

Leadership Perspectives from the Humanities

Faculty lead: Dr Pegram Harrison

Aims of the course

As part of a great university, Oxford Saïd aims to make the wider intellectual richness of Oxford available to its students and staff in various ways—for example, by engaging with ideas, activities and scholarship from the humanities.

Humanities scholars have been thinking and writing about leadership for 3,000 years; and Oxford has been at the centre of that thinking for close to 900 years. The work of historians, philosophers, classicists, as well as the study of literature and artefacts from diverse cultures and traditions, can shed light on most challenges that concern business school students. The study and performance of drama and music can develop perspectives on leadership and communication that are valuable in other contexts, including companies and organizations. And the pursuit of critical questions with a spirit of humane enquiry can expand and enhance our appreciation of value.

In short, leadership learning happens in more ways than are dreamt of in the Social Sciences. Thus the purpose of this course is to widen and enrich your management learning in ways that are not achievable elsewhere. Students should expect to experience ideas and practices that are increasingly essential to meeting the wide and rich opportunities and challenges you'll face in your careers—as leaders and as humans.

No prior knowledge is expected; instead, be willing to engage actively in class discussion, external activities, and critical debate.

Course Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should be able to ask and answer questions like the following:

Coordination and Communication

How do teams work? What is the role of leadership? How is that influence established, used and maintained?

We'll explore these questions through musical performance. Musical ensembles represent team dynamics in a very physical way; the outcome of engaging with a musical ensemble is understanding and feeling how these dynamics work more memorably than is possible from leadership theory.

Leadership across time: past, present, future

How does the past shape the present and future?

The outcome of an historical perspective is a better ability to predict outcomes before they happen. History is the surest guide to the present and the future, and its interpretative and analytical techniques—when

applied to any context, or any corpus of evidence and data—bring insights for strategy, decision-making, and leadership generally.

Structures of Power

How does the world around us communicate ideas of authority, or influence how people think?

Architecture and the built environment are tools of leadership communication as strongly as words or deeds: and Oxford possesses some uniquely well preserved and understood artefacts of how power is represented at different—and especially turbulent—times in English history. The outcome of learning how to “read”: this architecture is a better understanding of these particular levers of power and influence: how to use them, and how to resist them.

Literature as an instrument of power and resistance

Words are power, but how does that work? How is verbal power wielded and resisted?

In the session on Global Literatures, as well as throughout the course, we seek to increase our understanding of what certain writers and artists in the Global South say and teach about power and how to deploy it optimally.

Collection and Curating Communities

Who decides what is valuable, and to whom, and for what reason? How do such decisions in the past impact the present and affect the future? How do leaders deal with legacy issues in meeting their current responsibilities?

The leadership challenges of responding to urgent social trends and movements, requiring adaptation and agility, can be understood through looking at how museum directors engage with collections, technologies, and changing stakeholder communities.

Images of Leadership

Do different people see different things differently?

Visual is enormously important to leadership effectiveness, but harder to control or understand than verbal or physical methods. Art historians and artists have ways of evaluating, explaining, and controlling this understand; sharing these brings valuable learning outcomes to leaders in any discipline or organisation.

Heritage and the value of the past

What is value? How is it measured? How is it measured and preserved?

The study of heritage—and the management of it—bring lessons and learning outcomes for understanding value in more nuanced and realistic ways than we normally condition ourselves to with a mainly financial toolkit.

Leadership, language and identity

Bad leadership is everywhere; how can it be recognised? Mitigated? Improved? What are its sources and causes? Its effects?

Shakespeare’s language, for example, is in some ways the foundation of modern leadership, in that it represents techniques of communication and representation that underpin much of contemporary practice.

Also, Shakespeare scholars have long worked on understanding ambiguities in textual authority that form the basis of many qualitative research methods. Learning outcomes here are a heightened sensitivity to the way language works for and against leadership effectiveness.

Course Schedule

Timings are to be confirmed but live sessions will take place between 18-22 October, and are expected to start no earlier than 12.30pm and finish no later than 6pm UK time (BST).

Faculty Profile:



Pegram Harrison, Senior Fellow in Entrepreneurship, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford

Pegram's research and teaching concern entrepreneurship and leadership in an entrepreneurial context.

He is a member of the Oxford Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and of Brasenose College, Oxford.

He teaches entrepreneurship (pre-start-up, opportunity recognition and business planning) and leadership (especially in entrepreneurial contexts) to executives and Diploma students, as well as on the MBA and undergraduate programmes.

He also conducts research at the intersection of business and social issues, and on projects relating to business education, particularly for women entrepreneurs in Muslim communities.

Pegram received a BA in Literature from Yale University, a PhD in English Literature and Indian History from the University of Cambridge and an MBA from the London Business School. Before joining Saïd Business School in 2008, he taught entrepreneurship and strategy at the European Business School, London, and was Director of the Emerging Leaders Programme at the London Business School. He has also taught literature and history at New York University and Birkbeck College at the University of London.

Pegram has worked as a strategy consultant around the world for both public and private sector organisations, as well as for governments in both developed and developing countries.

He is a founder member of the Pan European Entrepreneurship Research Group, an association of researchers based at Paris-Dauphine University who work on European entrepreneurship and higher education.



MBA Elective 2021

Tentative programme – subject to change

Find out more about Pegram's work, visit his full [School profile](#) and read his [CV](#).

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