

OLC Meeting February 17, 2021 – Minutes/Recommendations

Present: Hannah De Mulder, Marat Markert, Vivian Graham, Kim Deschka, Emma Nündel, Ivan Anderegg, Chiraz Hassoumi, Looi van Kessel, Irene Hadiprayitno, Jeff Fynn-Paul

Course Evaluations 2020/2021 (Semester 1)

Core Courses and Area Courses

Overall, response rates for the evaluations were much lower than previous years, thereby creating difficulty in gaining a holistic view of student opinions and recommendations for their courses. However, a few issues stood out that can be taken into consideration in the future.

Technology/Remote teaching: In regard to remote teaching, a few issues recurred. A difficulty that emerged in some classes involved misunderstandings with technology. Certain professors recorded their lectures on powerpoint, which many students had difficulties with as they did not understand how to pause them. Additionally, recording with powerpoint and a voiceover does not allow students to see the face of their professor which can be less engaging. Some recorded lectures were very poor in terms of audio quality which detracted from the students' ability to learn. Finally, some instructors who used powerpoints would refer to parts of a slide without using a tool to point, which was especially problematic in classes such as economics where students need to know which part of a graph is being referenced.

Recommendations:

Improve resources for lecturers in terms of audio and other equipment, and maybe implement training in these areas.

Recommend to management team that they make an announcement this week that instructors not record within powerpoint and use a more familiar platform such as Kaltura instead.

Tutorials/Lectures: The majority of core and area courses received very positive evaluations. There is some variation across courses regarding course load, teaching methods, and overall difficulty, but these tend to be balanced between positive and negative responses to the same issue. One issue students pointed out was that with the move to online teaching, some instructors have become more likely to ignore the time constraints of the lecture period and sometimes far exceed their scheduled time.

Individual assignments: For certain assignments, students would like to receive more instruction and guidance on new assignments before they begin. For example, in Academic Reading & Writing, as this is the first class where students must write an academic paper within their bachelor, some students have requested more instruction before they are to begin writing. Additionally, for the Area Politics courses where students must write a literature review

for the first time, many students felt that they hadn't received enough instructions on how to properly structure and write this type of paper before they began. For the Area Economics courses, many students requested that their final paper be made more of a focus throughout the semester and receive more guidance and feedback while writing.

Recommendations:

Students must be given more instruction and guidance on initial academic papers and literature reviews. The OLC will discuss with the area coordinator and program board to see how this can be arranged, for example by creating a dedicated session within the Area Politics tutorials or lectures for discussing and explaining the literature review. For Area Economics classes, instructors will be advised to place more emphasis on the term paper throughout the semester through additional assignments such as outlines or peer feedback.

Groupwork: Within area and core classes that had groupwork assignments, many students reported that group projects that must be conducted entirely online and involve many people become complicated, problematic, and stressful.

Recommendations:

Instructors are advised to consider alternatives to group work, especially those with large group numbers and those which require additional technology to perform well.

Language Courses

Language courses also received very few responses, with some classes only receiving around 2 responses. This made it difficult to draw any sweeping conclusions about how the courses functioned and how they could be changed in the future. However, most of the students that did respond were mostly very happy with their language course. One issue that stood out and is recurring from previous years is the concern voiced by some students as to the difference in language proficiency that students have upon entering their language course. Students who enter their language courses with little or no background knowledge in their language have voiced concern over working with and being compared to students with more extensive backgrounds in the chosen language. Certain students have noticed that this can have the effect of accelerating the pace of the course, as tutors then believe that the whole class is performing at a higher level. Additionally, other students have voiced complaints that by the end of their bachelor, the level they are at with their selected language is not as high as they expected or would like.

Recommendation:

It will always be the case that some students may select a language class below the level they perform. However, some actions can be taken to remedy this, such as combining students with prior knowledge, give additional work to these people, and implement a lower threshold for number of people in a group who have some proficiency. Additionally, expectations can be managed for the language level that students will obtain by the end of their course. This can be clarified and emphasized within the e-prospectus and within the courses themselves. The

Program Board might additionally consider allowing certain students to take part in classes for the BA for that language in Leiden or creating additional classes so that students may be better matched with the language level they are performing at.

Research Methods

Most students felt very positively towards their tutor and research methods class. However, students' expectations for the classes were not met due to a misunderstanding of what the course was striving to teach, and students all learned different methods depending on the seminar (and in some cases students did not feel that they had learned research methods).

Recommendation:

Management team should create a more centralized set of parameters. Class titles and descriptions should be clarified, so that students have a better understanding of the specific type of research they will be conducting, and a list of specific research methods that should be advertised. Courses should also maybe become more centralized so that some of the same material should be covered, for example certain types of research methods. The program board will be invited to next OLC meeting to discuss concerns over research methods.

Evaluations

Course evaluation responses were very low this semester across the board. To enhance the amount and quality of student responses, the OLC proposes potentially conducting evaluations during tutorials, creating a deadline after the finals, and allowing student mentors to play a role in sending out evaluations link.

OLC Reports

The OLC is considering sending evaluation reports back to lecturers, potentially next semester if secretary role resumes.