Beyond the Thesis: Pitching Your Next Project

Schools/Department/Unit involved: Modern Languages (German) and Film Studies

Amount awarded: £732

Aims and objectives of project:

Beyond the Thesis is an away day for PhD students in their final or penultimate year that offers an opportunity to discuss postdoctoral research. Bringing together PGRs from across the Arts & Humanities, the event encourages cross-disciplinary dialogue, networking and peer support. Sessions will be dedicated to the following objectives:

- to facilitate cross-disciplinary dialogue about research priorities in the Arts & Humanities
- to develop the skills needed to formulate a feasible and competitive post-doctoral research project
- to provide information about relevant funding sources and postdoctoral schemes
- to provide guidance about assembling a good, well-presented application

Outcome of project:

Dr. Flaig and Dr. Osborne led a one-day workshop for PGR students in the Arts & Humanities at St. Andrews focused on preparing for future, post-doctoral projects and generously supported by the PGR Development Fund. Announcements about the event circulated one month prior to the workshop and interested PGR students were asked to submit brief statements about their background and interest in attendance. 17 students attended the event, represent Film Studies, Modern Languages, Art History and English.

The event began with an hour long presentation by Dr. Steve Joy, who is director of the Research Development Programme at Cambridge University and worked formerly in career service at Cambridge as well as numerous other universities. Dr. Joy has written widely on academic research and employment for numerous publications as well as his widely read Early Career Blog for Researchers. Dr. Joy’s presentation was entitled “Writing CVs and Research Proposals” and explored career pathways in academia, the psychology of job recruitment, the fundamentals of good CV writing and drafting effective research proposals. Dr. Joy’s presentation elicited a very positive and very spirited response from workshop participants.

After a coffee break, Dr. Osborne led a short presentation on “Connecting Research to Emerging Research Trends.” Dr. Osborne discussed dominant and emerging research trends within the arts and humanities, the broader UK funding landscape, and a sample of recently funded projects sponsored by AHRC, Leverhulme, Carnegie and other funding bodies. Following the presentation, students were divided into groups and asked to first examine this sample—distributed as a worksheet—and discuss the scope of these projects to be “(a) collaborative (b) work across disciplines (c) relate to research priorities/current themes or trends. They were then tasked with creating a network that encompasses their own research and has the potential to connect to other research in other disciplines.” After group discussions, we came together and heard a fascinating and very productive array of observations and proposals, linking individual student projects to emerging research trends.
Following a lunch break, Dr. Flaig led a short presentation on “Collaborating Across Disciplines.” Dr. Flaig discussed the importance of interdisciplinary work as well as different ways, sites and methods for understanding one’s doctoral and post-doctoral research across traditional disciplinary lines. Once again divided into groups, students were asked to “1. Spend 5-10 minutes drafting a list of ways and sites for connecting your research to other disciplines. 2. Share your ideas with the group. Are there points of connection between your different research interests? 3. Imagine your group is part of a post-doctoral research centre. Can you brainstorm any potential interdisciplinary events or collaborations?” After group discussions, students revealed numerous potential interdisciplinary dimensions of their work and many even developed specific connections with each other across department, discipline and school. The workshop concluded with a general discussion and Q & A on “Articulating Research Questions & Addressing a Non-Specialist Audience,” which was led by Dr. Joy, Dr. Osborne and Dr. Flaig.

Students also filled out Feedback Sheets, in which they were asked first, what aspects of the workshop they found useful, informative, or helpful; second, specific areas of improvement or alteration; and third, other topics or themes they would find useful for future PGR workshops at St. Andrews. The feedback was uniformly positive with students consistently noting how much was learned from the presentations as well as the importance of discussion and group work with peers from across disciplines. Based on their suggestions for other potential workshop topics, there seems to be a good basis for producing further workshops around this theme.