YOU SAID: WE DID

SPAH Actions Taken in Response to Student Concerns
February 2016

STUDENT CONCERN 1: Deadlines piling up.
The Director of Education reviews deadlines every year in light of this recurring student complaint. We modify whenever possible to minimise this problem. However, avoiding deadline clustering at the end of term is largely unavoidable due to several factors:
a.) The fact that lecturers need to assess student progress in terms of the entire module.
b.) The fact that students often have overlapping deadlines because they are taking modules outside of SPAH. We have no control when it comes to deadlines set by other departments.
Nevertheless, many of the sweeping curriculum changes to second and third year Philosophy modules – changes to be implemented in 2016-2017 – will help with this issue insofar as modules will have more ongoing assessment occurring throughout the term, and most students will be taking fewer modules per term. Changes to deadlines in Art History last year were also aimed at helping to alleviate the problem.

STUDENT CONCERN 2: Late return of coursework and different methods of submission.
The Head of SPAH will continue to encourage prompt return of feedback. SPAH now operates with online submission only and it is hoped that adopting a FASer-only system will facilitate prompter feedback. The change in assessment for Philosophy as part of the curriculum review will also address some of these concerns, with more in-class assessment throughout the year and fewer modules to be marked by lecturers per term. It is important for students to note, however, that it is university policy that lecturers be granted one month from the time of submission in which to conduct the marking.

STUDENT CONCERN 3: Lack of module choice.
With recent new hires in both Art History and Philosophy, there will be more capacity for new modules. As a result of the Art History curriculum review held in 2013/14, further 15 credit Art History modules have been introduced in 2014/15. As part of the Philosophy curriculum review, new modules will be introduced in 2016/17.

STUDENT CONCERN 4: Lack of confidence in presentation and communication, and concerns about assessment not testing understanding
The new Philosophy curriculum proposes a radical shake-up to assessment that will see all end-of-year formal examinations scrapped (for our second and final year students) and replaced with a range of assessments. These assessments will (a) target assessment more on testing students’ understanding rather than mere power of recall and (b) aim to offer more opportunities for students to develop broader communication and presentation skills (e.g. the possibility of oral presentations, project work, etc).

STUDENT CONCERN 5: Lack of support for philosophical writing
Lecturers have been encouraged to upload guidance documents on essay writing to Moodle sites and to draw students’ attention to them. The Philosophy department already has intensive courses on philosophical logic and essay writing for first year students, and will run a new module in spring 2016 on ‘Writing About Philosophy’ (for second and third year Philosophy students). Students are also encouraged to take advantage of the Talent Development Centre – information on which can be found on the university webpage under the ‘Study Resources’ heading on the lefthand side of the student-specific webpage. The following link will also take you there: http://www.essex.ac.uk/students/study-resources/tdc/default.aspx

STUDENT CONCERN 6: Lack of advice available regarding study or career options.
Students are encouraged to realize that their personal tutors are there for this purpose. Every term personal tutors contact their student ‘tutees’ to remind them that they are available to advise them. Additionally, there is always a member of faculty who is assigned the task of promoting student employability. Students are invited to speak directly to the Employability Director for further advice as needed. This role changes from year to year – contact the SPAH Office for up-to-date information.

STUDENT CONCERN 7: Lack of clarity about how student feedback is acted upon
Every term the school holds Staff Student Liaison Committee meetings at which student representatives are encouraged to come and discuss their concerns and hear back from the school on what changes are being considered. The school also regularly holds Open Forums where all students are invited to provide feedback and hear about any proposed changes. We are also producing this ‘You Said: We Did’ report.