

Faculty Representatives Termly Report

2017-18

Your Name: Iida Kayhko

Your Faculty & Role: Faculty Representative for Social and Historical Sciences (Postgrad Taught)

Faculty Priorities:

The issues that affect students at the Social and Historical Sciences faculty are largely shared with the rest of the student body at UCL. The chronic problem is space, with students having to make their way all across central London to lectures and tutorials, and attending classes in cramped rooms that often have inadequate provisions (not enough chairs or desks, no WiFi so teaching materials are unavailable, etc.). Students have also commented on the lack of locker space on campus, which is an accessibility issue specifically affecting those who travel from afar or have need for specific equipment (medical or study-related) during the day.

A specific issue this academic year has been the change of the module selection deadline for Term 2 modules. This change, in which the deadline was pushed from mid-January to early December, and made a hard and fast deadline, has been immensely unpopular among students – and particularly among Masters students in our faculty. The Social and Historical Sciences faculty hosts many departments which do not run exam-based assessments for postgraduate students, so many students felt that they were being unnecessarily inconvenienced by the change without gaining anything (as the earlier exam timetable release would not benefit them). I ran a survey for taught postgrad students in our faculty which showed that this issue was deeply felt: of the over 100 respondents, over 80% found the deadline change inconvenient. The meeting, organised by our Education Officer, with the Director of Academic Services, made it clear that many students felt this change to be disruptive to their academic progress and freedom of choice over modules.

This relates more generally to the student satisfaction issue at UCL: among some Masters students, there is a sense of being the least looked after group among UCL students. While undergrads and research students get personalised care and support during the years they spend at this university, Masters students are here for a very short time.

Finally, I would like to note that there has been noticeable interest in some departments to work towards decolonising the curriculum, increasing an

emphasis on works written by academics from the Global South and from BME backgrounds in the Global North. Students have expressed a wish for a wider, more representative curriculum, that would better correspond to the experiences, interests and demographics of the diverse UCL student body. There is a sense among some students that UCL upholds hierarchies of power based on racist, colonial and patriarchal ideologies, and that this significantly affects and disadvantages BME students in particular. Seeing as UCL's difficult relationship with eugenics and white supremacy has once again made headlines, these student concerns should be listened to.

Meetings in the Faculty:

I have attended the Faculty Teaching Committee and Faculty Library Committee, alongside Academic Board and Union Council. I won't go through each meeting individually. To these meetings, I have brought student concerns over space, locker space and module selection deadlines. I have raised questions on provision of space at UCL East and encouraged staff members to sign the open letter calling for increased funding for Student Psychological Services at UCL.

Meetings with the Union:

In meetings with the Union, I have raised the question of whether the Union is actually doing what it should be doing in its attempts to represent the student body. Students face increasing financial precarity, a growing mental health crisis, declining health services and mountains of debt. These are enormous issues to contend with if you have nobody on your side. The Union, in its current depoliticised state, is not adequately responding to these issues, and it cannot fall on individual student representatives to take these on without the supporting structures in place. Having these conversations about the purpose, function and future of the Union has never been more urgent or crucial as it is right now.

Other comments:

Feel free to get in touch if you made it this far and have any questions or comments: iida.kayhko.13@ucl.ac.uk