

**Department of Philosophy
Staff-Student Committee**

Tuesday, 8 November, 2005 1pm
AT 8.25

Minutes

Present: Matt Thomas (chair), Tom Morgan, Chris Cork, Krystal Evans, Alex Artaud de la Ferriere, Edward Grefenstette, David Muhl-Richardson, Tim Fiennes, Vikki Wood, Robert Logan, Peter Hughes, Joshua Forstenzer, Heather Arnold, Nick Tasker, Alex Goodson, Bob Stern, George Botterill, Anne-Marie Cox, Eric Olson.

Apologies were received from Leif Wenar.

1. Library matters.

The students suggested creating an electronic noticeboard for comments about availability of books, noting that this would be less threatening than emailing the departmental library representative or approaching the lecturer. Bob Stern promised to look into it. The students also asked the Department to press for longer opening hours in the library.

2. Timetabling.

The students noted that when the provisional module timetables issued before registration were changed afterwards, this sometimes meant that students were unable to take a module they signed up for owing to a clash, and that by this time their second-choice module might be full. It was agreed that this was unsatisfactory, but it was uncertain what to do about it, as late timetable changes are inevitable. A ranking system might help (see next item).

3. Ranking system for module selection.

The current system of module registration, where module places are allocated to all students on a first-come, first-served basis, was thought to be unsatisfactory, though there was no consensus about how to improve it. The best idea seemed to be a system where students rank modules according to their preference rather than simply ticking those they wish to take, and where second and third choices are taken into account in working out who gets what modules. Eric Olson had inquired about how they do it for third-year Politics modules, and promised to come up with a proposal.

4. Assessing seminar presentations at Level 1.

George Botterill reported that he planned to introduce this for Spring 2006 for Philosophy of Art and Literature. (It would work best with 20-credit modules, and the only other 20-credit module for the spring is Critical

Thinking, where presentations are inappropriate.) Students who gave no presentation would be docked 5% off the overall module mark. Students who gave a 'minimally adequate' presentation would have their mark unaffected. Those who gave a good presentation (roughly 2i standard) would have 2 points added to their module mark, while those giving an outstanding presentation (first-class standard) would get 5 points. The students were generally in favour of this, and asked for feedback on presentations to be sent to students' personal advisers.

5. Problem classes.

Although Physics run problem classes for students having trouble with technical matters, this seemed inappropriate for philosophy. Students were reminded that lecturers' office hours were meant to serve this function.

6. Essay writing.

Many students felt uncertain about what lecturers expected in philosophy essays, not only because it's difficult and new, but because different lecturers seem to expect different things. There were several suggestions. One was for lecturers to explain what they expect, which may go beyond the general advice offered in the student handbooks. Another was for lecturers to comment in lectures on how the first essays were in general, what mistakes were common, etc. A third was for lecturers or tutors to devote a seminar to essay writing. One student recommended the essay-writing advice by James Pryor that Steve Laurence included in his first-year course pack. Since this is available online, it would be easy to link to it from the departmental website. [A link has now been added.]

7. PDPs (Personal development planning).

Students were unclear about what they were for or whether they were compulsory. It was unclear from the MUSE page what students were supposed to do, and it was alleged that some personal advisers had never mentioned it to their advisees. Eric Olson noted that the department's policy was included in the Teaching Committee papers. (It is also on the Department website under information for current students.) This tells students what they have to do and what it's for. The students had mixed opinions about the value of PDP.

8. Long Essays.

At present single philosophy students are allowed to do up to two long essays in the third year, one in each semester; duals are allowed one. The students proposed increasing this to three for singles and two for duals. The staff had no objection to this and promised to discuss it at a departmental meeting. [It was agreed at the departmental meeting, and will come into force next year.]

9. Attendance.

The students were unclear about the purpose of the attendance sheets filled in at lectures and seminars. The staff reported that attendance records were added to students' files and taken into account in letters of reference.

10. Past exam papers.

Past exam papers for 1st-year courses are available on the department website. Unseen past exams for other courses were available for inspection in the department office. The issue also arose of whether students were allowed to look at their exam scripts, or take a copy. The staff agreed to look into this.

11. Philosophy of Religion.

It is uncertain at this stage whether the second-year Philosophy of Religion course will be offered next year.

12. Taking second-year modules as unrestricted units.

Third-year students are allowed to take second-year modules for 20 credits as their unrestricted module. However, they need 90 credits at Level 3 to graduate, and a student who took only 100 credits at level 3 and failed a course would have only 80. The possibility was raised of allowing third-year students to take second-year modules as if they were third-year modules, with assessment appropriate to level 3. Apparently this happens in Economics. This seemed likely to be administratively complicated; it was also unclear whether the Arts Faculty rules allowed it (Economics is in a different Faculty with different rules). EO promised to look into it.

There was no other business.