

Minutes of the Undergraduate Student-Staff Liaison Committee Lent Term Meeting
Wednesday 21 January 2009, Room E509

Students present: Louisa Evans, Adi Jhaveri, and Adrian Rogstad

Staff present: Nigel Ashton, Andrea Mason, Paul Horsler and Ruth Murphy from the Library

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

- No report from the Undergraduate Student Forum.
- Louisa Evans reported that the Library User Group discussed the issue of lack of books for core history courses, especially second and third-year courses, and the tendency for overlap between courses to create high demand for certain books. It was agreed to set up a separate meeting to cover the problem in more detail.

Another concern amongst students was reported to be the price of course packs for third year history courses, which are usually mandatory for students to buy. Nigel Ashton stated that the Department would look into relative costs for course packs to see if this problem can be alleviated. Adrian Rogstad suggested that more materials might be made available online, and in the following discussion the positive development of an increase in courses and materials being available on Moodle was noted.

2. *Student feedback on last term's study skills and careers sessions*

- Louisa Evans said she thought events last term had been good, and attended by a fairly diverse range of students from the Department. It might be positive to make the events less formal in order to encourage discussion and tailor to the needs of the students actually present, as some of the basic information would be old news to many.
- Nigel Ashton asked whether it would perhaps be better to hold study skills sessions as early as possible in Michaelmas Term, as the topics covered are most useful in work with students' first essays. There was general agreement on this.
- Paul Horsler asked if there was more which could be done from the Library side with regards to study skills sessions. It was agreed that both a stronger focus at inductions on what is available in the Main Collection, as well as a session for second year students starting their dissertation work on what is available in special collections like the archives and Government Publications would be positive. This latter issue should be specifically co-ordinated with the HY300 administrator.

3. *Student feedback on teaching quality in the Department*

- Due to concerns with teaching quality only being raised at the Summer Term meeting of the Committee last academic year, Nigel Ashton raised the issue in case there were any concerns which could be alleviated at an earlier stage.
- Nigel Ashton informed that the changes planned to be implemented in HY314 have been found to be more complicated in practice than expected, and will take more time to implement properly. The changes will therefore not be implemented in the 2009/10 academic year.
- Nigel Ashton informed that the Department is likely to take part in a pilot project from the School launching a standardised feedback form for essays across departments. The form, which was passed around, includes more space for commentary by the class teacher and also space for students to comment on the usefulness of the feedback received. The general feeling in the Committee was that the form did not necessarily represent an advancement on the current system of feedback in the Department, but that it should be tried out in the pilot project period.
- In the discussion arising about general feedback in the Department no major concerns were raised by students, but a suggestion to make it a policy for class teachers to set aside a part of their office hours to discuss at least the first essay written in each course with students in depth received support. This is already done by many teachers in the Department, and the experience was reported to be good by students. Students are encouraged to make use of office hours in order to get feedback on essays in general.

- Adrian Rogstad raised the problem, also discussed at the Committee's Summer Term meeting, of the low level of undergraduate teaching done by permanent members of staff, which can create problems for students requiring references in their third year. Louisa Evans mentioned that many undergraduate students thought the experience of being taught by permanent members of staff was very rewarding.

Nigel Ashton replied that the Department are aware of the problem, but that both for practical reasons of time and because of the need for Graduate Teaching Assistants to get experience, it is difficult to find any solution which will insure enough contact for all students.

Adrian Rogstad suggested that a possible solution to the reference problem could be for these to be written in collaboration between GTAs who know the student and the permanent member of staff responsible for that particular course.

4. *Student feedback on courses offered in the Department, including difficulty of choosing courses in other University of London colleges*

- Adrian Rogstad raised a student concern over the lack of courses on African and Latin American history offered in the Department. Nigel Ashton and Andrea Mason reported that a new appointment is being sought at the moment and that Latin American experts are particularly encouraged to apply. The Department's African expert has been away on leave this academic year.

- Adrian Rogstad raised a student concern over the difficulty of choosing courses in other University of London colleges. Nigel Ashton replied that the impression might sometimes be given that it is harder than it seems due to warnings from staff about the possible clashes in timetable and/or exam times, as these are not co-ordinated with other colleges. The procedure is otherwise the same as for anybody wishing to take a course outside the regulations of his or hers program, with the added condition that a course similar to the one offered by another college should not be offered by the LSE.

5. *Any Other Business.*

- Adrian Rogstad raised a student concern over why there are no computers in the Undergraduate common room, E509. Nigel Ashton and Andrea Mason informed that there are school regulations in place preventing this.

- Paul Horsler informed of the following upcoming events at the Library: Annual book sale, 3 and 4 February in R301; Book availability survey on 12 February; and the Annual Student Survey in late February/early March.

- The provisional date and time for the Summer Term meeting was set to Wednesday

6 May at 12 noon.

Adrian Rogstad
Student Chair