

International History department
Wednesday November 3 Undergraduate SSLC Meeting Minutes

Present:

Astrid Barsk (Chair, BA History year 3, minute taker)
Calum Young (BA History year 3)
Catherine Capone (BA History year 3)
Nicholas Nalbantian (BA History year 1)
Benedict Sarhangian (BSc IR and History year 3)
Eduardo Baudet (BSc IR and History year 2)
Raphael Bousquet (BSc IR and History year 1)
Sanaz Tailafar (General Course)
Dr Joan Pau Rubies (UG programme director)
Mathew Betts (UG administrator)

Apologies:

Justin Lau (BA History, year 1)

Topic of Discussion:

Professor Lieven's Manifesto:

- Generally, the students felt that it was nice to get an email at the beginning of the year knowing how the department will be addressing issue that have been raised in previous years
- All the students felt that the **roundtable discussion** was a good way to increase contact between senior level department members and students
- But question of whether or not a roundtable discussion is a good substitute or way to address the **GTA question**
 - o Although, most students did not feel that GTAs were problematic and many had had good experiences being taught by GTAs
- **Paper feedback on GTAs**/Teachers is good for higher response rates, but a question of how effective feedback is – previous experiences with students complaining about certain methods of teaching through the feedback scheme, yet no changes were ever made
- **Exam feedback** was welcomed and is helpful in understanding past mistakes on exams, however would be useful if that information is readily available to tutors closer to exam time, so students can refresh on mistakes made in previous years
- **Face-to-face feedback on essays** – seen as extremely positive and a great teaching tool, especially by first years and general course students who are unfamiliar with how essays are marked
- **Continuous assessment** – appreciated as a way to test knowledge in a more history-appropriate multi-faceted way. Those who are not good 'exam takers' can demonstrate knowledge in another way

General issues

- Maybe a greater explanation to first years as to how **office hours** should be used, NOT only about when a crisis has arisen, and NOT only for right before exam time, and is not only serving an administrative function.

- The first year **induction** was run well, excluding the somewhat confusing library presentation, a few students were not aware that a course collection existed, and some minor issues such as mentioning the existence of a study room on the 5th floor.
- Several first years expressed frustration with the **HY116 course**
 - o Felt that lectures were rushed, and that perhaps making some of the lectures that cover an especially large subject area could be 2 hours
 - o felt that lectures were too broad for the specific essay questions
- **exams and 'predictability'**
 - o topics that show up repeatedly every year, making exams predictable.
 - o Most students did not feel this was problematic, but some felt that this made the whole exam somewhat defeatist
 - o However, it was pointed out that it is a progressive degree, and that by 3rd year the exams are often unpredictable.
- **Incentive structure** for studying could be improved
 - o Any way to increase the incentive to stay on top of work and reading for those who may struggle adapting to the massive shift in teaching structure from high school to university
 - o E.g. many Econ. History courses put students into pairs and have them hand in a page summary answer to the essay question based on the essential readings.
- **Less essays** were appreciated, as it allows for students to focus on doing the reading and keeping up with their classes, and mocks are seen as essential in allowing some form of training for the exam-style essay
- **IR and History:**
 - o Why can't history students do an IR dissertation despite being required to take so many IR courses
 - o The degree structure seemed rigid and students resented being forced to take certain IR modules – more flexibility with the three required IR modules would be appreciated
- All students supported the move to abolish the **HY314** course and to spread it over three years
- HY314 needs more of the background texts available in the course collection, at least as a Set Text, since come essay time the entire third year History have only one main collection copy of each text to use, and an essay written with only the course pack materials is unacceptable.
- Feedback from third year students on the Michaelmas term HY300 dissertation workshop was as follows:
 - o The presentation could have focused more on the structuring of the dissertation in the write up stage, which students should now be commencing.
 - o The Library presentation was very similar to the presentation in the previous year Lent term workshop.
 - o Coverage of Endnote should be included earlier on in the course than the 3rd year MT workshop
- Benedict Sarhangian volunteered to be the representative to the Undergraduate Consultative Forum, which was agreed by the Committee.

- The Committee agreed to arrange the Lent term meeting at the same time slot, Wednesday 4:15pm, if possible.