

Ten years of media and communication at LSE

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Polis is part of the Department of Media and Communications at the LSE which celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. Polis director Professor Charlie Beckett is currently Head of the Department. In this article Monika Lang (MSc Media & Comm, '13) gives her account of the the history of the LSE's Department of meddepartment and offers a unique student perspective on how it has grown over the years.



The late Professor Roger Silverstone, founding head of the department of Media and Communications

From the moment my classmates and I entered the Department of Media and Communications the word interdisciplinary has been emphasised continually. As we now approach our dissertations, we are lucky in that we face such a challenge with a solid foundation of support from the faculty while also being able to draw from the theoretical frameworks found across a number of disciplines. Naturally, the department's evolution is brought to the forefront of discussion as we celebrate its 10th anniversary—a discussion that would be remiss without highlighting the diverse thought it hosts.

Beginning as a small interdepartmental program spread across Sociology and Social Psychology in 1993, the department became official in 2003 and today it is an internationally celebrated space for social inquiry around media, both old and new, characterised by innovative research

—a quality enabled through a focus on interdisciplinary inquiry.

Speaking with Professor Robin Mansell, one of the founding members of the department, it became clear that the department has not lost sight of its original foci while expanding over the past decade. “We began with a strong commitment to critical studies of innovation and governance embracing policy and regulation,” said Mansell, “and we have deepened that with a commitment to research focusing within the UK and across the EU.”

Diverse Areas

Traditionally, the department has addressed questions around media and innovation across the spectrum of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), consistently investigating the mediated public sphere and digital literacies. Although every academic staff member engages with media and mediation, journalism, and policy in some capacity, the department hosts faculty with research profiles providing depth of understanding in diverse areas.

To name a few: Lilie Chouliaraki joined in 2007 as a specialist in media ethics, Damian Tambini (2006) contributes regulatory and legal prowess, Myria Georgiou (2009) lends expertise in identity and diaspora, and Ellen Helsper (2009) brings an understanding of inter-personal communication and digital exclusion. Additional research agendas represented by faculty include protest and resistance by Bart Cammaerts and globalisation and the Chinese media by Binchun Meng, among many others.

Mansell cites the depth of understanding afforded by the steady growth of the faculty and the resulting capacity to build the department through comparative research as key in its success.



In 2006, BBC and ITN journalist Charlie Beckett joined the department to set up Polis, the LSE's international journalism think-tank that is just one of the ways that academic research is connected to the world of media practice. Beckett is now a professor and head of the Department in this anniversary year.

Nurturing Excellence

Cammaerts, Georgiou and Helsper, junior level faculty who started at the LSE early in their careers, are prime examples of how the department has engaged in both capacity building and the nurturing of academic potential. Cammaerts began his career with the department as a post-doc while Georgiou and Helsper were PhD students in the department's earliest years. Since joining as permanent faculty each have greatly impacted the direction of the department.

Cammaert's forte in power and social change has dovetailed with Mansell's specialty in ICTs, development and inequality. The result of their fruitful collaboration was the MSc in Communications and a Development. Both Georgiou and Helsper have recently worked on multi-year grants funded by the European Commission, Georgiou for a project on transnational television culture and identity and Helsper, with department colleague Professor Sonja Livingstone, on young people and the Internet.

With such rapid growth over the past 10 years, the road that lies ahead is an optimistic one. Currently the department offers five different MSc programmes and two PhD programmes, each reflective of diverse and vibrant research specialisations. Additionally, 2012 saw the largest PhD intake ever at nine due to to the majority these students holding full scholarships from a number of funding bodies. Additionally, in 2013 two new permanent faculty—Drs. Wendy Willems and Allison Powell—joined the department.

Challenge Ahead

Livingstone, a founding member with Mansel and the late Roger Silverstone, is proud of what she has helped to build over the last 20 years but also, "humbled by the scale of the challenge ahead—the many questions and puzzles that remain as institutions and practices of socio-technical mediation become ever more complex, subtle, perhaps insidious, and yet critically important to us all."

Entering this department as a student in Autumn of 2012, I quickly became aware that I would not be receiving training where I would be asked to regurgitate. Instead I have been challenged to critically investigate the social world through issues germane to media and communication. This is crucial in the increasingly digital and globalised world of today—a fact never lost on the faculty. The crafting of the department as a protected space for critical and engaged research from an interdisciplinary perspective is ever apparent and is a defining feature of the its past and future.

For updates and news you can follow the department on Twitter @MediaLSE.

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