**Capstone Political Science: Irish Politics Theme**

**Instructor: Liam Kneafsey**

This research theme allows students the opportunity to develop a research project that seeks to answer a critical question in our understanding of Irish Politics broadly conceived. This project could involve questions regarding changes in Irish political culture, electoral politics in Ireland, governmental and legislative processes, constitutional issues and referendums, Irish political parties, interest group politics, the social basis of politics in Ireland, issues of public policy development in Ireland, or the issue of conflict and post-conflict in Northern Ireland. Students can engage with a broad range of topics in Politics in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland that can form the basis for a research project.

Students are free to choose and develop their own research project in consultation with the theme instructor. The project can employ any appropriate methodological approach of the student’s choosing, again in consultation with the theme instructor. The module will discuss questions of research design and the advantages and disadvantages of particular methodological approaches as relevant to the study of Irish Politics to guide students throughout the course and as they work on their project.

There are several substantive topics from the study of Irish Politics literature to consider. A research question related to any of these topics could form the basis for a Capstone project. If you are interested in any of these topics and a related research question, then you should consider a project within this theme.

The first broad strand to consider are political institutions in Ireland with a number of potentially interesting questions. How exceptional or otherwise is voting behaviour and the party political system in Ireland? Is there evidence that Ireland is moving more towards other comparable industrialised democracies over time along these various dimensions? What are the major structural divisions in Irish politics and how might these be changing? What are the social bases for politics in Ireland in the 21st century? How and to what extent do recent referendum results illustrate growing social liberalism in Ireland and what are the causes of this? How are Irish political parties organised in the 21st Century? How do we explain the absence of an organised right wing populist movement in Ireland? What are the causes of the weakness of the Left in Irish politics and how relevant are these today? How important are the media as political actors in Irish politics?

Second, you could consider a question regarding the development of Irish public policy. What is the nature of the relationship between public opinion and public policy in Ireland? Have new political arrangements altered the role of the Opposition in policy development? How powerful are organised interests in shaping public policy development in Ireland, and what are the primary mechanics of interest group influence? How does Ireland’s membership of the European Union link to the domestic policy-making process?

Third, you can consider questions regarding conflict and post-conflict in Northern Ireland. Is there evidence of political transformation in Northern Ireland? How important are the traditional divisions in explaining the policy process and/or trends in public opinion in Northern Ireland? Is there evidence for the emergence of alternative forms of political competition? How successful has the ‘consociatonal’ power-sharing solution been in Northern Ireland? What are the political, social and economic legacies of conflict and/or how successful have peacebuilding policies been in addressing these legacies? How can we best explain the Brexit vote in Northern Ireland, and is it illustrative of broader political trends going forward?