

Commission Mixte (CM) Minutes, March 9 2023

Present: Prof. Genoveva Puskas, Dr. Erzsi Kukorelly, Maria Peters, Holly Lavergne, Alexandra Brites, Christina Zholdokova

Excused: Lorys Fioletti, Sarah Cerqueira

Minutes taken by Holly Lavergne

1. A small sum of money left over from a conference

There is a small sum of money left over from the “Economies of English” SAUTE conference. CM members agreed that this money should be set aside in the English department to buy presents for staff members at special moments.

2. Recording of lecture courses

An issue shared by many students in the department is that many lectures are no longer being recorded. Many students need to work, either to help their parents, because they live alone, or because they are mature students retraining to be able to teach as a new career or to get a diploma to validate their current career. Furthermore, it is difficult for students to get from class to class because seminars and lectures are spread across Geneva.

We discussed how recording lectures is not compulsory and can only be strongly encouraged. One idea that was suggested is to have letters be written by students and the AELLA directly to professors who are not recording their lectures. It was also pointed out that it is more difficult for teachers to record the lectures, especially since there is no technical help for teachers in many of the new buildings in which classes are taking place. Prof. Puskas will relay this information to the *collège des profs*.

3. Accessibility survey results

The AELLA conducted a survey about accessibility in late November 2022 in order to see how students’ physical and mental health has been affected by the scattering of classes across the city due to the renovation of Bastions. The survey was completed by 33 students. Out of these students, 57.6% found that the new scattered layout of classrooms in buildings across the city has had an impact on their physical health and/or ability to focus in class and 63.6% found that it has had an impact on their mental health and/or ability to focus in class.

The most common issue for students is the lack of tables in some lecture rooms, which means that students have bad posture which leads to back and/or neck pain. This includes students with previous conditions as well as students who have never had back pain before. It also makes note-taking much more difficult. Furthermore, students must spend more time in public transport and must walk farther, which is difficult and painful for students with specific physical conditions. Students noted difficulties focusing, increased anxiety, stress, and tiredness, as well as a lack of feeling like a group/cohort in *lettres*, as there is no common area for students in the faculty. Suggestions included the importance of having tables to write on, of arranging a common area for students in *lettres*, and of recording lectures so that students with physical and/or mental conditions can follow lectures at home or at the library when necessary. It was

also noted that it is unfair that students in *lettres* are paying the same tuition fees as students in other faculties, but do not have the same conditions.

CM members agreed that it would be a good idea to do this kind of survey faculty-wide, such as through the AEL, since having more responses from students in the entire faculty would give more weight to the results. Christina pointed out that there is an AEL *groupe de travail* that is working on these issues.

A key issue that came up is regarding the deadlines for telling the university about any disabilities or conditions one has in order to get support from the university. The *Commission d'Évaluation des Aménagements pour les Besoins Particuliers* (CEBP) meets four times a year, so there are four deadlines per year for students to submit documents regarding any disabilities or conditions they have that require specific arrangements. These deadlines are not clearly communicated to students or staff. CM members agreed that this information should be communicated at the *pré-rentrée* staff meeting and at introductory classes for students so that both students and staff members are aware of this. Furthermore, staff members should be kept informed by the *décanat* about decisions regarding students with disabilities and the support they are given.

The question about the early January deadline also came up. The deadline for submitting papers is three weeks before the exam session. This deadline cannot be changed officially, but it is clear that instructors are free to modify that deadline. What is most important for students to know is that if they have problems, they need to get in touch with their instructors. Then, they can negotiate in order to find alternative arrangements.

4. English BA modules survey results

The AELLA ran a survey in the first week of March 2023 about the BA modules in the English department. There were a total of 43 participants.

A key result of our discussions was that students should be encouraged to take the BA7 module in their second year. All members of the CM think this is a good idea. This way, students are exposed to one kind of methodology in BA1 and to another in BA7. Being exposed to multiple methodologies might help students in other modules. During the final BA1 lecture, it would be good for the lecturer to encourage first year students to take BA7 in their second year.

All CM members also agreed that it makes sense to swap BA3 with BA7 in the *plan d'études*. Changing the numbering of modules would help encourage students to take the American Literature module in their second year. Since the BA7 module covers a vast time period, it would not be a problem to number it as BA3.

Alexandra suggested that the AELLA make a guide to help first year students with planning when to take different modules, as well as planning the time they should be spending on each of their courses – which is more than their physical presence in class and includes planning when to do their readings and preparation outside of class. One of the major concerns found by the survey was the large workload for several modules. One of the solutions we found is the creation of this AELLA guide which can help make students aware of the time and preparation required for various modules.

It would also be good to reassure students that it is okay to extend their studies, as this is often the case for students working part time. The *service des examens* is lenient about the number of years students can take to complete their Bachelor's degree (it does not have to be completed in three years).

Holly suggested that the AELLA run a meeting for English students at the start of the year to help answer students' questions about different modules. Christina suggested that the AELLA create a Whatsapp group at that meeting that includes AELLA members and BA students. BA students could use the group as a resource to ask questions about their studies in the English department.

5. Inclusion of books to purchase in the *programme des cours*

It would be good if the *programme des cours* was modified to include the necessary books to be purchased for each class, including the exact editions that are required. Even though this is done in most cases, students wish that this be made systematic. Prof. Puskas will contact Susan about reminding instructors of this in upcoming semesters.

6. Modalities of BA5 in-class written test

Some students are confused about how they need to prepare for the BA5 in-text written test, which includes both studying factual information and texts. They are confused about the importance of memorizing dates for each part, as well as of how they should be distributing their time to be prepared for the test. Erzsi will speak to Prof. Erne about this, but she noted that she did not think that students were being told to memorise authors' dates and publication dates.

She informed the commission mixte that a survey was done after classes were moved back in person to see whether students preferred having the test with short answer questions or analyzing passages, and the results were split so it was decided that the test would be composed of half of each type of question.

Students find it really helpful to have a session held to go over practice questions and see what is expected of them during the exam, which is done every semester. Information about study techniques and how to prepare well for these types of tests could be included in either the guide or Whatsapp group the AELLA will create.

7. Outreach—recognition and/or payment for staff who do such activities

A lot of work and time goes into outreach run by staff at schools. It is mainly assistants that are doing this. It would be nice if staff members could be paid for this. Instructors get paid to be a *juré.e de maturité*, but not for outreach. Prof. Puskas can get in touch with the faculty or the rectorat regarding the possibility of paying staff for outreach activities.

8. Update on future staffing

As Dr. Leer is retiring next year, the department has requested to be able to replace him with an equivalent MER position. The profile has already been approved. There will be a *commission de nomination* which will consist of a dean or vice-dean, two members of the professorial staff of the department (Prof. Swift and Prof. Erne) and a member from another department. It could be

someone from outside the field of literature, but it is unclear whether they can be from outside the faculty. There also needs to be a student member and a CER member. The AELLA will be able to help find a student member for this. It is an MER position – which cannot be changed – although the future MER could be promoted to an assistant professor later on. The description of the position will be written later and staff members will be able to look at it.

With respect to the members of the *commission de nomination*, Erzsi noted that it would be advisable to make sure that it included a woman, as well as someone with particular knowledge of the stakes of post-colonial studies and literatures of the contemporary world.

There is also going to be a *commission de nomination* for Tabea Ihsane. As both Prof. Puskas and Prof. Haerberli cannot be members of the committee due to conflicts of interest, Prof. Madsen will be on the committee. A student member and a CER member will also be required.

9. State of the offices in the *Comédie* building

There has been work being done in the *Comédie* building and some pipes have been replaced. However, the situation is getting worse in the former Writing Lab (now Secretariat). There are many health issues linked to the conditions in the department's offices. Some of the teaching staff visited potential office space on the third floor of the Aile Jura, but it would not be possible to move the department there because of the lack of separate office spaces. Overall, it is clear that there is no global solution in the short-term, as there is no other building or office space available. While Bastions is being renovated, a solution needs to be found. We also need to find out what the plans are for the English and German departments' offices once Bastions is reopened.

The English department deserves the same consideration as the other departments in the *faculté des lettres*, especially since it is a big department. It is not good for the health of staff and students, it complicates office hours for staff, and has displaced the Writing Lab to a variety of other rooms. The teachers' well-being is not being promoted and students suffer from that too.

Margherita Pallottino's office on the third floor of Landolt has a couple unused desks, so some staff members could move there if there is ever an emergency. There may also be the possibility of holding the Writing Lab there. Due to difficulties in finding rooms for the Writing Lab, two sessions are being held on Fridays this semester, which is not ideal.

The CM members agreed that we need to circulate a letter to be signed by everyone in the department, both staff and students. First, the *corps professoral* needs to give input on the letter. It would give more weight if the whole department contributes to this letter, including students. This should be done soon.

10. Staff office hours

Some staff members are finding that fewer students are available during their office hours, meaning that they sit in their offices with no students showing up. More students than before contact them to organize meetings separately. Some staff members only meet with students by appointment, but others are unclear whether it is mandatory to have an office hour. Given the state of the offices at the *Comédie* and the fact that classes are now spread across the city, it

would make sense to be able to only meet with students by appointment. We will ask at the AGM whether this is possible.