Studying Social Policy and Criminology has never been more important or timely. Who is living in poverty and why? What should governments do to address homelessness? Should the state intervene in personal lives? How can we make cities more child-friendly? Can social policy reduce obesity levels? How should we think about migration? Should drug taking be criminalised? How do ideas of crime and justice vary between countries? What crimes can states commit? How should governments respond to cyber-crime?

These are just some of the questions addressed in our degrees. The social harm perspective in Criminology that we emphasise in Bristol complements the interest in wellbeing and social needs that is the basis of Social Policy. This is reflected in our teaching, which spans the boundaries between the two disciplines. Social Policy, the study of societal wellbeing, is a natural partner for Criminology, the social scientific study of crime.

Studying either Social Policy or Criminology here in Bristol means being part of a department which is one of the very best in the country. The people teaching you these subjects are leading experts in these topics – 80% of our research is categorised as ‘world-leading’ and Social Policy is rated top in the 2018 Guardian University league table.

Bristol is an excellent location to explore these issues; it is a city with a high proportion of young people, engaged with issues of environment and sustainability, wrestling with inequalities, and enriched by cultural diversity. It is a great place to study and relax, and is regularly voted as one of the best places in the UK to live.

We look forward to seeing you next year!

Esther

Professor Esther Dermott explains more about Social Policy and Criminology at the University of Bristol

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We tend to call these “drugs” for shorthand, but in almost all societies, throughout history, there has been something that was an ‘acceptable’ drug, while other drugs have been seen as unacceptable, and controlled in some way. That acceptable drug may not be something used routinely, but may instead have a role in ritual and ceremony.

‘Acceptable’ drugs
Where a particular drug falls in terms of that ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ divide has, historically, had less to do with the particular properties of the drug itself, and everything to do with things like familiarity and who is thought to be the user of it in any given society. Social customs, norms and ‘etiquette’ grow up around ‘acceptable’ drugs, while laws and prohibitions grow up around ‘unacceptable’ drugs. This is what we mean by drug policies: the set of responses a society has to drug use – laws, arrangements for control, treatment of users – and the thinking behind those responses. This is what we mean by drug policies: the set of responses a society has to drug use – laws, arrangements for control, treatment of users – and the thinking behind those responses. Since the middle of the twentieth century, different countries’ drug policies have increasingly been framed within a global structure created by the United Nations Conventions on drugs and the systems for administering and enforcing those conventions. The UN conventions aim to eradicate the production and use of the drugs they control: all those that our own 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act classifies and bans.

Prohibition
This global framework of prohibition has many critics: countries whose own traditional ‘acceptable’ drugs are now criminalised like Bolivia, which has tried to legalise the use of coca, for example. Or international NGOs that argue against the way UN policies like crop eradication hurt less developed countries. Since the middle of the twentieth century, different countries’ drug policies have increasingly been framed within a global structure created by the United Nations Conventions on drugs and the systems for administering and enforcing those conventions. The UN conventions aim to eradicate the production and use of the drugs they control: all those that our own 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act classifies and bans.

A great topic
So why is this such a great topic to study? It covers everything from questions about why individuals get into difficulties with drugs, and the ways we as a society treat them and provide help for them, through to global issues – why does the UN take the line it does and where does drug policy fit into international relations? If we are looking at British policy, we can see whether national politics affect how we think about drugs – have Labour, Conservative or Coalition governments had very different approaches to drugs, for example? From a sociological point of view, drug use is a fascinating topic: many of the classics of early sociology looked at drug use as a form of deviance and have insights to help us understand policy. It raises key philosophical issues: Can we see drug use as a self-regarding action, and one that individuals should have choice over, or do we believe there are harms involved that the law must protect people from, even against their will?

In the optional unit ‘Drugs and Society’ I address these sorts of questions, and look at the way British society has developed its drug policy over the last century, putting that into the global context and comparing it to other countries’ approaches.

Dr Rachel Lart has worked on research projects looking at a range of policy initiatives in the area of health and social care. Rachel convenes the first year unit Social Policy and the Welfare State: Historical Perspectives, and teaches two optional second/third year units: Healthcare Policies and Drugs and Society.
Fashion counterfeiting
A victimless crime?

Dr Joanna Large explains why social harms create significant issues in society.

Despite the number of counterfeit or fake fashion items such as luxury handbags, GHD hair straighteners and Nike trainers you might be familiar seeing in places such as Facebook marketplace, Instagram and other online platforms, it is an offence to manufacture, sell, or be in possession of counterfeit goods with a view to sell, under the Trade Marks Act 1994 (Section 92). The maximum sentence available for a person convicted of these offences is ten years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine. Once someone has been convicted, they could be subject further to a confiscation order under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. This targets the ‘criminal lifestyle’ and has the power to recover assets (such as property) which are said to have been funded through committing counterfeiting crimes.

The Intellectual Property Crime Group (IPCG), based in the United Kingdom, further provides examples of the relationship between counterfeiting and criminal activities citing ‘many’ cases where links have been found. These ‘criminal activities’ include ‘money laundering, people trafficking, loan sharking and the exploitation of children’.

Growing political and policing concerns about the harm and dangers of counterfeit goods and their role in funding other criminal activities has seen an emphasis on tackling the supply of counterfeit goods. This has resulted in enforcement operations that tackle the offline sales of counterfeit goods in shops and market; attempts to infiltrate and disrupt the movement of counterfeit goods and attempts to tackle the online sales of counterfeits through websites and social media.

Consumers are also seen to play an important role and it is hoped that if we are ‘educated’ about the ‘dangers’ and harms of fakes we will stop wanting to buy them. Therefore, as criminologists, as well as understanding the supply of counterfeit goods and how this relates to crime and harm, we also need to understand the demand for them. Why is it that people want to buy fake fashion goods, and will stopping people from wanting to buy them (the demand), stop the crime and harm related to their supply?

Do prisons really work?

Christina Pantazis explains how prisons can be socially harmful

We often think of prisons as institutions holding the most dangerous individuals. As a result, the rest of society – the law-abiding majority – is protected from the harmful predatory actions of the minority. The idea that prisons can protect society from harm provides an appealing utilitarian argument in defence of prisons, particularly in the context of rising crime rates. However, rather than being a source of harm reduction, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that prisons can be socially harmful.

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We often think of prisons as institutions holding the most dangerous individuals. As a result, the rest of society – the law-abiding majority – is protected from the harmful predatory actions of the minority. The idea that prisons can protect society from harm provides an appealing utilitarian argument in defence of prisons, particularly in the context of rising crime rates. However, rather than being a source of harm reduction, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that prisons can be socially harmful.

A major issue of concern is that the prison population is made up of society’s most vulnerable individuals. The Social Exclusion report (2002:8) depressingly found that: “compared with the general population, prisoners are thirteen times as likely to have been in care as a child, thirteen times as likely to be unemployed, ten times as likely to have been regular truant, 60 to 70 per cent of prisoners were using drugs before imprisonment. Over 70 per cent suffer from at least two mental disorders. And 20 per cent of male and 37 per cent of female sentenced prisoners have attempted suicide in the past.”

Whilst prison can deal with some of the problematic issues affecting vulnerable offenders, the experience of prison may serve to exacerbate problems. For example, prison may provide access to cognitive therapy and access to other counselling, yet the isolation, violence, and mundanity of prison life may contribute to the deterioration of a prisoner’s mental health. It’s not surprising that self-harming and suicide are such major problems in prisons. In 2013-14, 88 prisoners took their own lives, whilst there were a disturbing 24,000 incidents of self-harming recorded – incidents which disproportionately affect women (Ministry of Justice, 2014).
Social Policy is a broad-based social science subject which analyses a variety of issues facing society in order to advise governments, international organisations and policy-makers on how to address real-world problems, locally, nationally, and internationally. Such engagement can also inform teaching, keeping it up-to-date with the latest issues, and relevant to the needs of society.

I am a Senior Research Fellow in the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol. For many years I have worked on issues related to migration in a research, teaching, and advisory capacity. I have advised the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and EU Presidencies, and collaborated with many NGOs and international organisations including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

Such work informs my teaching at a variety of levels, and my unit ‘migration policy in the UK and European Union’ has been an optional second and third year unit for the BSc Social Policy degree for several years.

Most recently, I co-edited the journal Fatal Journeys Volume 3, which explores the challenges of collecting data on migrant deaths and disappearances. Better data on migration would help inform policy by helping to understand migration trends, enabling, for example, the construction of safe migration pathways and assist in better preparedness for migration ‘crises’. The report, published by the International Organization for Migration, makes it evident that the number of migrants who die across the world are vastly under-reported. In many remote regions of the world, bodies may never be found, and many migrants may never be identified. Accurate data on the number of missing migrants is vital to building a true picture of the problem, to create strong, evidence-based policies to save lives and to improve identification of missing migrants.

The report focuses on the problems of collecting accurate data in six regions around the world: Middle East and North Africa; sub-Saharan Africa; Asia-Pacific; Central America; South America; Europe and the Mediterranean. Each of these regions presents specific problems related to the availability and collection of data on migration.

In Central and South America, for example, there is little data on migrant deaths and disappearances, and crimes against migrants tend to go unreported and therefore are not investigated. While there is greater awareness of migration from North Africa and Turkey across the Mediterranean, much less is known about the journeys that migrants make before they reach the Mediterranean coast. Those travelling through the Middle East and Africa may have travelled through or may be fleeing from conflict zones, making data collection difficult.

In the Asia Pacific region, migration across the Andaman Sea illustrates that while occasionally women and child migrant deaths can be ‘hyper visible’, they are much more likely to be invisible, with women less likely to be reported missing, their bodies less likely to be recovered, and when they are, less likely to be reported than men.

With these issues in mind, the report makes a number of recommendations including:

- Make better use of administrative data and publish it whenever possible
- Promote survey-based data collection where standardised processes do not exist
- Improve data sharing across regions to inform the ‘bigger picture’
- Explore the use of new technologies including big data
- Work with civil society groups and involve the families of missing migrants as further sources of information.

The full report is available for download free at: publications.iom.int/books/fatal-journeys-volume-3-part-2-improving-data-missing-migrants
The rise in youth poverty

Youth poverty is generally ignored in political debates in both Europe and the UK. When it is discussed, it tends to be in the context of unemployment. Yet, labour market participation does not necessarily guarantee social inclusion. In a context of high youth unemployment and poor quality jobs, new policy proposals are needed to tackle rising youth poverty.

Across Europe as a whole young people today are more likely to be poor than older adults, including pensioners. In 2014, almost one in four European youth lived below the poverty line. And, the issue of youth poverty in Europe is not limited to the poorest countries in Southern and Eastern Europe. In fact, the highest income poverty rates are observed in countries with low overall poverty rates: Denmark and Norway. In the UK around 25% of young people live in income poverty which is close to the European average.

The outlook for young people has worsened during the recession. Young people were amongst the hardest hit by the 2008 economic downturn, which saw youth unemployment rates skyrocket across the continent and surpass 50% in Spain and Greece.

In the UK young people under 24 are almost four times as likely to be unemployed as older adults.

Yet, policy responses to date have been notably poor. Over the last decade or so, the European Union has launched a number of initiatives to promote youth social inclusion with a strong commitment to the reduction of youth unemployment. Given the numbers discussed above, the European Union concern with youth unemployment is very welcome. It is also insufficient.

While getting a job is a way out of poverty, it depends on the quality and stability of the jobs provided. Policy initiatives often focus on increasing young people’s motivation and skills while job creation is largely absent from the discussion, as are job quality and social security.

Neglecting to look at issues around quality of work, job insecurity and social protection risks generating long term problems. Unemployment, short term and unstable jobs and limited entitlement to social security all have consequences in terms of future risks of poverty, and challenge the long term integration of young people. This is particularly worrisome in a situation in which, young people are already experiencing more temporary employment and substantially lower wages than adults (ILO, 2010). Recent policy reforms, that limit young people’s access to public support risk excluding some of the most vulnerable from the safety net, precisely at times when they may need it the most.

In the UK, the situation is not much better, the analysis of the political party manifestos produced by Academics Against Poverty reveals a disconnect between the election conclusions that: “All parties do poorly in addressing equality or the position of young people”. We need to develop innovative and brave social policy proposals that tackle youth poverty both in Europe and in the UK.

Numbers confirm

Without numbers we wouldn’t be able to say that in 2011, 22.7% of the UK population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Source: Office for National Statistics). This is equivalent to 14 million people not earning enough income to sustain decent standard of living. Similarly, numbers allow us to confirm that inequality in Britain has risen dramatically in the last 10 years. In fact, Britain’s richest 1% have accumulated as much wealth as the poorest 55% (Source: Office for National Statistics). It is now well known that high levels of inequality negatively affect individuals’ socio-economic position in society and restrict their life chances. The extent to which this happens can only be answered with numbers. In a globalised and data-driven world, it becomes therefore even more important to develop skills that can help analyse and interpret these data, so that we can inform policy making as well as improve career options. Increasingly, numerical (or quantitative) skills are in high demand from employers in all sectors and would definitely enhance students’ chances of getting a job.

Lack of confidence with numbers

Although the latest research indicates that 15-year-old pupils in the UK are motivated by numbers and can see their utility, the UK still lags behind when compared to other countries in the world (Source: OECD PISA report). So much that in 2014 the education minister was rushed to Shanghai to discover the secret behind their pupils’ top scores in maths. Why? Numeracy not only increases individuals’ ability to succeed in life and in the workplace but at a national level it increases the country’s competitiveness and growth. In the social sciences, students underestimate the value of numbers and often think that to interpret or use numbers they need to have a mathematical mind. This, unfortunately, discourages students from taking any further maths. But this is a complete misconception in the social sciences, particularly, numbers are used as a tool, which only works if students have a social sciences mind.

Sponsored tuition to help

Any social science student can learn to use and interpret numbers if they are motivated, engaged with the topic and, most importantly, if they receive learning support.

With this purpose, in 2013 the University of Bristol has become part of a £19.5 million national programme sponsored by the Nuffield Foundation designed to support students in the acquisition of quantitative training, by setting up the Bristol QStep centre, one of only 15 centres in the UK. Three highly skilled lecturers, including myself, were hired as part of the initiative to teach new units that did not only appeal by their content to childhood studies students but would also equip them with the latest analytical tools to understand society.

For instance, I deliver a unit called “Segregation and Inequality in Britain”. The aim of the unit is to consider the extent to which the UK is a segregated or unequal society giving particular consideration to what is meant by segregation and inequality and how these concepts may be formalised and measured. With interactive lectures and computer labs we use data to better understand the UK socio-economic landscape. A data analysis project gives students the opportunity to explore the data they most enjoy studying whilst learning data analysis skills. This subject can be chosen as an open unit or as part of the new BSc in Social Policy with Quantitative Research Methods, and is taught by leading UK experts in quantitative methods. As proof that anyone can do it, no prior maths skills are required!

Undoubtedly, the strengths of the social policy programme at Bristol have already been recognised by numerous institutions, placing us first in several University leagues. But now, students at Bristol will have the unique opportunity to engage with the more quantitative side of social policy. Social Policy at Bristol gives students the option to strengthen their degree and widen future career opportunities, with the help and support of lecturers who are truly passionate about teaching the use and interpretation of numbers.

Did you know?

The per capita consumption of cheese (US) correlates with the number of people who died becoming tangled in their bed sheets?

These and other spurious correlations can be found at www.tylervigen.com

Numbers up!

“I really dislike numbers but policy makers want numerical evidence so I need to learn how to provide evidence” ...

... said a first year student when I enquired about why she was studying my unit. And I couldn’t agree more. Numbers can help quantify the social world by identifying the extent to which there is advantage or disadvantage in society so that we can address areas of need.

Dr Alba Lanau discusses why this is an issue which needs addressing.

Dr Julia Gumy talks about her research interests and research methods.

Knowing your numbers will make a huge difference to your future, writes Dr Julia Gumy.

Dr Alba Lanau is a Senior Teaching Associate at the School for Policy Studies. Her research interests centre around poverty and inequality. These, and other issues are considered in units such as ‘Poverty and Social Exclusion’ and ‘Social Exclusion and Social Policy’, in BSoc Social Policy.

Dr Julia Gumy is a Lecturer in Policy Studies with Quantitative Research Methods. Her research interests lie in the study of the life course, subjective and economic well-being, gender, comparative welfare policies and the use of quantitative research methods.

Please wait here until you are useful.

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Jessica tells how her Study Abroad experience exceeded her expectations.

I always knew I wanted to study abroad in Hong Kong, it was one of the reasons I chose my course (Social Policy and Sociology) at Bristol, and so I had extremely high expectations. Despite this, after returning from five months away, I was pleasantly surprised with how my expectations were surpassed.

The academic experience was fantastic. My mind was opened to topics which I wouldn’t have studied in Bristol, and from a different perspective. As you might imagine, the workload was different - not necessarily harder - but the facilities and support which were made available helped immensely. Away from my studies, there were so many different opportunities to get involved in; making friends from all over the world along the way. Some of these activities included going to Lamma Island, hiking Lion’s Rock and Victoria’s Peak and dining out at the legendary Mr Wong! I learnt so much about Hong Kong and its culture.

I was also lucky enough to have the opportunity to travel across South East Asia and Australia after my studies and so, visited eight countries in total. The whole experience will always be one of the most exciting times in my life and I look back with only positive memories as I took advantage of everything this fantastic opportunity had to offer.

Widen your horizons with Study Abroad

Study Abroad student Elliot, describes what it’s like arriving for the first time at an international university.

Earlier last year, I flew to Hong Kong with two other students from the School for Policy Studies to begin our five-month placement abroad.

After the plane journey we arrived at Hong Kong airport feeling excited but also a little apprehensive. We were greeted by local students from the City University of Hong Kong and were taken by coach to our accommodation. On the journey we were all quite nervous as we watched the city go by out of the window, unsure what the coming months had in store. However, once we had arrived and settled in, all those fears faded away. The first night we were introduced to a large group of other exchange students who were all very welcoming and soon became good friends. These friendships lasted throughout our stay.

The five months I spent in Hong Kong were truly amazing and transformative in so many ways. It is an experience I’d recommend to anyone; helping to develop both my maturity and independence. Whether it was the wonderful people I met, the places I was able to travel to or the new cultural experiences, it is an experience that will stay with me forever.

“Widen your horizons with Study Abroad”

Elliot

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Jessica
Criminology at Bristol

VICKIE: I chose to study Criminology at the University of Bristol after coming to Bristol for a summer school. I found it helpful to be able to experience what it’s like to be a student and understand a little about university life. I liked that the University in Bristol is so open and that it is part of the city and not a separate campus. I also discovered that I could study Criminology at degree level!

At college I studied crime and deviance in my A-level sociology course and that was something that I found very interesting – I am considering a career that enables me to analyse patterns and causes and the extent of different crimes.

My family originally came from south Poland and I came to the UK when I was 9 years old. I learned English and feel really settled in the UK. None of my immediate family went to university – my family are proud of me for following my dreams and securing a place at Bristol. I started studying Criminology in September 2017, everyone was very welcoming, and it really helped that everyone else seemed to understand what we were going through and were kind and supportive. I was a bit nervous about finding my way around – but I needn’t have worried – everything is easy to get to and close by. We even get a free bus pass! The staff in my accommodation also put on social events and help us get to know where everything is.

As for the course, studying Criminology is everything that I had expected – the criminology units are fascinating, and the staff are very good at explaining things. I also really appreciate that we get to leave the classroom occasionally and learn more about the city via crime walks, film nights and visits to courts, prisons and museums, etc.

SAMIR: I am from Jordan and my family are Palestinian in origin, an identity that I am very proud of. I come from a very family-oriented background. I grew up hearing my family’s stories and this helped me to understand the importance of place and of belonging. My grandparents were refugees: they had to leave their homes and start again; one of my grandfathers was an orphan by the time he was 17. So, I have always been conscious of harm and mistreatment and the importance of caring for others.

As long as I can remember I have been involved in charity work. We would cook at home and then take food out to the children in the rural poorer areas; I would collect up my friends’ old toys and re-distribute them. I also went to an international school, which stressed a global perspective on education and citizenship. It is this interest in society and human rights that led me to choose to study Criminology. I am interested in the law and particularly how the law can secure the rights of gay people, of women, or refugees, and so on.

I always knew that Bristol was where I wanted to go. Since I was young it was a dream of mine.

In fact, my grandmother came here on a scholarship funded by the Jordanian government. It was her first time leaving the country and she graduated here 55 years ago! She took Economics and English and studied in the Wills Building. And then my Aunt came here and studied Sociology. I am therefore the third generation in my family to study at Bristol.

Graduate careers

The BSc Social Policy and Criminology courses are a great way to start your career. The skills and knowledge you will gain are highly sought after by employers, and our graduates have an excellent track record of employment. Here’s a selection of what some of our students have gone on to achieve:

Holly (2016)
Worked in children’s social care, before moving to the transport sector where she contributed to the West of England’s policies on digital information, and designed the on-street timetables for the Metrobus rapid transit system.

Zeynep (2015)
Employed by Zacchaeus 2000 in London – an organisation which addresses poverty issues that arise as a result of unfairness in the legal and benefits system.

Molly (2015)
On graduating, secured a place at Hft, a national learning disability charity, as part of the 12 month Charity/Works trainee programme. Now works as a Community Builder for the Barnwood Trust, a charitable foundation dedicated to making Gloucestershire an inclusive community for people with a disability or mental health problem. Molly also works alongside the national ABCD forum to raise awareness of Asset-Based Community Development.

Casper (2014)
After graduating completed various internships: One in a European Valuation Consultancy, another in the affordable housing consultancy at a French Investment Bank and then finally for a large global property firm in commercial leasing based in the Middle East. Currently a graduate at Knight Frank.

Matt (2013)
Works in Policy and Research at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies in London.

Ellie (2013)
Assistant Private Secretary in the Department for Transport’s Ministerial Private Office.

Becky (2012)
On graduating worked in a number of senior management roles within the third sector and civil service. Currently studying for the MSc in Public Policy at Bristol part time, whilst working full time for the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, as the Head of the Inquiry Office for Wales.

Joanna (2012)
Joined the UK Civil Service’s Analytical Fast Stream as a Social Researcher and is now a Senior Research Officer at the Office for National Statistics.

Laura (2010)
Secured a place as a trainee manager on the NHS Graduate Scheme, delivering the National Bowel Cancer Screening Programme in her local region and went on to work at the King’s Fund – the major health policy think tank.
At the time of publishing, the BSc Social Policy degree was top of The Guardian’s 2018 university league table.