

## International Studies OLC Meeting

Date: 18/04/2017

Present: Harel Berger, Michelle Carmody, Crystal Ennis, Anna Karisto, Maurice Kirschbaum, Marat Markert, Ksenia Robbe,

### **1. Language courses: class size and new language course (Foreign Language in Practice)**

The OLC addressed the response from the Programme Board to our recommendations regarding the programme restructuring (see [minutes](#) from 14.02.2017). Several points that were raised during the last OLC meeting have been clarified by the Programme Board. However, on the point of the size of language classes there continues to be disagreement: in contrast to what the Programme Board states, the student members of the OLC note that there are language classes which exceed the official maximum number of students per language class (i.e. above 20 students per class). To get an overview which language courses are crowded, the student members will produce the exact numbers per course for our next meeting in June. In general, the OLC noted that if language classes are indeed a fundamental pillar of the BAIS programme, the programme should aim for smaller classes (maximum 12 students per class) so as to allow more effective language training. A second, related point discussed during the meeting concerned the new language course (Foreign Language in Practice (3<sup>rd</sup> Year course)) that is foreseen in the new programme structure. This new course is effectively replacing the previous 3<sup>rd</sup> Year elective course. The OLC has been [skeptical about abandoning the 3<sup>rd</sup> Year elective](#) completely. In line with the reflections of the Programme Board in its Progress Report on the midterm review (21.02.2017) the OLC agrees that designing a common learning outcome for this new language course might be difficult, given the varying achievement levels across languages in the first two years of the programme (see page 9 Progress Report). Therefore, the OLC continues to support the idea that an element of choice should be maintained between language course and elective in the third year, a consideration that is also raised in the Progress Report (page 9).

In order to move forward on this subject and be able to provide input on possible merits and feasibility of the course Foreign Language in Practice, the OLC would need more information on the design (purpose, learning goals, achievement levels, differentiation across different languages) of this course from the Programme Board (or the relevant subcommittee working on this course).

### **2. Workload in 3<sup>rd</sup> Year courses/honours classes**

The OLC discussed the issue of workload for students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Year who take part in the honours programme. We agreed to seek advice/input from the Study Coordinators on this issue (are the minimum requirements for honours classes observed throughout the three years, i.e. only students who maintain at least 7.5 average can participate in honours classes? are students aware of the workload when they sign up for the honours classes? etc). The OLC also reiterated its position on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Year course Practicing International Studies: while the OLC recognizes the usefulness of this course, the question remains whether the workload has to be so heavy for this course, given the other obligations students have during their final semester.

### **3. Recommendation: Electronic version of a guide book for incoming students**

The OLC – especially the student members – suggests to the administration to develop an electronic version of a guidebook for incoming students (and, in general, as a reference document for all students). This guidebook should contain practical information on the BAIS programme, such as information on plagiarism, referencing style, information about minor programmes, appeals procedures (regarding grading).

#### **4. Resits for individual exams components of a course (midterm (30%), final (40%), overall (70%))**

Following an idea proposed by the Programme Board to allow for resits for individual components of a course (i.e. allowing to resit either midterm, final, or both exams), the OLC discussed this proposal. The student members of the OLC were in favor of this proposal, pointing out that in the current system students might feel discouraged/demotivated to take a resit, if they failed only one of the components of the course (e.g. the final) but ultimately have to study all the material (even for those components of the course, where they have passed). The lecturer members of the OLC were opposed to this proposal, pointing out that such a rule would have the effect of demotivating students to study for the midterm (given that they have the chance to retake just this part at the resits), thereby run counter to the original idea of having a midterm in the first place. Moreover, in practical terms such a rule would also entail an additional workload for lecturers (devising and grading three different exams) and tutors grading. It was pointed out that such flexibility exists for the electives.

At this point there is disagreement, and the OLC agreed to discuss this further in the upcoming meetings. In order to do so, the OLC would like to ask the Programme Board to clarify the rationale for this proposal.

#### **5. Thesis Seminar Proposal (Special Track procedure)**

The OLC discussed the Programme Board's proposal to introduce a special track thesis seminar for those who fail the thesis seminar twice. In brief, according to this proposal students who fail the thesis seminar twice would get into a thesis seminar where they could continue working on their thesis, would benefit from extra guidance (from the thesis seminar coordinator, from the writing lab, peer feedback etc.), yet, at the end of the seminar would not get a grade for their thesis, but a pass/fail. The rationale for this proposal was that apparently there are some students who take the thesis seminar for the 4<sup>th</sup> time(!), but are unable to pass. The Programme Board maintains that part of the repeated failure might be explained by the current rules, i.e. obliging students who failed the thesis seminar to pick another seminar and a new topic. Following this argument, since most of the time repeated failure occurs with weaker students, the current rules do not make it easier for students to complete their studies. Moreover, it is expected that the number of students who redo the thesis seminar multiple times (more than twice) may increase in the future, and thereby lecturers and thesis seminar groups are burdened with weaker students. The OLC maintained that while it is important to monitor the situation (something the Programme Board's proposal points out), there is no need to introduce for such a special track procedure. Rather, the supervision in current thesis seminars could be improved by reducing the number of students per seminar, and continue to improve the allocation of students to seminars (i.e. students who want to write about a topic concerning the economy should be allocated to supervisors who can actually supervise such a topic).

#### **6. Recommendation: Anonymity of grading**

Based on a proposal by the student members, the OLC discussed different options for ensuring anonymity in grading of exams (e.g. only providing student number on the exam sheet, swapping exams to be graded among tutors of a course etc). The OLC agrees that this is an important issue and invites the Programme Board to discuss different options.

#### **7. Course evaluations: greater differentiation on the final evaluations & adapting standard evaluation questionnaire for language courses**

The OLC also discussed a proposal from student members to adapt the final course evaluations for disciplinary and language courses. With regard to the former, the idea is to ensure a greater differentiation in the assessment of different components of the course (e.g. difficulty of the lecture material vs difficulty of the tutorial material). Until now, it is difficult to see from the course evaluations whether they relate to the lecture or tutorial components. The OLC agreed that from next semester onwards the wording of the survey questionnaire items would remain

unchanged, but additional questions would be added referring explicitly to the tutorial component. With regard to language courses, the OLC agreed to replace some of the items from the standard questionnaire with items appropriate for language courses. The reason for this is that so far, the same evaluation questionnaire is used for language courses and disciplinary courses, whereby several items do not fit the content of the language course. The student members and the chair agreed to come up with new questions for the questionnaire for the language courses, possibly taking over those from other language courses offered at the faculty.