

Semester 1, 2020-21, Report – School of History President

*Geraint Morgan*

*This report covers the period from me taking on the role at the end of May 2020 to the End of January 2021*

Taking on the role at the start of the summer break, one of my prime priorities was making sure that the momentum towards curriculum de-colonisation and diversification was sustained beyond the immediate reaction to global protests. Whilst the school had been approaching ways of undertaking curriculum review, my involvement ensured that this went beyond the broad brush approach asked for by *College Gate*, but looked more deeply at reading lists and involved students in the process. Involving students has been a really important mechanism in ensuring that the department doesn't hide its light under a bushel, which is often its tendency.

At the end of the summer and at the start of the semester, I attended the trainings organised by the Union for School presidents. This was helpful in understanding what was possible in the reality of a university during a pandemic and helped enable me to make links with other School Presidents.

During Freshers week I attended the academic fayre held on *HopIn*, which gave me a fantastic opportunity to meet incoming freshers, and to help make them feel welcome in the School. However, like all new online formats it was an interesting experience getting used to the technology!

Another new technology which I had to get my hand around at the start of the semester was the elections portal. This proved to be a slight palaver, along with the process of trying to encourage candidates to run for various positions. However, I was able to get a fantastic group of really helpful class reps out of the process. Being able to work with a broader group of students has been really important over the last few months, as the student experience has become increasingly fractured and diverse.

My weekly email circulars with students have also been a really helpful way of maintaining links between students and the school. I have collated the seminar programs for the diverse research seminars which are open to students (but often have poor attendance), and provide them in the weekly email to encourage students to attend those sessions on topics which they find interesting. During these difficult times this has provided a useful way of helping students feel more involved with the life of the school, especially when attendance is not limited by the size of a seminar room!

Additionally, weekly office hours have proved to be a useful mechanism of allowing students to reach out to me. Whilst for most weeks they just force me to stay focused on my computer for an hour(!), where students have used it as a way of contacting me, it has proved to be a really useful way to have a conversation with a student, which I find useful in understanding what a student's concern is in more detail. Additionally, it is nice to know that someone reads my weekly emails!

Events of all sorts this year have been increasingly difficult in light of changing restrictions and making judgements of what is responsible to do. Whilst the Can-do tents do provide a useful space, discussing the option of using them with my class reps, the general feeling was that the activities which worked effectively whilst maintaining social distancing were not of sufficient quality to warrant the extra work of accessing an in person events, and the significantly higher COVID-19 risk which that brought.

I have been lucky to have been blessed with an enthusiastic and interested careers class rep, who was fantastic in taking the lead with organising our careers webinar series in semester 1 (in collaboration with Classics, English and Art History) focused on internships. In the coming semester we are organising another series of lunchtime webinars, this time hearing about graduate journeys from Alumni. This format has been something forced on us by the pandemic, as it is no longer possible to hold our usual careers fayre days with multiple sessions ongoing. However, by hosting these events online, it enables them to be recorded, so people can watch back if they are unable to attend, and it enables a wider group of alumni who normally wouldn't be able to attend to contribute from not only this country, but around the world.

However, my main interest as school president has been representation. The SSCC which was held was really productive. I continued Madeline's innovation of splitting the meeting (PG&Hons vs. SubHons), which also helped online, and also assigned specific time frames to each class rep presenting issues, and for discussion. This helped avoid the build-up of animosity which often comes at these meetings, though I feel that a lot of this was eased by the online environment in which these meetings were held. Either way, the more productive atmosphere massively improved the flow of information in both directions.

The other major committees which I sit on are the monthly Teaching Committee and Educom. These are really important opportunities to influence decision making within the school. Additionally, me and my DOT have weekly/biweekly meetings to maintain contact and inform each other of any up coming issues. These meetings have been really important in information flow, but also in producing a productive and collaborative relationship with the department which ultimately produces better decision making for students.

Looking forward, this semester promises to be a good one. We have the second SSCC coming up, and another series of careers webinars to look forward to. I am really pleased with how the department is doing, and the vast majority of the feedback which I receive is positive. I am really enjoying representing my fellow students as school of history president, and am looking forward to handing over the role in the coming months to someone who is equally as passionate about improving the experience of students in the school of History.