

## Undergraduate internship scheme: what's it like to work as a research assistant?



In summer 2015, the **Department of Government** ran a research internship scheme for undergraduates. The programme was an opportunity for BSc students to develop key skills by working with academic faculty on their research. We caught up with research assistant Barnaby Perkes and **Dr Denisa Kostovicova** to hear more about their collaboration on Denisa's project *Conflict, Identity and Transitional Justice*.

### **Barnaby Perkes, BSc Government and History**

“I'd never done any real research work before, so when the opportunity emerged to work with Dr Kostovicova I jumped at the chance. The task – conducting a review of the use of identity in transitional justice literature – was somewhat similar to much of the weekly reading work which we all do as students throughout the year. However, this work involved a more thorough approach to reading: it involved deeper analysis of the ways in which the scholars positioned themselves within the debates, and close attention to the underlying assumptions they made about identity. The task also involved establishing a summary by the end of the review which would form the basis of Dr Kostovicova's review section for her subsequent critique of the academic literature in this field.

This meant that finishing the review was a really satisfying and rewarding experience, and has helped me in various ways. Working as a research assistant has especially helped me tackle academic readings in a more nuanced way, helping me capture the more subtle differences between academics whose arguments might once have seemed more similar than they in fact were. The gradual summer-long process of compiling the review was also a really enjoyable insight into research work more generally, and has only made me more interested in research work after I complete my undergraduate degree. I also owe many thanks to Dr Kostovicova for the opportunity and for her help and advice in compiling the review – it made the process run smoothly, but also made the work feel valuable and helped pique my interest in a field I hadn't previously studied. I would highly recommend any sort of research work that fellow students can get their hands on!”

### **Dr Denisa Kostovicova, Associate Professor in Global Politics**



“I had two students working for me and I found the experience very positive. My approach to the exercise was very engaged and hands on. I was in touch with the students regularly by email, and we also held several meetings in my office where we discussed the readings but also general ideas about identity, conflict and facing the legacy of mass atrocity.

It was evident that the students gained a lot about how to approach research, and how to conduct a literature review. The students also learnt how research questions are formed and revised, as well as how to read the literature critically (from an angle).

It was very interesting to note that the project allowed the students to familiarise themselves with the field of conflict studies for the first time. As there is currently no conflict course at the undergraduate level, the review gave the students an opportunity to enquire about whether and how they can learn more about this field of politics and political science.

Lastly, the experience was insightful as it exposed the students to conducting research within a team, which includes discussion and formulation of new ideas collaboratively. This made the experience rewarding and fascinating, both for the students and myself.”

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*The next Department of Government research internship scheme will run in summer 2016. For more information on other internsip opportunitites, please visit the [LSE website](#).*

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