

## **Philosophy Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) 2016/17**

Meeting held on Tuesday 22nd November  
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: Alessandra Fassio, Year 4: Thomas Cheong-MacLeod and Andrew Hermsmeier

**Staff Representation;** Dr Matthew Chrisman (Head of Department), Dr Guy Fletcher, Dr David Levy (Exams Convener), Dr Elinor Mason

**SSLC Convenor:** Dr Nick Treanor, Teaching Director

**Minutes:** Sarah Nicol, Student Support Officer

**Apologies:** Laura Altinsoy, Year 3 Rep

Introductions of staff and students.

### **1. Philosophy Department's Report**

**PPLS Writing Centre and Philosophy Writing Studio;** NT explained there was a test pilot writing studio for Year 3, but the department decided to roll out a Year 4 specific writing studio. Clarification is Writing Studio is for Year 4 and Writing Centre for Y3.

#### **End of Term get together;**

Organised by students and taking place on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2016. Invites are being handed out in classes.

#### **Virtual Academic Fair;**

Student Rep from last year is taking the lead of running a philosophy virtual academic fair for students, they are currently talking to staff about courses and looking at transition into honours. They are working with 8 others over the next couple of months. If anyone wants to get involved, get in touch with NT.

#### **Student Rep Socials Idea**

If there are any reps that are interested in running social events then speak to NT. It could be something that could be regular and would have some financial support for the department. Suggestion is it could be different events for each year group, and some general ones. Ideas are welcome and department would be happy to discuss, but should be student led.

#### **Honours Curriculum Review;**

Department are looking at curriculum, but there isn't anything proposed for major change at the moment. Committee is looking at smaller class sizes in Year 4 Honours years and feel that there should be development from Year 3 to Year 4. Courses that lead from each other, or specialising in an area from

course to course. Department are keen to create an idea of building from Year 3 to Year 4. Any suggestions from pre honours students would be welcome.

## 2. Year 1 Report

**General;** Feedback is that courses are going well. NT confirmed that his action from last SSLC to speak to Course Organisers had taken place and another outcome of those meetings were that Pre Honours Course Organisers would be invited to the SSLC's going forward. The students confirmed that they had noticed a difference in approach to readings.

**Feedback for Mid-Terms;** Students were happy with quality of feedback they have received for Morality and Value. What GF provided on learn was very helpful and gave opportunity to ask questions.

**Marking Criteria;** The group discussed whether marking criteria should be provided with an essay question. It was stated that the assessment section on Learn is not the easiest to navigate. The department explained the complexity of the previous marking rubric and what the disadvantages were for students and staff when in use. The majority agreed that it was better to have more meaningful feedback that was specific than general. NT explained that DL had looked into feedback and his findings were it was more effective to have less comments, but more specific comments. It was agreed that engaging the student with their own work made feedback a useful process.

**Attendance;** Students raised that attendance dropped since mid-terms. The students stated they feel if lecturers only read off slides, then people don't go, as they feel they can pass without attending.

**Mailing Lists;** Only Philosophy Programme students are on the current mailing list. Maintained by Teaching Office (TO). Not reaching everyone on the course. If students would like information put on Learn they should speak to Course Organiser (CO) or TO.

## 3. Year 2 Report

**Recaps;** Students are more positive about Mind, Matter and Language (MML), since it's switched from Mind to Language. Recaps in the middle have been very useful. NT confirmed he had spoken to the CO since the last SSLC. Students were asked to expand on the bridge from Mind to Language. It was felt there wasn't a bridge and they didn't connect that well. Comment was made that students didn't connect with what the Matter part was in MML. It was stated that Mind and Language feels like different courses. The students reported the flow of the lectures wasn't great, and stated it needs to have more coherence between subjects.

The question was raised - what is a better model? 1) Having more lecturers like Morality and Value (MV), who has a different lecturer per subject or 2) Having more overlap like MML. Students felt it was easier to follow one

lecturer per subject, therefore a recap can be done by one person as they have covered it all. **ACTION** – NT to raise with Course Organiser.

**General Structure;** It was suggested that because there are only 2 compulsory courses, students feel they are doing less Philosophy than other subjects. Department stated they would need to discuss offering more pre honours however, that would impact the honours courses offered. It was suggested that a course covering more Logic or a bridge from MV to MML would be good, then perhaps students would worry less about honours transition. These hypothetical courses should be optional not compulsory. It was agreed it would be good to have more balance and have a bit more Philosophy courses. **Action;** NT - Think of a way of communicating to students that the courses they do in pre honours are preparing them for honours, so students shouldn't worry.

NT explained the advantages of the Scottish System being you get more optional courses open to you. It also makes students more rounded and open to learning not sure their discipline. This could be covered by the video project and also transitions at the end of year 2.

The discussion concluded that the department is already having discussions about what they offer at pre honours.

#### 4. Year 3 Report

**Course Descriptions;** Not all courses for semester 2 on Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study (DRPS) have reading lists. It was explained that the DRPS are not updated with reading lists due to the fact that they change each year, and is hard to maintain. Students should seek reading lists from Learn. However, students raised that they cannot see Learn pages for Semester 2 yet. It was confirmed reading lists should be confirmed by the 16<sup>th</sup> of December, however the department would like to remind students they can ask course organisers directly. **ACTION:** NT - Speak to Teaching Office and/or Dr Simon Fokt to ask we get the Semester 2 Learn pages to go live at least a month before the course takes place.

**Dissertations;** Students are anxious about coursework dissertations and wondered how do students know if they are going to get what they ask for. It was confirmed that Year 4 typically get what they ask for and it is common for some to wait until they are taking the course before they select. It was the case in previous years, all students got the coursework dissertation they requested this year.

**Longer Essays;** some students are concerned about writing a longer essay for the first time. After discussion it was agreed that it could be a PhilSkills session to cover how to write for different length essays. **ACTION:** NT to discuss with Dr Brian Rabern.

**Exam Only Courses;** Students are worried about it all being 100%. DL advised it should be approached the same as doing 2 1 hour philosophy essays. It was suggested that a formative essay would be useful. DL confirmed that when it's offered it is always a poor show. Currently, Dr David Levy, Dr Andrew Mason, Prof Theodore Scaltsas and Prof Pauline Phemister all encourage students to write midterm essays, not for marks but for formative feedback, in the courses they teach that are 100% final exam. Patrick Todd is teaching such a course in Semester 2 for the first time and has not yet settled on what the formative feedback during the course will be.

**Attendance;** it was raised that class discussion is poor as not many students attending since the mid-terms. Some lecturers don't want to cover too much when not all students are there, however it has been raised by those that do turn up as unfair. Students agreed that in Year 1 & 2 tutorials it feels like a punishment for students who have attended get time wasted as things are covered again for the students that didn't attend. Lectures and Tutorials should work on the assumption that students have attended all. Honours example - Philosophy of Fiction – 5 students turned up. However the lecturer didn't want to cover all of the stuff in the first class in case people turned up for the second week of the topic.

The committee then discussed what potentially could be put in place to encourage attendance. For example - having attendance or mini assessment count towards final grade would encourage students. Some students found quizzes in classes engaging and helps motivation. Logic 1 for example has mid semester test, so students were engaging and could gauge how on track they were, but this did not go towards the final grade.

The group had a lengthy discussion about why students who study Philosophy feel that they can still pass and graduate with a Philosophy Degree without attending. It was suggested that Philosophy is more reading based, but it doesn't always feel essential to attend as all the information on Learn. Also, you only need 40% in Year 1, and Year 2 overall 50%. It was raised that isn't not like this in honours and in pre honours students find out the learning curve – that if you attend, you will learn more and likely get a higher mark. It was pointed out that pre honours lectures are not interactive, it can be more like a text book information, but in honours there is more opportunity to question.

**ACTION:** NT/MC - Transitions into Honours – make sure students are aware of the difference in attending in honours compared to pre honours, and how that will directly impact your grades in honours years.

**ACTION:** NT – discuss with Pre Honours CO's for semester 2 that they should outline student expectations in the first lecture.

**Philosophy Library;** It was raised that not all students know about it's existence or resources.

**ACTION:** SN – report to PPLS Induction Team that incoming Philosophy students should be told about the Philosophy Library

**PhilSkills;** Some students think they have missed the email about PhilSkills.

**ACTION:** NT PhilSkills send it out again.

**Department Calendar;** Suggestion from a rep, it would be very handy if the Philosophy department could have a calendar of events from the start of the year.

#### 5. Year 4 Report

**General;** Workshops for writing was well received. Concern from students that they are concerned about not doing Logic for so long and they feel out of practice.

**Structure of classes;** it was raised that some seminars are 2 hours back to back of straight lectures, with no chance for discussion. Year 3 reps pointed out that some students preferred to just be talked at, and go away to think about it more in depth. It was agreed it varies from lecturer to lecturer. It was suggested that academics could learn from their peers about how they are teaching. MC suggested that this is something he could consider taking forward as Head of Department.

#### 6. Any other business

The reps would like to thank PhilSoc for adding students into their weekly emails, this has been well received.

The group was reminded about the PPLS Bake Sale taking place on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> between 12-2pm in Dugald Stewart Building.

PPLS Marketing are looking for Ambassadors for Philosophy which is a paid position and reps should get in touch with Marketing if they are interested.

7. Next Meeting – Tuesday 14th February, S38 (7GS) from 12.30pm - 2.00pm