



Semester 1 Report

President of the School of English
Semester 1, July 2020 -January 2021
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Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Manifesto
3. Orientation Events
 - 3.1 Drop-in Centre
 - 3.2 Desert Island Books
 - 3.3 Overall Evaluation
4. Representation
 - 4.1 Class Representative Election Overview
 - 4.2 Class Representatives and Representational Structure
 - 4.3 Class Representative Forums
 - 4.4 Education Committee
 - 4.5 School Presidents Forum
 - 4.6 Equality and Diversity Committee
 - 4.7 Learning and Teaching Committee
 - 4.8 Staff Student Consultative Committee
 - 4.9 School Council
 - 4.10 School Presidents Advisory Group
 - 4.11 Schools Wellbeing Advisory Group
 - 4.12 University-Led Review of Learning and Teaching
5. Careers Events
 - 5.1 Humanities Internship Fair
6. Looking Ahead: Semester 2
7. Thank you

1. Introduction – *‘Between my finger and my thumb, the squat pen*

rests...’

What follows in this report is a review and evaluation of the activities and actions taken by myself as the School President, the School Class Representatives, and some members of staff in the School during the Martinmas Semester of the Academic Year 2020-2021. This Semester has built upon some of the issues found in my first year as School President, and I have attempted to lay foundations that will hopefully become long-term improvements to the School, and to advocate for fair mitigation as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Though I’ve been in this role before, it’s found new ways to teach and challenge me, but throughout what has been a challenging and changeable year so far, I have tried to be steadfast in my resolve to make sure every student is treated fairly, and to be a conduit of communication between the students, the School of English, and the University as a whole. I’m incredibly grateful for the opportunity to represent students for a second year, and I hope I have done enough to be present and available to listen and guide students as individuals, and to speak on behalf of the collective student voice.

As mentioned, this report will review and evaluate the activities, meetings, and events that took place during my time so far as School President, and at the end, it’ll look ahead to what is to come during Candlemas Semester, where I’ll continue to work alongside staff from the School of English, the Class Representatives, the other School Presidents and Faculty Presidents, and of course, the students themselves. There may also be a few Heaney quotes along the way... Here’s to another wonderful semester,

Callum Robert Forbes Irvine

From 'Digging' by Seamus Heaney

2. Manifesto - 'Anyone with gumption and a sharp mind will take measure of two things: what's said and what's done'

During both the election campaigns I've run, I put similar proposals at the centre of what it means to be an effective School President. It's important to revisit these, to hold myself to account, and make sure that I'm keeping on the right track of what students expected of me when voting me in each time.

I'd like to continue to work with the School to make changes to better engagement with students, taking the best practices of the Schools and School Presidents that I've worked with over the last year. A transparent and closed feedback loop on Module Evaluations should be implemented, so that students know that the School acknowledges, values, and will take action based on feedback. A continuing dialogue between the School of English and other Schools should occur, so that we can learn how they implement enhancement-led learning practices, such as digital assessment submissions and feedback, or lecture capture, bettering our own learning environment to make it more equal, and accessible. - from my re-election manifesto.

To boil it down to my main goals:

- Improve School's engagement with Students
- Advance Equality and Diversity Matters across the whole School
- Introduce a more-rigid procedure for engagement with student feedback

With hindsight, I am proud to have set these goals, as we have either completed them, made significant headway already, or have plans in place to do so in the upcoming Semester.

From Beowulf – translated by Seamus Heaney

3. Orientation Events – ‘The quick bell rang again

3.1 Drop-in Centre

To welcome new students into the department, we had a drop-in session on Teams for students new to the School to come and chat to myself and the Director of Teaching; to get to know us, and ask any questions they might have for the upcoming semester. Overall, the event was a success, and the main attendees to the event were first-year undergraduates, who felt that the event gave them a warm welcome into the department, and managed to resolve most, if not all of their questions for the upcoming semester.

3.2 Desert Island Books

This year saw the introduction of a new event I designed, called ‘Desert Island Books’, not dissimilar to the more-famous Desert Island Discs segment on BBC Radio 4... The first iteration of this event had a very clear Orientation Week vibe to it, and I invited Dr Sam Haddow and Dr Katie Garner to talk about their academic interests, their career journey, their favourite bits about St Andrews and the School of English. The event was a resounding success, so much so that popular demand has led to more of these events throughout the semester, featuring Dr Augustine, Dr Archer, Dr Manly, and Dr Mackay.

3.3 Overall Evaluation

The Orientation Week was a success despite the unusual format we had to take due to the pandemic, and I'm glad to have seen so many students, new and old to the School, getting to know each other and the Staff during the events we put on. I hope these welcoming events will continue in years to come in a physical *and* virtual capacity, and grow in their popularity, so that students of all years and degree-paths can form, over time, a long lasting, tightly knit, and inclusive community.

From Station Island – Seamus Heaney

4. Representation – ‘They stood. And stood for something. Just by standing.’

After being re-elected School President, I attended all the mandatory training sessions covering a range of topics from chairing, minuting, and facilitation, and a Careers Centre training session, all of which were incredibly useful to continuing to represent the students of the School of English. Below are brief summaries and activities of the various committees, bodies, and fora that as School President I either chair, or sit-on as a member, and what we've done during the 2020 Martinmas Semester.

4.1 Class Representative Election Overview

The Class Representative Elections went relatively smoothly, with few technical blips along the way. We had a successful candidate for each position, and only had a vacant space in the PGT level elections. As I had stated during the election campaign for my Presidential election the previous year, I increased the number of Taught Postgraduate

Representatives, to further give the postgraduate community a voice in the happenings of the School of English. Furthermore, the William and Mary Representative was reworked into a Study Abroad Representative, to better reflect their remit.

I am incredibly grateful for all of the elected Class Representatives for putting themselves out there to represent their cohort, and I am particularly thankful for the efforts of my First-year Representative and Social Rep, Nicole Entin, and my Second-year Representative and Minutes Rep, Catherine Mullner, for going absolutely above and beyond to assist me so much behind-the-scenes, organise events, and to do as much as they can with their elected position.

4.2 Class Representatives and Representational Structure

The Class Representative Structure is as follows:

- 2x 1000-level Representatives – Nicole Entin, Briton Mori
- 2x 2000-level Representatives – Catherine Mullner, Rebecca West
- 2x 3000-level Representatives – Francesca Ash, Maia Rakovic
- 2x 4000-level Representatives – Will Edic, Greer Ross-McLennan
- 1x Study Abroad Representative – Emily Childress
- 1x Mature Student Representative – Rachael Stark
- 2x PGT Representative – Rachael Murray, Jess Parker
- 2x PGR Representatives – Fabien Troivaux, [vacant position].

4.3 Class Representative Forums

Throughout the Semester I have regularly met with my Class Representatives as a whole, or on an individual basis so that we can discuss ideas for future proposals to the School of English, prepare items for Staff Student Consultative Committee agendas, and deal with any more-urgent questions that could be answered by myself, or passed on directly to the Director of Teaching for an expedited response.

4.4 Education Committee

Every week, I sat on the Education Committee, which included all School Presidents, Faculty Presidents, and the Director of Education. During these meetings, we would discuss matters arising directly relating to education at the University, which included primarily responses to the ever-changing pandemic and its impact upon education. These meetings have been invaluable to my role as President as they were last year, allowing arrangements to be made for future collaborations with other Schools, and in particular, discussions with other School Presidents of examples of best practice in their own respective Schools, to offer to the School of English as suggestions and solutions for various matters – but I’ve also particularly enjoyed just spending time with the other School and Faculty Presidents each week, even if we’re all scattered across the globe. Part of my role in the Education Committee, has been to produce a weekly report summarising the actions taken as School President, not dissimilar to the brief-summaries I have provided to students in my weekly emails.

4.5 School Presidents Forum

At intervals throughout the semester, Education Committee meetings are replaced by meetings of the School Presidents Forum, which includes all members of the Education Committee, joined with the Proctor and the Deans, to discuss topics raised during Education Committee that require input from senior figures of the University. Again, lots of these meetings were primarily focused on the changing circumstances in education as a result of the pandemic, and one of the most significant actions taken in my role (introduced in a School Presidents Forum) was to challenge an almost two-decade long extension policy in the School of English dissertation module, though this undoubtedly could not have been achieved without the Director of Education, Amy.

4.6 Equality and Diversity Committee

Another committee I sit on is the Equality and Diversity Committee in the School of English. In the Martinmas Semester, we were primarily tasked with identifying potential reasons for the large gender imbalance among the students of the School of English, and so we put together a focus group of male students to gain some insight into the reasons for their choosing of the study of English.

4.7 Learning and Teaching Committee

The Learning and Teaching Committee of the School of English also met this semester, and have discussed the School's approach to online examinations, the feedback given and potential lessons to be learned from the 2020 National Student Survey, the School's approach to dual-delivery teaching, the introduction of some new Honours modules, and finally, the potential redesign of the School's sub-honours modules. Overall, the Learning

and Teaching Committee matters have been incredibly exciting, especially with regards to looking forwards into how the School will change in the coming years.

4.8 Staff Student Consultative Committee

In my role as School President, I chair the Staff Student Consultative Committee, which invites the Head of School, Director of Teaching, an Office Representative from the School, the Welfare Officer, the Equality and Diversity co-chairs, the Exams Officer, and all of the elected Class Representatives to discuss matters arising from their roles, as well as feedback collected throughout the weeks preceding the meeting. During the Martinmas Semester, we had one SSCC Meeting, which I hope during the Candlemas Semester to increase to two. The meeting was very successful, getting through a packed agenda within the hour allotted. The Director of Teaching introduced the committee to the upcoming University Led Review of Learning and Teaching, and told us what to expect and prepare for; and the Class Representatives offered feedback regarding Panopto organisation, the transition to in-person teaching, the quality of dual-delivery learning, the provision of study spaces and access to materials; and finally there was a discussion around increasing staff participation in School social events, which subsequently led to the regular occurrence of Desert Island Books, the reintroduction of Frankenreads at Halloween, and an increased sense of community throughout the semester. As mentioned, I hope to have twice the number of SSCC meetings during the Candlemas Semester to have further, more-frequently communication between the Students and the Staff.

4.9 School Council

The School Council invites members of staff from the School to discuss matters such as Admissions, Equality and Diversity, Teaching, Postgraduate Matters, and Health and Safety. Discussions included a review of the currently vacant Berry Chair position, given Alexander Berry's (the chair's namesake) problematic behaviour; issues with teaching spaces and their suitability to safe working environments during the pandemic; a review of the sub-honours modules' structure and content (and the creation of a working group to explore this further).

4.10 School Presidents Advisory Group

The School Presidents Advisory Group for careers aims as a committee to create a better working relationship between the Careers Centre and the School Presidents, and assist the Careers Centre in better providing the support students need, and have discussed the creation and provision of a 'set menu' for careers events, the design and functionality of the Careers Centre website, and the overall connection between School Presidents and their Careers Centre counterparts.

4.11 School's Wellbeing Advisory Group

The School's Wellbeing Advisory Group aims to address wellbeing concerns across the university, and has discussed the provision of Lecture capture post-COVID, various matters of accessibility, increasing the amount of mental health support provided to

students in this demanding circumstance, the tone of academic alerts, and the introduction of a university-wide policy on the provision of extensions to assessments.

4.12 University Led Review of Learning and Teaching

The School was due for its six-yearly review of Learning and Teaching by the University. For this review, I wrote a 3600-word reflective report, identifying elements of success and failure across all aspects of the School of English's Learning and Teaching, which was submitted to a panel in advance of the review day. I also recruited students from the school across several different demographics to take part in the review day and offer their experiences of learning and teaching to the panel. Overall, the review day was a success, and the panel were impressed by the School's quality of learning and teaching, and I hope to use the last semester of my presidency to resolve the areas of improvement identified by the review panel, particularly the need to improve the working relationship between- and the effectiveness of- the School and its student representatives.

From Lupins – Seamus Heaney

5. Careers Events – ‘...where small buds shoot and flourish in the hush.’

5.1 Humanities Internship Fair

In collaboration with the School Presidents of History, Art History, and Classics, we each invited speakers to come and do a talk on their internship experiences and answer any

questions from students at a joint 'Humanities Internship Fair' which took place over the course of a week. Each School invited great speakers to share their experiences with internships each day, covering the common themes of 'Archaeology and Field Work', 'Archives', 'Museums', 'Academia', and 'Public Policy'. The School of English invited Sophie Dickson who completed a virtual internship with the Scottish Council on Archives and Alice Gibson who completed an Undergraduate Research Assistantship focused on introducing Older Scots texts into the SQA curriculum.

From Glanmore Sonnets: v – Seamus Heaney

7. Looking ahead: Semester 2 – *'...a wind freshened and the anchor weighed'*

7.1 Aims

In the upcoming Candlemas Semester, I hope to continue my work in representing the students of the School of English as best I can, and leave behind me meaningful changes to the School of English that will shore-up the foundations of a positive and engaging place to learn, and hand over a role with a powerful and effective voice to whoever ends up my successor.

7.2 Thank you

I've said this before, but this job has been exhausting, difficult, and I'm sure I've come out of it with far more grey hairs than I went into it almost two years ago... but that doesn't change the fact that I've loved every second of being School President, and that, to those

who elected me, those I've worked with over the years, I cannot offer enough gratitude.

I care just as deeply about making the student voice heard and about making the School of English a better place, as I did on day one of the job, and I'll care about it long after I've left it too. Though it's been a challenging time, with industrial actions, Brexit, a global pandemic, I hope I've left something positive behind me that lasts, and that I've done right by the staff and students.

The last thing I'll say here is a very heartfelt, *thank you, for everything.*

From In the Attic – Seamus Heaney

