

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS  
SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHICAL, ANTHROPOLOGICAL & FILM STUDIES

PHILOSOPHY STAFF/STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

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MINUTES OF 16 NOVEMBER 2011

**Present:**

Katie Allan (Secretary), Colin Caret, Ruth Cunningham (Student Rep, 1000 level), Berys Gaut, Ephraim Glick, Patrick Greenough, , John Haldane, John Harper (Student Rep, Honours), Katherine Hawley, Hamza Iqbal (Student Rep, Honours), Lisa Jones, Christina McDermott (Student Rep, 1000 level), Mike McFarlane (Philosophy School President & Convenor), Laurence Moore (Student Rep, 2000 level), Garry Paton (Student Rep, MLitt), Simon Prosser, Craig Smith, Matthew Steele (Student Rep, 2000 level), Jens Timmermann and Deborah van Herstraeten (Student Rep, Honours).

**PRELIMINARY MATTERS**

**1. Apologies for Absence**

James Harris, Caitlin Leach (Student Rep, Honours) and Tim Mulgan.

**2. Minutes of the Philosophy Staff/Student Liaison Committee meeting held on 23 March 2011**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2011 were approved and adopted.

**3. Matters arising from the above minutes**

There were no matters arising.

**STAFF BUSINESS**

**4. Departmental Library**

The Departmental Library Representative provided an update on developments within the Departmental Library since the last meeting of the committee. The removal of popular short loan books to the main University Library took place during the summer. The book ordering process has been changed and it was reported that research postgraduate students are required to place any book order requests with their supervisors. The department recognises the value of the Library as study space and is reviewing the use of the space during the current session.

**STUDENT BUSINESS: GENERAL MATTERS**

**5. Possibility of assignments for tutorials**

It was reported that many students, particularly at Honours level, felt that it would be advantageous to have assignments set for tutorial discussions. Some students believe that it would assist in motivating students to prepare in advance for tutorials and that it would encourage participation. The model of pre-set questions, used to frame a discussion and available in advance of the tutorial would be useful.

Staff noted these comments and reported on the variety of models used within the department in respect of the running of tutorial groups.

## 6. **Anticipated Stress of First Semester 2012/13**

The School President reported on student concern about a perceived increase in workload resulting from the introduction of a new academic year in 2012/13. In particular concern was noted about the impact of the loss of Reading Week during semester 1 on 1<sup>st</sup> year students who have previously valued this period as an opportunity to catch up with reading and study as they manage the transition from School to University.

However, it was also reported that the proposed removal of examinations from honours modules was popular with students.

It was agreed that preparatory material for S1 modules (i.e. lists of preparatory reading) would be made available to students over the summer period via our webpages, so as to allow students to begin preparing for modules prior to the start of semester. It is hoped that this will ease the some of the stress of the 'condensed' teaching term.

## 7. **Sub-Honours Tutor Award Scheme**

The School President proposed the introduction of a departmental award scheme for postgraduate tutors which would have the aim of awarding good tutors and offering an opportunity to reflect on the progress of tutorial groups during the running of the module.

The Director of Teaching noted that two separate issues appeared to be raised by this proposal: a) a proposal to award recognition to good tutors and b) a desire by students to have an opportunity to provide feedback and raise any issues about the running of a module during the semester. Regarding the latter point, there are a variety of mechanisms available to allow this reflection during the running of a module, either directly with individual tutors or with the Module Co-ordinator.

The committee noted that in terms of the reward element, the Students' Association does run an annual award for teaching staff, and staff and tutors within the department are regularly nominated for this award by their students.

It was agreed that the School President would submit a more detailed proposal for a departmental scheme to the Director of Teaching.

## 8. **Clarification of Essay Word Limit Guidelines**

Student sought clarification on the following guidance published in the Philosophy Undergraduate Handbook: 'The word-lengths specified for each essay include everything *except* the bibliography (i.e., the word-count includes footnotes, quotes, etc.) This goes for dissertations and essays, at all levels. **Do not exceed the word limit** – material in excess of the word limit may not be read by the marker.'

The Director of Teaching confirmed that this means that any material that exceeds the stated word limit may not be read by the marker. The committee did not feel that a revision to this policy was required.

## **STUDENT BUSINESS: MODULE SPECIFIC**

### **9. PY1105 Ethical Controversies**

The Student Rep reported that some students felt that some lectures were over-simplified and were too close to the suggested readings. The Director of Teaching noted that students taking first year Philosophy come from a variety of academic backgrounds with a range of previous experience of philosophy, and indeed little or no prior experience of the subject. This means that the design and teaching of first year modules must ensure that the right balance between these different needs is found. She went on to note that more students coming into first year have previous experience of philosophy and so this balance will be reviewed for next year in light of this.

The Student Rep also sought clarification of the purpose of tutorials as some students had reported that the content of tutorials was too close to lectures. The Director of Teaching advised that students should take up any queries or concerns that they have about tutorials with either the tutor or the Module Co-ordinator. As it is now the mid-point of the semester, now would be a good time to review the running of tutorials with tutors.

The Student Rep concluded by reporting that students are enjoying the opportunities available to participate and engage with the material on this module with innovative approaches such as straw polls. It was noted that the Kant lectures have been well-received.

### **10. PY1005 Mind & Reality**

The Student Rep reported that she had received very limited feedback from students on this module but the feedback received has been very positive.

### **11. PY2003 Ancient Philosophy**

The Student Rep reported that students had requested that the slides for lectures be made available before the lecture. The Module Co-ordinator responded that the slides were not made available in this way as she felt that they disincentivise student attendance and participation in lectures.

It was also noted that some students reported that they would have liked a wider choice of essay topics although this was not considered a significant concern. The Module Co-ordinator responded on the need to ensure that the right balance of topics is achieved across both essay and examination questions to reduce the opportunity for students to repeat material across essay and examination answers.

The Student Rep concluded by reporting that students have enjoyed the directed reading and found the guidance provided on reading to be very valuable.

### **12. PY2002 Metaphysics & Science**

The Student Rep reported that the first half of the module had materials available in advance of classes on MMS but for the second half of the course the material was not made available until after that section had begun. The Module Co-ordinator reported that this material was now available.

### **13. PY3701 Language & Reality**

The Student Rep reported that some students had noted the larger size of tutorial groups on this module than they had been used to at sub-honours level. The Module Co-ordinator

responded that a number of students have been attending a different group than the one that they signed up for and at least one group is smaller than the others. If possible, then any student concerned about the size of their group can transfer into the smaller tutorial group.

The Director of Teaching confirmed that the department is restricted by the limitations of staff resources.

**14. PY4604 Political Philosophy**

The Student Rep reported that there was a lack of books available via short loan which was causing students difficulties in terms of their essay preparations. The Module Co-ordinator was surprised to learn of these problems as he had requested in the summer that additional copies be made via short loan, extra copies had been ordered for the short loan collection and reading packs had also been ordered in larger numbers. The Module Co-ordinator will discuss this with the Library directly.

**STUDENT BUSINESS: MLITT MATTERS**

**15. Availability of Books**

The Student Rep reported that he had no significant matters to report on and the MLitt cohort is pleased with the progression of the course. There has been some concern noted about the availability of books on the modules with larger enrolments.

**16. Allocation of Academic Advisors**

The Student Rep also reported that students had not yet received final confirmation of their academic advisors. The Director of the MLitt responded that this information had taken a little while to finalise and the final allocation would be circulated to students immediately.

**MATTERS FOR NOTING**

**17. AOCB**

*17.1 Honours Prize Seminar*

The Director of Teaching reported that the Honours Prize seminar will run again in semester 2. The seminar will be given by Ian Church and is on 'Luck and the Gettier Problem'. Information will be circulated to honours students in due course.

**18. Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting is *Wednesday 21 March 2012 at 2pm.*

*Katie M Allan  
Senior Administrator  
30 November 2011*