

## **Special Topic Module PO303A**

### **Researching a Politics for our Time: Challenges and Possibilities**

During the first half of the last century, politics appeared to respond to major historic ruptures, such as the Great Depression or World War II. Yet political responses to public crises of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have, so far, not resulted in a fundamental re-configuration of social power. This Special Topic course will enable students to devise research which supports the study of a wide range of contemporary political challenges. These can include, but are not limited to, the rise of the far right, climate change, the influence of mega-corporations, or gender and racial injustice.

Major recent and ongoing public controversies all call for a politics of action that supports fundamental changes. Significant social movements have amplified this urgent need, reflecting strategies and tactics formulated by a new political generation. Yet, despite such activism, common identification of the challenges and solutions to major social and political problems has proven elusive. This is at least partially due to less ideological certainty from traditional political actors, as they struggle to respond to a new complexity around the boundaries of our individual lives, the roles of states, and corporate interests. Public democratic practice is further weakened by powerful populist discourse, or by deference to, or mistrust of, elite expertise in the face of such complexity.

This special topic will also include consideration of methodological approaches to exploring, in practical terms, what a 'politics for our time' might look like and be advanced. The module will provide students with a basic grounding in the nature of social research, the selection and development of a research topic and the preparation of a research strategy. Specifically, we will discuss methods of accessing and reviewing literature, designing 'doable' research questions, research methodologies, and research design and writing.