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Marianna Karakoulaki, POLSIS Student conference (June 2012)

Conference organiser and MA Student Marianna Karakoulaki shares her experiences of the sencond POLSIS Student Conference "Cosmopolitan Dimensions".

On a rainy summer day on 7th June, students from the School of Government and Society gathered in Muirhead Tower, for the Second Annual Student Conference. It was the second year in a row that the student conference was organised and this year we moved one step further by including students, beyond POLSIS, from the International Development Department (IDD) and the Institute for Local Government Studies (INLOGOV).

Launched last year, this year's conference further established the event – something many students anticipated with much excitement from the beginning of this academic year. This year the conference was named "Cosmopolitan Dimensions" a general title some would argue, that includes every discipline in Social Sciences; but that was the point of this year's committee, they wanted to make everyone from the School feel welcome and comfortable in participating.

But let's get into the details before running out of space describing the conference in general. As I mentioned in the beginning the conference was designed in such a way in order to cover various disciplines in Social Sciences. The papers that were selected by the organising committee covered three topics; the first one focused on 'Political Economy and Security', the second on 'Contemporary Britain' and the last one on 'Gender and Politics'. I can barely say which panel was the best and which presentation stood out simply because everything was perfect. The students – most of them undergraduates – presented their best work and all of the papers were of a very high standard.

> The highlight of the day was the keynote speaker – Ramita Navai – who so kindly accepted our invitation. Ramita, a freelance journalist who works for Unreported World (Channel 4) enthusiastically joined us for one of the most interesting Q&A sessions I have ever been. It was really surprising to see how many questions the audience had and how engaged they were with the discussion during the whole time. Ramita gave us a very clear view of the troubles and difficulties she has experienced during her career as an undercover journalist in the world's most dangerous places. But not only did the audience enjoy this session but so did our keynote: talking to Ramita a couple of days later she told me that the questions were really interesting and the audience was really engaged "which was great!"

The second 'extra' session included another Q&A panel – a 'Question Time' with representatives of the Student Political Societies. Apart from the expected controversy among them, both the participants and the audience seemed very engaged and I can honestly say that we all experienced a lively political debate!

The end of the conference found us all relieved from all the stress and anxiety of presenting in public. However, the Head of the Department, Colin Thain, was left with the toughest job- he was the one to decide on the best three papers that would win the 'million dollar prize' – OK maybe not a million dollars but rather £100! The top three papers from the conference were delivered by Amanda Moorghen, James Bowker and Jon Robinson.

The feeling that I have a week later – and I am sure the rest of the committee feels the same- cannot be described with only one word. I couldn't be more thankful to everyone that participated and to everyone that came for making the Birmingham experience worth remembering!

Hopefully the Second POLSIS Student Conference will turn out to become the 'third', the 'fourth' and, the 'fifth' so that a few years later it will be a tradition and all of us that participated will proudly say *"I was a part of that too"* ! It is an experience that every student should have during the course of their studies and it is an experience worth remembering!

Degrees and course information

- **International Relations (with specialist pathways) MA/PGDip (/postgraduate/courses/taught/govsoc/international-relations.aspx)**

Student experience

- **Undergraduate Student Conference (/schools/government-society/teaching/enhancing-student-experience/undergraduate-conference.aspx)**

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