

PROGRAMME OUTLINE - CIVIC LEARNING PROGRAMME REVIEW BOARD

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1. GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Civic Learning Programme Review Board (CEPC) plays an advisory role in the running of innovative teaching modules offered at the Sciences Po Undergraduate College – specifically the Civic Learning Programme – by providing a framework intended to support students' learning and protect all stakeholders involved in teaching, training and supervising students.

The CEPC is responsible for upholding ethical standards and ensuring that the civic themes and field experiences students choose as part of the programme are not detrimental to the interests of the individuals and/or institutions involved. The board is also responsible for providing a critical appraisal of and ethical perspective on emerging societal issues analysed by students.

The board has four principal objectives:

- To stimulate critical reflection on sensitive or contradictory themes by fostering an ethical culture among the faculty and academic staff responsible for running the Civic Learning Programme.
- To advise academic staff about issues or consequences that may arise should they choose to approve (or not approve) a complex Civic Learning Programme proposal; e.g. projects that raise issues in relation to their aims, values, or the terms and requirements of the module.
- To facilitate the sharing of ideas and best practices by informing stakeholders about ethical issues surrounding certain fields or types of voluntary work within the social sciences.
- To work collectively to come up with precise and reasoned responses to recurrent questions, e.g. concerning contentious areas of work; the implementation of the law on

laïcité (French secularism) and freedom of expression; the eligibility of host organisations, or any other area of ambiguity.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Creation and structure of the Civic Learning Programme: with the Undergraduate College reform introduced in September 2017, Sciences Po reaffirmed its academic and social commitment to advancing understanding of civic and citizen issues and responsibilities. In coherence with their chosen academic modules, students complete a three-year programme of voluntary placements and critical reflection on civic and citizen issues. The programme forms part of the undergraduate core curriculum and aims to connect the theory students learn in courses with practice in a field serving the public interest. Through it, students gain first-hand insight into issues of citizenship through a minimum of two field experiences within dedicated host organisations (in the public, private or non-profit sector) working at local, national, European or international level. At the end of their third year, students produce a Capstone Project. This is an extended written piece in which they summarise what they have learnt over the course of the programme, drawing connections between the courses they took and their placements in the field.

Evolution of the module, institutional framework and emergence of new needs: since the launch of the Civic Learning Programme, the projects completed for the module have become increasingly complex and specialised, both in terms of the fields students choose to work in and the programme options available to them. Students are proactive in choosing their themes and determining the parameters of their placements (organisation, type of work, etc.): they are free to define their own project, on the condition that it complies with the stipulations and principles/values set out in the Civic Learning Programme Charter. There is currently a bipartite system for managing the programme: students' administrative procedures are supervised by the Civic Learning Programme Coordinators on each campus (working in conjunction with Sciences Po Careers), while they receive academic support from dedicated academic officers (one per group of 20 students). Particularly "thorny" or complex decisions (e.g. regarding pro-life, anti-vaccination, religious or partisan organisations; independent schools, etc.) are made by the Head of the Civic Learning Programme, who reports to the intercampus team of the Dean's office, in conjunction with the Dean and Executive Director of the Undergraduate College, each Campus Director, and, where relevant, external advisors (or experts in the field) with specialist knowledge.

The decision to establish a Civic Learning Programme Review Board, with the role of upholding ethical and deontological standards concerning voluntary placements, was initially agreed upon as part of the reform of the Undergraduate College in 2017. However, due to a lack of time, its creation was delayed. The highly particular nature of the crisis engendered by the "Duhamel Affair" during the 2020-2021 academic year, which saw the consecutive resignation of both the Chair of the FNSP's Board of Directors and the President of Sciences Po, and the subsequent creation of a

working group on deontology at Sciences Po, acted as a catalyst in accelerating the Undergraduate College's plans to instate a review board of this kind.

An additional catalyst was the publication of the [Deontology Working Group's final report \(Fr\)](#), presented to Sciences Po's interim governing bodies on 4 May 2021. This reviewed the university's ethical obligations and provided an institution-wide opportunity to reexamine the regulatory mechanisms in place within it. Members of the working group put forward a series of practical recommendations to reinforce the institution's ethical framework. The establishment of the CEPC is one element of that reinforcement process, responding specifically to Recommendation #25 of the working group's report.

"All members of the wider Sciences Po community must be able to seek advice from specially appointed interlocutors, who are known, identifiable and accessible individuals. These interlocutors must sit on the joint Deontology Committee of the IEP and the FNSP to enable the committee to assume the role of "ethics advisor", "whistleblower advisor", "laïcité advisor" and, in general terms, to be responsible for reporting any ethical complexities arising within the Sciences Po community, excluding those pertaining to sexual and gender-based violence, discrimination and harassment (Recommendation #25)."

The CEPC's purpose is to provide a forum for examining all ethical issues from an interdisciplinary perspective by weighing up their various legal, social, institutional and other implications in order to arrive at a consensus, and issue a reasoned and justified conclusion. The board's establishment advances Sciences Po's commitment to being a university that protects the rights and upholds the duties of every person, while providing an education founded on rigour, tolerance and inclusiveness.

3. BOARD MEMBERS

The CEPC is composed of a varied range of members from both within and outside Sciences Po. Four groups of "expert representatives" sit on the board:

- **Academic representatives:** drawn from research and academia, these members must have the competency necessary to assess the suitability of projects proposed for the Civic Learning Programme from an academic perspective, particularly as concerns the themes and fields of work chosen, relevant law and ethical norms (relating to finding and completing a placement).
- **Civil society representatives:** these members must be able to use their practical and operational experience to inform discussion and critical analysis. Their in-depth knowledge of the realities on the ground, combined with their expertise and interest in ethical issues, will allow the board to arrive at a balanced assessment.

- **Student representatives:** these members from within the university itself play an active role in board procedures, including the final vote. They represent the student body and work to ensure students' voices are heard and understood*.
- **Sciences Po staff representatives:** these members are drawn from the staff of the Undergraduate College and Sciences Po Careers. They are invited to provide specific procedural insights into the management and academic supervision of the module**.

*Two currently enrolled Master's students sit on the CEPC: one appointed by student union representatives and the other by the Undergraduate College Dean on the basis of the student's experience within student associations.

**To ensure an even representation of all campuses, two Civic Learning Programme Coordinators sit on the CEPC on a rolling basis. Their term on the board ends after one year.

In all cases, the CEPC must be demonstrably interdisciplinary in its composition and must strive for a diverse representation of different genders, skills and expertise. The CEPC is linked to Sciences Po's Deontology Committee, a statutory body governing both the Fondation nationale des sciences politiques (FNSP) and the Institut d'études politiques de Paris (IEP de Paris). To facilitate that link, the institution intends to appoint a member to sit on both the CEPC and the Deontology Committee. Where necessary, the board may seek additional expertise or consult interlocutors inside or outside the university regarding cases brought to its attention.

4. CONTEXTS OF CONSULTATION AND DUTIES

There are several contexts in which the CEPC may be consulted:

1. When academic advisors are confronted with ethical dilemmas prior to, during or after a student's completion of the Civic Learning Programme.
2. When a student contests a decision not to approve their Civic Learning Programme project and requests the opinion of the review board.
3. When an academic officer requests that a student be informed about the ethical aspects of their Capstone Project.
4. When there is a need to examine a host organisation's ethical provisions in order to assess its eligibility for the programme.
5. When academic freedom is undermined in the context of a student's Capstone Project.

These five contexts give rise to the duties summarised below:

1. Respond to requests for advice from Civic Learning Programme Coordinators when they are confronted with ethical dilemmas prior to, during or after a student's completion of the Civic Learning Programme.
2. Ensure that requests and concerns raised by students completing complex projects are heard.
3. Work with academic officers to inform students about ethical issues while the latter are

- writing their Capstone Projects.
4. Investigate ethical dilemmas concerning host organisations involved in the programme.
 5. Defend students, academic officers and academic freedom more broadly.

5. BOARD PROCEDURE

The CEPC is an advisory body regularly consulted by the following stakeholders:

- The Dean of the Undergraduate College
- The Campus Directors
- The Civic Learning Programme Coordinators on each campus
- The Civic Learning Programme Coordinators at Sciences Po Careers
- The Civic Learning Programme Coordinators based in the Campus Life and Student Engagement Department
- The Civic Learning Programme Academic Officers

N.B. Undergraduate students may consult the CEPC indirectly by sending a formal note to the Civic Learning Programme Coordinator on their campus.

In addition, the CEPC may refer any emerging ethical issue to itself for review. This option of self-referral allows the board to react and respond to the specific ethical issues of contemporary society, while guaranteeing its independence of opinion. The CEPC's referrals are sent by email to the Head of the Civic Learning Programme – a member of the intercampus team at the Undergraduate College – who is responsible for compiling and categorising them.

The majority of the CEPC's work takes place during a primary (confidential) meeting:

- A plenary session: this annual meeting is attended by all members of the review board. The plenary session is its main deliberative forum. The quorum necessary for adopting an opinion is half the board's members plus one. The aim of each plenary session is to address major recurring ethical issues on a largely retrospective basis (these issues are compiled and communicated to members in advance of the session).

Discussions during the session are summarised in a report and accompanied by a recommendation or opinion. Academic staff are then responsible for rendering the conclusions operational and implementing recommendations.

It should be specified that smaller sessions with a stricter remit, such as those held in previous years of the Civic Learning Programme, will continue to take place. These will be organised on an ad hoc and "on demand" basis, and attended exclusively by members internal to Sciences Po. These smaller sessions will only address single requests of a specific and operational kind: they will be organised throughout the year on the basis of the requests received.