

Centre for the Study of Australian Politics

Business Plan for 2014 -2016

Title

The Centre for the Study of Australian Politics was established in 2012 by the School of Politics and International Relations, College of Arts and Social Sciences. It is located as part of the School, with a website at: <http://politicsir.cass.anu.edu.au/csap>.

Academic Justification

The Centre was formed to promote the study of Australian politics as a central feature in the national university in the national capital. The University has a long tradition of excellent teaching and research in Australian politics, and the Centre represents a new way of deepening wider public understanding of roles of the School and the College of Arts and Social Sciences in promoting studies of Australian politics.

Missions and Objectives

The Centre's mission is to promote the study of Australian politics to the ANU community and to interested members of the wider public community. The mission is met through six objectives:

Objective 1: new academic courses

Centre director John Uhr has established four new academic courses to promote better student understanding of politics in Australia. The *Ideas in Australian Politics* course was first taught in 2013 as an innovative undergraduate course in 'the big ideas' in Australian politics and political history. The *WordPower* Honours course was established and taught in 2012 and 2013 as an elective course in the Honours study of Australian politics and political rhetoric. The *Foundations of Political Theory* undergraduate course was established and first taught in 2012 as an Australian-related course in the historical development of core concepts of politics in Western history. The *Political Theory: Competing Concepts of Justice* course was established in 2014 as a new first-semester elective Honours course to bring together studies of theory and practice in political science.

These four academic courses significantly enrich the School offerings in the study of politics in Australia. The two undergraduate courses can be taught over each of the three years 2014-2016, and either of the Honours courses can be taught each year 2014-2016.

Objective 2: new web site

The Centre established a web site in 2012 to provide a public platform to showcase important innovations in the study of Australian politics. The website is expanding to reflect reports of Centre activities and to publicise Centre discussion of new developments in studies of Australian politics. The website is now ready for a major makeover to modernise its appearance and impact, but the contents are nationally and internationally distinctive in gathering together debate and discussion over competing ways of studying Australian politics. For instance, the site now includes 33 book

reviews by School associates of the Centre examining new publications in Australian politics; 9 short essays by international visitors to the School examining aspects of Australian politics; reprints of 'lost classics' in the historical study of Australian politics; and a number of research papers by PhD students on Australian politics.

Objective 3: new research conferences

The Centre has an annual conference program on the study of Australian politics. The inaugural 2012 conference was on School expert Ian McAllister's new book *The Australian Voter*. Aspects of the event appear in the webpages and a recent issue of *The Australian Journal of Political Science* published a major article by Macquarie University's professor Murray Goot from this conference. The 2013 conference was on the contributions to Australian political studies of Oxford's great expert professor David Butler, author of *The Canberra Model* (1973), who visited the ANU for this event. The centenary of Canberra celebrations included this event in its official program. The 2014 conference is on political marketing, building on the PhD research of one of the Centre's research scholars Jennifer Rayner, for a two day event in July co-sponsored by the University of Sydney. The Centre plans to hold or support a major research conference on the study of Australian politics each year through to 2016.

Objective 4: new academic publications

The Centre has two book publications on Australian political rhetoric emerging in early 2014 with ANU E Press. The editors are director John Uhr and School associate Ryan Walter. One book publishes essays originally written by Honours students in the *WordPower* course in 2012 and 2013; the other book publishes chapters by senior academics who attended a two day conference in 2013 on Australian political rhetoric budgeted by the School. These book publications reflect School teaching and ARC projects managed by the Centre and the aim is to continue the link with the ANU E Press for additional publications in 2015 and 2016.

Objective 5: new PhD and Honours scholars

The Centre has three PhD students since 2012: Jennifer Rayner; Shaun Crowe; and Helen Minnican. The aim is to develop a cohort of students with expertise in studies of Australian politics. The Centre plans to improve the School's training of Australian-focused PhD and Honours students with seminars from invited experts who can also present into the School's regular academic seminars. One such seminar in 2014 involves professor Conal Condren for a two day event on his recent research on political rhetoric. Honours research is also being promoted by John Uhr who has taken over as Honours Convenor, and has taken on as supervisor of three Honours students in 2014: the plan is to continue the Honours Convenorship through to the completion of 2016.

Objective 6: new 'Improving Politics' program

The Centre plans to sponsor a visiting speakers program. Inspired in part by Harvard University's 'Center for American Political Studies' (<http://caps.gov.harvard.edu>) and Yale University's 'Center for the Study of American Politics' (<http://csap.yale.edu>), the Centre is organising a 'Improving Politics' program of visiting speakers to promote fresh thinking about the future of Australian politics, examining menus of change to 'the rules of the game' dominating Australian political culture. The idea is to devise and debate procedural and cultural changes which can challenge and improve

Australian political practices. Speakers will try to show ways that the community can get better value from changes to the political process away from the standard 'winner take all' struggle of narrow partisanship. The focus is on the intellectual case for change: change can be made to community interest in the 'business practice' of Australian politics, and change can be made to public debate over the norms and practices appropriate to decent politics in Australia.

The Centre plans to begin in 2014 with at least two such presentations, one in each semester. Examples of possible speakers include prominent 'public intellectuals': Judith Brett; Don Watson; Janet Albrechtsen; Noel Pearson; John Keane; Narelle Miragliotta; Mark McKenna; Peter van Olselen; Anne Summers; Peter Shergold; George Williams; Fr Frank Brennan; Richard Flanagan; and so on.

Cost implications: around \$2500 for each presentation (travel, accommodation, room costs, media): \$5000 for two presentations each year in 2014-16.

Outreach

Centre director Uhr has extensive contacts with public service and parliamentary staff. His former ANU Parliamentary Studies Centre ran an ARC Linkage grant with the Commonwealth Parliament and discussion is under way to build on these foundations with another Linkage grant in 2014 dealing with forms and practices in Australian parliamentary politics. The director's two periods of recent leave in 2012 and 2013 have allowed him to represent the Centre in international academic exchanges, including publications, in the US, Italy and The Netherlands. Uhr is also a frequent commentator on Australian politics in the Australian media. No outside leave plans for the Director are scheduled for 2014-2016, meaning that the Centre can mobilise external interest through such activities as the 'Improving Politics' program, which will be promoted through the media (eg, ABC radio) wherever possible.

External funding

In 2013, the Centre won an ARC Discovery grant of \$173,000 for a research project by Uhr and SPIR colleague Ryan Walter investigating Australian political rhetoric. This project dovetails into the Centre's promotion of wider networks to study Australian politics and will involve the Centre in more conferences and research partnerships with academics in other Australian universities. The departure of Dr Walter to another University in mid-2014 means that these ARC funds will be split between the School and another university, with Uhr and Walter intending to work co-operatively to complete the research project as a dual-institutional activity. The Centre is also in discussion with departments of the Commonwealth Parliament to test interest in an ARC Linkage Grant on historical turning points in Australian parliamentary politics, to be submitted in late 2014, for funding over the years 2015-2017.

Staffing

John Uhr is director of the Centre. Uhr is employed as a professor in the School of Politics and International Relations, with the Centre directorship supplementing his roles as researcher, lecturer and Honours Convenor. The director employs part-time assistance from research students to manage the website and to assist with Centre activities. School experts in teaching and research in

Australian politics are 'Associates' of the Centre, often writing for the Centre's webpages with reviews and essays on Australian politics.

Recently, the director was asked to take long service leave in 2012 and then won an outside studies program award in 2013. These leave arrangements have meant that the Centre has not had its director holding his regular university office for a semester in each year. There is no plan for similar leave periods in the period 2014-2016. The existence of ARC funding means that the Centre can make use of such funds to hire research assistants to manage aspects of a limited range of Center activities.

Academic Representation

The Centre is represented in the College by the head of the School of Politics and International Relations, and in the ANU by the head of the College.

Annual Report

The director makes a brief annual report to the School head each year.

Review

The Centre participates in regular reviews of its performance established every two years by the School head.

Governance Arrangements

The Centre's governance is established as part of the School of Politics and International Relations.

Administrative Arrangements

Director John Uhr manages the internal administrative arrangements and is responsible to the head of the School.