

International History Department Student Staff Liaison Committee meeting minutes

Wednesday 30th October 2013

Present:

Emma Forth (BA History year 3, Chair)
Maryam Osman (BSc IR and History year 3)
Matteo Lenzi (BSc IR and History year 3)
Alistair Hughes (BA History year 3)
Georgia Derrett (BA History year 3)
Jack Kelly (BSc IR and History year 2)
Lodewijk Vriens (BSc IR and History year 2)
Uday Mehra (BSc IR and History year 2)
Kathryn Houston-Floyd (BA History year 1)
Soo Ji Kang (BA History year 1)
Orla McNamara (BA History year 1)
Josh Hitchens (BA History year 1)
Catrina Brooker (BA History year 1)
Edward Tan (BA History year 1)
Khanh Nguyen (BSc IR and History year 1)
Yeva Agayan (BSc IR and History year 1)
Kanan Parida (BSc IR and History year 1)
Fazeela Jahangir (BSc IR and History year 1)
Lucy Flamm (General Course)

Professor Vladislav Zubok (Undergraduate Programme Director)
Mathew Betts (Undergraduate administrator)

Apologies:

Sivakami Sivakumar (BA History year 2)
Eleonore Lazat (BSc IR and History year 2)
Alexander Hradecky (BSc IR and History year 1)
Paul Horsler (IH Library liaison)

1. Welcome and introduction

The committee members introduced themselves and the Chair thanked the new first year and General Course reps for volunteering. The SSLC terms of reference had been circulated to reps prior to the meeting.

2. Cohort feedback

First Year BSc IR and History

- Students appreciate being able to take two outside options in the first year.

- More Library copies of *A. Best, J. Hanhimaki, J. Maiolo & K. Schulze, An International History of the Twentieth Century* are needed for students taking HY113. It was noted that this course has grown in student numbers since the withdrawal of HY117 and continues to do so.

Action: Mr Betts to liaise with the LSE Library

- Students are finding it difficult to get to grips with their first year IR course. It was noted that perceptions of International Relations on the part of new students and how it is taught as an academic discipline do differ. Second and third year joint degree reps reassured the first year reps that they will become more comfortable with the subject and the courses as the programme progresses.
- A concern was raised over a comment made in an IR lecture which some students felt characterised Islam in a derogatory way. It was discussed that this was likely to have been the lecturer referring to views of others in the context of a wider debate rather than expressing his/her own view. It was noted that tensions are running high on campus following the events of the Freshers Fayre. Students were advised that if they feel concerned about Islamophobia or other forms of discrimination they should contact the Student Union and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies.

First year BA History

- Students are feeling unprepared for their first essays in terms of what is expected for university-level essay writing. The department's study skills session was useful but could have had a greater focus on essay writing. Students who have attended Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) workshops have found these useful, but many students are not aware of them. First year reps were reassured that the first essay in first year courses is a learning experience from which students are subsequently able to improve their marks. One-to-one feedback will be given on the first essays. Students were encouraged to make use of their teachers' office hours to discuss matters such as essay writing outside of class.

Action: Mr Betts to circulate the TLC workshop programme to first year students

- A concern was raised over first year class sizes, particularly HY116. Mr Betts advised that class sizes in the International History department should not exceed fifteen students. In the early weeks of term larger class sizes may have existed before additional classes were put on (the School over-recruited across the board at undergraduate level this year) and due to students informally swapping class group, which is not allowed.

Action: Mr Betts to investigate specific class sizes and follow up as necessary

- HY116 has a lot of non-History students. It was noted that the course is compulsory for single honours IR, an option for Economic History and Government students and is a popular outside option due to its nature as a 'survey course'. International History students benefit from being able to take outside options during their degree so the department must reciprocate by offering some of its own courses as outside options to other students.
- A query was raised over why HY113 lectures are not recorded. The matter of recording lectures has been raised at previous meetings and the core of it remains the same: it is at the discretion of the academic giving the lecture and s/he may

choose not to due to reasons of intellectual property, moral hazards or to encourage greater student attendance at lectures.

- The departmental induction was well received by students. It was felt that some contact with the department earlier on in the induction week than the Thursday would have been beneficial.

Second year BSc IR and History

- Students are generally happy.
- Some students had been concerned that HY241 and HY243 would not run this year due to small numbers. Mr Betts confirmed that they will.

Second year BA History

Written feedback had been provided by the student rep who was unable to attend.

- *The lack of resources available for some courses such as HY208 if you miss a lecture- as they are in smaller classroom rather than lecture theatres, there are no substantial resources on Moodle if students were unable to attend a lecture.*

This relates back to the issue of recording lectures discussed above.

- *HY203- different teachers are giving different amounts of required readings- one class was apparently given 17 whereas another class was given 5.*

One of the student reps present who is taking HY203 confirmed that the course syllabus is clear and that this may be a problem of clarity with the new online reading list system. Dr Schulze can be consulted if clarification is needed.

- *Some people are finding it difficult to navigate the new system for the reading lists*

This issue is addressed in the third year feedback below.

- *Some students have asked about why we can't take modules at other universities as part of the university of London scheme? Universities such as kings allow students to take modules at LSE and some have raised queries about their ability to do so as well.*

Mr Betts clarified that students are allowed to take courses at other London universities as an outside option, but not instead of compulsory History courses. The department does not allow students from other universities to register for its courses in order to keep class sizes down.

Third year BSc IR and History

- Students who are taking the HY300 dissertation would appreciate more guidance on how to write up and structure their dissertation. Mr Betts advised that students' dissertation supervisors can provide guidance on this in the first instance, but a general document could be offered as well.

Action: Mr Betts to raise the matter with Dr Sood, Teacher Responsible for HY300

- Students would like their IR exam feedback. Whereas this has not been possible at all in the past, arrangements can now be made with the IR department to obtain the feedback and for a student's academic adviser in the IH department to provide it. It is not possible to offer this routinely; individual students who wish for it must make a request.

Third year BA History

- The third year BA History reps supported the point raised by the BSc IR and History rep about the dissertation (see above).
- Students across all years are not finding the new Library online reading list system to be user-friendly. The difficulties are:
 - The system is hard to navigate and clicking through many screens is cumbersome, particularly on a small device.
 - The system retrieves a long list of readings when a particular one corresponding to a weekly topic on Moodle has been selected.
 - When linking through Moodle, the second log-in required is bothersome.
 - Classmarks are not provided.
 - It is harder to track books in the Library using the new system.
 - The suggested links to social media are unnecessary and obstructive.

Mr Betts advised that this system is a large project which has been implemented School-wide and so a reversal is not likely to be forthcoming. It may be beneficial to raise the issue at the Undergraduate Students' Consultative Forum (see item below) due to its scale. Unfortunately Mr Horsler, the Library liaison officer, could not attend the meeting due to teaching commitments so Mr Betts will convey these concerns to him.

Action: Mr Betts to provide feedback on the system to the LSE Library

General Course

- General Course students have appreciated that teachers are aware that they have a different grading system and have been communicative about this.
- The departmental induction meeting clashed with the General Course registration session. Mr Betts advised that this clash has come up before due to the difficulty of scheduling all the events of induction week, but that renewed efforts will be made to avoid it next year.

3. External examiner reports

The committee received and noted the external examiners' reports for the undergraduate programme in 2012/13. These were very positive and pleasing to the committee.

4. New course proposal: Travel, Pleasure and Politics: The European Grand Tour 1670-1825

This course proposal had previously been circulated to second and third year reps who gave feedback, prior to first year reps volunteering, in order to meet the School deadline for submission. The meeting formally noted and welcomed the course.

5. Undergraduate Students Consultative Forum representatives

Uday Mehra volunteered to be the UG forum rep, with Lodewijk Vriens as deputy. The meeting agreed.

6. Any Other Business

No matters were raised.

7. Date of next meeting

The date and time of the next meeting were provisionally set as Wednesday 5th February 3:30pm, week 4 of Lent term.