

OLC Meeting 27 November 2019

Present: Gabriel, Irene, Jeff, Kim, Looi, Marat (chair), Mario (secretary)

0. Midterm exams and final exams: proposal by Frans Willem Korsten
 - a. Prof. Frans Willem Korsten reached out to the olc by email to present some of his ideas and experience with replacing the midterm with a mock exam and restructuring the final exam, as well as his experience with blended learning in Literary Studies courses. Ultimately Frans Willem couldn't be at the meeting, but Looi van Kessel briefly explained some of these ideas and what other courses in the program could take away from these alternative forms of examinations. There were some reservations among OLC members about mock exams (their didactical value as well as work-load and completion rates) and blended learning (whether this ultimately will lead to a reduction in contact hours and the consequences of that).
 - b. We reiterated that the decision to abandon midterms (or replace them with mock exams) should not follow a one-size-fits-all approach, but take into considerations the structure of courses (e.g. courses that are taught by two instructors from two different disciplinary angles), the views of instructors teaching a course and whether there are other didactical reasons to have midterms (or to abolish them). Some uniformity, however, will be required (e.g. for area courses).
 - c. We decided to have a meeting with Frans Willem in February to hear his proposal and discuss this further.

1. Advice on the Academic Profile Document (Multidisciplinarity)

- a. The Program Board (PB) sent to the OLC a document outlining an adjusted academic profile that clarifies the role of "multidisciplinarity" and "global perspective" in the program in general (highlighting in which courses multidisciplinarity is addressed) and specifically for the thesis seminar.
- b. The OLC critically discussed the proposal and there was unanimous rejection of the plans for various reasons:
 - i. It is not clear what the purpose of this proposal really is: it doesn't seem to provide additional disciplinary training, but merely seeks to highlight in which courses different disciplinary perspectives are taught. The proposal states that in the context of the thesis students are expected to "analyse" a given phenomenon through different disciplinary lenses, but at the same time does not expect from students to use methodologies that are strictly discipline specific. Further, the document assumes that core and area courses also teach/train specific methodology, though it is questionable whether such assumptions are warranted. In short, as a communication document to both students and instructors/thesis supervisors, it is potentially more confusing than illuminating as it sends mixed signals what is expected of students (and ultimately of supervisors in thesis seminars).
 - ii. With regard to the thesis supervision and multidisciplinarity, the proposal assumes that all potential thesis supervisors are able to assess thesis that have multiple disciplinary perspectives. The current experience of some thesis supervisor, however, shows that this is not the case.

- iii. Regarding the Thematic Seminar: Research Methods (TS/RM), the proposals states that students are familiarized with both quantitative and qualitative methods. According to both students and staff members who are familiar with the TS/RM seminar series, this is not necessarily the case across all seminars. The fact remains that quantitative methods (statistical analysis, including simple means comparisons or significance tests) are not properly addressed anywhere in the program. There is a risk that the course description of the TS/RM is promising something that is actually not fulfilled. In general, it is not very credible (also not to third/external parties) that a 5EC course is training both quant/qual methods. In light of the exit survey from alumni of BAIS, one of the most frequently recurring comment concerned the lack of proper methodological training.
- c. Suggestions: the program could identify a number of research methods that are associated with different disciplines and focus on those (e.g. primary source analysis (history), comparative case study methods (politics/pol.econ), interpretative analysis (cultural studies, politics)). The thesis seminars should structured around discipline and not region. This way students can also write thesis from a global perspective, by comparing different regions and the match between students interest and supervisor's expertise can be improved.
Finally, the TS/RM seminars could focus on specific methodologies. As to quantitative methods (a proper 101 stats course), the program board should consider to introduce such a course (voluntary, on top of the regular program), given that many students go into social science master programs after their BA studies.

3. Advice on Teaching Philosophy

Overall the OLC has no issues with the 12 principles of the Teaching Philosophy (TP), but the explanatory document ("implications") contains both very general, as well as very specific implications of the TP. Some members remarked that what is described in the implications part does not necessarily reflect reality as of yet (e.g. the extensive feedback part). One implication that is not explicitly mentioned is that for this to work, the tutorials should change more into moments where students work on their academic skills by applying concepts, write, argue etc. rather than just being another moment of repeating the content of the lecture (as is the case in many tutorials so far). In general, there was agreement that if this document is meant as a source of inspiration/orientation for staff and students, its fine, but if it is meant as a help for new colleagues to help them orient within the program (e.g. how interaction in seminars/lectures/tutorials should work) it would be good to spell this out in the first paragraph (i.e. state the purpose).

4. Advice on the Staffing document for 2020-2021 (Onderwijsaanvraag)

The OLC discussed the staffing document for 2020-2021. Detailed advise, also in light of the course evaluations will be send to the program board. In general, the OLC remarked that it is important for the program board to select instructors that they can retain over several years and ideally for several courses. At the same time, the OLC supports the view of the lecturers' council, namely that in staffing the different courses, instructors should not be allocated to teach more than 1 thesis seminar at a time, and not allocated to an elective course and a thesis seminar. Teaching more than 1 thesis seminar clashes with the idea that proper supervision/feedback can

be insured (2 thesis seminars means up to 24 theses that have to be graded within 4 weeks). Electives with up to 25 students (who all write 5000 word essays) comes down to the same work-load. In general, and as in previous years, the recommendation for both program board and faculty institutes in particular remains, i.e. when allocating staff for BAIS the heightened workload but also continuity of staff should be taken into consideration. A high staff turnover implies that more effort goes into familiarizing the staff with the program which mainly adds to the workload/work-pressure of new staff. At the same time, and in light of discussions with some of the new staff members, the information provision and support for new staff members could be improved.

5. Other issues

One staff member brought up the issue of what to do with students who fail a course several times (more than 3 times). We decided to investigate the number of those students concerned (via the study coordinators and/or administration) until January before advising the program board on this issue.