Welcome to the first Department of Political Science newsletter. We hope this new initiative will help us keep past, present and prospective students and staff informed of what’s going on in the department and also provide a means whereby former members can let us know what they are doing – both personally and professionally.

The past year has seen several major changes and challenges. Perhaps the biggest change and challenge was the departure of Sally Welham, the School of Public Policy’s longstanding executive administrator, to become Deputy Chief Executive of the British Thoracic Society. Sally was rightly seen as embodying the School and there was understandable trepidation on the part of everyone about whether we could find anyone capable of filling her shoes.

However, I am delighted to say we were extremely lucky to find a wonderful successor in Nicky Henson, who joined us from Imperial College at the start of the academic year. I think everyone is extremely pleased with how quickly Nicky got on top of her job at what was a particularly tricky time, coinciding as it did with the new intake of students, the arrival of three new academic staff members and two new members of the administrative team and the department’s submission to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).

Two of the new academic members, Dr Alex Braithwaite and Dr Christine Reh, replace respectively two other founder members of the department, Fiona Adamson, who set up the MSc in International Public Policy and Fabio Franchino, who was responsible for the MSc in European Public Policy. They are joined by Dr Markus Kornprobst.

He brings the IR team to three, and will be directing a new MSc programme on Global Governance and Ethics.
Sad though we were to lose Fiona and Fabio, the new members continue the policy of growing the department through recruiting globally for the brightest and best vigorous young researchers around. Indeed, the youth and enthusiasm of our academic staff was favourably commented on in a recent visit to the department by Sir Stephen Wall, the new Chair of UCL Council and a former advisor to the then PM, Tony Blair, on the EU. With Meg Russell now having moved from a 0.5 to a full member of staff, the department’s strength is now up from 11, when I joined in 2005, to a respectable 14. Fortunately, we were able to include the new staff in the RAE. Our submission can be found at www.ucl.ac.uk/research/rae-2008/39.

It represents the result of considerable hard work by colleagues over the past 7 years and we hope the department will finally get the recognition (and funding) its research excellence deserves. The signs are good, with both Meg and Basak Cali winning prestigious ESRC grants targeted at young researchers.

New challenges for the future are likely to include the impact of the Immigration Points Based System on the recruitment and admission of non-EU students and the need to constantly expand and improve our teaching programmes and externally funded research to cover the pincer movement of declining government support and ever rising costs. However, I am very optimistic for the future and look forward to sending further updates on our progress and growth in future newsletters.

**PROMOTION SUCCESS**

I am sure former students and colleagues will be delighted to learn that David Coen has been promoted to a personal chair as Professor of Public Policy and that Meg Russell has become both a fully funded member of the department and a Reader. Their promotion reflects the excellence of their work on EU policy-making processes and business government relations and on parliament and party government, especially in Britain, respectively.

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**SPP SEMINAR SERIES**

Dr Alex Braithwaite,
Lecturer in International Relations,
introduces…

The School of Public Policy’s Seminar Series will return in the 2008/09 academic year, looking to continue convening a combination of presentations of scholarly research and talks by policy practitioners. The Series is designed to enhance students’ access to the variety of real-world applications of their training. It is also intended to provide a public outlet for SPP’s growing research agenda, as well as a forum within which a UCL- and London-wide audience can discuss and debate a variety of issues of considerable policy significance.


Our Seminar Series included talks by Professor Andreas Follesdal from the University of Oslo, “Why the European Court on Human Rights might be Democratically Legitimate”, Dr Toby Kelly of the University of Edinburgh, “The UN Committee Against Torture: Human Rights, Civilisation and the Legal Recognition of Cruelty”, and our own Dr Saladin Meckled-Garcia, who discussed “Whose Responsibility: Human Rights and Accountability.”

We are currently finalising details of the series for the forthcoming year and are confident of securing a similarly star-studded line-up relevant to matters of Public Policy across domestic, European and international arenas. In addition to our traditional solo speaker meetings, we also hope to arrange a number of panel/roundtable meetings with experts on key topics identified under UCL’s current Global Challenges research agenda. These could include sessions on the political barriers to health care provision, political solutions to problems of environmental sustainability and the role of political institutions in combating the ever-growing gap between rich and poor globally.

The SPP Seminar Series will be held in the SPP Council Room at 5pm on Thursdays throughout the duration of the two teaching terms, October to December 2008 and January to March 2009.
In this sixty second interview we quiz Dr Jennifer van Heerde, Lecturer in Research Methods and MPhil/PhD Programme Director.

**What is your name?**
Jennifer van Heerde

**When did you join UCL?**
September 2003

**What are your responsibilities in the Department?**
I am the director of the MPhil/PhD Programme and teach Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods and the Voters, Public Opinion and Participation courses. My current research examines media bias and public perceptions of campaign/party finance and public attitudes toward poverty in developing countries.

**What do you particularly like and dislike about your job?**
I like exploring new data for a project; I used to enjoy puzzles as a kid so a new data set is something akin to a puzzle. I also like and get good energy from teaching. I dislike figuring out new statistical software programmes!

**What do you consider your greatest achievement to date?**
Leaving California and moving to London.

**Most inspirational person that you have met whilst at UCL?**
Sally Welham

**Favourite location around UCL?**
Tavistock Square – it’s a lovely park and a nice place to enjoy lunch or champagne in the evening with friends and colleagues. It’s also the site of the July 2005 London bus bombing which reminds me of our collective vulnerability and strength.

**What would your ideal afternoon/evening in London include?**
Reading in one of London’s many green parks, going for a walk along the Thames and an evening of great food and drink.

**What is your favourite book?**
To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee

**What are your hobbies?**
Reading, cinema, going to the gym. I’ve taken up running recently and did the Reading Half Marathon in 2hr 31min – which isn’t very good but it’s a start!

**If you had not gone into academia what would you be doing now?**
I’d most likely be working in politics in some aspect, either as a campaign consultant for a polling firm or on Capitol Hill.

**If you could implement one policy in the world today, what would it be?**
Raising female literacy/numeracy rates and more generally closing the gender pay gap (that’s two policies…).
EXPLORING THE HEART OF EUROPE

In what looks set to become an SPP tradition, students from our MSc in European Public Policy went on a study trip to Brussels in early June 2008 to visit the European Parliament, to meet with practitioners and to get a feel for what the EU is like beyond the textbook.

The visit gave students the opportunity to gain insights into the working of the institutions and decision-processes studied during their programme, to get first hand accounts of the challenges facing European policy-makers today and to establish contacts with the Brussels “Eurocracy”.

Eighteen students joined the trip organised by Dr Christine Reh, the School’s Lecturer in European Politics.

Despite leaving London on a very early Eurostar and arriving in Brussels to the pouring rain, the mood was cheerful and curious—exams were over and most students were visiting the “Capital of Europe” for the first time.
We got off the underground at Rond Point Schuman, the centre of gravity around which EU decision-making revolves. After taking a look at the two institutions directly facing each other there—the Council of Ministers and the European Commission—we headed for the European Parliament. Our first stop was the hemicycle, the Parliament’s impressive debating chamber, where we were given an informative overview of the EP’s day-to-day operation: what is the seating order? When and how do MEPs vote and where are the results indicated? What is the role of the party whips? How does the simultaneous translation of a parliamentary debate work? Following the introduction was a debate with Timothy Beyer Helm, Policy Adviser to the European People’s Party and the European Democrats (EPP-ED). As a pro-European British Tory who started his career in Westminster, Tim provided not only interesting insights into the organisation of EU-level parties but also discussed how the European Parliament could become more politicised and adversarial—despite the well-known challenges stemming from its highly diverse membership of 785 MEPs representing citizens from 27 countries and working in 23 languages. A good part of the discussion focused on the impending Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty—the chances of a “yes”-vote and the potential repercussions of a “no”.

After lunch in the EP’s canteen (and for those of you wondering about the food served there: we did have chips!) we visited White&Case, a prestigious British Law Firm located down the road from the European Commission. We were hosted by Jesse Scott, an Associate at White&Case and a Programme Leader at E3G, a leading environmental NGO. Jesse gave an incredibly lively and informative account of what working in public affairs is like in Brussels—offering expertise to the Commission in the early stages of the legislative process, building informal networks with key decision-makers and not least, getting accustomed to the different cultures in the private sector and the EU institutions. The topic she picked—environmental policy—could not have been more timely: the Commission’s package on “Climate Action and Renewable Energy” is currently negotiated by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. The second speaker at White&Case was Sarah Murray, Head of the East of England Office. She explained what an affluent English region can gain from being represented in Brussels and discussed the different facets of regional representation—monitoring, lobbying, networking and raising the profile of “her” region.

The day ended in a truly “Eurocratic” fashion—with a pint or two on Place Luxembourg: according to one of our speakers it is here that lobbyists strike their deals in the evening sun. The sun was nowhere to be seen but we did meet up in one of the bars with a group of young fonctionnaires from the European Commission, giving students the chance to chat more informally about life, work and internship opportunities in Brussels. For most of us the day ended where it began—on the Eurostar but not without stocking up our supplies of Belgian chocolates and waffles. Some, however, used the opportunity to stay in Brussels over the weekend—to explore the nightlife and to participate in the “Open Day” of the European institutions on Saturday. Back in London all agreed that the trip across the channel was a success—something we look forward to repeating with our students in 2009!
NADIA TELLS TAVISTOCK TIMES ABOUT HER TIME AT UCL

Nadia M. Montoto
Msc. International Public Policy student 2007–08

Nadia Montoto is the recipient of the 07-08 Abbey Master’s Scholarship. The Abbey Master’s Scholarships, funded by Abbey, aim to assist the most academically able students from leading universities in each of ten Santander network countries to pursue a Master’s programmes at UCL. Up to ten scholarships are awarded each year to students from the following countries; Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, Venezuela.

After working for five years in Argentina, in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Economy, I was eager to get some international experience through studying abroad. I chose London as an exciting and cosmopolitan city with a good reputation for university education.

I chose UCL because of its well-known international academic tradition and its interesting and challenging intellectual environment. I have always been passionate about the role of international economics in my country’s development. My family, friends and I lived the effects of the Argentine crisis in December 2001. So when it came to selecting a course, I chose the MSc in International Public Policy and decided to specialise in International Political Economy.

The course has helped improve my understanding of the international public policy of developing and developed countries and the importance of the role of non-government actors in international relations. It has been particularly interesting to look at how developing countries’ vulnerabilities affect their economic development. The year studying at UCL has given me a truly global perspective on these issues. Not least because each lecture and seminar is enriched with the thoughts and experiences of students from a wide range of cultures; we learn as much from each other as we do from our lecturers! I am now exploring some of these issues in my dissertation. I am conducting my own research on remittances to Argentina through surveys and interviews with Argentine migrants in London. I am fascinated by the potential for development that this has for my country.

The School of Public Policy is a friendly place to be. The lecturers, tutors and the administrative staff are always keen to help out and the University’s staff have been really responsive from the very beginning of the application process. They sent me brochures with useful information that included how to apply, student accommodation and even a map indicating how to reach UCL! They also included scholarship opportunities. Thanks to this information I applied for a Shell Centenary Chevening Scholarship that paid for my tuition fees and covered my maintenance in London too. And applying to the university made me eligible for an Abbey Master’s Scholarship. I could not believe it when the scholarships department contacted me to say that Abbey had granted me extra maintenance help!

And life in London is just amazing. The city is full of excitement and I discover new places all the time. Friends at the University are the perfect companions for exploring all that London has to offer. Spending our time together has helped us to share and enjoy each others’ cultures. And having dinners with typical food from each country has been a real pleasure!

My experience in London studying at UCL has been wonderful. My advice to newcomers is to work hard and be open to meeting new people, the results are absolutely rewarding! I plan to stay an additional year in London to add some valuable work experience to my studies. After that, I intend to develop further a career in international public policy in the Argentine government. I am passionate about making my own contribution to the sustainable development of my country, and studying at UCL provided me with new skills to draw on in pursuit of this ambition.
Launch of MSc Global Governance and Ethics programme

In September 2008, the UCL Department of Political Science, School of Public Policy will launch an innovative new master’s programme in Global Governance and Ethics.

The Programme Director, Dr Markus Kornprobst writes:

Politics Unbound – Introducing the MSc Global Governance and Ethics

Even in the heyday of the nation-state, political challenges were already formidable and the list of failures is long and at times gruesome indeed. Yet the locus of meeting these challenges, at least in hindsight, seems to have made things somewhat manageable. Challenges to produce and reproduce an economically viable, just and peaceful political order were, more or less, restricted to what was happening within the borders of the nation-state. Politics, in other words, was bound.

Politics, in other words, was bound. In the era of globalisation, this has changed fundamentally. Politics has become unbound. The intensity of global interconnectedness has increased dramatically across many policy fields – for the most part precisely those fields that matter most to the global citizen. There is simply no way any more for the nation-state to provide for the nation on its own.

Global political and economic networks distribute opportunities of welfare, justice and peace within and beyond the nation-state. Very much unlike the nation-state, however, there is no global government with the power to channel these opportunities into a certain direction. All we can do is rely on a tenuous system of governance, which is comprised of a host of actors such as nation-states, international governmental organisations, international non-governmental organisations and global publics.

This tenuous system has to cope with much more daunting tasks than the nation-state in its heyday. There is the problem of global warming. If the lack of progress in cutting greenhouse gas emissions continues at today’s alarming pace, these emissions will have increased by 50 to 100 percent above 2000 levels by 2030. There are severe distributive injustices. UNDP reports that global inequalities have doubled since 1970. One billion people in the world live now on less than US$ 1 a day; 2.6 billion live on less than US$2 a day. There are the casualties of civil wars – most of whom are civilians. To give just a few examples, between 1983 and 2002, two million people were killed in the civil war in southern Sudan. 200,000 people have been killed in the current genocide in the Sudan. 2.5 million Congolese died between 1998 and 2001 in what has sometimes been referred to as Africa’s First World War. Health statistics are even more shocking. About 2 million people die of AIDS related illnesses each year. Every 30 seconds a child dies of malaria; overall 1 million people die of malaria each year. This list of global tragedies could be extended almost indefinitely.

Global politics has to rise to these challenges. The system of global governance – as tenuous as it is – has to be able to cope with them. The new MSc Global Governance and Ethics at the School of Public Policy prepares the next generation of leaders for taking part in meeting the global challenges. It is an innovative programme that introduces students to the major empirical and normative issues of global governance. Students work not only with staff in political science but also within the departments of economics, geography, law, philosophy and health, making this a truly interdisciplinary programme, with a breadth of expertise difficult to match elsewhere. This focus on innovation and multidisciplinarity is very apt. It is the only way to make sense of the politics of the 21st century.

Further information about the programme and application forms can be found at www.ucl.ac.uk/spp/teaching/masters-programme/Global-Ethics-and-Governance
Expansion of the undergraduate affiliate programme

New modules in Global Environmental Politics, Gender and Politics and International Relations Theories: Continental Perspectives

September 2008 sees the launch of three new SPP affiliate courses, Global Environmental Politics, Gender and Politics and International Relations Theories: Continental Perspectives.

Global Environmental Politics will deal with the theory, history and current problems of (international) environmental policy-making. The course will introduce students to important environmental issues and show how these have been and are currently being dealt with. Students will gain a thorough understanding of environmental policies and their history and learn to critically apply different theoretical perspectives on the environment to a range of contemporary issues for global public policy. The course will look at the development of environmental policy issues and rule-making and introduce students to the key players in international environmental policy-making: states, international organisations, (I)NGO’s and transnational corporations, environmental advocacy networks and epistemic communities. By the end of the course students will be able to critically assess existing laws and regulations, policy initiatives and governance structures.

Gender and Politics will provide an overview of key topics in politics and gender. The first part of the course will cover introductory theory, the impact of gender on citizenship and voting behaviour, whether the gender of our political representatives matters, and what the normative arguments are about the use of positive action measures. The second part of the course has a more international flavour, considering women’s rights and human rights, the importance of gender in international development and the role of gender in armed conflict. The course will also look at gender ‘policy machinery’, such as specialist government departments and quangos concerned with women and equality, at both the national and international level. By the end of the course students will be familiar with some of the basic theories and policy questions around politics and gender, have a sound understanding of the role of gender in civil society and political participation, understand some of the key issues regarding gender in international relations, particularly with respect to development and to conflict and be able to critically assess the arguments for and against greater gender equality in different political institutions and the mechanisms for achieving this.

International Relations Theories introduces the theoretical projects in the field of International Relations (IR). It is designed for both students who are new to the study of IR and for advanced students, as it discusses the core concepts, the background assumptions and the recent debates within the theoretical projects examined. Furthermore, the course aims to provide an arena for connecting the theories to contemporary phenomena and events in international politics, while being reflexive about the way the theories are implicated in the construction of those ‘events’. In its exposition of theories, the course will give precedence to continental debates in IR, in general and to British IR. For the novice student, this represents an opportunity to get acquainted with the field of International Relations as a multi-vocal, rich and pluralistic conversation. For the advanced student, this is an occasion to complement knowledge of IR theory, while becoming familiarised with theoretical approaches that are often overlooked.

Further information about these courses and the affiliate programme can be found at www.ucl.ac.uk/spp/teaching/affiliate/

Planning for next year is underway and the Department expects there to be vacancies for part-time Fellowships for the 2008/09 academic session on a number of the Department’s undergraduate affiliate courses.

All research students registered in the Department of Political Science, whether part-time or full-time, are eligible to apply for these posts which provide a valuable introduction to postgraduate teaching.

Keep your eyes on the Departmental website www.ucl.ac.uk/spp/ for more details as they become available!
We are delighted to announce that Dr Meg Russell, Lecturer in British and Comparative Politics and the Deputy Director of the Constitution Unit, has won a prestigious three-year Research Fellowship from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Competition for these fellowships is fierce, so this is great news for Meg and for the Department.

The Fellowship provides secure research funding for three full years, during which time Meg intends to follow three strands of research all focused on her specialism of parliament. She has recently completed another major three-year project, also funded by the ESRC, on the House of Lords. This demonstrated that the chamber, despite remaining unelected and “unreformed” has grown in strength and confidence since most hereditary peers were removed in 1999. This project generated various papers and book chapters but also produced data which is as-yet unpublished. During the fellowship Meg will write further papers and a possible book on the changing House of Lords. She will also pursue new research to assess the policy impact of the British parliament more generally. It is often assumed, for example, that the House of Commons is weak because it rarely defeats the government but there is much negotiation behind the scenes and committees in particular are growing in strength. Meg aims to draw together a consortium of scholars to conduct a more careful study of these forms of influence which often go on “beneath the radar” of the media.

Finally, her research will include an exploratory study of whether lessons from group psychology can be applied to help us better understand the behaviour of parliamentarians, challenging the assumption that they are selfish “rational” actors.

We are excited to report that fieldwork has started on Dr Basak Cali’s ESRC-funded project on the legitimacy and authority of supranational human rights courts.

The European Court of Human Rights is the most powerful international adjudicatory institution in the field of human rights, with its judgements affecting around 800 million people. Dr Cali’s three-year research project will answer questions such as: How are these judgements perceived by law-makers and judges domestically? Why do individuals take their cases to Strasbourg? Why do states comply with these judgements? What is the basis of legitimacy of supranational human rights courts?

Dr Cali’s research will aim to understand the perception of the legitimacy and authority of the European Court of Human Rights. To this end, the research will carry out a comparative and cross-sectional analysis of the perception of the European Court of Human Rights in five different political and legal contexts with high profile human rights cases: the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Turkey and Bulgaria. The research will collect qualitative data by interviewing politicians, constitutional or apex court judges and human rights lawyers. Alice Wyss, a former MA in Human Rights Student from the department, is the research assistant for this three year ESRC-funded major project. Basak and Alice have already started fieldwork in the UK. They are heading to Turkey and Bulgaria in the Autumn term of 2008.
Amanda Keeling, MA in Human Rights 2007-2008, will carry out an internship at the Centre for Peace Studies (Centar za Mirovne Studije-CMS) in Zagreb for three months starting in September 2008. CMS is a leading Croatian human rights and peace NGO directed by MA Human Rights 2003-2004 Alumni, Gordan Bosanac. Amanda will work with the European Convention on Human Rights Litigation Project team and will help start up CMS’s programme on EU discrimination law.

Dr. Sherrill Stroschein’s edited volume on Governance in Ethnically Mixed Cities was published in December 2007 by Routledge. The book is a collection of essays that examine the interaction of ethnic and religious groups in the context of local city governance. The pieces range from an examination of European cities such as Mostar and Bolzano to cities in Iraq, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, and the United States.

Yukihiko Hamada of the MA in Human Rights 2007–09 (part-time) is the first MA Human Rights student to carry out an internship at a Corporate Social Responsibility Unit of a Multinational Corporation. Pentland Group PLC is the holding company of brands such as Boxfresh, Red or Dead and Lacoste footwear. The Corporate Social Responsibility Unit of Pentland is one of the first of its kind established in the UK. Natasha will work on the development of a training module on the right to association for Pentland’s suppliers. She will also provide a report to SPP community on her experience as a human rights intern in a transnational corporation.

The department would like to congratulate Yukihiko Hamada on the completion of his Doctorate. Yukihiko successfully defended his thesis ‘Japanese Firms in the EU: Europeanization of Lobbying Strategies and Enduring National Characteristics’ on 7th December 2007 and was officially awarded his PhD 28th January 2008. This coming September, Yukihiko will join the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan working as a diplomatic researcher at the Japanese Embassy in London. He will be in charge of conducting research on UK–Japan relations as well as working in the PR/External Communications team. Yukihiko, we wish you the best of luck and success in your future career and look forward to catching up with you in the future.

The department would like to wish Laura Valentini the best of luck at her upcoming Doctoral VIVA defence. Laura submitted her thesis ‘Global Justice: Cosmopolitanism, Social Liberalism and the Coercion View’ in July 2008.

From October 2008 Laura will take up her new position as Junior Research Fellow in Politics at Queen’s College, Oxford, a 3-year post-doctoral research post.

Laura, we wish you the best of luck and success, both at your VIVA and in your future career. We look forward to catching up with you in the future.

The MSc in Democracy and Democratisation has set up a Facebook group, thanks to the technical abilities of current student Barbara Neofitou. The group includes both current students and graduates, to facilitate networking between those interested in matters of democracy. The students and alums met up for the end of term gathering on 19 June 2008 after the SPP events that day. The group can be found on Facebook at www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=9810431145
NEWS FROM THE CONSTITUTION UNIT

The Constitution Unit is an independent research institute situated within the School of Public Policy. The Constitution Unit is the UK’s leading centre for the study of constitutional change and has a long track record of conducting high-quality research and influencing policy debates through publications and events.

The Unit is led by its Director, Professor Robert Hazell, and comprises a further four full-time researchers and two administrators. The Unit also frequently recruits interns to assist in its research projects, including many SPP graduates. Some Unit staff also teach courses within SPP and act as supervisors for students’ dissertations in relevant areas. SPP students are also welcome to attend many of the Constitution Unit’s public events and to draw upon the Unit’s extensive back catalogue of publications about constitutional reform.

Full details of the the Constitution Unit’s activities can be found at: www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit

A few recent highlights are discussed below:

Devolution Conference

On 22 May, the Constitution Unit held its annual devolution conference, Inside Devolution 2008, bringing together over 90 officials, academics and journalists from across the UK. Panels of experts explored topics such as the system by which devolution is financed, and the effects of devolution on European policy-making; the Director of the Constitution Unit, Robert Hazell, gave a keynote lecture on ‘The Purpose of the Union’; and a final session brought Labour and Scottish National Party politicians face-to-face to discuss their rival visions for the future of Scotland.

Full details at:
www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/events/insidedevolution08.htm

Professor Hazell delivers the keynote address to Inside Devolution 2008

On 3 June 2008 the Constitution Unit held its annual information rights conference, FOI Live. Organised in partnership with the Ministry of Justice and Information Commissioner’s Office, the event attracted over 300 practitioners and policy makers from central and local government, the NHS and wider public sector. Keynote speeches were given by Richard Thomas, Information Commissioner; Michael Wills MP, Minister of State for Constitutional Renewal; Maurice Frankel, Director of the Campaign for Freedom of Information; and Robert Hazell, Ben Worthy and Mark Glover of the Constitution Unit. A variety of practically-focused topics were also covered in the afternoon break out sessions, from the interface of Freedom of Information and Data Protection to the security of electronic communications. Recordings and presentations from the event are available on the Constitution Unit website at: www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/foidp/events/foilive2008.html

Public Seminar Series

The Constitution Unit holds a monthly series of public seminars to which all UCL staff and students are warmly invited. Recent seminars have addressed a range of topical constitutional issues:

- In January, Richard Wilson, the director of Involve, spoke on the challenge of tackling low public participation in politics, discussing the range of different initiatives that could be used to stimulate public interest in politics.
- In February, Sir Christopher Foster, chairman of the Better Government Initiative, led a seminar on ways in which government and parliament can better govern and make policy for the country.
- In April, Lord Goldsmith QC spoke on what it means to be a British citizen and the ways in which the bonds of citizenship could be enhanced, following the publication of his Citizenship Review.

Constitution Unit Annual Lecture

On 5 March 2008 Michael Wills, Minister of State in the Ministry of Justice, delivered the Constitution Unit’s annual lecture, setting out the government’s vision for further constitutional reform. He expressed satisfaction with the constitutional progress made under Labour since 1997 and described how the ‘Governance of Britain’ programme of Gordon Brown would build on this work, enhancing the legitimacy of the political system by imposing new limits on executive power, creating a new Bill of Rights and Responsibilities; and utilising new processes of democratic engagement to augment representative democracy.

Research Updates

- The Constitution Unit coordinates the ‘Devolution Monitoring Programme’, involving researchers from across the UK. As part of this project, the latest sets of Devolution Monitoring Reports were published in January and May 2008.

- As part of its ongoing ESRC-funded project entitled ‘Evaluating the Impact of Freedom of Information in the UK’, the Freedom of Information (FOI) team has started two streams of data collection: interviews and surveys of requesters. The interviews aim to understand the impact of FOI on Whitehall. The surveys of requesters aim to uncover the world of FOI requests that take place outside the media spotlight.

An Intern’s Tale

Martha Spurrier, a recent Cambridge history graduate, gives an account of her experience as an intern at the Constitution Unit.

“I started my internship at the Constitution Unit in February, having graduated with a history degree last summer. I have been working for Dr Meg Russell, on various aspects of her House of Lords project. I can honestly say that working at the Unit has been a rewarding venture into the real world. The work that I have been doing has been incredibly varied and I have been given the freedom to follow my own initiative and often to choose the tasks that appeal to me. Whether I have found myself doing literature reviews in the majestic armchairs of the House of Lords library or analysing the latest voting rebellion, I have always been interested, challenged and given real responsibility. The Unit is a very friendly place to be but it is also a place of academic integrity and public profile which commands the kind of respect that can really brighten up a CV.”
True to tradition, SPP staff and students gathered on a sunny June afternoon for the annual end of year drinks and photo session marking the end of teaching and celebrating the successful completion of exams. On the steps of the UCL Portico, squinting against a bright sun, the class of 2007/8 was captured by UCL photographer Mary Hinkley and added to the growing SPP family photo gallery.

Drinks and nibbles followed in the Jeremy Bentham room (JBR) in the Wilkins Building. Jeremy Bentham’s (1748-1832) writings had a great influence on the founders of UCL and continue to form part of SPP teaching, valuing his attitude of critical thinking and analysis and encouraging the development and honing of these abilities in SPP students. Soon the room was buzzing. Exam answers were being compared, dissertation topics discussed and plans for well-deserved pre-dissertation summer breaks revealed. Students and supervisors chatted informally in the relaxed atmosphere, though walking around the room catching snippets of conversation, it soon became evident that possible Euro 2008 and Wimbledon results were discussed as seriously as upcoming dissertation work.

As the drinks event was closing to an end Professor Richard Bellamy addressed the room, thanking students for their hard work and positive engagement with SPP. He continued his address by congratulating Nicky Henson for successfully taking over the pivotal role as departmental Executive Administrator and finished off by relaying his and the SPP academic staff’s gratitude to the administrative team for their fine work throughout the year. The point was underlined by a bouquet of flowers being presented to each member of the team including Nicky, Helen Holt, Helen Elliot, Selina, Lisbeth, and Vicky.

SPP staff wishes students the best of luck with their dissertation work over the summer and look forward to receiving this, their final piece of work for their Masters degrees, 1st September 2008.