

Department of History
STUDENT VOICE GROUP

MINUTES

Wednesday 6 November 2019, 1.00pm, Room 5N.3.10

Present: Andrew Priest (Chair), Mark Frost, Tom Freeman, Amanda Flather, Belinda Waterman, Matthew Davies, Chloe Molyneaux, Jessica Cheung, Lauren Young, Sarah Romero, Anna Sala I Sanchez

| | Action |
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| 1. Starring of Agenda Items: | |
| No items were starred for discussion. | 36/19 |
| 2. Apologies for absence: Jane Mwaura, Felix Schnell, Lisa Smith, Jess Fure, Miles Clayton, Boris Dyulgerski and Matthew Vincent. | 37/19 |
| 3. Minutes of last meeting: | |
| The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 20 March 2019 (previously circulated) were approved by the Committee and signed as correct by Andrew Priest. | 38/19 |
| 4. Matters arising: | |
| There were no matters arising from the previous committee meeting. | 39/19 |
| Section A - Student Business | |
| There were a number of items raised for discussion: | |
| 5/6. (i) HR211: Approaches to History | |
| Lauren Y. reported that some students were confused about the teaching format for HR211, specifically that the seminar classes cover the previous week's lecture topics and readings. In addition, some students felt that the return of feedback for the weekly reading responses was unproductive, and was having an impact on the quality of their work. The feedback for the reading responses is currently discussed in the seminars the day after the submission deadline. It was reported that students would prefer to have a discussion about the reading responses before the submission deadline (rather than receiving the feedback afterwards). Andrew P. noted that the idea behind this is that students can use this feedback to help them with future reading responses. It was agreed that the purpose of this needs to be clarified. | 40/19 JC |
| (ii) HR101: Becoming a Historian | |
| Lauren Y. raised a concern that some HR101 students were struggling to engage with the module readings. This was primarily due to the readings being unrelated to other first year modules. Amanda F. acknowledged these concerns, however emphasised that this is a stand-alone module. It was suggested that rather than changing the seminar readings, the essay analysis assignment could be altered slightly so that students have a selection of sources that they can choose to analyse. This would be a mixture of modern and early modern sources, which would draw upon some of the concepts and themes covered in the other first year modules. It was also suggested (as a future proposal) that HR101 could be removed from the curriculum altogether, and instead be incorporated within the other first year modules. Lauren said that a similar change had been implemented in Sociology, which had worked well. | 41/19 AF AP/AF |
| In addition, it was further reported that students would like the workshops to be more interactive, and less focussed on PowerPoint presentations. Amanda F. said that she would look into this. | 42/19 AF |

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| (iii) Mentimeter | | | |
| Regarding the use of Mentimeter for mid-term feedback, Amanda F. raised a concern that students may feel under pressure to give positive feedback, with the seminar teachers present in the room. It was suggested that staff could leave the room while students provide their feedback, or that the live results could be hidden until the students have finished voting. | All staff | 43/19 | |
| (iv) SVG co-chair | | | |
| It was agreed that a co-chair would be elected to each Student Voice Group. It will be the responsibility of the student reps to decide who will co-chair each meeting. | Student reps | 44/19 | |
| (v) Chairs in the Graduate Study Room (5NW.7.5) | | | |
| A request was made for new desk chairs to be provided in the Graduate Study Room (5NW.7.5). It was noted that a Departmental Committee will be introduced in the near future, where issues such as this can be discussed. Student participation on this committee is welcomed. It was also suggested that someone from Occupational Health could check the condition of the chairs to see if they need to be replaced. | BW/MD/ OH/KS | 45/19 | |
| (vi) Welcome Talks | | | |
| Lauren Y. reported that student feedback from the Welcome Talks had been extremely positive. Students were particularly impressed with the structure and social aspect of the talks. There were, however, a few issues raised with the first-year Welcome Talk. Some students felt that the day went on for too long, and there was too much information to digest. Belinda W. suggested that the talks could take place across two days, with the IT workshop and 'meet your peer mentor' on one day and the remaining talks on the other. It was also reported that the Library talk was repeated in the HR101 library session which will be taken into account when reviewing the Induction Day programme next year. | BW | 46/19 | |
| It was agreed that the VTeam talk should be shortened to 5 minutes. The Department will feed this back to the VTeam for next year. | AP/BW | 47/19 | |
| In addition, students felt that there was a degree of duplication with the information provided at the IT workshop. It was reported that the same information was provided in the seminars during the first week of term, particularly with regard to Moodle. It was agreed that the IT workshop should be reviewed to see which systems would be most useful to focus on. In particular the students requested more information on Talis. | BW | 48/19 | |
| Andrew P. suggested that it might be more useful for the second and final-year Welcome Talks to be organised as separate events for each of these year groups. | AP/BW | 49/19 | |
| (vii) Campus navigation | | | |
| Lauren Y. reported that some first-year students had experienced problems finding their teaching rooms. It was suggested that the Department could create a campus map, illustrating some of the key lecture rooms, which would be included in the first-year welcome packs. | Admin Team | 50/19 | |

Section B – Formal Business

7. Head of Department's Report

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| Mark F. reported that the Department is undergoing a period of strategic review. Mark emphasised the importance of involving students in this process, and welcomed student feedback in the following areas: | | 51/19 | |
| 1. Personal Tutor appointments – how students feel these are going, and whether there is anything further that could be discussed in the meetings. | | | |
| 2. Studying History at Essex booklet – specifically the content of the guide and whether students feel that any changes are needed. Mark noted that the Department is currently updating the booklet, with the aim of completing this by March 2020. | | | |
| 3. Coursework assessment criteria – whether students understand the different assessment criteria. | | | |

4. Peer Mentors – whether students feel that the peer mentor system works. For example, are the peer mentors communicating with new students (e.g. through email) at the start of the year?

Anna S. raised a concern that some students were confused about the Peer Mentor and Personal Tutor schemes, and their purpose, before they arrived. It was agreed that the Department would provide more information in the Welcome letter/pack. It was also agreed that a profile could be created for each peer mentor, explaining who they are, what they do, etc. in order to give new students more background information about their Peer Mentor. It was suggested that this could be posted on the History Department blog at the start of the year.

52/19
Admin Team

Mark will circulate the above information to all students in due course. The student reps will report back on any feedback raised at the next Student Voice Group.

MF /Student Reps 53/19

Mark addressed some of the key departmental reforms from the previous academic year. For example, the introduction of two work based learning modules in the second year (HR221: History in Schools and HR222: Sharing the Secrets of Colchester Castle Museum), as well as a new careers portfolio non-credit bearing module (HR510: History Works), which runs across all three years of the undergraduate degree.

54/19

Mark reported that the Department had performed well in the NSS (National Student Survey), scoring particularly highly on the questions pertaining to ‘student voice’.

55/19

Mark noted that the Department will be holding an Education Away Day on 15 January, where further reforms to the curriculum will be discussed. Student reps are invited to attend this.

56/19

8. Any other Business

Andrew P. reported that the History Society is set to be revived. The students have arranged a meeting with Sam Woodward to discuss this further.

History Society/SW 57/19

9. The meeting closed at 2:30 PM

58/19

Dr Andrew Priest
Director of Education

Key:

| Initials | Name |
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| JC | Justin Colson |
| AF | Amanda Flather |
| AP | Andrew Priest |
| BW | Belinda Waterman |
| MD | Matthew Davies |
| OH | Occupational Health |
| KS | Karen Shields |
| MF | Mark Frost |
| SW | Sam Woodward |