and tuition at University. It was in pursuit of wanting to come to Oxford and study this course and to read for this subject specifically at Oxford that I applied for that funding. I did that in November of my last year at University, so that's almost two years ago now. It was a very challenging process, but I think it was a rewarding one, in the sense that when I got that funding I knew that coming to Oxford would be a possibility.

Franziska Meinck

For my Masters I was unfunded because I had worked as a social worker. I had some savings and I sold my car, and then I had my parents give me a loan for the living costs. And then I was put forward by my supervisor for the ESRC scholarship, and they have been an amazing funding body. They are paying for all my tuition fees, my college fee, and my living allowance and it's such a huge worry off my mind.

Thorn Pitadol

I got a scholarship from the Thai Government and I got it because I was already working as a University Lecturer before I came. The Thai Government is willing to invest in further education, invest for them to go and do their PhD. We have to work for the Government when we go back; in my case I have to go back and teach in the Thai University for twice the time I spend here.

Life in Oxford – Antonia Santalova

Page 13 of e-brochure

I come from a far, far away country – the name of that is the Kyrgyz Republic. It is located in Central Asia and it is a former part of Russia. Before Oxford I used to work in the development sector and it was my profound interest in learning more – how to build the policy in the developing context in order to make it a better place for people.

The whole atmosphere of the town of Oxford itself is educating itself – any coffee shop, any grocery store - you see students with papers, with books, with huge rucksacks and laptops, you see people reading constantly, you see them studying, trying to investigate new things, and it makes you think maybe you should work as well the same hard, or try to!

I absolutely adore the centre of Oxford with the narrow streets and the secret corners, like this one. All this atmosphere in this town, in Oxford makes every single minute spent here like it is teaching you and educating you – that is what I love most about this town.

I believe the University's facilities are maybe the best in the world, particularly the libraries - the number of them is impressive. There are plenty of beautiful, historical places. Not mentioning the number of colleges which the University consists of, I should definitely mention two major museums that are in town: one is the Oxford University Museum that was founded a long time ago, and that is absolutely free of charge! But as for me, my favourite museum is the Ashmolean.

By having the University located right in the city centre and actually not being separate from it but being in this constant interaction with the local people here, with all the students coming for undergraduate courses as well as simple language learning courses, it makes my life here absolutely exciting because everyday you meet different people, you meet new faces.

If I say that life in Oxford is 100% a fairy tale I would lie. It is not. It is plenty of hard work and commitment and dedication. When I came here for the first time I was so impressed by the people I met here, by facilities I found at Oxford University, by the incredible group mates, class mates, department mates, not mentioning the historical part of this town.

So I want to warn students who come to Oxford that despite all the distracting things like the beauty of Oxford's countryside and the excitement of all the historical places in Oxford, and the possibility to find any book you wish or could ever wish to find, you should try still not to forget about your main target and your main purpose of staying here and being here; and that's a challenge because life here is really interesting and it really enforces that.