

09.11.06

Philosophy Staff-Student Committee

Minutes

Present: Eric Olson, Bob Stern, David Owens, George Botterhill, Chris Burgees, David Muhl-Richardson, Alexis Artaud de la Ferriere, Georgie Potter, Patricia Hughes, Rebecca Watson, James Burgess, Helen Gaunt, Edward Grefenstette, Toby Rees.

1. PHI 114, History of Philosophy. This compulsory course was new this year, and there had been several problems. Many students did not know, when they decided to come to Sheffield, that there would be compulsory modules, and felt misinformed. The module was not listed in the University Guide to Courses. It was unclear how much guidance tutors were supposed to give the groups. Some students had trouble arranging meetings for their group and complained that some members never responded to emails. WebCT, which is central to the module, was not available to students living outside University accommodation. These concerns were noted. Some of the trouble arose because the new modules were finalized after admissions materials were prepared. The roles of tutors would be clarified for next year, and some sort of introductory meeting for students to get to know others in their group seemed a good idea. The issue of WebCT would also be looked into. The Department was happy to hear of concerns or difficulties concerning the module, and acknowledged that not everything had gone smoothly.

2. Second year Descartes and the Empiricists' module students expressed wish to have seminar materials and questions given to them at an earlier date so more work can be put in prior to the seminars. George Botterill acknowledged this issue and will implement the necessary adjustments and went further to suggest intermediate and advanced readings marked on the reading lists to help students.

3. Size of seminar groups in second-year modules: some seminar groups have nearly 30 people, notably the Rationalists and Feminism. David Owens made clear that although there is a cap of 15 people per seminar, there remains one seminar group if the size is under 30 and that more seminar time is always a tenuous issue due to resources of department (time, rooms etc.). Also, large seminars can result when a lecturer offers several seminar times and more students go to one than to the other (often because of timetable constraints). Students suggested creation of arbitrary seminar groupings, e.g. alphabetically so that students would attend the same seminars each week to enforce evenness.

4. Attendance and participation in seminars. Students express concern as to the general need for more participation in seminars, suggested pre-seminar WebCT discussions so issues are clarified and positions taken before the seminar as to make more efficient use of the time. Bob Stern thought this was a good idea, but said it had been tired before and students didn't tend to make use of it. Students suggested making the WebCT discussion obligatory, but this remains an issue. Bob & David also pointed out that greater than 50% attendance in a seminar is exceptionally good' and the problem with compulsory attendance comes down to the contributors and contributions. Issues of attendance and WebCT work will be raised in the departmental meetings.

5. Friday departmental seminar paper now being charged for. Post-grads suggest a free e-copy should be made. Bob acknowledges this as a good idea and suggests it should be sent via email or published on a secure area of the universities website. However, if given a free-copy online it shouldn't be printed as well.

6. Course registers in first-year modules. Some tutors did not know who was in their tutorial group. Some tutors had suggested that the course registers and mark sheets be sent to them automatically. It was pointed out that they were available in the departmental office.

7. Post-grad students requested ability to update their old photos on the departmental boards. Staff said this is no problem and can be updated.

8. Students noted the post graduate computer rooms have problems, some computers don't work and shelves are also cluttered, which diminish the effectiveness of the resource. Bob acknowledged this is being pursued and suggested appointing a new Computer Rep.

9. Outreach Project. Alexis reported that he was organizing a program that would involve Sheffield students visiting local schools, particularly disadvantaged schools, and helping to introduce pupils to philosophy. This might in future be connected with financial assistance for poorer students to study at Sheffield. Both the Department and the University as a whole were keen to support this.