

Meeting of the CM of the English Department – Monday, November 25, 2019

All members present: Genoveva Puskas (GP), Erzsébet Kukorelly (EK), Oran McKenzie (OM), Blerina Bajrami (BB), Tristan Clément (TC), Lorraine Devillard (LD), Megan Zeitz (MZ).

The president opens the meeting at 14:10

Commission mixte

- Lorraine is unanimously re-elected as president
- Oran is unanimously re-elected as vice-president

The role of the president is to plan the meeting, lead the discussion and take the minutes (or ensure that they are taken). He/she then communicates them to all members of the commission for validation, and once they are validated sends them to the secretary.

A discussion on the purpose of this commission follows in order to clarify its frame and the role of its members. The commission ensures a space to assemble the voices of each body of the department (the students of BA and MA levels, the CER, the professors) in order for every side to hear the issues and constraints with which the other bodies are confronted and what is done to solve them. The discussion provides a space to look for solutions together. For this to happen, it is important that every representative gather concerns from the body they represent, and then relay the information of what has been discussed during the meeting back to them. The newly formed AELLA is now a good place for students to do this. Both the CER teachers and the corps professoral already meet on a regular basis.

It would be important to send a message to all members of the department in order to let them know when the CM meeting is taking place, so that they can address their concerns to the representants. The president will take care of it. All people present are in favor of letting the students know about the department's AGM in the English Department Bulletin.

News from students' side

Some remarks and concerns were gathered during the General Assembly of the AELLA (which was held on Wednesday Nov. 20).

Journée des filières and Journée des masters

A suggestion has been made to have the presence of students at the "journée des filières" (during which all the faculties present their departments to high school students). This suggestion had also been made during the last General Assembly of the English Department. The idea is welcomed and validated by all. EK also validates it as the coordinator of the event for the English department.

The presence of the corps professoral (instead of only CER) would also be welcome. The suggestion is made of having one professor 2h per year (and since there are 6 professorial places at the department, this would ensure a turnover of every 6 year per professor). GP would be ready to be present and will relay the suggestion to the other professors.

EK takes care of organizing the event and the planning for the staff's presence; and the students take care of organizing planning for the presence of students through the AELLA.

A side question emerges during the discussion regarding the "journée des masters" on whether the department should get involved. GP suggests asking Mrs Rubal if this event helps raising the number of students at a master level.

On their side, the student representatives can investigate among the students if such an event would raise enthusiasm (e.g. for MA-students to present their mémoire, for BA-student to help them make a decision). It could make sense to organize this at the level of the faculty (rather than the whole university).

Film club

The film club receives a lot of enthusiasm, but mostly from people not registered in the department. Many students of the department cannot come on Thursdays, although they would want to. This opens the questioning whether Thursdays are still a good day for the film club.

Two steps should be undertaken before any decision can take place:

- First, checking the room's availability. OM checks the availability with Clare.
- Then, undertaking a survey among students (in accordance with the room's availability).

A change of the time to 6pm is suggested and accepted for next semester (as 7pm had been chosen when AT classes went until 7pm, which is no longer the case). This might already have a positive impact on the attendance.

BA7-Module

Students have also expressed 2 main concerns about the BA7-module:

- There are some complaints about the absence of a free module within the bachelor curriculum in English. Following observations and answers were made:
 - This complain comes mostly from students who have known the former plan d'études. It would be interesting to investigate among the students who have started their bachelor without knowing the former plan d'études.
 - There was a sense (on all sides) that the choice was forced upon them, since the former commission had made it quickly and without much consultation. The most reasonable attitude now is to wait until things calm down and re-evaluate in a few years, as there is a real logic behind the choice. Each periods and fields offered by the different professors of the department are covered over the bachelor curriculum and are given the full space of a module.
 - It is also important to consider the larger freedom given to the master curriculum, where students are now really free to choose their courses according to their deep interests. The bachelor hence teaches the students a general perspective of all fields and the tools to make clear choices for their master studies.

- Given the narrow choice of seminars (one seminar “American Literary Counter-Voices” given by two different teachers), there are worries over what would happen if a student fails the attestation three times.
 - EK gives her experience of BA5, in which students would simply try again and again.
 - This point should be clarified for BA7 (e.g. whether students would have to present another topic, or what they could do).

- This opens the discussion to the idea of opening the module to courses given by assistants of other literary periods on American authors or to have cross-module courses (e.g.: poetry from the early modern period to the contemporary period). Opening to more flexibility and permeability could be of interest for teaching as well and allow more creativity in the conception of classes (as some assistants already had such ideas but did not know where to fit their seminar in the plan d’études).

BA5-lecture

The BA5 lecture course is perceived as very dense. Some students feel that the amount of work given for it should be attested by a grade so that their work would be valued. A comparison is taking place with the BA6-module, which has now two grades instead of one (as it is hosting a graded paper from the BA7 of the old plan d’études).

Different points were then raised:

- A change of grading would imply a change of plan d’études (and the necessity to create a commission for it). Having the lecture on the whole year (1 hour per week over the whole year instead of 2 hours per week over 1 semester) is theoretically possible, but would also require a change of plan d’études. The necessity and the benefit of such a change should therefore be really well thought before a step is to be undertaken.
- The bachelor as a whole offers a wide range of abilities and capabilities. The BA5-lecture course functions as an exercise to train a very specific skill: that of taking notes, doing a lot of reading, listen to things in English at a high rate, and be able to cope with a lot of information at once.
- According to EK, the failing rate is of about 30%. GP remarks that, from a theoretical within pedagogical frameworks, this is the highest tolerable rate (beyond this, the teaching staff has to revise their expectations). It is hence technically in an acceptable frame.
- The scope of the module makes sense (i.e. to have an overview of the history of literature from 1500 to 1800) and should stay, but the form of evaluation could be put into question. EK is going to address this issue with Prof. Erne.
- It is important for students to become aware that a Contrôle Continu is quite easier to pass than a 4-hour exam, and that changing it to an exam would probably make the module even more difficult.
- The question here is also about how one values his or her own work and if a grade really is that which gives value to the studies and learning process.

MA studies

The MA requirements are very high. The degree is supposed to be done in 1.5 years, the high load (exams, 6 papers and the memoire) makes it common for students to study over 3 years.

- There is the necessity to guarantee a certain quality, and a risk in lowering the standards which should not be.
- In comparison with British and American Universities, this workload sounds quite normal (there might even be more workload in England) and is also what makes it a good master's degree.
- There is also a certain reward for the students in being able to achieve such a challenge.
- It is however true that the number of evaluations has doubled with the Bologna-agreement (when the system changed from the former licenses into bachelors and masters), making it denser for the students.
- There is an issue if the time is doubled... No answer could be provided to this.
- A tension can be observed in the student body between those whose studies are driven by a real interest for researching and those who do it as a means towards another aim (e.g. the IUFE).
- The teaching staff is aware that it is tough and shows flexibility if necessary. They are willing to find solutions. Students are really encouraged to talk with the staff, something that the student representatives can insist on.

Recording of lecture courses

Some students have also asked why the BA4, BA5 and BA6 lecture courses are not recorded. For some of them, studying at home can help learning.

- In last year's Commission Mixte, the point had already been raised. For Prof. Bolens' lecture (BA4), it is a conscious choice, with pedagogical aims behind. For the BA5-lecture as well (as mentioned earlier). OM will ask Martin Leer for the BA6-lecture.
- GP mentioned the whole process of evaluation on teaching that took place last year. One part of the "plan d'action" (i.e. the measures that are to be undertaken in order to address weaker points) is precisely to ensure that they systematically let the students know about the pedagogical aims at beginning of classes

News from staff's side

The new BA1-module represents a big change and the discussion is to come. A lot of work is done on the level of the CER.

- This point will be discussed in next meeting of the Commission Mixte
- Having the feedback from students will be very important. Students representatives are key for this.
- Megan and Aïcha, the current Writing Lab monitors, are invited to the discussion with the CER.

The president closes the meeting at 16:05.

LD/ gp / ek / om / bb / tc / mz.