

Minutes of the Undergraduate Student-Staff Liaison Committee Summer Term Meeting
Tuesday 13 May 2008 at 12 noon, Room E408

Present:

Students: Louisa Evans, Kevin Heutschi, Thomas Whitfield, Adrian Rogstad
Staff: Nigel Ashton, Alexandra Smith

1. *Reports from the Department's representatives to the Undergraduate Student Forum and the Library User Group.*

Louisa Evans reported from the last meeting of the Library User Group. The main points raised were:

- General complaints about noise and food in the library.
- Proposed changes to the fine structure for overdue books
- Concerns from representatives of amongst others the History Department about the lack of key texts for many courses and a generally bad reflection of reading lists in library "reality".

Nigel Ashton will raise the last point at the Departmental Meeting, urging course administrators to re-examine reading lists and re-check the number of key texts in the library.

2. *Proposed reforms to HY314: Representing the Past, Historiography and Historical Method.*

Nigel Ashton informed about proposed changes to HY314, on the basis of persistent negative feedback on the course in both student and staff surveys. The main proposed changes, which would take effect from the 2009/10 academic year, are:

- The replacement of HY314 by two new courses, HY100: *Concepts, Themes and Sources in International History*, and HY200: *History & Theory: The Scholar, Society and Explaining the Past*.
- HY100 will offer a sound introduction to the evaluation of sources and a pathway into the variety of courses and approaches on offer within the department, and will be compulsory for BA History students and optional but recommended for joint degree students.
- HY200 will be an elective course designed to allow those students with a particular interest in historiography and philosophy of history to pursue the study of the discipline further, and will be optional for all students.

Feedback from the rest of the committee was positive. The changes seem to be advantageous for preparing students for dissertation work and to open up for more specialisation in their third year.

Kevin Heutschi raised the question of an increase in compulsory courses for first year BA History students, but after having examined the regulations the committee found that there would not be any major changes to this.

Adrian Rogstad raised the issue of what will happen to students who start their degree before the changes are implemented. There will have to a transition period where HY314 is still taught to students who started their degree under "old" regulations.

3. *Request for volunteers to act as student mentors*

The Department have recruited only one student mentor for next year. The plan to send out an e-mail for more volunteers has since been dropped since the deadline for recruiting mentors centrally has expired.

4. *Any Other Business*

- a. Kevin Heutschi raised a concern over last year's teaching of HY203. Due to sabbaticals there were no contact people in the department for the course during the year, and there was a discrepancy between the course and the exam. There was agreement in the committee that there should be at least one contact person in the department for a course to go ahead.

- b. Kevin Heutschi raised a concern over a sudden change of teacher in HY319 in Michaelmas Term this year. Although it is impossible to avoid these sort of changes completely due to uncertainty of demand, the committee agreed that they should be made as early as possible, preferably before week 4 of Michaelmas Term.
- c. Kevin Heutschi raised a concern over the contact between permanent members of staff and undergraduate students, as undergraduate courses are usually taught by graduate teaching assistants. Coupled with potential changes in personal tutors over the three years, this potentially produces a problem for undergraduate students in getting references for masters' degrees. Nigel Ashton informed that this problem is being considered in conjunction with a forthcoming report of the Teaching Task Force. Any potential changes will probably be made mainly in 300-level courses.
- d. Kevin Heutschi raised a concern over the holding of departmental meetings in E509, especially in Summer Term. As staff in the department have the possibility of booking other rooms and these are readily available in the Summer Term, it would be good if E509 could be left for study in the run-up to exams.
- e. Nigel Ashton raised the question of next year's chair. Adrian Rogstad stood for the position and was elected unanimously.
- f. Kevin Heutschi raised the question of how members of staff are being replaced when they leave, with reference to covering specific issue areas. Nigel Ashton confirmed that it is unlikely that the dept will seek to recruit a medieval historian. He also acknowledged the student interest in the provision of an undergraduate course on African history in future. Louisa Evans informed of a petition where signatures are being collected to lobby for the establishment of a course on African history.

Adrian Rogstad
Student Chair