

OLC International Studies May Meeting Minutes

May 11, 2021

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

1. BA OSO International Studies discussion

- Discussion regarding the document “Course and Examination Regulations,” valid from 1 September 2021.
- OLC members are generally in agreement with the document but offer several recommendations. These include:
 - o The program board should be more specific about which master’s programs that IS students are being prepared for in Article 2.1 (“the student meets the entry requirements for admission to the master’s programmes that follow on from the bachelor’s programme.”)
 - o The program board should be more specific about what is meant by “student’s native tongue” in Article 2.3, considering the diversity of backgrounds of IS students and the possibility of varying degrees of experience with multiple languages. This section could be further specified and formalized.
 - o Additionally, within Article 2.3 and regarding languages, the program board should attempt to better manage expectations in terms of learning outcomes. Students with language proficiency should be further discouraged from taking lower-level language classes by emphasizing that beginner’s classes are only for those with very little knowledge and skills in the language. We advise that the program board inform the teachers so as to implement an official policy regarding this.
 - o Regarding the “Obligatory sequence” mentioned in Article 4.2, the OLC discussed the possibility that the current requirement for first years to pass Academic Reading & Writing and their first language class be replaced. As these two requirements both focus on acquiring skills and make no requirement for content, we advise the program board to consider replacing one of these classes with a first semester content-based class such as Introduction to International Studies.

2. Requirements for thesis seminar

- Discussion regarding the credits and classes required for entry to a thesis seminar.
 - o Current requirements: 100EC and Thematic Seminar or Research Methods
 - o Proposed requirements: 100EC and Thematic Seminar and Research Methods

- Creating further requirements in order for students to be able to begin their thesis seminar may create pressure and incentivize them to properly complete these questions and could therefore potentially lead students to be more prepared for their thesis.
- Alternatively, it will likely lead more students to have to add semesters or years on to their study.
- Proposal to make both classes a requirement but also add options in the alternate semester so that there are smaller selections of seminars in both semesters. This would ensure that if for example a student fails Research Methods in the first semester, they will still have the option to try again in the second semester.
 - o However, this presents challenges for students who still wish to go on exchange/internship. Possibility of making these seminar courses available remotely?

3. Online examinations in future

- Discussion regarding the possibility to include online examinations in the future, even if there is no necessity for them regarding Covid-19.
- The online examinations make it easier for instructors to organize each exam. However, some believe that this process for creating online exams should become stricter and more uniform. Instructors should be given a proper explanation of how to make an online exam, and they should be overseen in order to ensure the examination questions are proper questions, considering the format. This should be done by the Board of Examiners.
- Alternatively, some argue that students do not learn as much from online exams, and that they do not seem to take the studying as seriously as they might for an in-person exam.
- Therefore, while we believe that online exams should not be completely removed, there are some reservations regarding their use. While online exams offer some unique possibilities, for example in cases of students abroad, we believe it makes more sense to return to in-person exams when possible. The possibility for a mid-way solution would be best, where instructors may present their motivation for why an online exam makes more sense for their specific class, and this can be decided on a case-by-case basis.

4. Group work (in online settings)

- Both instructors and students agree that group work in online settings is difficult, especially for larger groups.
- In the case of PRINS in which group sizes averaged around 14 students, this was especially difficult. However, students seem to agree that the implementation of smaller subgroups within a larger group was effective. We recommend that these subgroups remain in the organization of PRINS in the next academic year.

5. Meeting with tutor regarding semester 1 evaluation complaints

- In evaluations, the OLC noticed that within a specific tutorial, many students stated that they were afraid of their tutor and of speaking up in class. Further, many mentioned that they felt unprepared and felt like instructions and feedback were unclear.
- An OLC member met with this tutor, who responded to these complaints by saying that these evaluations provide a distorted view of their class, as they believe that only those who have reason to complain fill in the surveys.
- They also said that last semester their teaching was impacted by their personal health. Additionally, their assistant was not providing the feedback on time, and because of the tutor's health issues, they were not able to do it themselves. Regarding complaints on their office hours, they felt that students did not make use of the office hours, and while they were not present for their hours sometimes, it was because the students did not notify in advance that they were planning to join.
- The meeting appears to display that this is not a structural issue but a semester-specific issue. The tutor appears to be taking the feedback seriously and incorporating the responses within their classes this semester.

6. Spanish in Practice issue

- The OLC has received numerous complaints this semester regarding several Spanish in Practice tutorials. The complaints focus largely on the differences between different tutorials, including that some teachers speak entirely in English, while others speak entirely in Spanish. Additionally, some tutors give weekly graded homework assignments, while others only have the midterm and final portfolio grades.
- The Spanish in Practice lecturers have all been emailed regarding this issue but, at the date of this meeting, no response had been provided.
- The OLC will recommend that the program board appoint a section coordinator, so that this person may better coordinate the teachers and set common standards. These standards should include clarifying which language a class will be taught in and regulating the number of assignments.