Please complete this report and submit by email to your authorising signature from your School/Unit and capod@st-andrews.ac.uk

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Event /Course Title: ECPR Graduate Student Conference 2016

Date of event: July 10-13, 2016

1. Brief description of Event (50-100 words):

The ECPR Graduate Student Conference is a biennial conference which gives graduate students and young scholars the opportunity to take part in a high-profile, international event designed specifically with their needs in mind.

Following the traditional format of Sections, organised around a common theme or major research question, the conference brings together young scholars from across the world for their first experience of an academic conference. Participants are encouraged to take on the full spectrum of roles, from Section and Panel Chairs, to Discussants or Paper givers. Alternatively, they can simply attend and observe.

The ECPR Graduate Student Conference (GSC) 2016 took place in Tartu, Estonia, from July 10-13.

2. What were the benefits of attending and what did you gain from the experience in terms of transferable skills and knowledge.

Even though I have attended other conferences in political science and international relations before, the ECPR GSC 2016 was different as it was the first gathering of only postgraduate students that I participated in. The conference was
specifically designed for Master's and PhD students eager to present their work, network and take a next step for their professional development. Attending the conference helped me in three different ways. First, I was able to present and receive valuable critique on the research paper I had prepared for the conference. This will help me in further improving my paper and the way I am conducting research. Secondly, a number of workshops incl. on funding and research proposal writing and publishing papers in academic journals strengthened my understanding of the technical and academic processes and requirements in my discipline. Publishing and project management have been substantial components of any academic career, hence the first-hand insights provided on how to realise first publications and how to improve the quality of potential research and funding proposals were very helpful. Thirdly, I was able to get in touch with like-minded colleagues and fellow research students which helped me growing my personal network of academic contacts. Research draws from interaction among those researching and those benefiting from it, hence enlarging my personal network will help me in maintaining a basis of contacts for future exchanges and collaborations.

3. What actions will you be taking as a result of attending or by making new networking contacts.

The critique I received on my research paper (which analyses the positioning of the permanent members of the UN Security Council towards recent proposals to reform the institution) will be helpful in further improving it. I am now more enthusiastic about commencing a related yet distinct new research work as the comments that I received and new ideas I have discussed underlined that there are many more intriguing questions to be explored further. The interaction with fellow young scholars has also encouraged me to focus on my prospective doctoral studies that I intend to start this or next year. I was able to discuss personal worries and exchange thoughts on this demanding project that will occupy me for the next three to four years. As a direct outcome of the conference, I will prepare at least two PhD proposals for the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa / Florence and the University of Copenhagen – two institutions that I believe would be great destinations to pursue doctoral studies. I am also considering an application for the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops next year – a unique research event held annually.

4. Can you share any additional resources produced in connection with the event (e.g. feedback from participants, training resources, website links, and additional materials.)
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I was surprised to be the only postgraduate student from the University of St Andrews attending the event. Considering the high number of participants from other leading European universities and research institutions, I am sure that making ECPR more known among the IR community at the University of St Andrews would result in a higher turnout from young scholars from the University. 
ECPR – the European Consortium for Political Research – is one of the leading institutions in the discipline in Europe and offers, particularly for young scholars, a wide range of events that aim at enhancing young scholar's academic skills and profile. The website of ECPR is very helpful in finding the event(s) that suit one's interests the most: http://ecpr.eu/events/eventdetails.aspx?EventID=98. ECPR offers, next to the biennial Graduate Student Conference (the next to be held in 2018), the aforementioned Joint Sessions of Workshops, but also the large-scale annual General Conference, a Summer and a Winter School as well as annual Research Sessions – each year in different locations across Europe. ECPR also offers books and other publications at subsidised rates for students and offers, if eligible, some co-funding opportunities.

5. Tips/experience learned from the event

Attending a conference as a PGT is a greatly valuable experience. For me, it was very much so in at least three ways. Firstly, by attending various panels and roundtables, I have broadened my understanding of the discipline substantially. Getting to know the research of fellow young scholars helps to contextualise one's own research, to keep up to date with emerging trends and to benefit from the insights of others. Secondly, the workshops offered were helpful to improve my understanding of research technicalities: I became better aware of publishing requirements and of how to raise funds for research projects. Attending such workshops and engaging with instructors substantially benefits one's own capabilities to do good research and understanding about how to communicate it. Lastly, exchanging with fellow young scholars is an important way to become an active member of domestic, regional and global academic communities. Drawing from the expertise and thoughts of others stimulates self-reflection and critical review about one's own work.

6. Any additional comments or information regarding the event

The University of St Andrews is a member institution of ECPR, however attendance at ECPR events by young scholars from the University seems to be comparatively low. As annual membership fees are high and as ECPR offers a wide range of opportunities and services for young scholars, it would certainly be of a great
contribution to raise more awareness within the School of IR regarding its membership in ECPR and the deriving benefits for students as well as the calls ECPR launches for events and journals. As an attentive postgraduate student, I have been following Gail Reid's (the School's PGT secretary) emails to us students and believe that the secretariats for PGT/PGR students at the School could take over this role. ECPR issues a regular newsletter which informs about all upcoming events, calls et al – a device that could be used to remain aware and up-to-date on opportunities that are potentially relevant to us postgraduate students.