Advisory Committee for International Students (ACIS)  
No. 03/2015-2016 – 13:00  
COVE 02.10

**Present**

B. Lemmelijn (Chair), I. Wouters, V. Androsova, V. Blanco, P. Chalupnicek, C. Dawson, Y. Q. Geng, J. Kuriakose, L. Pedregosa, M. Richards, L. Shahan, S. Tautz

**Excused**

M. O. R. Okwara

**Minutes**

1 **Approval of minutes from ACIS meeting on November 17, 2015**

Minutes were approved by the present members of ACIS.

I. Wouters informed ACIS members that the list of possible proofreaders was made available on Toledo. The plan is to update the list every year. All other arrangements are left to the individual students and it was made clear in the announcement that the Faculty bears no responsibility with regard to the quality of the service.

As a way to improve integration of new incoming international students, B. Lemmelijn asked ACIS members to encourage current students from all regions to participate in the Buddy System. She also suggested that the members of ACIS could serve as the first contact point for new students from their respective region. Members of ACIS agreed with this proposal.

**Follow-up:** B. Lemmelijn will present the approved minutes to the Faculty Board.

2 **Change in the composition of ACIS: a new representative for Anglophone America**

B. Lemmelijn informed ACIS members that M.-C. O’Reilly-Gindhart finished her studies and that Lydia Shahan will serve as the new representative of Anglophone America. She and the ACIS members welcomed L. Shahan to ACIS.

3 **Feedback on the January exam session**

B. Lemmelijn asked ACIS members if there were any problems to report with regard to the January examination session.

C. Dawson said he received complaints about the time schedule of the new “bloc” system, especially because there is a large time gap between the end of lectures in the first part of the semester and the exam period in January. Some courses had a special class before the exam to allow students to
rehearse before the exam, which was helpful, but it was not a rule. B. Lemmelijn responded that this issue was also discussed at the Faculty’s committee for education (POC) and that the POC is looking for solutions.

S. Tautz mentioned another aspect of the new “bloc” system that was not popular among some of the students: the seminars are squeezed into six weeks, which makes the reading assignments and other work load overwhelming. L. Shahan added that many students leave their writing assignments till the end of the course, because they have no time to do it during the course, which means that the work for the courses from the first part of the semester interferes with the work for the courses in the next “bloc” and it somewhat defeats the purpose of the new system. There is also an imbalance between the amount of work in different parts of the semester for some students: some have many classes squeezed in one part and are free in another. S. Tautz agreed and said that the current system is a combination of the old system and a pure “bloc” system and it seems to have the disadvantages of both. It was suggested that the Faculty should make the ‘bloc’ system more consistent and avoid the ‘mixed’ form of both systems.

I. Wouters asked if follow-up was provided for students with written assignments after the course ended. L. Shahan said that in her experience professors did arrange meetings with students between the end of the course and the assignments’ due date to discuss the assignments, but it was not a general arrangement.

S. Tautz also questioned if the new system helps to meet another of its goals, namely the ability of professors to have more time to focus on publications – he said some professors were doubtful. B. Lemmelijn responded that the organization of the semester is now more in the hands of the professors and they have more flexibility in case they would like to leave the Faculty for teaching or research duties abroad during the semester. However, she acknowledged that the pros and cons of the new system are currently under discussion. In particular, the imbalance of the work load for students in different parts of the semester is a big concern.

J. Kuriakose said that oral exams are difficult for many students, especially non-native speakers. He suggested giving students the choice between oral and written exams. V. Blanco added that written exams also provide a written proof of the quality of the students’ responses, while during oral exams such a proof is lacking. She mentioned a case where the professor’s additional questions lead to a lower score for the student. She considered it unfair that some students were asked additional questions and others were not. Written exams are more objective, because everyone is facing the same set of questions. Moreover, oral exams tend to take into account the students’ presentation skills, not only the knowledge, which introduces an additional degree of arbitrariness. She also raised concerns about the wording of some course notes as well as exam questions, which according to her are not politically correct. J. Kuriakose said that transparency is crucial, especially in the case of a re-examination, with no third person at the exam which could act as an independent observer. B. Lemmelijn agreed that transparency is indeed important. However in her experience, professors often ask additional questions in an attempt to help the student with his/her exam. All the issues mentioned are reasons why written exams have currently become more general. However, the tradition of the Faculty is that most exams are oral and there are many students who prefer this kind of examination, because it takes less time than a written exam. C. Dawson responded that indeed many students like the oral form because speaking comes easy to them, but such students have room to show off their presentation skills during seminars. He completely understood the problem, especially for non-native speakers. L. Shahan said that many Americans are not used to oral exams, but they get to appreciate it over time. Still, from her perspective the main disadvantage of the exam system is not its form, but the fact that here the exam is fully based on one exam moment, while in the U.S. universities grades are usually composed of several assignments, not just the final exam itself. B. Lemmelijn responded that the current system allows grades to be composed of several items as well; it is the decision of each professor. She summarized the discussion and said that there are three main areas that need to be clarified for students: possibility of choosing oral or written exam, the transparency of the evaluation criteria and of the exam, and the possible multiple character of items that the final grade consists of.
V. Blanco said that some students complain about the fact that they have to prepare in the same room in which another student is answering questions. It is disturbing and often students come in and leave in different time intervals, which means that some have more time for preparation than others. More regularity should be in place. B. Lemmelijn agreed that the time for preparation is normally scheduled as 20 minutes in all cases and there should be ideally only one student preparing at any time.

V. Androssova asked about the possibility to prepare for an oral exam in advance. P. Chalupnicek said that some professors organize “mock exams” before the exam period in which students can try the oral exam to experience the system. If the professor does not offer such an opportunity, students should ask for it – if there are interested students, it could be organized.

4 Student concerns

P. Chalupnicek received a concern about the availability of study spaces at Agora. Apparently, and especially during the exam period, many places are blocked by books or other personal items of students, but the students themselves are not present. This means that new students that need to study cannot find an empty chair or table where they can work. He asked what would be the best solution in such a situation. It was concluded that it would be best to reach out to the personnel at Agora. They are responsible and should know how to proceed in such cases.

L. Pedregosa asked how the Faculty can help students transit from education to work life, especially in terms of connections, networks and professional skills. B. Lemmelijn said there are different solutions. One is the Alumni Association, which can provide connections in different parts of the world. There are conferences, which can connect students to people in his/her field. With regard to acquiring skills such as how to present and how to teach, there are also possibilities at the level of the Research Unit and one’s promoter, who can also help in this respect. P. Chalupnicek said that often the information about events such as conferences is not sufficiently available – people in general do not share information about conferences or job openings besides their narrow network. The infrastructure is available (such as the Faculty web, which has a special section about conferences or jobs), but very few people let others know when something is happening. B. Lemmelijn agreed that Faculty members could be reminded, that the possibility to share such information exists.

5 Varia

I. Wouters asked ACIS members to distribute the information about volunteering during the Thomas Feast, as there is a lack of international students participating. V. Blanco said the information was given to students via SAINTS, but there was zero response. The list of available shifts is available at https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1IFJDVMoq3SPalhLAIO89HPrvk9fADWvWwq3YAWjiuo/.

I. Wouters also received information about a seminar on time management for students organized by KU Leuven. She will post information about it on Toledo. P. Chalupnicek will share the information with students on Facebook.

ACIS members are asked to communicate any student concerns to B. Lemmelijn and P. Chalupnicek before the next meeting on May 3, 2016, so that these can be added to the agenda.

Pavel Chalupnicek Bénédicte Lemmelijn
ACIS Secretary ACIS Chair