

# **History: Semester One Report**

## **Introduction**

In this report I hope to show you an element of what goes on in the School of History, and what it is I do as History President! Semester one was a busy one, and semester two looks to be just as full-on, but that what makes History such a great school - there's always something going on!

I have really enjoyed the work I have done this past semester, and working with such a variety of great people. I look forward to what semester two brings!

## **Training:**

### **School Presidents Training**

At the end of last year, and again at the beginning of semester one, I attended a School President Training session. All of the School Presidents discussed goals for the year and bounced potential crossover ideas off each other. We also spoke to the director of Nightline to learn how to act in a situation of a student struggling. Training was provided on how to run meetings, such as the SSCC feedback meeting each semester.

### **SUMAC/Mentoring Scheme**

I received training before the academic year began through CAPOD on how to use the SUMAC online system to facilitate a mentoring scheme for undergraduates. This was very useful as it allowed me to continue the mentoring scheme that Megan set up two years ago, and expand it through an easy to use system that could track multiple partnerships.

The blurb for the scheme on the front page of the handbook was as follows:

“Transitioning into university life can be a challenging process. The buddy scheme is an informal system seeking to ease the transition by matching new students with experienced students to form peer mentoring relationships where students can gain confidence and benefit from the sharing of insider knowledge. This is also intended to create links across years and thereby enhance the community of students studying history. The scheme is a voluntary system which is flexible, confidential and fits around your availability and preferences. It is designed and run with the support of the Centre for Academic, Professional and Organisational Development (CAPOD).

The scheme helps new students to get the information they need to find their way around; and to encourage integration and engagement with their new community by meeting and learning from students in later years. A buddy mentor is a volunteer student from History who is available to their mentee(s) to provide support during the first stages of the degree. The role is designed to develop confidence and offer encouragement, as well as practical help and advice, giving new students a point of contact, the opportunity to have someone to attend events with, and perhaps to answer questions ranging from 'who do I talk to about my

module?' to 'how can I get involved in activities outside the course?'. The mentor / mentee relationship is one built in a series of discussions in order to aid the transition of new students to life studying History at St Andrews and to help new students gain a sense of belonging. The scheme lasts the whole academic year (though of course the relationship between mentor / mentee may last longer if you want it to, and we hope it does). The scheme is not about academic support, and students should seek guidance on academic issues from their Module Convenor, the university's Advice and Support Centre (ASC) or from CAPOD. Mentors are not expected to take the place of professional staff."

Over the summer I set up an online form that budding mentors or mentees could fill in to stream them into different categories. The system would then allow me to take mentees and find suitable mentors for them - SUMAC would calculate how similar the mentee was to the mentors on offer and suggest a 100% match. These matches were based on gender, if the mentees or mentors had a preference, and the different strands of history available at St Andrews. This meant that someone studying modern history and Scottish history who wanted a female partner could be paired with someone of similar subjects and who was female. I reached out to registry to send this information and form out to the incoming first years, along with the handbook I created to provide everything they needed to know about the scheme.

I posted on the History facebook page, which I am the admin for, and sent out a school-wide email asking honours students to sign up to be mentors. Although progress was slow at first, with many mentees signing up with an unequal ratio of mentors, a second call for mentors gathered a lot of interest and soon pairs were being matched up. SUMAC allowed me to create provisional partnerships which the mentee would then accept, and both people in the pair would receive each others emails.

59 partnerships were successfully created for undergraduates.

I was approached by a few postgraduate students during freshers week requesting a similar scheme for postgraduates, with second year or above PhD students mentoring first year PhD and Masters students. I thought this was a great idea and sent out a request through email for mentors and mentees from the postgraduates.

7 partnerships were successfully created for postgraduates.

A review survey was sent out to all participants, which will be analysed and discussed in semester two in order to work out any flaws in the system and perfect it for next academic year.

## **Events:**

### **Freshers Week Events**

Freshers week was very busy in the department of History, with lots of different events available to help both incoming undergraduates and postgraduates, and returning students, meet and get to know each other. Although there were various talks and introductory events

that I was not involved with, particularly those run by the mature students rep, there were many I was too!

### *Welcome to the School of History Talk*

Aimed at Freshers, this was their chance to learn more about the school of history in a talk from the director of teaching and the module chairs. In the Buchanan Lecture Theatre between 11am and 12pm, this event was designed to introduce the freshers to the important information about history here in St Andrews, in a formal manner. After the staff had all given a broad introduction to their modules and the school, I gave a short talk welcoming the first years and letting them know about other freshers events and the mentoring scheme again. Those who came found the talk really informative and helpful, and it allowed them to put faces to names and emails!

### *History Department Staff and Students Afternoon Tea!*

I upheld the tradition of the annual department afternoon tea and organised it between 1 and 3pm in St John's Garden. Whilst staff and students mingled, homebakes and tea/coffee were provided, and this gave everyone a perfect opportunity to meet fellow historians, makes friends, ask questions to students and staff, and meet academic family! I gave a short speech outlining my plans for the year, and made sure I got around to everyone there to answer questions and make sure everyone had the history president email to get in touch! This event is always popular and was a great, busy afternoon.

### *History Society Garden Party and Pub Crawl*

In St John's Garden/The Undercroft between 1pm and 4pm was the History Society's garden party. I had no part in organising this, but helped provide advertisement and included it in the guide for freshers for the week. I attended and spoke to lots of fellow historians, and it was a really popular afternoon, with a chance at discounted membership of the History Society.

The annual history society pub crawl was also included in the guide for first years, and was a fun, historical evening for everyone who attended.

### *Introductory Talks*

I attended the first lectures for modern and medieval history, in order to introduce myself to any first years I hadn't come across in freshers week.

### **Internship Event**

During first semester, I organised an internship event for students. This was to give students insight into how their cohort find internships, and their experience of them. I sent out an email asking for anyone who had completed an internship to get in touch, and there were plenty of volunteers.

7 speakers talked about their internship experiences - with everything from The UN to archival work in a museum. Also speaking was Shona from the Careers Centre, the link for

the school, who gave a broad overview of how the centre can help with internships. Students were given the chance to ask questions.

Free pizza was provided and attendance was fairly good, with everyone who attended finding it very helpful.

## **Emails**

I have tried to keep school-wide emailing to a minimum, in order to avoid overwhelming everyone with information! I send out an email weekly, to communicate events coming up, and I always finish my emails with a 'too long didn't read' summary for those who want to quickly find out what is happening.

I have also continued to post and maintain the History Facebook page, established by Jack a few years ago.

Although I am aware that some will have email alerts turned off for the history president account, I have found that there is a lot of engagement with the emails - with students emailing to ask questions or pass on feedback.

I have also been advertising the Academic Skills Workshops, both the workshops for honours and those schoolwide, heavily through email and facebook this semester. Feedback from Kevin from registry suggested that this was strongly helping boost attendance for the schoolwide workshops, and this will continue next semester. The schoolwide workshops have been more popular this year, potentially due to the introduction of a 'drop-in' system, but feedback will be gathered next semester on why the honours workshops are less well attended.

## **Class Reps Elections**

Early in September, at an Education Committee meeting, School Presidents were given a class rep election timeline, beginning the election process earlier than usual.

I ran the history portal, approving candidates, and sent out various emails calling for nominations. After the week of nominating was up, the voting process went on for two days. Although the nominations were slow to trickle in, we managed to get at least one candidate for every position, including having over 10 candidates for both postgraduate positions - an unheard of statistic that was a great indicator of the postgraduates getting involved! Some positions only held one candidate, but the candidates chosen were all very enthusiastic and raring to get going! The results were as follows:

PGR Rep: Mrs Hailey Ogle

PGT Rep: Miss Sophia Sophia Silverman

William & Mary History Rep: Mr Luke Henry Campopiano

Medieval History First Year Rep: Miss Niamh Logie

Medieval History Second Year Rep: Mr Archibald Clive Nelson Batra

Medieval History Honours Rep: Mr Glenn Adam Mills

Modern History First Year Rep: Mr Joshua John Mendelson

Modern History Second Year Rep: Rachael M. Herz

Modern History Honours Rep: Miss Hannah Bridget Burnett

Some of the newly elected class reps took on additional positions, with Hailey taking on the role of Library representative, Sophia and Rachael taking on social representative positions, and Hannah becoming the new careers and employability representative. We have had various meetings over the semester to gather and discuss feedback from the various cohorts, and all of the representatives have been involved in assisting with events. The reps have all worked really hard this semester to gather feedback for the SSCC (see section below) and I'm positive the hard work and enthusiasm will continue next semester!

### **Meetings:**

#### **Education Committee Meetings**

The Education Committee meets every week with School Presidents, Zach the Director of Education, and the Postgraduate Convenor to discuss educational issues in the university. This also allows the School Presidents to report on what they have done throughout the week and bounce ideas off of each other.

This semester we have focused on the postgraduate experience, lecture capture, careers events and links, CAPOD feedback course, student surveys (MEQs, NSS, TEL), among various department specific topics.

#### **Teaching Committee Meetings**

As student president it is one of my duties to represent history students at the history teaching committee meetings, with the director of teaching, department chairs, and various other staff representatives. These meetings occur every few weeks and are invaluable in learning what is currently going on within the school. I am given the opportunity to comment on these subjects and give a student perspective.

This semester the main topic for consideration was the feedback sheet for essays and coursework. We altered this within the meeting, working on replacing the tick boxes with further space for specific comments and pointers.

We also discussed feedback from masters students on various issues, including digitalisation of resources.

#### **Director of Teaching Meetings**

Myself and the history director of teaching, Dr McGladdery, have met regularly throughout the semester to keep each other up to date with what we're doing in the school. This has led to many event ideas, as well as the tweaking of the history school website. We are currently discussing the potential for internships and research assistantships within the school.

#### **School Presidents Forum**

The forum meets twice per semester with School Presidents, the Proctor, and the Deans. This allows us to discuss university-wide issues. These meetings are chaired by Zach, Director of Education.

This semester we have discussed mentoring, the postgraduate experience, lecture capture, the IGrad student satisfaction survey, careers links, the learning and space review, and other surveys the university participates in.

The topic of careers links also came up in the **Employability Forum**, where the careers centre met with school presidents and employability representatives to discuss careers events.

### **Proctor's Meeting on Teaching Excellence Framework Survey**

Myself, along with School Presidents and Directors of Teaching from Classics, Art History and Management, attended a meeting and presentation with the Proctor. This was to discuss the Teaching Excellence Framework Survey and the trial survey on teaching time. This is to give an indicator of how many teaching hours the schools of History and Management provide, and how these are received by students - the schools chosen being at random. This survey was released at the end of the semester, and myself, my class representatives, and the Proctor advertised it throughout the school.

### **SSCC Meeting**

Throughout the semester, myself and my class representatives gathered feedback from modules in order to pass this on to the relevant module coordinators and chairs at the SSCC meeting at the end of the semester. I coordinated my class representatives in gathering this feedback, signed off on all surveys, and put together an invitation and agenda for all attending. I chaired this meeting and it was a great success, with a lot of really helpful feedback from the class representatives being discussed within the group of students and staff. Staff and students provided ideas for change, and action points were made for the next steps for next semester. Class representatives passed on these results to their cohorts, and I circulated the minutes I took in the meeting to everyone relevant.

The class representatives worked really hard for this meeting, and it was reported as one member of staff who was in attendance as 'the most successful SSCC he'd attended yet'.

### **Staff/Student Lunches**

Something I was very keen to establish in the school was a staff/student lunch series, where lecturers and students would meet for some food in an informal setting to get to know each other better and ask questions (about the staff member's period of study and just in general).

After being given the go ahead from the Director of Teaching, I successfully ran one of these lunches near the end of semester with Dr McGladdery in the Undercroft. Although attendance was not great, potentially due to the deadline week it was during, those in attendance had a nice time and it was a fun hour spent with Dr McGladdery.

The facebook event for this lunch:

[https://www.facebook.com/events/131873114197802/?active\\_tab=about](https://www.facebook.com/events/131873114197802/?active_tab=about)

Next semester, I intend to run this event as a fortnightly or monthly regular fixture. This should be in partnership with the History Society, with a small entry fee (discount for members) and food provided. There will hopefully be a selection of different staff with different historical interest, and a number of faculty members have already expressed interest in being involved.

### **Study Spaces**

During the revision period, I approached both the Medieval and Modern secretaries in order to sort out study spaces for history students. Dorothy in Medieval emailed me daily to tell me which rooms were available and I passed this information on through email and facebook. The rooms were used and very helpful for students when the library got a bit full and stressful! Although no modern study spaces were established this semester, this will definitely be in place for exams next term, in addition to the continuation of the medieval spaces.

### **Looking Forward**

I have really enjoyed this semester as president, and am looking forward to getting stuck back in as the new term begins. Although the role is quite full-on and a lot of work, it's been fun and very interesting so far. I hope this report has given you an indication of most of what i've been up to!

Things to look out for next semester are: a dissertation event, a postgraduate panel, internship information (and potential school specific assistantships), more staff/student lunches, dissertation workshops, an alumni careers event, a Teach First assessment centre mock-up, and, my baby, the Classics and History department Ides Ball (which is already in the works for March!).

Thank you for all your enthusiasm and support this semester, and please carry on with all your feedback, questions, and suggestions through email this coming term!