

Philosophy Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) 2018/19

Wednesday 13th February 2019 12pm,
7.01, Dugald Stewart Building

MINUTES

Student Representation; Year 3: Ruby Sullivan, Year 4: Freya Gordon and Rebecca Phipps

Staff Representation; Dr Nick Treanor, Dr David Levy, Dr Brian Rabern, Dr Anna Ortin Nadal

SSLC Convenor: Dr Bryan Pickel, UG Teaching Director

In attendance; Emma Nelson (Student Support Office), Alison Lazda (Undergraduate Teaching Office), Ani Cowe (Undergraduate Teaching Office)

Apologies: Dr Pauline Phemister, Siena Wotherspoon (year 2 rep), Rebecca Joyce (year 3 rep)

- 1. Events and Initiatives** – the Convenor talked briefly about some of the events and initiatives that have been happening;
 - a. Philosophy lunches – these have been successful this semester. The department is looking to run these again next year. The Teaching Office will be attempting to find days/times where there are fewer clashes with teaching. Anything that the reps can do to raise awareness of these events would be much appreciated.
 - b. There will be a briefing for students who will be taking part in the upcoming TPR.
- 2. Actions from previous meeting**
 - a. BP to help produce a statement on the department's stance on lecture recording policy – **In Progress**
- 3. Philosophy Hires**

Philosophy would like to thank the students who took part in the recruitment process for two positions in Social and Political Philosophy. Two further positions in History of Philosophy will be advertised shortly and we will be looking for student involvement with these hires too.
- 4. Year 4 Report**
 - a. Feedback was received about the timing of take-homes tests – students don't like that it's possible to have more than one take-home test running at the same time. It was clarified that this is unlikely to be a problem moving forward as the new programme of year 3 and year 4 courses will make it easier to prevent this within Philosophy. It was also reiterated that take-home tests should not take a full 3 days to complete – students should be able to revise for these as they would a regular test and be able to complete them in a shorter time-frame.
 - b. More negative feedback was received about all deadlines being on the same day. This was spoken about in a recent department meeting and different approaches to the scheduling of deadlines are being considered. It was noted that this would effectively give students less time to complete some assessments.
 - c. Students would like lecturers to spend more time clarifying how they mark and what their expectations are for assignments. A recent TPR survey that shows that the majority of Philosophy lecturers are giving the students the opportunity for some form

of feedback ahead of assessments. However, this is not always in class time and can be in the form of, for example, extra office hours. The department feels strongly that, as much as possible, class time should be reserved for teaching in order to maximise time spent covering class content. There is a lot of extra support available outside of class (e.g. Phil Skills) and the department is looking at ways to embed this into pre-honours courses. **ACTION – BP to send the figure from the TPR survey about the number of lecturers offering some form of feedback ahead of assessments to student reps for dissemination.**

- d. There was a discussion on the effectiveness of SSLCs and the challenges of communicating with and getting representative feedback from the large undergraduate student body. Several ideas were discussed:
 - Expanding the use of mid-semester feedback cards to include department-wide feedback as well as course specific feedback.
 - Offer more alternatives when asking for feedback (e.g. do you prefer option A or option B) rather than asking students for ideas on the spot.
 - Bring back the newsletter from the Head of Philosophy
 - Increase the number of student reps (e.g. one per tutorial group or class) to help make the SSLC process more representative. This could be student-led with class/group reps reporting to year reps ahead of SSLCs.
 - Increase the use of welcome meetings (e.g. have a meeting per year group each semester) and use this to communicate updates to students.
- e. The stairs at the back of High School Yards are slippery and causing safety issues. This feedback will be passed onto estates. **Update 14/02:** Estates have clarified that these steps are not University property and any feedback about them should be directed towards Edinburgh City Council.
- f. Students are unhappy at their classes being moved to different venues. It was clarified that classes are only moved when necessary e.g. for accessibility reasons.
- g. Students felt that their final assessments marks from semester 1 were returned to them late. This was mainly due to markers being ill, and the department acknowledges that marks were late - they will try to improve this moving forward.
- h. Students have enjoyed the dissertation coffee/lunches that have been happening. However, some students haven't been offered the chance to participate in one of these or have not been given adequate notice. **ACTION – BP to raise this with Patrick Todd, the Philosophy Dissertation Coordinator.**

5. Year 3 Report

- a. Students gave positive feedback about lecturers that offer extra office hours ahead of assessment deadlines – this is appreciated.
- b. Year 3 students feel like there has been a jump in the amount of work they have to put into assessments (1500 words in pre-honours vs 2500 words in honours) but a lack of guidance as to the best way to approach this.
- c. There was feedback that students think the March deadline for a draft dissertation proposal is too early. It was clarified that the early deadline allows students to be allocated to a dissertation supervisor ahead of summer, which should leave them in a better position to start earlier. It also allows students to consider dissertation vs coursework dissertation and apply for the correct number of courses for year 4.
- d. Positive feedback was received about the course Ethics.

6. Year 2 Report

The year 2 reps could not attend the meeting and sent feedback via email:

- a. Students felt that the second assignment deadline (the essay outline) for

Knowledge and Reality was too early as not all potential essay topics had been covered in class. This was to leave enough time for feedback ahead of the assessment deadline, taking into account Flexible Learning Week.

7. The meeting closed at 2.15pm. The Convenor thanked everyone for attending. Next meeting – Wednesday 20th March.

8. Action Points

- a. BP to help produce a statement on the department's stance on lecture recording policy – In Progress
- b. BP to send the figure from the TPR survey about the number of lecturers offering some form of feedback ahead of assessments to student reps for dissemination.
- c. BP to raise that not all students have been given the opportunity to participate in a dissertation coffee/lunch with Patrick Todd, the Philosophy Dissertation Coordinator.

9. Appendix: Year 1 Report (via email)

- a. Most of the people are enjoying the courses content. There have been just some individual remarks, for example someone has pointed out that they would like the courses and specially the assessment to leave more space for personal opinions instead of just 'reproducing' what others have said (they said they are losing points for presenting original arguments if they do not mention other philosophers' works as well) and some have also said they would prefer to spend less time in puzzles in the logic lectures.
- b. Almost everyone believes the courses are well-structured. There have been dissenting opinions on the pace of the courses (some believe they are a bit rushed and others have said the material goes slowly).
- c. In terms of the resources, some people have pointed out that the reading list for Greats is not laid out very intuitively + most people agree that they prefer power points instead of projecting printed notes (specially because sometimes the angle and the zoom did not allow people to read them properly depending on where they were sitting).
- d. There has been a general agreement that students would like to have more assistance in managing references, especially regarding ancient texts, since we have been given contradictory instructions from lecturers and tutors.