

Philosophy Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) 2019/20

Wednesday 16th October 2019, 12pm

G32, 7 George Square

MINUTES

Student Representation; Year 1: Rainier Pilotte and Monika Zon Year 2: Steven Anderson, Year 3: Jose Luis Neira and Siena Wotherspoon, Year 4: Rebecca Stoll and Eilidh Northridge, PPLS School Representative: Nathan Zou

Staff Representation; Dr Wolfgang Schwarz, Dr Filipa Melo Lopes

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 Alistair Isaac, Dr Guy Fletcher, Dr Tillman Vierkant, Rachel Hughes (year 2 rep)

1. Welcome from Convenor

- a. Introductions took place
- b. The Convenor explained the purpose of the meetings and the role of Student Representatives – to gather feedback from their peers, discuss this with the Committee, and communicate the outcomes of discussions to their peers. Student reps may also be asked for advice and to gather feedback about specific topics raised by the Convenor on behalf of Philosophy.
- c. Student Representatives were asked to chair future meetings which will involve putting together an agenda.
- d. There was discussion on the methods by which Student Representatives could gather feedback, including using emails, events and checking the generic PhilosophyFeedback@ed.ac.uk email address. Students can also ask Course Organisers to send emails via course learn pages. **ACTION** - Student Support to check access to generic email and re-send relevant guidance.

2. National Student Survey (NSS) and Improvements

- a. The Convenor was told that the Student Representatives would be given access to NSS data so that this could be discussed. However, this did not happen.
- b. The Convenor provided some background on the NSS, including the strengths and weaknesses of the data it produces, and the specific difficulties with joint honours students. The improvements and actions that Philosophy has taken over the last few years were outlined (see appendix 1).
- c. Further to this, Philosophy plans to trial Piazza for the pre-honours courses Knowledge & Reality and Logic 1 in semester 2, which will be used as an anonymous discussion forum.
- d. There was discussion on the inclusion of joint honours Philosophy students on degree programmes that are not own by PPLS - they can find it harder to feel part of the Philosophy community (e.g. they do not receive the PPLS Student Weekly Roundup newsletter). Philosophy is sensitive to this and does try and include these students wherever possible, but this can sometimes conflict with PPLS, or other Schools, priorities. **ACTION** - BP to see if these students can be included in the newsletter mailing list.

3. Actions from previous meeting - none

4. Year 3 Report

- a. Generally, there was good feedback on the faculty, the Honours Dinner and excitement about the upcoming Highlands Trip.
- b. Students in Edinburgh on an exchange year from their home institution have reported that, in the course Topics in Mind and Cognition, students have been asked to reference their notes from the Year 2 course Mind, Matter and Language. **ACTION** – BP to talk to the Course Organiser and remind the faculty more generally to be aware of this. **ACTION** – BP to give further consideration to how exchange students are allocated to Philosophy courses and whether this can be improved.
- c. There have been no lecture notes, recordings or slides available for the course Late Modern Philosophy. It was explained that there will inevitably be differences in practices across the department on the provision of notes and their format. **ACTION** – BP to talk to the Course Organiser and see if they would be willing to provide notes. **ACTION** – BP to start a discussion in Philosophy about producing a policy that strongly encourages the provision of some form of notes.
- d. Students have reported that not all lecturers are using microphones in their lectures. **ACTION** – BP to reiterate to staff that they should wear a microphone wherever possible.
- e. Students are unclear on the timelines for dissertations. BP explained the purpose of the zero-credit Philosophy Dissertation Preparation Course was to help with this type of query and that specific guidance is being produced for joint honours students which should include a final deadline for choosing between subjects. **ACTION** – BP to talk to Aidan McGlynn to ensure that announcements on the course's learn page are being sent as an email.

5. Year 1 Report

- a. Students would like the Morality and Value lectures to be recorded for students who have missed classes due to extenuating circumstances such as illness. It was suggested that the recording be paused for questions or that this be considered on a case-by-case basis. It was clarified that there were pedagogical reasons for lectures not to be recorded and that this decision had been taken after some consideration. Slides that contain more detailed notes than those presented in the lecture are available on learn to help students catch-up. Students are also encouraged to make use of office hours to speak to teaching staff if they have any questions while catching-up.
- b. Students have reported that their Morality and Value tutors are deviating from the guidance notes/questions in tutorials and not always covering topics fully. Students would like a more uniform structure for tutorials to help prevent this. **ACTION** – FML to discuss this with the course's teaching team.
- c. Students are uncertain of where there is study space for Philosophy students. BP clarified that the department is aware that there isn't much study space available and regularly feed this back to the University. This isn't something that can be solved quickly, but Philosophy is taking steps to ensure that space will increase in the long run.
- d. There was some general positive feedback about Morality and Value and it's organisation.

6. Year 4 Report

The year 4 reps had not yet had the opportunity to seek feedback from their peers, but had

some feedback about their specific experiences.

- a. One representative advised that it was hard to re-join the University after their year abroad and that their joint honours subject area had hosted a useful welcome back event. It was noted that in LEL a similar welcome is held at the end of the year 4 welcome talk where students returning from a year abroad are invited to stay for a short period to discuss any concerns they have. **ACTION** - BP to raise this with Damian Caluori and Aidan McGlynn.
- b. In the course Philosophy of David Lewis, students regularly need to read a paper and write a short analysis ahead of classes. Students are finding this challenging where the papers are on topics that are new to them. BP clarified that this type of philosophical reading is a specific skill that the course is trying to teach students. **ACTION** – BP to talk to course organiser to see if further guidance can be produced to clarify the expectations of these assignments.
- c. Nathan Zou asked the year 4 representatives if they could gather some feedback on Philosophy student's experiences of dissertations for future discussion.

7. Year 2 Report

- a. There were reports of year 2 students receiving emails through the year 1 course learn page. **ACTION** – Teaching Office to investigate.
 - b. There was a request for lecturers to repeat audience questions to ensure everyone has heard it. **ACTION** – BP to relay this request to staff.
 - c. There was positive feedback on Mind, Matter and Language lecture recording.
 - d. Students would like more information on study space.
 - e. Students found the 2nd year welcome talk helpful.
 - f. The year 2 rep had trouble gathering feedback via email and asked for lecture time to speak to students face to face. It was suggested that Student Representatives be allowed a couple of minutes to shout out at the end of lectures and to contact the Course Organiser to ask for information to be sent via students via a learn announcement. Students are also encouraged to apply for funding via the PPLS Student Initiative Fund to hold feedback events.
8. The meeting closed at 1.35pm. The Convenor thanked everyone for attending and will ask the year 3 representatives to chair the next meeting.

9. Action Points

- a. Student Support to check access to PhilosophyFeedback@ed.ac.uk generic email and re-send relevant guidance regarding access to this email address to Student Representatives.
- b. Bryan Pickel to see if non-PPLS Philosophy joint honours students can be included in the PPLS newsletter mailing list.
- c. Bryan Pickel to talk to the Topics in Mind and Cognition Course Organiser and remind the faculty more generally to be mindful that exchange students taking Philosophy courses will not have taken Edinburgh pre-honours Philosophy courses.
- d. Bryan Pickel to give further consideration to how exchange students are allocated to Philosophy courses and whether this can be improved.
- e. Bryan Pickel will talk with the Course Organizer for Late Modern Philosophy.
- f. Bryan Pickel to start a discussion in Philosophy about producing a policy that strongly encourages the provision of some form of summary.
- g. Bryan Pickel to reiterate to staff that they should wear a microphone wherever possible when lecturing.

- h. Bryan Pickel to talk to Aidan McGlynn to ensure that announcements on the Philosophy Dissertation Preparation Course learn page are being sent as an email.
- i. Filipa Melo Lopes to discuss the raised Morality and Value tutorial concerns this with the course's teaching team.
- j. Bryan Pickel to raise the idea of a welcome back for students returning from year abroad with Damian Caluori and Aidan McGlynn.
- k. Bryan Pickel to talk to Philosophy of David Lewis Course Organiser to see if further guidance can be produced to clarify the expectations of short assignments.
- l. Teaching Office to investigate reports of year 2 students receiving learn emails from Morality and Value learn page.
- m. Bryan Pickel to relay this request to staff - for lecturers to repeat audience questions to ensure everyone has heard it.