

Meeting: OLC meeting regarding complaints from the student body
Date: Thursday 18th of April 2019
Location: Room 3.06, Wijnhaven, Leiden University Campus The Hague
Chair: Marat Markert
Secretary: Eveline Vos
In attendance: Hannah de Mulder
Jeff Fynn-Paul
Maurice Kirschbaum
Madhav Warawdekar

Meeting to discuss complaints from the student body gathered during 2nd Semester 2018-2019

The following issues have been brought to the attention of the OLC (through student members and from students directly to the OLC via email) and have been discussed during the meeting. Below a summary of the issue and discussions, as well as recommendations for the program board.

North America

Some students complained that North America (NA) regional courses (Economy: NA) focused mostly on the US, leaving out Mexico and Canada. Jeff explained that Canada and Mexico are addressed in Economy: NA, but that the focus is indeed mainly on the US. Jeff also explained that there is a lack of coordination among NA area instructors (lecturers). Possible reasons are:

- The heads of sections are appointed seemingly at random, and the individual instructors do not meet. One way to address the issue would be to have lower staff turnover for NA and improve communication among NA area lecturers.
- Managing expectations of students: instructors involved in NA area courses could inform prospective students in that area that the focus is mainly on the US and this could be communicated either during the midterms of the first year or during the area fair

Recommendation: A general recommendation for the all area/section coordinators is to facilitate a meeting (once a year) among instructors in one specific area, to discuss the covered material, cohesion within courses and among area courses and the educational goal for the overall area. Underrepresented countries/areas/regions should be represented. Student representatives from the BASIS area could also be part of such a meeting, providing an input/feedback from student perspective on the study/reading material, on thematic overlap across different courses in one area etc.

Research Methods: thematic seminars

Student evaluations showed a lot of complaints regarding the research methods thematic seminar (RM). Specifically, students thought that the course was solely a continuation of the the academic reading and writing course from the first year and were unaware that the focus would

be on research methods, rather than the substantive topic as indicated in the title of the different seminars. These complaints were recurrent and raised in the written comments of nearly all RMs. There might be an issue of wrong expectations: from the written comments in the evaluations it seemed that students were expecting to talk about the substantive issue – e.g. patterns of warfare – in class. Instead, the focus in the seminars/tutorials was on research methods. The final assignment was also considered by some students (as well as by some instructors) as too ambitious: asking students to write an extensive research paper for which they have to collect their own data conduct their own research seemed to be a daunting task for many. The ambition to introduce students in the various seminars to mixed method approaches, as well as data collection and data analysis (as specified in the e-prospectus) might also be too high and not equally applicable to all RMs (e.g. those who primarily do close readings and work mainly with secondary literature). Finally, several students complained that the course book might be too difficult and too much focused on the social science methodologies. Based on the student evaluations and discussions with some RM instructors, the following points should be considered for next year:

- Make clearer to students what the focus of the elective is (research methods)
- Adjust the focus of the final paper (perhaps setting up a research design (an extended research proposal), without data gathering and data analysis).
- Allow for smaller exercises that train the different aspects of the course (e.g. one instructor suggested to task students with make small homework exercises for each seminar session to do a small data analysis or data visualization)
- If a proper research paper is maintained The research students would conduct for their final paper could focus on analysis of secondary sources (how other scholars studied a certain issue/phenomena etc), rather than collecting primary data.
- Consider to change textbook

Marat is contact with the coordinator of the Research Methods to see how the instructors of the different RMs plan to adjust the course based on this years' experience

Language in Practise

Some students voiced concerns regarding the course Foreign Language in Practice, which will be introduced next academic year. There are still a lot of aspects that are unclear about this new course. One particular concern is that the difference in language levels (especially between students who went abroad during their discretionary space and those who chose to do a minor or internship in NL) might influence the teaching quality and tutorial/seminar dynamic. The OLC was wondering how the instructors plan to deal with such differences in class.

In addition, several members of OLC are still skeptical about the choice to have this course taught by academic staff/researchers, and not language teachers. Finally, it is important to ensure that students are well informed about the goals, setup and organization of this course, so as to avoid questions and complaints once the course is running.

Recommendation: We recommend that the program communicates to the teaching staff involved in this course and to students (via email) how this course will be organized exactly, how differences in language skills will be addressed, the contents and aims of this course, organisation of the course and what students who have to retake electives and language courses will have to do.

Course International Relations

Second year students raised some concerns regarding the course International Relations, especially with regard to heavy course load (number of readings assigned, Pitch-2-Peer exercise, feedback exercise on outline of final papers). From the complaints it seems that the workload goes beyond the assigned EC for the tutorial part of the course; to get a better picture, the OLC will await the course evaluations for this course.

Complaints and concerns received through email or posed by staff members of the OLC

Students with Disabilities during midterms and finals

Students who have a learning disability do not take their midterms and finals in Opera, but at Wijnhaven. However, no instructors who teaches any of the courses is present.

Recommendation: Tutors and lecturers have to coordinate who will be present at Opera and who will be invigilating at Wijnhaven.

Policy on uploading video lectures

There seems to be no official policy on when video lectures are posted. Students complained that the video lectures for GPE were posted 10 days before the midterm. From other courses, students had the expectation that video lectures would be posted in the same week of the lecture. Lecturers pointed out that if recordings of their lecture are posted immediately, attendance would drop and performance in exam would also suffer. The OLC recognizes that it is ultimately up to the lecturer to decide if (and when) to post the recordings of their lecture on Blackboard. However, a common policy for the whole program that specifies a minimum number of days before the exam the recordings should be posted, could be a compromise.

Recommendation: the Program Board should come up with a policy regarding video lectures, because it will alleviate the stress of the lecturers. Exceptions to the rule can be formulated within the policy; rule: minimum 10 days before the exam, however tutors and lecturers may upload lectures earlier.

Practicing International Studies

Workload for PRINS is perceived by students and staff members high, interfering with other obligations students have in this semester (elective, thesis seminar). Several students complaint

that the course does not teach actual research strategies and methodology. Other complaints referred to the lack of appropriate guidance from research coaches and lecturer.

To confirm/disconfirm some of these issues, the OLC will await the course evaluations for PRINS. In addition, it was proposed to organize a meeting between OLC and PRINS instructors to relay the issues, but also discuss with instructors how they perceived the running of the course this year, and what changes, if any, they plan to take for next year to address the issues raised.