

Minutes OLC Meeting 28 May 2015

Present: M. Carmody, C. Ennis, J. Fynn-Paul, D. Polackova, K. Robbe, H. Ruud, T. Vesters, F. Volz

1. Program Board response to minutes

We are unsure why we were referred to the Annual Report with regards to Blended Learning, as this does not address any plans or issues, merely stating we have issues before, and still do. We wonder if there are more explicit plans on the table with regards to this project.

The rest of the response has been noted, and we thank the program board for their reaction.

2. Current Issues

We have not yet received an update about the Current Issues course redesign, we would urge to programme board to do so quickly, preferably within a week to ensure that this crucial course is still being worked on. Additional problems have arisen with the resits being this semester instead of last, when the knowledge was more fresh in the student's head, we wonder why this is the only sem 1 course getting this treatment.

3. Thesis Seminars

We feel there are problems with the current method of assigning second correctors, both the timing being late, and the assigned correctors being unfamiliar with the course. The first comes from us hearing reports of employees being sent papers without approached about availability first. This places an undue burden on them having to reorganize their planning without proper notice. Secondly the second correctors assigned are often specialists in their subjects, which is good, yet lack the necessary interdisciplinary attitude prevalent in International Studies, this makes for a schism between what students are taught in this course, and what the second correctors grade on. Thus a frustrating process for both. Better would perhaps be if lecturers already in the IS programme were assigned these tasks more, or even exclusively. This ensures that the correctors can grade the thesis according to the standards taught, and in the mindset valued in our course. Of course this would create extra workload for the lecturers, but this can be compensated by allowing tutors to grade more exams, which they should be more than capable of if more were hired.

That said, we do appreciate a system of first corrector primacy as well, and this is a good first step to ensure the best correcting for the students.

Lastly, the seminar standards should be more standardized in terms of word length etcetera, and this should be sent out in a document before the start of the seminars, not halfway through.

4. Practicing International Studies

We have received numerous complaints with regards to this 3rd years course. Mostly on the purpose and course being unclear, and the workload both in timing and in amounts. Many 3rd years felt that the burden of the Thesis, Elective essay, and PIS final report were focused around the same time, creating an excessive workload at the end of the semester. Additionally, the workload as a whole for

PIS is too large for 5 ECTS, more suited for 10. A solution would perhaps be to switch the ECTS around for the elective and PIS, so that it would be better distributed.

Other complaints are that the groups are too big to really coordinate, or to even simulate the business/consultancy setting that is intended, and that the group leaders receive an unnecessarily high burden of workload, without any compensation (and having to do the same report). Students were also disappointed that a lot of their work was not used by companies, often because they had already found solutions or plans on their own. On a positive note, the tutorials were deemed useful in dealing with the switch from academic thinking towards business thinking. The issues will be dealt with more after evaluations by our side, yet should already be planned for for next year.

We have not received any documents for the redesign of these seminars, contrary to the response minutes sent to us.

5. Internal coherence

We have received numerous complaints about the lack of coherence between courses, both core and area, with many treating the some topics at times, and the deadlines of essays often overlapping. While this is part a planning issue for students, we do feel perhaps some attention can be paid to this to ensure that the students can plan out their semester better. This could be an overview of tutorial related deadlines before they sign up for them, to ensure they can space them out when needed.

For content coherence, we feel it might be useful to sent the syllabi with the overall themes of each lecture to the subsequent lecturers dealing with the pillars in their courses, this will allow a more in depth dealing of certain issues, or allow the lecturer to skip some preparatory work they might think they need to teach. For example, current second years Middle East area students had the very basics of Orientalism explained 4 times.

6. MLA

Much like with the Seminars, there seems to be a lack of coherence of how MLA is treated, and how tutors assess it. Students have reported being told to do something in one way with one tutor/lecturer, and then losing points on formatting in other courses for this. This is unacceptable, and there should be an official document with standards, or an official source this course uses, such as OWL purdue online.

7. Other business:

a. First year subjects

First years have sent feedback regarding the, for instance, Economics course being too simple for those who had Economics in High School. While we feel this is inherent to a first year course which often serve to equalize knowledge, and thus to be expected, we would encourage the PB to see if there can be a solution to this perhaps in a more advanced course being offered as well. Additionally tutors with a more economic background could be hired to challenge these students.

b. Statistics

As many master programmes have a statistics requirement, we urge the PB to consider including it in this programme as well. It is vital for any who wish to continue in Social Sciences, as well as just being a very useful life skill in general.

c. Temporary contracts

Students have responded to some tutors being not offered permanent contracts quite badly. While we understand why the university might not want to do this so quickly, we do feel it sends the wrong message to both tutors and students if they are being let go for 6 months while being told they will be rehired afterwards. Additionally this could lead to incoherent teaching if it concerns, for example, language tutors. To alleviate this, longer contracts could be offered after the first one if they perform well enough