

## Commission Mixte Minutes - March 26th 2024

Present: Pr. Simon Swift, Dr. Erzi Kukorelly, Nora Zufferey, Christina Zholdokova, Caique Cardoso

Minutes taken by Caique Cardoso

### 1. Mémoire Discussion Group

Caroline Martin brought to the *Commission Mixte*'s attention that it would be beneficial to set up a space for Masters students to discuss their *mémoires*, similarly to the functioning of the AELLA's past "Mémoire Discussion Group."

The CM agrees on the fact that this would be a good project, and that providing support - and potential research workshops - for Master students could fill a current need.

It was noted that students seem to increasingly struggle with research, and that even BA students would benefit from acquiring these skills; in order to provide writing and research instruction throughout the BA curriculum, the *plan d'études* would need to be revised, which would need to be discussed at a later occasion with the *corps professoral*. An inspiration for such changes could be found in the French BA3 (method) and BA4 (writing) modules.

The CM agrees on the fact that providing a space of support for MA students writing their *mémoire* should better be the responsibility of the *corps professoral*, since it involves providing official guidelines for *mémoire* research and supervision.

As such, it was decided to communicate this via appropriate channels.

### 2. Failing grades on degrees

A student recently complained about a particular - and rare - situation: they failed their first attempt for an exam, and finalised credit for the English component of the BA during the same exam session, resulting in the automatic *conservation* of their failing grade on their final transcript. The Faculty did not allow this student to retake the failed exam, although the student wanted to complete their diploma with all passing grades.

The CM decided that it would be best to communicate on this eventuality through the department mailing list, and for teaching staff to mention this situation during their seminars. A draft of communique will be prepared for sharing in class.

### 3. The AELLA's Health Survey

Several factors seem to affect student mental health: the closing of the Bastions site inducing a feeling of isolation, a sense that the department's curriculum might not be a right fit, the lack of guidance resulting from a freedom of choice of schedule, students feeling pressure to finish their degrees quickly causing stress and poor workload management.

A summary of three relevant survey results can be found in the annex.

The CM is of the opinion that there should be more communication on the fact that completing a BA degree in 3 years is not a must, and is only possible if one studies full-time and does not have a job. The department director can include this information in the welcome meeting for new students, and also members of staff might helpfully communicate their own experience of taking a longer time than they may have anticipated to get to where they are - which is ok! Since it is a necessity for many to have income during their studies, students should be encouraged to extend their degrees to allow for a healthy lifestyle.

An anonymous staff member relayed the following message to the CM: "I feel that we should be very careful to ensure that we do not become directly or indirectly involved in students' mental health care in so far as it is possible. It is a very slippery slope, and - as much as we all may have had our own experiences! - we are simply not qualified to treat mental health conditions, and we do risk making matters worse when we intervene. I suggest that we have clear procedures in place for escalating specific mental health concerns to the correct sources."

The CM agrees on the fact that it is not the teaching staff's responsibility to cure mental issues, but still highlights that it is their responsibility to familiarise themselves with protocols and procedures available to students, and to communicate these protocols and procedures in an appropriate manner. The English department must ensure that such procedures and protocols are in place and known by the teaching staff. This will hopefully help to mitigate negative trends in student mental health, like those underlined by the AELLA's survey.

The CM identified the following university bodies that deal with mental health struggles: HELP (a support group for victims of aggression, bullying and toxic behavior), *Sentinelles* (students assigned to a department to support other struggling students), and #MyMindMyPriority (campaign supporting students with various mental health issues and providing awareness workshops).

Although these resources exist, the CM feels like most students are not aware of them. A project should be put into place (possibly with an *ad hoc* working group, with members of each *corps*):

1. to create a tab on the department webpage, with explanations and links to the relevant resources.
2. to create a brochure (or to update the existing departmental introduction Brochure, used to promote English studies during the Journée de Bachelors etc.) with easy-to-access information regarding workload, University life, work/life balance, etc.
3. to share this information in the A5 brochure (“The First Year”) that is given to all students during the welcome session, since the BA1 brochure is mostly concerned with the cursus itself.
4. advise teaching staff on such matters at the end-of-year staff meeting.

## Annex

### 1. UNIGE survey “Qu’est-ce qui procure du stress chez les étudiant-es?” (2022)

Students well-integrated into the UNIGE have less stress – the closure of Bâtiment Centrale is a significant factor increasing the feeling of student isolation.

Students who feel like they have chosen the right discipline have less stress – choosing the right subject is important; students should not study English only if they have, or feel like they have, a good level of English, since the curriculum revolves around analysis and develops critical thinking.

54% of students declare to have a bad stress management – almost half feel that they do manage. The difference between stress and stress management provides further insight: students do not feel an increase in stress, but they find it harder to manage it – it would be interesting to find out why.

The biggest source of student stress is exams. However, there is every risk that there will be more exams with ChatGPT. Women also seem to get more stressed about exams than men – these are factors to consider in the argument about shifting back to exams.

The survey highlights a link between stress levels and the feeling that students were not well-prepared by *collège* – although programs like “Athéna Langues” should be helpful, it would be beneficial to increase communication with *collèges* to ensure student preparation.

An increasing source of stress is uncertainty about the students’ professional future – students should be encouraged to attend orientation information sessions.

Interestingly, the Humanities seem to have less stressed out students than other faculties, which is surprising, given the perception that Humanities students have poorer career prospects.

Students in greater financial precarity feel more stress – the university should attempt to provide greater help to these students.

International students (not from France) studying in Geneva are also indicated to having to juggle between varied sources of potential stress.

### 2. Internal Health Survey by the AELLA (2023)

Certain students follow 10 classes per semester – stress seems inevitable with such a heavy workload.

Time management between their studies and part-time job is only hard for 28% of the students who have a job (55%) – only 16% of the whole student body struggles with this.

Over 50% of respondents declared to suffer from mental health problems, with only 5% having informed the University. – Why might this be? Is the university perceived as not actually very helpful?

Several students expressed a desire to have the possibility to attend workshops, or group discussions focused on different mental health struggles (ex: how to study with anxiety). – The Department could work on organizing a workgroup.

Issues of a heavy workload and the resulting stress can be mitigated if students take the time they need to complete their degrees.

Although some students asked for class recordings, the Department teaches critical thinking, and developing it requires presence in class, unlike factual lectures of other faculties.

### 3. QUISS 2015 survey “Les étudiantEs et le temps”

UNIGE students do more paid work and study less than French students. They do slightly more autonomous work, though.

UNIGE students do not seem to know how many hours of study are expected of them (in relation to the French): a third to more, a third less, and a third the right amount. – Relevant information seems to be lacking.

Many more UNIGE students feel like they are “late” in their studies. – Students could be in a rush to complete their degrees (as shows workload data from the AELLA survey), or this fact could be due to Swiss academic culture.