

Philosophy Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) 2016/17

Meeting to be held on Tuesday 14th February
12:30pm-1pm, 7 George Square - S38

Student Representation; Year 1: Meyra Coban and Tim Francis, Year 2: Vasiliki Passaris and Violet Tinnion, Year 3: Laura Altinsoy and Alessandra Fassio, Year 4: Andrew Hermsmeier

Staff Representation; Dr Matthew Chrisman (Head of Department), Dr David Levy (Exams Convener), Dr Elinor Mason, Prof Jesper Kallestrup, Prof Pauline Phemister, Dr Brian Rabern

SSLC Convenor: Dr Nick Treanor, Teaching Director

Minutes: Sarah Nicol, Student Support Officer

Apologies: Dr Bryan Pickel

1. Philosophy Department's Report

External review

NT explained the department underwent a recent external review by two academics from other institutions. He explained that it entailed a 2 day visit, in which they met with staff and students. The outcome will be a report outlining their findings and recommendations. He is hopeful that he will be able to report the findings at the next SSLC in March. He explained that upon an informal discussion some of the topics covered will be intellectual development from Year 3 to 4. NT said that if anyone in the committee has any suggestions then they should put it to the department.

The students stated that they felt one good development from pre honours to honours was with regards to being made responsible for selecting their own question in an assignment.

MC told the committee that the externals had lunch with some UG students, and some of the discussion was regarding courses building more on each other. Possibility from courses from year 3 to 4.

The group had a discussion regarding having a prerequisites for courses would mean that the texts could have more variety. For example, currently for Mind, Matter and Language (MML), Knowledge and Reality (K&R) and Greats all cover the same text for Descartes, but perhaps if there was a development structure in place from course to course it would mean more learning. This may be an issue for prehonours as students outside Philosophy programmes take the courses at outside subjects, but could be built on from year 3 to 4.

Sub-honours

MC and NT are encouraging Course Organisers (CO) to look at their course as whole, and how all the weeks run together. NT explained how the department currently works with regards to teaching reviews, and how it

currently was under his remit as Philosophy Teaching Director. However, the department are working on creating new roles. This year, a new position of Tutor Coordinator was created to increase the training offered to postgraduate tutors, and next year there will be two new UG roles, that of a subhonours and an honours coordinator.

2. Year 3 Report

General

Students reported that they were happy. Exam results came back promptly. The Philosophy Dissertation Preparation Course was very helpful.

Dissertations

An issue for joint honours is that students feel lost with regards to their other subject. One rep found out information from fellow politics students but other subjects were unsure. It was discussed that each school deal with dissertations differently and this can cause issues. For example, Politics you have to choose courses quickly. The department fed back that dissertations for joint honours students can cause all sorts of coordination issues. Philosophy have the preparation information early as there are two types of dissertations that a student can do.

Joint Honours Students

MC reported he is meeting Senior Tutor soon to discuss potential options. Perhaps the department can have dedicated pool of personal tutors (PT) that are experts about particular joint subject, and students on those programme would be assigned to those PTs, or at least have a list of academics to ask for help.

Students raised that there should be a contact person to ask in each school. Suggestions are have a contact person in each subject area students can contact and/or provide a list of every school's UG Director, Senior Tutor, Teaching Office and Student Support Officers and put into the Personal Tutor Handbook. **ACTION:** NT/MC to discuss with Senior Tutor

PPLS Writing Centre

NT explained about the pilot which is focusing on Year 3 students. Students can book an appointment for academic to look at coursework. The department asked students to share the information with fellow students.

ACTION: SN to send Writing Centre info to Reps.

3. Year 1 Report

Logic 1

Students have asked for slides to be put on Learn prior to lecture. BR said he would encourage students not to look at them before, as there is a point to not seeing the answers.

The department asked for feedback on how the Logic 1 tutorials were going as the structure has been changed. NT explained to the committee the

difference from previous years, and updated the committee that there were two tutors now assigned per (larger) group, so that students could work on more basic or more advanced material, depending on their level of understanding. Students reported that in some groups it feels more like a lecture than a tutorial, with less discussion than in other courses. They described how they aren't split into groups, as intended, as the room makes it physically impossible. There is mixed opinions from the students and the tutors about how it's going. It was suggested that talking to timetabling may have to be an action as a better solution is needed.

ACTION: RB to gather information from Tutors identifying good rooms that fit purpose.

ACTION: RB to have discussion with Pre honours Secretary about Room bookings for next academic semester.

Greats: From Plato to the Enlightenment

Student would like slides to be put up prior to lecture. PP confirmed all have been put up on time as she gets notifications, however a particular staff member had accidentally put them in the wrong section of Learn. **ACTION:** PP to check all lecturers know where to post the lecture slides in advance so it doesn't happen in future.

It was raised that there have been a few technical issues on several occasions during Prof Dory Scaltsas lectures. PP reported she is not happy with the lack of support at the lecture theatre, and in fact the closest Servitor to assist is the Main Library. **ACTION:** MC/NT to raise issue with Building and Estates.

It was reported that Dr Andrew Mason was late on several occasions, but didn't make up time. **ACTION:** NT to touch base with Dr Andrew Mason.

Morality and Value

The committee had a discussion about the take-home exam as this was new for Morality and Value. The pros and cons were discussed. MC explained the rationale about 3 days for joint students and having enough time to have a sit an exam within the time. DL explained the fact that its already possible for students to have exams in close succession. Take home has more advantage as they have more flexibility. It is also similar to having coursework around the same time. It is about judgement call on the student. It was agreed that having a take home exam is more of an advantage, and something that students could work around. MC suggested that the department could consider running more exams as take home exams but with less time.

ACTION: MC/NT to speak to Dr Guy Fletcher with regards to results compared to last year.

General Feedback

The tutors for Greats informed the students know that tutorials were not the same as lectures, as per the last SSLC.

Comment was made that most students attend Logic and not Greats. The group had a discussions with regards to students who have done Philosophy at A level are missing out by not attending. Students perhaps feel that they don't have to or want to go. PP explains that she wants students to engage with texts in a personal way so it is a different way of approaching the texts. We are trying to make students think of themselves. It was agreed that students coming to Greats with an A level may be disadvantaged.

There was feedback that the excerpt in the previous exam was good, which was conflicting against what other students had previously reported. **ACTION:** MC to consider asking the new Pre Honours coordinator to look into what the A level syllabus is.

4. Year 2 Report

Knowledge and Reality

Reported that having one lecturer has been good, and students are enjoying the continuity. The lecture slides have been clear and Dr Bryan Pickel explains them well.

Tutorials

Tutorials had more of a mixed review. Some students leave feeling more confused, others feel they like the discussion and gives them further understanding. Students have asked for more guiding questions. NT explained being confused it not necessarily a bad thing, but that there is a balance to be struck between helping students simplify the material so they understand it better, and helping them see the deeper or more profound aspects of it. It was discussed that it would be appreciated if tutors can ask at the start of the semester – do the group want questions to help lead discussion. JK explained that getting the balance right in tutorials can be hard. It can vary from tutor to tutor, and the department are trying to help them. Some tutorials are lively and some are slow, it can depend on the tutor and the students partaking. Students reported that they were very happy having senior staff tutorials. JK has said he is also been enjoying it. Students feel when the staff member is senior it comes across that they really care about the topics. It was agreed that it would be good to encourage more colleagues.

Essay questions

Students said that the essay questions were confusing, and students don't know what they mean. It was felt it was a big step up from last year. NT explained Dr Bryan Pickel was rightly trying to encourage students to find their own thesis and not write formulaic essays. Contrast between MML where it was easy to identify which question relates to which lecture.

ACTION: JK to speak to BP about essay question clarification.

Readings

Students have admitted they don't do readings. They aren't sure if they should do them before or after the lectures. Is it possible for lecturers to say at the first lecture of the semester what is expected? It was discussed that readings

depended on the student's work ethic but BP does state what relates to the readings in lectures.

ACTION: NT to check whether information from previous SSLC was passed to other COs.

5. Year 4 Report

Rep raised that all information regarding assessment should be on Learn, for example if there is class participation elements. It was brought up that this information is on DPRS, so students can look this up. Student find locations on Learn can cause slight confusion. For example, a student may not see a notification about a change. It was agreed that sometimes it can be hard for staff and students to find information on Learn, as each page is managed by a different Course Organiser. It was discussed how the department don't have control over computer systems and how they work. Computer systems we don't have a control over them. Feedback from students for Learn is it's generally good and easy to navigate. DL suggested that everyone get the dashboard by default, unless you are staff. It was agreed that it is needed for students to feedback issues as staff don't see the same view so are not always aware.

MC asked the 4 Year rep encourage students to do the NSS survey, as the department would like a good participation from our students.

Any other business

The noise levels in Dugald Stewart Building are causing major disruption to students.

ACTION: SN to email committee members with facilities contact details.

ACTION: MC, NT, AS and BP to meet

ACTION: SN to send out Information about PPLS writing clinic to reps

6. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 28th of March, S38 (7GS) from 12.30pm - 2.00pm