

Sarah Sokhey, Ph.D, Visiting Professor at Sciences Po Bordeaux
Faculty Mobility and Online Teaching in the Time of Covid-19



Professor Sarah Sokhey, Ph.D, is an Associate Professor at the [University of Colorado, Boulder](#). Originally invited to teach at Sciences Po Bordeaux as a visiting professor this March, the Covid-19 outbreak and consequent international lockdowns prevented Professor Sokhey from travelling to Bordeaux and resulted in her short course being moved online. With her course now coming to a close, Professor Sokhey shares her thoughts about her experience joining the Visiting Professor Program at the institute and transitioning her class online.

What attracted you to participate in the Visiting Professors Program at Sciences Po Bordeaux?

The Department of Political Science at the University of Colorado, where I am a faculty member, has a longstanding exchange set up with Sciences Po Bordeaux. Several of my colleagues previously taught in this program and had excellent experiences. The prestige of Science Po Bordeaux, the high quality of students, and of course, the great location were all a big draw for me. More generally, I write about politics around the world and the opportunity to teach in another country is a very welcome one for me!

I've been traveling to Russia for the past 18 years (since 2002 when I first went as an undergraduate student in a study abroad program). I travel to Russia every year or more often, and I have lived in Moscow. The chance to travel to Bordeaux to teach about Russia—a country about which I am very passionate—was a dream come true. Sadly, I was not able to travel to Bordeaux because of the Covid-19 pandemic, but I still very much enjoyed getting to know the students and teach about Russian politics.

Please tell us a little bit about the course you taught at Sciences Po Bordeaux.

I taught a short course about Russian politics, a topic I love and that I regularly teach about in the United States. The course introduces students to the era of post-communist politics in Russia including topics like democratization, economic reform, corruption, and the rise of the so-called “oligarchs”. Especially given Russia’s continued importance as a superpower in the world, these topics are very salient and important for understanding world politics today.



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– Sarah Sok

With the complications that have arisen due to the spread of Covid-19 so far this year, your course was ultimately conducted online. Can you tell us in a few words what the experience of online teaching has been like for you?

I have taught an online course before so that aspect was not new for me. A particular challenge here was that this had been planned to be an in-person course and there was a pretty last minute shift to making this online. Although I had not planned to offer this course online, it really was a pleasure to do so. I am really grateful that I was still able to teach the course even though, sadly, I could not be in Bordeaux in person. I was impressed at how engaged the students were and the extent of technical and staff support from Sciences Po Bordeaux. Everyone at Sciences Po Bordeaux was tremendously helpful in making the transition to online an easy one for me.

Can you describe what the experience of teaching and exchanging with the students of Sciences Po Bordeaux through online platforms has been like? In your opinion, were teaching and learning objectives met in spite of the limitations posed by the pandemic?

Yes, I think the teaching and learning objectives were definitely met despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic! There are always tradeoffs when teaching online and it was especially challenging that this course was not intended to be online when students enrolled or when I planned it. I was really impressed with the students that for a short course in which the students and I had never met each other we could still make the course interactive. The key, I think, was to have a variety of ways in which students could interact with me and ask questions including live video lectures, discussion boards on Moodle, Zoom office hours (both at scheduled times and on request), and email. The lectures (even the live ones) were all recorded and posted online and I think that helped students who could not attend the live lectures or wanted to review those.

To whom would you recommend to participate in the Visiting Professors Program?

Based on my experience and the experiences of my colleagues – everyone! I think this is a great opportunity to meet the diverse and interesting students at Sciences Po Bordeaux. If you have a topic that students might be interested in, I would absolutely recommend participating in the Visiting Professors Program. The staff made it easy to set up the course and to adapt it to an online setting. And, of course, if you can go in person, all the better! I myself am hoping to participate again when it is possible for me to travel to Bordeaux.