PGSSLC Minutes

Summer Term, Meeting 2

Monday 19th May 2023

Chair: Grace Rhyne
Minutes: Ruth Walbank

In attendance: Ross Forman (Director of Graduate Studies), Michael Meeuwis (Convenor MA in English Literature), Dan Katz (Convenor MA in Critical and Cultural Theory), Sarah Akhtaruzzaman (Subject Librarian), Charlotte Pearce (Widening Participation Officer), Tess Grant (Convenor MA in English and Drama), Kimberley Richardson (World Literature Student Rep), Chris Foley (English MA Student Rep), Nate Cope (English and Drama Student Rep), and Kishan Katira (Critical and Cultural Theory Student Rep), Grace Rhyne (PGR Rep), Ruth Walbank (PGR Rep), Ayushi Rakesh (MA student & FAB research Project Officer)

Apologies: Paulo de Medeiros (Convenor MA in World Literature)

1. **Matters arising from previous meeting**
   Outstanding action points from the previous meeting were raised:

   a. **Online feedback form (GR)**
      GR & TG meeting after PGSSLC to put the online feedback form on the website.

   b. **PG Symposium debrief (RW)**
      RW has given the PG symposium debrief at the department meeting, TALC, and research committee.

2. **Feedback from recent meetings (RW)**
   RW has represented the PGSSLC in several other committees and raised some key points from each meeting.

   a. **Board of Graduate Studies**
      Guidance on AI and academic integrity continues to be a work in progress, with the hopes of upcoming guidance over the summer break. The board highlighted the impact of industrial action on upgrades, vivas, and annual reviews for PGRs. The Students' Union also brought their [GTA survey] to the board, which foregrounds issues such as a lack of support, contract delays, and pay to workload ratios. This report is worth ECLS being aware of with our GTA community.

GR and RW were also part of a meeting with the doctoral college about the new PGR strategy, which is a new document seeking to fill a strategic gap at Warwick. It covers areas such as recruitment, finances, supervision, training, and inclusion for PGRs. Suggestions in response to the strategy included a joined-up approach to supervisory training that involves both students and supervisors together, alongside clearer guidance on disability support for PGRs.

b. **TALC**
The committee had an in-depth discussion about the proposed code of conduct for disabled students. Collated feedback from this discussion will be sent to the university's Education Committee and the Student Learning Experience & Engagement Committee, which includes the proposed code's lack of guidance for PG students. There is also a proposal submitted to the next department meeting for next year's MA bursaries to be fewer in number but greater in financial support, increasing from £1,000 to £4,500.

c. **Department meeting**
The department have asked PG reps to reiterate the communications around the marking boycott and how this will likely delay PhD upgrades until Autumn. There was also a request for a PGR representative on the research committee for next year.

Action point: GR & RW to include PGR representative on research committee as part of a handover document for next year's PGSSLC.

3. **Support for International Students (GR)**

GR brought several issues raised by international students to the committee including:
- Concerns around the induction process, which does not adequately cover the transition from international education systems to British ones during welcome week.
- Suggestions for one-to-one academic tutoring or an introductory module that covers academic writing, editing, and referencing conventions at a postgraduate level.
- Concerns that supervisors and academic tutors have too large a workload to fully support their students.

RF raised that there is a planned additional induction for international students next year in week one and that there are places in the faculty for writing support (e.g., the FoA's regular study café). Several colleagues also raised that the transition for international students can be very country specific.

KK suggested that sample essays on MA modules could offer guidance on what is expected for international students.

AR also highlighted some feedback from student surveys completed as part of the faculty-level 'Assignment Feedback and Satisfaction' focus groups that UG students are requesting more frequent assignments with lower wordcounts.

Action points:
- *TG to convey UG-relevant feedback from international students to the UGSSLC.*
- *RW & GR to highlight in the PGSSLC handover that international students have raised these concerns and that, with changes to inductions, these concerns should be monitored in the next academic year.*

4. **Student Engagement (GR)**

GR presented concerns raised by students around engagement to preface item 5's discussion. These points included:
- A perceived divide between home and international students contributing to a lack of cohesive community.
- A suggestion that the department celebrate more cultural holidays throughout the year to foster more connection with international students.
- Requests for department organised events such as lunchtime socials or coffee breaks where students and staff could come together and chat.
- Requests for more evening events that both staff and students could attend, such as boardgame, karaoke, and quiz nights.

5. **Building a PG Community paper (RW)**

RW gave an outline of the 'Building a PG Community' paper with proposed actions, including Work in progress sessions, a dedicated PG(T) workspace, working lunches/coffee morning, a dedicated Teams channel for department notices, an increased use of social media to communicate with students. The paper also included a detailed example from the history department's 'Graduate Research Forum' available for first-year PGR students, which their student reps have highlighted as a driving force of their research community.

Several staff members foregrounded that while the ideas were good that the onus is on students to organise these groups. Staff also raised concerns about events such as the research seminars not being attended by students, and a need for a clearer understanding on what events would enrich a PG cohort. It was also suggested that events are scheduled at the beginning of the year rather than on an ADHOC basis to allow for plenty of notice. Staff also wanted to reiterate the expectation for students to check their emails regularly.

Student reps suggested there is a lack of information on how to book rooms, how to get resources from the department (e.g., catering for events). The communication around department organised events was also raised as a barrier, with last minute notice and the other pressures of deadlines etc., deterring students from attending. Events such as the Said memorial lecture were well attended after being advertised in seminars.

On the communication suggestions, concerns were raised around using social media and messaging platforms that were outside the university's IT system, as these are not always secure and against university policy. The group agreed there needed to be a distinction between opt-in student only spaces and centralised departmental communication methods.

SA highlighted spaces/resources for PG students in the library, such as the Wolfson, the community engagement team, and the bookable rooms for team discussions.

Action point: GR & RW to ask other departments what communication and community models are working well and include the workable suggestions from the paper in the handover for next year.