

Balliol College: Balliol College Politics: Dr Sudhir Hazareesingh - video transcript

The tutor, Doctor Sudhir Hazareesingh, is seated, facing the camera. The tutors' name and course subject are shown the first time they appear. The tutor answers the questions that are displayed on screen.

>> DR SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH (CUF LECTURER IN POLITICS AND TUTORIAL FELLOW IN POLITICS): Hello. My name is Sudhir Hazareesingh, and I'm a Fellow and Tutor in Politics at Balliol. My research interests are in French politics and French history.

[Question displayed on screen:]

What work do you give to students to prepare for tutorials?

>> DR SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH: So, for a politics tutorial, students will be given a reading list which can look a bit intimidating sometimes. It's carefully marked with specific items. It's a combination of books, chapters from books and articles, and for a typical politics tutorial - and students in effect for the PPE degree only have three/four days in which to read the material and write their essay, so for a typical politics tutorial we'll give them about five or six things to read and they'll be a combination of these books, chapters and articles. The idea will be that they'll use this material, sometimes a few newspaper articles as well, in order to put together all the material that they'll need for their essay.

[Question displayed on screen:]

How are tutorials structured?

>> DR SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH: Politics tutorials: every student is given some material to read over the previous week. They then have to prepare an essay, which is about 2,000 words long roughly, 1,500-2,000 words. That essay is going to be sent in typically to the tutor the day before the actual tutorial. That essay will be used by the tutor as a basis for having a discussion, so the tutorial itself lasts about an hour and it typically involves the tutor and two students. The tutor then engages in a discussion with the two students about the topic. If the topic, say, is power in international politics, you know the student will have prepared a very specific essay. The essay itself normally is focused on a very specific question, because part of what as opposed to just, you know: "Tell me everything you know about power." It will be a question like: "Has the power of the United States declined in the contemporary era?" The readings will have been tailored very specifically to answer that specific question and the discussion in the tutorial will

start with what both students have written in their essays, and it'll be a conversation between the tutor and the students about the different things that they wrote. After that, after the first sort of 15-20 minutes, where we have concentrated on what the students themselves have written, the tutor will then broaden the discussion and talk about perhaps some of the things that the students hadn't had time to focus on, or some of the issues which are a bit more complex, like: "How do we think about power?" Because, power is quite a complicated issue and people have analysed it in a number of different ways. The conversation will then move into those broader areas.

[Question displayed on screen:]

How do you explore ideas with students?

>> DR SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH: One of the things that's really important in exploring ideas is to keep the discussion very open-ended. What that means is two things. One is that the student should feel very comfortable in advancing his or her own ideas, and in fact the whole point of the tutorial is that it's not for the tutor to try and impress upon the student what his views are, it's really about exploring how a particular student wants to approach a question and actually end up with ways of exploring those ideas for himself or for herself. The tutorial really isn't about instructing a student about what to think; the tutorial is really about helping people to think for themselves.

[Question displayed on screen:]

What do you enjoy about conversations with students?

>> DR SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH: I enjoy having conversations with students in a number of different ways. For one thing, it's very nice to be able to see how people master certain topics and how people immerse themselves in a particular literature and what they are able to extract from it and then convey in both in their writings and in their discussions. I also very much enjoy in those conversations seeing how students make that material their own, because the whole point of a tutorial is not to get students to replicate what they've read, but actually to take it on board to criticise it sometimes. Because more often than not the point of us giving students something to read is that there may be a mistake or a flaw or something contestable in what's there. and so, what we're really trying to see, through our conversations, is how students are able to cast a critical eye on this material and come up with a view that is both critical of the material and something that shapes their own way of thinking. So, the point of the conversation is really to sharpen people's analytical and critical abilities.

[Question displayed on screen:]

How do students inform your own understanding of your subject?

>> DR SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH: I research politics, and politics is not just an abstract theoretical subject, it's also a very concrete practical subject, it's something that surrounds us. We're surrounded by politics, by political actions, and so one of the things I really enjoy in my own interactions with students is finding out how they think about politics, what their sources for thinking about politics is, what newspapers they read or what websites they go to. But also, sometimes, you know, if they're willing to tell me, I ask them who they vote for, not because I'm trying to shape their views, but also because I'm trying to understand why it is that they vote for particular parties. That's something that they themselves will be studying in the course of their work for the politics degree but it's interesting to me also as an observer of politics to find out from them how they think about the political world and how their views about politics shape their own decisions in terms of political choices.

[Question displayed on screen:]

What qualities do you look for and seek to develop in students?

>>DR SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH: The qualities we look for in a politics student is obviously first of all an interest in what's going on in the world, because politics is a very concrete, living, ongoing subject. We want people who are interested in the world, who have a curiosity about what is happening and a curiosity that goes beyond just what's happening in Britain. Very often people who will have studied politics will have studied mainly British politics, but what we're really interested in are people who are who want to know about what's happening in Europe, what's happening in the northern hemisphere, the southern hemisphere, so as wide-ranging an interest as possible in what's happening in the world is something that that we look for. We're also looking for people who are interested in being politically active, and we don't, obviously, want people to be active in any particular way - whatever their political affiliations are, that's fine - but I think you learn a lot about politics, if you're practising it to a certain extent, and you can practise it in a number of different ways - it can be, you know, by stuffing envelopes through people's letterboxes or joining an online campaign. It really doesn't matter what it is you're doing, but I think we look for evidence that your interest in politics is actually also a practical interest. That is something that really matters to us. Of course, beyond that, what we want are people who are interested - in the case of politics in Oxford - studying politics alongside philosophy and economics, because you don't study politics alone here, unlike in most universities: you study it alongside these other two subjects. At Balliol at least, that really matters to us, because we want people who think that it is meaningful to study politics alongside philosophy and economics and that's something that we will be looking out for in terms of people's interests.

[Question displayed on screen:]

What is the best thing about teaching at Balliol?

>> DR SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH: The best thing about teaching PPE at Balliol is that if we think historically, PPE was actually founded at Balliol by Balliol tutors. We've just celebrated the centenary of the degree, so this is a degree that's been around for very long and Balliol has been very closely associated with it. But also, as a result of that, PPE at Balliol has a very established presence in terms of having a number of tutors in each of the subjects, so we have three politics tutors, three philosophers, and until recently we had three economists as well. What that means also is that we have a large cohort of students that we admit annually and PPE is one of the largest subjects in Balliol. And that's really important because, it means that students have a lot of people that they can talk to and exchange information and ideas with, and it really helps to be part of a large, dynamic, vibrant, student community.

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