



**American History 2 (HIST08003)
Student/Staff Liaison Committee Meeting**

**Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 16th November 2011
Room G14, 1-2pm - William Robertson Wing**

Present: Dr Fabian Hilfrich (course organiser), Prof Frank Cogliano,
Dr Paul Quigley, Malcolm Craig, Lindsey Flewelling, Mark McLay,
Lara Budge, Oliver Giles, Robert Hannah, Rachel Johnstone,
Phoebe Savidge, Bryn Tod-Tims

In attendance: Marie-Therese Rafferty (minutes),

Absent: Dan Clinkman, Iain Maciver, Rusty Roberson, Jodi Spooner,
Charlotte Amor, Dawn Edwards, Benjamin Gentilli, Cameron
Maciver, David McGinley, Milena Salci, Steven Vettraino

Apologies: Dr Andrew Wells, Michael Yeomans,

1. Introduction:

FH opened the meeting and explained process. Emailed comments from representatives were passed to the attending representatives for inclusion in feedback.

2. General feedback on the course

There was very positive feedback on the course overall. Reps noted that former AH2 students also give positive feedback on the course. Course content considered to be current and topical.

3. Main points raised by students

3.1 Tutorials

- One representative complained that his/her tutorial was more tutor-led than student-led, with a question-response format rather than discussion. It was acknowledged, however, that teaching styles may differ and that students reading different sources can contribute to problems in discussion.

FH - Valid point that could be raised with tutors directly. Difficulty highlighted in finding the right balance in tutorials. Possibly more direction could be given by lecture staff. The course organiser invited the student in question to present his concerns individually after the session. The course organiser will contact the tutor directly.

- Some representatives complained about receiving reading lists on a week to week basis. This restricted advance planning for tutorial reading and composition of journal entries.
- FH – Tutors are strongly advised to hand out reading lists at the start of the semester rather than on a weekly basis.

3.2 Coursework/Journals

- Good range of topics and questions.
- Greater clarity on Journals requested. Suggestion that 1st/2nd tutorial be used to explain the expectations, using concrete examples. Possible group planning exercise suggested.
FH – Will act on that in future years. Reminder that students should also consult the information in the course handbook and approach tutors when they have questions. Course organiser will also contact all tutors to ask them to compile generic feedback on journals for the start of semester 2 and to once again explain the exercise and the expectations in detail. This will also be beneficial for visiting students who join the course in the second semester.
- Suggestion was made that journals be taken in weekly and returned with feedback.
FH – Tutors not permitted to give individual feedback on weekly basis, due to logistical difficulties regarding chasing up late submission, and working out when penalties would apply, given that journal entries do not have to be returned each week. Students can arrange weekly submission with their tutors on an individual basis, but the tutor is not allowed to comment on individual entries, apart from the practice entry.
- One representative appreciated the primary source exercises because she felt that this was the ‘real’ work of a historian. There were perhaps too many historiographical exercises.
FH – It was noted that there would be more mandatory primary source journal entries in semester 2. However, secondary literature is beneficial for realizing that history is about rivaling interpretations rather than one agreed upon convention. This is designed to make students more confident to engage in their own interpretation.

- Students found access to the weekly readings quite simple, particularly when they can be found on JSTOR. Library readings, particularly book chapters, are harder to come by because of competition for the resources.
- FH – encouraged to hear that students also read books, acknowledges the perennial problems of library provisions.

3.3 Lectures

- Students praised the high quality of the lectures. There was some discussion among representatives of whether there should be more information on the lecture slides.
FH – Pedagogical reasons for not providing too much verbatim lecture information. Lectures to be viewed as jumping off point for further individual research. Key points used on slides to provoke thinking rather than to provide definitive answers. It was noted that the worst exam answers in previous years were those mimicking lectures.

3.4 Course Handbook

- Students would prefer printed copy of handbook. WebCT issues close to deadlines also impact on accessing handbook for guidelines.
FH – It was explained that online accessibility is a School policy rather than specific course decision, but that feedback was appreciated and would be passed on. Based on past student questions in the course and in tutorials, the course organiser felt that printed versions of the handbook were not used frequently either.
FC noted that it would be interesting to see if 1st year students, who will only have had experience of online material, would make similar comments in subsequent meetings.

4. AOB

- There was some discussion on whether 'American History' was a misnomer for the course, since 'America' encompasses more than the United States. The course organiser responded that this issue may be addressed in future years since a Latin Americanist is joining the School in January. FC also thought that, as an adjective, American History is still the most fitting title because 'United States History' would not adequately address the colonial period.

FC asked for thoughts regarding possibly splitting the current 40 credit programme into two 20 credit courses across the two semesters, but stressed that this was only at discussion stage and had not yet been decided. Students felt that this might be a good idea if it also meant that there would be December *and* May exams, but in substantive terms, in relation to course contents, they preferred the existing 40 credit course because they consider earlier American history essential to understanding the 20th and 21st centuries.

No further business was presented and the meeting was called to a close.