Distributed freely to all individuals and PRS departments in UK Higher Education and to those registered in our subject areas; register at:

http://www.prs-ltsn.ac.uk/registration/index.html

The PRS-LTSN Journal
Volume 2, Number 1, Summer 2002

Welcome to the third issue of the journal for the Philosophical and Religious Studies Subject Centre of the Learning and Teaching Support Network.

Contents

Project reporting: editorial

This is the third issue of the *PRS-LTSN Journal*. We are now publishing the output from the projects and mini-projects we have been funding over the last twelve months. This means that we are making available some of the best subject-specific learning and teaching scholarship and practical teaching advice in the PRS disciplines in the UK.

Each of the project reports printed below tackles a different important issue that lecturers and tutors are currently confronting. Each has its origins in a different subject area, but offers real advice and scholarly consideration of matters that are of concern to all.

Jarvis and Cain's excellent and detailed survey of research on the diversification of forms of assessment in essay writing and examinations is nominally addressed to those teaching history of science, but has obvious and timely application to all the disciplines supported by the *PRS-LTSN*. This report is only the first part of Jarvis and Cain's research; once published, the whole series will form a comprehensive account of the means by which changes in modes of assessment can dramatically improve the student learning experience. I heartily recommend this project report as a well-researched and important resource that all should keep close to hand when examining departmental assessment practices.

Crosby, Pattison and Skilton address a perennial problem for our disciplines, how to properly integrate questioning into topics where students have strongly held beliefs. Again, the application may be extended; although their research and experiences have a locus in theology and religious studies, their insights are also germane in areas of philosophy that touch on fundamental beliefs and real life ethical situations. The survey of student attitudes and the exercises that the authors used are printed here to help staff explore students' beliefs and attitudes. This should give an informed picture of those aspects of the programmes, units or courses that students find most challenging or even invasive. I am sure that the exercises can be adapted for other TRS courses and for PRS generally.

Hawley introduces us to a peer-led group work practice in philosophy that encourages reading and discussion amongst students. Its application to all PRS subjects—that rely so much on close textual work and discursive examination of concepts and abstract ideas— is immediate and clear. It is an excellent model for the development of future programmes where pressures to increase student numbers will force a re-examination of the traditional teaching methods. It is important that the discursive "face-to-face" nature of our disciplines isn't lost in the struggle to deliver to greater numbers with relatively reduced resources.

Finally, Sellars' overview of current trends in the scholarship of philosophy learning and teaching provides an excellent introduction to a number of themes for debate in which I hope you will participate.

I am particularly pleased to publish these three reports and Sellars' article, as they demonstrate how the PRS-LTSN (and the LTSN as a whole) has moved forward in generating fresh subject-specific debate and scholarship in a relatively short period of time. The funding councils, working to their given government targets, have set objectives that we will find hard to meet if we wish to retain the quality of the education we deliver to students. However, the agenda may not be impossible to address if we attempt to find what is distinctive and worth preserving in the best of our current practices. There may be real and hard questions to be asked about just *what* learning in philosophy, theology and so on, is supposed to be. But unless there is some scholarly basis for these discussions, all that is valuable will be lost before we have even considered what this learning is. We all know the importance of clear evidence and analysis in our research for carrying forward arguments and discussion. Without similar evidence and analysis of learning, teaching and assessment, we have no position from which to argue a case for alternative targets and objectives. Falling back on traditions devised for a previous period in higher education will certainly not help us at this time.

David J Mossley, Editor

The LTSN and the PRS-LTSN

LTSN

The Learning and Teaching Support Network is a network of 24 subject centres based in higher education institutions throughout the UK. It is funded by the four HE funding bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It aims to promote high quality learning and teaching through development and transfer of successful practice in all subject disciplines.

Activities

The LTSN's core activities are:

- setting up, supporting and developing learning and teaching networks;

- promoting and sharing successful practice in learning, teaching and assessment through workshops, conferences, meetings and the interoperability of resources and databases of resources;

- facilitating the transfer of knowledge between users, experts, developers and innovators.

The LTSN Generic Centre

There are also learning and teaching issues and practices common to all subjects that are disseminated and promoted by the LTSN Generic Centre, located in York. The Generic Centre is becoming a major national source of information and expertise on learning and teaching practices. It assists the subject centres, and HE providers generally, to make the best use of a wide range of approaches to learning and teaching, drawing on the expertise already present in HE.

The PRS-LTSN

The Philosophical and Religious Studies Subject Centre is based at the University of Leeds and at a partner site at the University of Wales, Lampeter and covers the disciplines of Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, History of Science (including the History of Medicine and Technology), Theology, and Religious Studies. The name 'Philosophical and Religious Studies' is merely an abbreviation for these subject areas.

General Activities

The mission of the PRS-LTSN is to enhance teaching quality and improve the student learning experience for all in the context of a changing educational environment. More specifically, we aim:

- to be the accepted source of information and advice to PRS subject communities on subject-specific and relevant generic educational issues;

- to promote the discovery, development and brokerage of good and innovative practice in learning, teaching and assessment;

- to develop and maintain a national and international profile;

> For up-to-date information on all developments at the PRS-LTSN:
> **http://www.prs-ltsn.ac.uk**
>
> Welsh access:
> **http://www.rhcda-aac.ac.uk**

- to identify and disseminate current and future national policy objectives in learning and teaching and to assist departmental implementation where appropriate.

We provide the following services and resources:

- individual consultations;
- departmental visits;
- grants and funding for learning and teaching projects (see pp. 7-13);
- a comprehensive website of electronic resources and reviews;
- the *PRS-LTSN Journal*
- national and regional workshops and conferences.

Projects and Funding

Currently the PRS-LTSN can award grants for projects that will help to promote its aims, and from time to time, it receives additional funding for projects that are more ambitious. Since the four UK higher education funding councils fund the PRS-LTSN, grants are restricted to employees of UK institutions that are funded by the councils. However, in certain circumstances it may be possible to include people with a close connection to such institutions—for example, retired members of staff, or postgraduate students.

Having funded a number subject based projects, for the time being we shall be paying particular attention to project proposals that are subject-specific to the PRS disciplines and that address the key issues of:

- **widening participation in HE**
- **equality of access to HE**
- **student retention and completion**
- **key skills and employability**

Applications for funding will normally be for mini-projects of up to a set maximum of £3000.

Applications for funding in these areas should be received by **2nd December 2002**. Please contact the centre for further details on how to apply.

Other contributions

Additionally we rely on colleagues' willingness to contribute voluntarily. We would therefore encourage anyone who has an active interest in teaching to send us materials for publication on our website or in this journal. We would be very pleased to receive:

- responses to documents we have already published;
- case studies of innovative practice;
- descriptions of methods which work particularly well;
- discussion papers outlining problems which are likely to be shared by others, reviews of textbooks or other teaching materials;

- anything which will be of interest and of help to people teaching in the same subject area elsewhere in the UK.

Projects from Tranche One and Tranche Two Funding

We have provided funding for the following projects:

- **Diversifying Assessment: Survey and Synthesis of Advise from Research**—Department of Science and Technology Studies, UCL[1]
- **Report on a Project for the Internet Assisted Teaching and Learning of Theoretical Modules**—Centre for Philosophy, University of Manchester
- **A Report on the use of the www in TRS Teaching within a School of Humanities**—School of Humanities, Greenwich University
- **Independent Learning**—Department of Logic and Metaphysics, University of St Andrews[2]
- **Institute of Feminist Theory and Research**—Department of Philosophy, University of Liverpool
- **Evaluating Learning Resources in Teaching Formal Philosophical Methods**—Department of Philosophy, University of Glasgow
- **A Report on the Wolverhampton On-Line Framework as a Learning Tool**—School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Wolverhampton
- **Partnership in Truth: The Theory and Practice of Collaborative Learning within Philosophical Discussion**—Institute for Environment, Philosophy and Public Policy, Lancaster University
- **The Evaluation of Participative Learning and the Development of Critical Thinking in Buddhist Studies**—Religious and Theological Studies, Cardiff University/Study of Religions, SOAS
- **Critical Thinking and the Experience of International Students on Taught Masters Programmes**—Cambridge Theological Foundation, Anglia Polytechnic University
- **The Culture of RS Departments and Problems of Group Learning**—Department of Theology, University of Exeter

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[1] The first part of the reporting of this project is available on pp. 24-57.
[2] The full report is available on pp. 90-109.

- **An Analysis of the Scientific Conceptual Frameworks Utilised by Undergraduate Theology Students when Studying Science and Religion**—School of Education, University of Birmingham
- **Using Religious and Theological Studies**—Religious and Theological Studies, Cardiff University.
- **Developing Student Response to Written Feedback in a large group context**—Religious and Theological Studies, Cardiff University.
- **Supporting Critical Questioning in Religious and Theological Studies**—Religious and Theological Studies, Cardiff University.[3]
- **Introductory Logic for Philosophy Students: Learning Resources, Teaching Methods, and Rationale**—Centre for Philosophy, University of Manchester
- **A Case Study in the Teaching of the History of Philosophy using Electronic Texts**—Department of Philosophy, University of Liverpool
- **Theory and Application: Teaching Ethics in a Religious Studies Department**—School of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Gloucestershire
- **Key Skills in Religious Studies**—School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Wolverhampton
- **An Evaluation of Interactivity in Traditional and Non-traditional Philosophy Courses**—Department of Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University
- **Identifying Good Practice in the Delivery of Taught Programmes in Practical and Applied Theology**—Department of Theology, University of Birmingham/Religious and Theological Studies, Cardiff University
- **Perceptions of Relevance and Conceptual Challenges of the Psychology of Religion among Theological Students**—Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford
- **Taking Philosophical Dialogue On-Line**—Department of Continuing Education, University of Oxford
- **Project Archelogos Report**—Department of Philosophy, University of Edinburgh

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[3] The full report is available on pp. 58-89.

- **Evaluation of the VLE System used in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Edinburgh**—Faculty of Divinity, University of Edinburgh
- **The Relationship between Faith Commitment and Academic Studying the Experience of Undergraduate Students at the University of Oxford**—Institute for the Advancement of University Learning/Faculty of Theology, University of Oxford

Reports and feedback, including events and workshops, will be made advertised and made available on our website in due course. We are pleased to be able to support this range of projects.

Ethics Teaching Highlighted in Contextualised Scenarios (ETHICS)

The PRS-LSTN has been awarded development funding from the LTSN Executive for a collaborative project involving six subject centres, to examine, collate and disseminate best practice in the teaching of subject-specific ethics. The PRS-LTSN is the lead subject centre for this project. The other partner subject centres are:

- Bioscience
- Health Science and Practice
- Law (UK Centre for Legal Education)
- Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine
- Psychology

ETHICS Overview

The requirement to teach ethics is a growing one throughout the higher education sector. HE departments must increasingly make provision for the teaching of ethics in relation to their particular subject area(s). Pressure on departments to meet this requirement comes from a number of sources:

- most benchmarking statements make specific requirements for the teaching of ethics;
- professional associations place a requirement on the inclusion of ethics in curricula;
- the embedding of ethics into HE curricula is being seen as an excellent way of providing students with key transferable skills to meet government employability needs.

Yet while the imperative to teach ethics increases, it seems that little has been done to systematically develop the provision of ethics teaching in HE. This has often resulted in situations where either practitioners with little background in general ethics (or moral theory) are teaching it within their own units, or ethicists—very often based in departments of theology and religious studies or philosophy—are engaged in the service teaching of ethics for a variety of diverse departments within their own institutions. The result is that the teaching of ethics across subject

communities is often, at best, uneven and is not always specific to the particular discipline.

The purpose of this project is to allow us collectively to examine the current provision of professional ethics teaching across a number of cognate subject disciplines. This will not only identify key concerns and problems, but also help to identify evidence of good practice that can be collected. This will be achieved principally through the identification of suitable contextualised scenarios teaching that will be analysed, disseminated, and embedded through an online and interoperable database, hard copy guides, events, and through the establishment of cross- and sub-disciplinary networks.

To supplement this, the subject centres involved in this collaboration will make money, from their recurrent funding, for mini-projects in pedagogical research. This combination of resources will provide departments and individuals with a 'one-stop shop' that can be regarded as the principal service provider in supporting HE practitioners and departments in the learning and teaching of ethics.

Look out for future developments from ETHICS and opportunities to apply for mini-project funding. All publications from ETHICS will be made freely available to the all the subject communities involved, and to the whole of HE.

If you currently teach ethics (moral theory, applied ethics or religious ethics in any form) using case studies of issues or applied examples please contact us and let us know what you do and how you measure the effectiveness of your course, unit or programme.

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Employability

The PRS-LTSN has been given extra funding by the LTSN Generic Centre to survey and analyse current trends in employment for graduates of all the PRS disciplines over the next six months. Analysis of the outcomes of the surveys will lead to development of strategies for improving the employability of graduates in PRS disciplines through enhancements in learning and teaching and making key skills more explicit in current practice. Special attention will be paid to groups of students who are perceived as disadvantaged.

From our initial investigations we believe that successful PRS graduates have a broad-based set of key generic skills that are of high value in many non-vocational careers. The challenge is to build on this insight and to make explicit and enhance the acquisition of these skills. We shall stress throughout that key skills for employability are already deeply embedded in the teaching of PRS disciplines. What is needed is a clearer articulation of these skills (both by academics in writing programme specifications, and by students in applying for jobs), and a more explicit focus on them in teaching and assessment.

All the outcomes will be disseminated through the PRS-LTSN website and journal, and through national and regional conferences and workshops. Please check the website and this journal for developments and future events.

We will be contacting all departments and subject associations as well as careers services in the near future. If you would like any further information on this project, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

Departmental Visits and Contacts

Departmental Visits

We are now in the midst of a programme of departmental visits. If we have not already contacted your department, we shall be in touch with your nominated representative or Head of Department/School shortly. The aim of the visits is to gather information about existing effective practice and to find out what are the most pressing issues for your department and for individual lectures and tutors, so that we can better direct our resources and efforts to serve the PRS community in all learning, teaching and assessment matters.

We are open to invitations at any time. Ask your PRS-LTSN rep. (or HoD) for details.

Contacts

Our list of departmental contacts continues to grow, but there is still a small minority of departments that have not registered a representative. If you would like to be a representative for your department, please contact:

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LS2 9JT
Tel: 0113 343 4184
simon@prs-ltsn.ac.uk

Workshops, Events and Networks

In the last six months or so there have been a number of successful workshops and events either organised directly, or supported by the PRS-LTSN.

Reports of these events are available on the website: **http://www.prs-ltsn.ac.uk**

Forthcoming events

Future events will explore important topics in:

- employability
- widening participation
- key skills
- subject-specific issues

Networks

From all organised events ongoing **networks** of enthusiastic practitioners arise which take the discussion forward. Those taking part are not overburdened in terms of the time they contribute to the network—the level of individual involvement is open. However, all are now benefiting from the ongoing dialogue. The forum is open to all interested parties and everyone is encouraged to join in. **Just email us to ask to join a discussion email list:**

enquiries@prs-ltsn.ac.uk

Since the PRS-LTSN's mission is to encourage the sharing of effective practice, we are keen to build on existing networks of experts and practitioners in the PRS subjects as well as establishing new networks. If you are involved in such a network—for example, as secretary of a learned or scholarly society—and would like to help promote discussion of learning and teaching issues relating to the interests of the network, we would be delighted to hear from you. Small grants may be available for network projects and we always looking for ways to work more closely with such organisations.

Contacts within organisations and networks will be added to our contacts' list for the monthly e-bulletin of events, funding opportunities.

Other LTSN Subject Centres

Art, Design and Communication
University of Brighton
http://www.bton.ac.uk/adc-ltsn

Bioscience
University of Leeds
http://bio.ltsn.ac.uk

Built Environment
Cardiff University
http://cebe.cf.ac.uk

Business Management and Accountancy (BEST)
University of East Anglia
http://www.business.ltsn.ac.uk

Economics
University of Bristol
http://www.economics.ltsn.ac.uk

Education (ESCALATE)
University of Nottingham
http://www.escalate.ac.uk

Engineering
Loughborough University
http://www.ltsneng.ac.uk

English
Royal Holloway, University of London
http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ltsn/english/

Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences
University of Plymouth
http://www.gees.ac.uk

Health Sciences and Practice
King's College London
http://www.health.ltsn.ac.uk

History, Classics and Archaeology
University of Glasgow
http://www.hca.ltsn.ac.uk

Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
Oxford Brookes University
http://www.brookes.ac.uk/ltsn

Information and Computer Sciences
University of Ulster
http://www.ics.ltsn.ac.uk

Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies
University of Southampton
http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk

Law (UK Centre for Legal Education)
University of Warwick
http://www.ukcle.ac.uk

Materials
University of Liverpool
http://www.materials.ac.uk

Maths, Stats and OR Network
University of Birmingham
http://ltsn.mathstore.ac.uk

Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine
University of Newcastle
http://www.ltsn-01.ac.uk

Performing Arts (PALATINE)
Lancaster University
http://www.lancs.ac.uk/palatine

Physical Sciences
University of Hull
http://www.physsci.ltsn.ac.uk

Psychology
University of York
http://www.psychology.ltsn.ac.uk

Sociology, Anthropology and Politics
University of Birmingham
http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk

Social Policy and Social Work (SWAP)
University of Southampton
http://www.swap.ac.uk

The LTSN Generic Centre
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www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/default.asp

LTSN Generic Centre

There are many learning and teaching issues and practices common to all subjects. These are disseminated and promoted by the LTSN Generic Centre. Established in the autumn of 2000, it is a key component of the LTSN programme. It focuses on working with subject centres as well as taking a wider role with key groups of staff such as educational developers, learning technologists and other stakeholders.

In order to produce results quickly, the initial focus was on areas that matched the team's personal knowledge and expertise. Since then, the LTSN Generic Centre has taken a more strategic approach refining its focus to better achieve its aim as set out below.

In partnership with others, the Generic Centre aims to broker information and knowledge to facilitate a more co-ordinated approach to enhancing learning and teaching.

Partnership, broker and co-ordinated are terms that have meaning and relevance for the entire Learning and Teaching Support Network. The Generic Centre team has achieved results by working collaboratively with others. Working with the Subject Centres has helped to maximise the potential of the network. Stakeholders have helped identify priorities within the HE community. HEI senior manager networks along with education and staff development communities have provided access to information, expertise and resources.

Stakeholders
• Association for Learning Technology
• Centre for Recording Achievement
• Economic & Social Research Council
• HE Funding Councils
Higher Education Institutions
• Institute for Learning and Teaching
• Joint Information Systems Committee
• LTSN Subject Centres
• National Co-ordination Team
• National Union of Students
• Quality Assurance Agency
Staff and Educational Developers
• Standing Committee of Principles
• Technologies Centre
• Universities UK

There have been a many different projects, employing different methods that have resulted in a wide range of outputs. A handful of these are outlined below in the form of case studies.

Assessment

The Generic Centre have co-ordinated a long term project in this key area. As the first stage of this project the Generic Centre commissioned a series of resources. Launched in November 2001 at an Assessment Conference, the series provides overviews of important issues and practices in the field of assessment for the higher education community. The four guides and eight briefings were written by experts in the field ensuring that the series is authoritative.

Current Projects
• Assessment
• Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
• Curriculum
• E-learning
• Employability
• Part-time Tutors
• Pedagogical Research
• Peer Observation of Teaching
• Personal Development Planning
• Problem Based Learning
• Subject Benchmarking
• Virtual Learning Environments

This was the first major publication from the Generic Centre, so it was used as a promotional tool and distributed widely. Free copies were sent to every Higher Education Institution in the UK including Vice Chancellors, Pro-vice Chancellors for Learning & Teaching, the main library and also the Head of Educational or Staff development. Electronic versions of the guides and briefs can be downloaded from the Generic Centre website and hard copies of the series are available for purchase.

Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs)

Virtual Learning Environments are by their very nature closed, usually requiring usernames and passwords. The initial challenge, therefore, was to find VLE practitioners and examples of good practice. To this end, a competition was launched in conjunction with the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) in January 2001. Entitled 'e-tutor of the year', the competition provided the opportunity to view and learn from effective practice.

There were a total of 32 entries including four international entries: one from New Zealand, one from the Netherlands and two from the USA. The judges were impressed by the range of approaches to supporting student learning, in particular the ways in which the communication facilities of these environments were being used to develop new forms of tutor supported online learning. The competition will be run again in 2002.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

In response to the Continuing Professional Development needs, the LTSN Generic Centre, in conjunction with the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT), held three national conferences. These events shared and disseminated effective practice and provided networking opportunities.

Subsequently, eight network groups were established to look at specific issues highlighted during the conferences. The groups are for tutors who deliver postgraduate programmes and pathways for new and experienced lecturers, learner support staff, education/staff developers and LTSN Subject Centre staff.

- Conferences
- Workshops
- Mailbases
- Discussion Groups
- Publications
- Institutional Case Studies
- Websites
- Network Groups
- Papers

Personal Development Planning

HE teachers use a variety of strategies to encourage students to reflect upon and evaluate their own learning experiences and plan for their own development. The term Personal Development Planning is being used to describe this process. Universities UK, the Standing Conference of Principles, the Quality Assurance Agency and the LTSN Generic Centre have produced guidelines to promote this as a core educational process.

The LTSN Generic Centre continue to work closely with the Centre for Recording Achievement on this project producing web based information, guidance and resources to help HE communities develop their practice in relation to Personal Development Planning.

Resources from Humbul in Your Web Page: My Humbul Include and News Feeds

Humbul (http://www.humbul.ac.uk/) discovers, evaluates and catalogues online humanities resources as the humanities hub of the **Resource Discovery Network** (RDN, http://www.rdn.ac.uk). Working with valued partners such as the Philosophical and Religious Studies Subject Centre of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (PRS-LTSN), Humbul's primary task is to develop and expand its catalogue of evaluated online resources. But such a resource would be nothing if philosophers, historians and other humanities professionals were not able to put it to use. That is why Humbul is constantly developing and improving methods to facilitate access to its records.

Development at Humbul is driven by two basic principles. First, and most important, is to meet the needs of our users. And since Humbul's users range from information professionals supporting the research community in the UK to humanities students in further and higher education, we know that no single solution will fit everyone's needs.

The second principle driving development is our belief that these resources should not be tied to a single online interface. Why should you *always* need to visit Humbul's website in order to discover the latest resources we have catalogued in philosophy or humanities computing? And why shouldn't you be able to bring Humbul's records within your own website, to share them with your students or colleagues? Recent developments at Humbul aim to meet both these principles head on.

My Humbul

My Humbul is Humbul's personalisation service, for which users may freely register. Registered users have access to **My Humbul Alert** and **My Humbul Include**. Within the My Humbul environment users have the option of saving their searches. If any new record is added to Humbul's catalogue that matches the user's search criteria, an email notification is sent. You can save as many searches as you like. A single notification is sent—weekly—of the new records that match the saved searches. The alert includes the title of the newly catalogued online resource and a link to its *Full Record View* in Humbul. As well as receiving alerts for new records matching a saved search, you may also choose to be notified when any record within one or more of Humbul's subject

areas is added to the public database. Again, you can choose as many subjects as you like. My Humbul Alert helps alleviate the need to return to Humbul's website each time you want to discover whether Humbul has catalogued any new resources in your field.

My Humbul Include goes much further. My Humbul Include allows you to select records from within Humbul's growing catalogue, and dynamically include sets of those records within your own web pages. You can even add your own custom descriptions detailing for your students, for example, how to use the resource described, and at which point in your course they will find it most advantageous.

Including the set of Humbul's records that you have selected and annotated is simply a matter of copying and pasting three lines of HTML into your web page. From then on, whenever users visit your web page it will dynamically retrieve the records you have chosen to export from Humbul. If you need to add more records, delete records or change your custom descriptions, you can do all of that from within My Humbul. Meanwhile Humbul is managing the data in the background, including regularly checking the links so that the data on your page is reliable. Putting Humbul's resources directly in the hands of tutor's and lecturer's to use as they wish meets both the stated needs of our users, and our belief in releasing control over how users find our resources.

News Feeds

My Humbul Alert is one method for a user to stay abreast of relevant new resources in Humbul. Another method brings news of new Humbul records within your own website through a news feed based on RSS (Rich Site Summary). Humbul will shortly be launching an RSS-based news feed service that is no more difficult to use than My Humbul Include. Select a news feed from any of the subject areas that Humbul supports, and have the most recent records added to Humbul in that subject area appear within your web page. The list of records will change as new records are added to Humbul. As with My Humbul Include, Humbul will manage and maintain the service behind the scenes making the service easy to use.

At the moment, RSS is perhaps more suitable for an advanced user, or in conjunction with your site administrator. Fortunately, Dr Nik Jewell of the PRS-LTSN has developed a tool that makes the process of implementing Humbul's (or anyone else's) RSS feed relatively straightforward. Dr Jewell's freely available program assists in turning an RSS feed into a simple JavaScript snippet that you can embed in your

web page. You can see an RSS feed in action on the PRS-LTSN website at:

http://www.prs-ltsn.ac.uk/rss/

For the full list of Humbul's RSS channels, see

http://www.humbul.ac.uk/output/RSS/index.php

To access Dr Jewell's parser, visit

http://www.prs-ltsn.ac.uk/rss/rssconfig.html

Humbul is constantly seeking to develop and improve ways of meeting users needs. With **My Humbul Include** you can select the records of your choice to include within your own web page. With our soon to be launched RSS news feeds you can choose to include the most recent records added to Humbul within your web page. Together, these offer two different ways of putting Humbul's resources in your hands.

For further information on Humbul or My Humbul, contact:

Randolph Metcalfe,
Humbul Humanities Hub,
Oxford University,
Tel: 01865 283 416,
email: info@humbul.ac.uk.

The Humbul Humanities Hub is a service of the Resource Discovery Network funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee and the Arts and Humanities Research Board and is hosted by Oxford University.

Articles, Discussion and Practical Teaching

Project Report:
Diversifying Assessment 1[*]
Essays and Examinations in Undergraduate History of Science

Louise Jarvis and Joe Cain[1]

Department of Science and Technology Studies
University College London

1. Introduction

Assessment in undergraduate history of science courses relies heavily on set essays and final examinations.[2] While these are useful for some developmental and assessment purposes, neither is an all-purpose tool. Most important, they concentrate attention on some learning processes but ignore others. If students do nothing but sit final examinations and write essays on set questions, some key and subject-specific skills may never be developed. Neither tool fairs well in campaigns to shift from passive to active learning environments or from summative to formative assessment.[3] Tutors tend to choose them for their familiarity rather than for their appropriateness within specific learning and teaching contexts (Knight and Edwards, 1995: 11).

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[*] This is the first paper in a series exploring a range of assessment techniques and issues relating to assessment.

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[2] The sample of syllabi provided in Steffens (1992; 2001) shows set essays and final examinations are the main tools for course assessment in history of science. However, these compilations also show a wide range of other devices supplementing these main tools, including short critical essays, presentations, take-away examinations quizzes, and the amorphous "participation". In her anthology of syllabi for courses focusing on women, gender and history of science, Rusnock (1999) shows less emphasis on set essays and unseen examinations and more emphasis on formative writing such as through journals.

[3] Knight (2001) provides a briefing on current concepts in assessment strategies. The impact of course design is discussed insightfully by Toohey (1999).

Tutors often forget that most students direct their learning in courses primarily according to mandatory assessment tasks.[4] This fact places a tutor's decisions about assessment at the heart of learning within courses. It teaches a harsh lesson: innovative teaching efforts are unlikely to succeed unless they are attached to assessment credit.

The project underlying this paper focused on a challenge to diversify assessment in our speciality within the practical constraints of an operating BSc degree programme in history and philosophy of science. We knew this was well-trodden ground in the education literature. Rather than re-invent the wheel, we undertook an extensive survey and synthesis project on alternative assessment techniques. In collating the material we collected, we identified practical advice on the design, implementation, and likely problems for the specific tools we might introduce into our overall assessment strategy.

This paper, the first in a series, considers two standard assessment tools: set essays and final examinations. What are their strengths and weaknesses? What kinds of adjustments might be introduced to improve diversification? What benefits can diversification bring?

2. Assessment built around learning objectives

Theories of assessment—why it should take place, how it guides knowledge acquisition, what forms it might take, and where it should be located within learning programmes—are reviewed authoritatively by Bloom, Hastings, and Madaus (1971), Brown and Knight (1994), and Brown, Bull and Pendlebury (1997). The LTSN Generic Centre provides a useful pamphlet series on assessment, including guides for building departmental assessment strategies (Mutch and Brown, 2001), for individual tutors (Brown, 2001), and for developing assessment portfolios (Baume, 2001).

It's easy to be caught up in the sheer variety of options when rethinking assessment practices. We chose to avoid change for change's

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[4] Clift and Imrie (1981), Schneck (1988), and Brown, Race and Smith (1996) argue the nature of the assessment imposed upon students is a key factor on student choice of study technique and the depth of their learning. Students tailor their learning to maximise success in assessment while minimising study effort. Without careful alignment between course objectives and assessment demands (Brown, 2001), students abandon a tutor's carefully planned curriculum and experience a course through the criteria set by assessment (Harvey and Knight, 1996). In short, students 'take their cues from what is assessed rather than what lecturers assert is important' (Brown, *et al.*, 1997: 7). Also see Schneck (1988).

sake alone. When considering the utility of new assessment tools, several concerns came to the foreground.

First, at the heart of any degree programme or course structure should be a set of learning objectives. Setting these objectives requires a fundamental shift in emphasis (Table 1). Move away from the activity itself. Think about why you're assigning a task in the first place. Focus on the central aims you want to pursue. Course aims tend to combine subject-specific goals and degree programme goals to produce a mixture of aims involving (1) content, (2) method, and (3) key skills (Gooday, 2002). Courses also set aims with respect

Activity	write an essay
Aims	develop critical thinking read sources on reading list
Objectives	compare and contrast X with Y locate and evaluate the thesis in X construct an argument in favour of X

to particular cognitive skills such as description, analysis, and synthesis (Biggs, 1999). Ideally, courses co-ordinate their aims within an overall programme and do so in a progressive fashion.

Table 1: Shifting from activity to objectives

A distinction between aims and objectives is key. Aims state goals. Objectives translate goals into demonstrable outcomes by translating mental states into observable actions. This shift to operational thinking is crucial when choosing assessment tools (*e.g.*, Beard and Hartley, 1984; Allan, 1996; Biggs, 1999; Brown, 2001). Explicit objectives are crucial for designing the tasks that make up an assessment programme. They help students understand what an assignment asks them to do. In the example in Table 1, a variety of observable tasks can be assigned to demonstrate the stated aims.

Aims and objectives should guide decisions about assessment activities, not the reverse. Set essays and final examinations should be abandoned where they prove poorly suited for the chosen combination of aims and objectives, or where they seem less well suited than alternatives.

Measuring the value of assessment tools requires distinguishing between two types of information that assessment can provide.

Summative assessment provides one type of information, focusing on final tests of ability. For the tutor, summative assessment provides a measure for the overall extent of learning achieved by a student at the conclusion of a course or course unit. A final examination, set at the end of a term or year, is the classic example of summative assessment. This type of assessment has no expressed function other than to indicate a student's ultimate learning achievement. Marking summative assessment requires little more than the production of grades and justifying comments. These leave little room for negotiation or constructive feedback to students.

Conversely, formative assessment monitors progress towards objectives. It is meant to diagnose relative strengths and weaknesses in this progress to assist both the tutor and student in their future provision of effort. As a developmental tool, formative assessment should involve the swift return of comments. These may originate from the students themselves, their peers, or the tutor. Commentaries may be extensive or limited, but they always should provide constructive steps ahead and be focused on the stated objectives.

In comparison, formative and summative assessment provide different information about the student's skills in relation to the learning objectives for a course.[5] The choice between them depends on many factors. There is no reason why the two functions cannot be combined within a progressive sequence (*e.g.*, when a summarily assessed project in one course provides formative value for a later course). Importantly, tutors commonly confuse the two sets of demands, particularly in marking essays and providing feedback (Ivanic, *et al.*, 2000; Lea and Street, 2000).

Second, measuring the value of assessment tools involves special considerations peculiar to the specific teaching environment. For example, some courses provide a service role related to specific key skills. Alternatively, local resources (*e.g.*, museum and galleries) might be especially well suited for use. Tutors might operate within specific constraints (*e.g.*, large numbers of students, lack of prerequisites, short timetables, and so on), or they might seek to implement specific policies (such as breaking student routine with assessment, moving students out of their comfort zones, increasing student fairness, or promoting more imagination and key skills). These considerations both constrain and

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[5] Bloom, Hastings, and Madaus (1971) provide extensive treatment of various formative and summative techniques. Hyland (2000) is one of innumerable authors defending the value of formative assessment.

enable the types of assessment that might be applied in any particular situation.

Course design should be governed by decisions about learning objectives. These objectives also should guide the choice of assessment tool. Assessment can be designed either to build towards outcomes that satisfy these objectives or to test proficiency after an appropriate period of training. Without clearly defined objectives, assessment is activity without purpose. In this context, merely shifting the method of assessment does nothing to clarify its purpose. Moreover, such a shift may cause more harm than good. Some methods are the poor means for accomplishing certain ends.

3. Set essays

This section considers the strengths and weaknesses of set essays as an assessment tool. It also considers ways to adjust their standard design to broaden their overall value in assessment systems. In section 4, we consider alternative writing projects.

Set essays normally have two formats. Targeted essays ask the student to answer a specific question or consider a single narrow thesis in an essay of set length. A list of core readings often accompanies the task. Open-ended essays ask the student to create their own topic within loose confines, writing to a specific length.

Benefits: The QAA benchmark statement for history emphasises reading and writing skills as central to learning the subject.

> History is largely a text-based discipline which requires students to learn to read widely, rapidly and critically, to take good notes, to digest arguments and to synthesise information quickly and intelligently. It also requires them to construct arguments in writing. (Fletcher, *et al.*, 2000: 5)

The statement is emphatic. "We recommend that all single-honours students should be assessed in significant part on their essay-writing skills." (Fletcher, *et al.*, 2000: 6) No matter how assessment is designed, essay writing should remain "a central component" in the training of historians.

Writing promotes active learning and increases engagement of examined materials. It helps students develop a sense of voice as well as a sense of structure for both narrative and argument. Fletcher, et al (2000: 6) promote essays because they "require students to demonstrate

a number of skills in combination" and develop "integrative high-order skills" (such as analysis and synthesis, as ranked by Biggs, 1999).

History of science courses often function in service roles to degree programmes in the sciences. In such contexts, writing assignments may present the only time within a degree that students are challenged to produce narrative or analysis in formats other than formalised laboratory reports. Composition and written expression become part of the key skills service these courses offer.

Targeted essays allow the student to focus specifically on reading and writing skills—though this rarely is made explicit as an aim of the project. This focus is especially useful in early stages of a degree and in courses where research skills are not expected to be well developed. Moreover, targeted essays simplify time management. When inclusive reading lists are provided (meaning the tutor expects the students to read no other materials), the student need not budget time for research into the total time they allow for their work. This opens opportunities for explicit skill development focusing on reading skills. Set reading lists also create a relatively uniform foundation of knowledge. This aids peer assessment and assessment by less knowledgeable assistants.

Open-ended essays normally aim to promote problem formulation and develop research skills. Because they assume the students already have some sense of the overall subject, these are more appropriate at intermediate and advanced levels of undergraduate work. Open-ended essays allow students to approach a topic creatively and make enquiries relevant to their own interests. They promote independent learning. Project choices also may augment other course work within a degree.

Recommendations and Implementation: Objectives underlying essays normally focus on research, reading, reasoning, and writing skills. Developing these skills requires training and explicit attention. Students should not be left simply to "get on with it". Courses should use or create a tutorial process to support the skills tutors expect students to demonstrate.

On research skills, Gash (2000) provides broad coverage on literature searching. Students also may benefit from a targeted review by the tutor of local resources (especially electronic databases) and reference guides, such as the *Isis Cumulative Bibliography* and *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*). Do not assume students know even the most standard resources. Many academic libraries offer tutorials for general and subject-specific research skills. They also often offer advice on-line (such as

Engle, 2001) and in reference documentation. Courses in subject-specific research methods are common in post-graduate programmes, with details available via course Web sites (key search terms are "research methods history"). The Internet provides many portals for historical research, such as Smith and Smith (2002), though these usually offer few resources immediately relevant for projects. Meta-search engines, such as google.com, can be more direct and up-to-date, though they require considerable sifting and training in effective search techniques. Hart (1998) provides an overview of the research process as it leads to an analysis of relevant literature for a project.

On reading skills, degree programmes should encourage active and critical reading, balancing breadth and depth. But any one course cannot do everything, and tutors need to make choices about the skills they aim to develop. Fairbairn and Fairbairn (2001) provide an exceptionally useful guide to reading skills overall. It is designed for student use. Northedge (1990) combines reading and note-taking skills. Booth, Colomb and Williams (1995) is useful for intermediate students refreshing their skills. Rael (2000) provides a basic on-line guide to the combined process.

Reasoning skills focus on critical thinking (Thomson, 1996). When reading, this involves skills such as locating a thesis, following an argument, and weighing different forms of evidence. When writing, this involves structuring texts to present a clear thesis and evidence within a sound argument. Fairbairn and Winch (1996) bring these three skill sets —reading, writing, and reasoning—together. Kuhn, Weinstock, and Flaton (1994) consider historical reasoning in terms of theory-evidence coordination. Voss, *et al.* (1994) demonstrates typical causal reasoning in history in a case study on the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hounsell (2000) distinguishes these essay tasks as argument, viewpoint, and arrangement. He encourages tutors to provide opportunities for students to develop each style.

On writing skills, a single course can focus on the complete writing process, or it can concentrate on particular refinements (such as organisation, citation, voice, punctuation, and so on). Many guides for essay writing describe and identify good practice. Crème and Lea (1997) is extremely useful and written for students. It extends the short treatment in Fairbairn and Winch (1996). Pirie (1985) offers additional support. Strunk and White (1979) is a classic for its conciseness. More advanced writers can profit from the advice manual for civil servants (Gowers, 1986). Specialised needs are served by style manuals, such as

the *Chicago manual of style* or the *MLA handbook for writers of research papers*. To help develop their voice, students can be given an audience.

Tutors should promote a culture of improvement for writing skills. Revision is a key aspect of writing. Tutors can dedicate some of their feedback to particular features of composition and exposition. In a formative setting, substantial failings can be identified, and the student should be asked for a revision. In a summative setting, expectations should be noted in criteria for assessment and failings should be reflected in final marks.

Targeted essays should be set with specific expectations regarding reading lists. If a list is provided, tutors should make their expectations clear regarding the need for additional research. Criteria for assessment should identify the cognitive skills the tutor expects to observe. These might be prioritised. Students often benefit from studying a model essay produced for an analogous assignment. Peer assessment can be instructive both to students and tutors (Cheng and Warren, 2000; Race, 2001). If specific writing refinements are chosen as aims in a course, guidance should be set to these ends. Length should be prescribed and justified to students. For example, a short essay places a premium on space and forces students to prioritise. A longer essay increases expectations for elaboration and development.

Open-ended essays promote wide exploration and research. Tutors should make their expectations clear regarding collection and sifting of research material. Students may be tempted to think that more is better, *i.e.*, longer bibliographies automatically receive higher marks. Including a formative stage for the production of working bibliographies (*e.g.*, Kies, 2002) or including an annotated bibliography (*e.g.*, Engle, *et al.*, 1998; Sexty, 1999) in the final submission helps focus the research process and provides the tutor with evidence of accomplishment. This also provides students with a sense of credit for work done regardless what appears in the final submission. Research notebooks are good practice in the sciences (*e.g.*, UFl OTL, 2001) but most on-line guidance seems hard to apply towards the research of typical historical projects (an exception is Davis, 1998).

Open-ended essays also require more supervision and project management. Many students find themselves lost when defining projects and settle for those that seem easy rather than those that are interesting or challenging. Others produce projects by foraging through library stacks or Internet sites. Others have difficulty narrowing the scope of a project to specific and do-able ranges within the provided time. Clear

objectives and expectations are important for guidance. Class time dedicated to project definition helps students focus. Sample or model papers prove useful as guides.

Formative assessment—whether through self, peer, or tutor approaches—offers a mechanism for corrective action in open-ended essays. Bell (1987) provides guidance on time and project management for students. Larger essays can be divided into progressive stages of development with components assessed formatively.

Potential problems: Targeted essays are frequent objects for plagiarism, whether through essay writing services, foraging through printed and Internet material, or inheritance from previous generations of students. Stefani and Carroll (2001) provide a briefing on plagiarism, plus a useful bibliography for tutors. Carroll and Appleton (2001) provide excellent practical advice. Wilson (2000) supplements coverage and is especially useful for Internet issues. Strategies to minimise overt plagiarism include: regular changes to the list of set essays (so students in one or two subsequent years cannot inherit past work), checks of random samples of essays from each assignment against past papers and obvious sources (the existence of these checks should be advertised to students), and a quick check of all essays using a meta-search engine on the Internet (such as google.com). Students should be asked to retain their drafts, notes, and working bibliographies for evidence in case suspicions arise.

Open-ended essays should receive the same treatment. In these cases, confusion over appropriate use of sources (such as the difference between quoting and paraphrasing) and sloppiness when writing from notes seem to be frequent causes of inadvertent plagiarism. Tutors should make a point of discussing plagiarism concerns because students show considerable confusion about the boundaries between use and abuse of sources. Proactive work, peer assessment of sample cases of ambiguity (*e.g.*, Northedge, 1990: 149–152) and a discussion of frequent causes of inadvertent problems (*e.g.*, Cain, 2000) proves more effective than simply listing rules and regulations or threatening harsh penalties.

In a study of the comments tutors provide as essay feedback, Lea and Street (2000) argue tutors often conflate the aims of targeted and open-ended essays when choosing criteria for assessment. Likewise, student expectations of supervisors tend to differ from tutor expectations of their obligations when it comes to supervision and advice (Hampson, 1994; Phillips and Pugh, 1994).

4. Other types of writing

Writing assignments can vary in format, style and length. These pieces may include an element of role-play or develop other types of skills than those fostered by a standard essay. Designating specific audiences can focus writing projects in particular courses. The length of the written product can be extended to involve more detailed or synthetic work. In addition to the classic term paper, these might include policy reports, guides to materials for future researchers, research proposals, aids for lectures, and so on. Alternatively, writing assignments may be narrowed to focus on specific skills. These types may include newspaper articles or letters, book reviews (or exhibit or media reviews) for journals or other formats, synopses or executive briefs, and so on. Creative alternatives include the production of imagined communications between contemporary historic figures or the construction of journals or diaries in the voices of relevant historical actors (*e.g.*, Chang, 2002). Student writing need not appear in finished and refined forms to develop the relevant skills. Personal journals and reading logs, for example, document creative and critical thinking (several examples are provided in Rusnock, 1999).

Benefits: Aims and objectives commonly chosen for set essays can be accomplished through writing projects of many kinds. Moreover, different writing formats allow tutors to concentrate on specific skills or learning outcomes. For example, evaluation skills can be demonstrated just as clearly in a 1,000 word book review, written so it could appear in an academic journal, as they can be in a routine 2,500 word targeted essay. Indeed, the reduced word count forces students to set priorities and to keep their writing focused. It also gives them more time to think about their actual presentation. A specific audience for the writing can improve the student's sense of voice and direction. Fewer words per essay also reduce the overall volume of material a tutor must read while marking.

The familiarity of set essays seems to be the key factor limiting a tutor's choice regarding types of writing assignments (Knight and Edwards, 1995: 11). The QAA benchmark statement for history recommends more than set essays in their discussion of assessment:

> Students should be expected to undertake a wide range of assignments (such as seminar and group presentations, reports, reviews, gobbets or document papers, essays of varying lengths, C & IT projects, dissertations). It should be explained to students how such assignments enable them to

improve their writing and oral-communication skills, as well as those of evidence-handling, the critical treatment of themes/historical arguments and the thoughtful, persuasive presentation of their work.

…We recommend that all departments should give serious consideration to the provision of opportunity for single-honours students to be assessed by essays of various types (as, for example, 'long' essays reflecting depth of scholarship, 'short' essays requiring precision of focus; essays focusing on different historical concepts - change, cause, similarity and difference *etc.*; essays written to a target length and essays written to time).
(Fletcher, *et al.*, 2000: 5–6)

Lea and Stierer (2000) consider the wider role of writing skills in higher education and the relation between writing projects and various forms of academic literacy.

Alternative formats for writing assignments also break the routine of set essays and challenge writing skills. This prevents over-specialisation by students, thus increasing the reliability of assignments as tests.

Lea and Street (2000) discuss student ability to monitor tutor expectations and adjust their skills accordingly. This leads to concerns over fairness with a routine of set essays (as students unfamiliar with a tutor are disadvantaged) and promotes diversity of format.[6] A successful newspaper article, for instance, requires different skills and writing structures than a targeted essay. An extended essay develops some skills; an argument outline develops others.

Shifting formats can bring expectations into better focus and reduce confusion. Students are slow to appreciate the changing expectations of writing assignments as they progress from introductory to intermediate and advanced courses. This is especially true when assignments over many courses use the same basic format and describe assignments using the same terms. Tutors often have difficulty describing their differing expectations for writing when it appears in different settings or different stages of the degree programme (Ivanic, *et al.*, 2000).

Writing in some formats, especially when role-playing, can give students valuable new perspectives on course material and promote

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[6] The trio of concepts: fairness, validity (the degree of fit between the learning objectives indicated to the students and the learning achievements evaluated in an assessment), and reliability (assessment is consistent and repeatable, using the same standard across all students) are discussed in detail by Gipps (1994), Brown (2001), and Torrance (1994).

active learning. It promotes empathy, which the QAA benchmark statement encourages as part of the historian's "quality of mind" (Fletcher, *et al.*, 2000: 3). Some evidence suggests this develops deeper learning of course content. Framing their knowledge in new ways will encourage the student to evaluate the broader importance of their material and consider how the knowledge acquired in an academic setting links to audiences outside their institution.

Recommendations and Implementation: When diversifying writing assignments, tutors should not simply select a new format at random. Set specific aims and objectives, and then select a writing structure that is well suited to them. Miller, Imbrie, and Cox (1998), for instance, distinguish several types of essays based around objectives:

- short answer: shows mastery of a single concept, usually descriptive;
- essay outline: shows mastery of substance and clarity of argument without an emphasis on exposition;
- set essay: shows analytical skills with an emphasis on developing a thesis and argument;
- extended essay: allows substantial exposition on a topic with a focus on depth and specialised knowledge or skills;
- dissertation: allows integrated, synthetic study in depth over a wide field.

Hounsell (2000) suggests many other types. Ideally, objectives for writing assignments should be tailored not only to the course objects but also to the courses' place within the relevant degrees and the broader programme of skills development.

Tutors will find a great deal of information available on different writing genres. This advice is useful for focusing expectations within an assignment's aims and objectives. Explicit guidance and support are vital when new genres are introduced (Macintosh, 1974). Students also should be encouraged to consider and even research demands of different genres. Displaying models and discussing the project in briefing sessions will provide useful benchmarks. Students can be asked to peer assess samples of a new genre (Race and Brown, 1993). For short writing projects, criteria for assessment should make clear what specific skills are the particular focus of assessment. Criteria for large projects should prioritise skills within the wide range of those a student will put to use. These criteria also should make clear overall expectations regarding the balance of breadth versus depth, analysis versus synthesis, and so on.

On student writing, Henry (1994) presents an overview of project work—oriented towards projects with written submissions such as literature reviews, information searches, empirical research such as case studies, and design projects—and is especially good for helping tutors appreciate broader pedagogical scope for this sort of work. Turk and Kirkman (1989) and McMurrey (2002, also on-line) provide general guides for writing for specialty purposes, such as instructions, proposals, explanations, letters, minutes, and examinations. Notes for guidance from granting agencies are useful for proposal projects. Many of these are available on-line—*e.g.*, (US) National Science Foundation (NSF, 2001), (UK) Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB, 2002), and the Royal Society (2002).

For journalistic formats, Mencher (1998) is a standard general textbook for training journalists and provides guidance for tutors constructing objectives and tutorials around such projects. Mencher (1999) focuses on news journalism; this is a classic text. Organisations such as the Poynter Institute (poynter.org) and the Writing Program at The Providence Journal (projo.com/words/) support journalism training with extensive on-line support. Many secondary school sample lesson plans for newspaper writing and story editing can be found on Internet sites and co-opted for introductory courses (keyword search "how to write a newspaper article"). Dick (1989) treats writing for magazines. Henning (2000) and Neilsen (1995-2002) treat writing for Web sites. An easily accessible source for basic elements of writing news articles is DFP (1997), which also considers other journalistic formats and offers advice on specific types of news stories.

Large writing projects are suitable for group work (Thorley and Gregory, 1994; Hunter, *et al.*, 1996; Jaques, 2000; Nicholson and Ellis, 2000) and for combination with oral presentations or posters. They also allow a strong element of self-design by the student, thus fostering skills of decision-making, design, planning, time management, and creative problem solving (Macintosh, 1974; Clift and Imrie, 1981; Brown, *et al.*, 1997).

Potential problems: The design of longer running projects must be undertaken with care to avoid overloading the student with demands or over-running the course calendar. Brown, Bull and Pendlebury (1997) advise on encouraging self-management and the timetabling of longer-term projects. Macintosh (1974: 107) offers advice on various design plans for project work that allow for different levels of student

autonomy and staff input. Though writing projects can focus on many elements of the research, reading, reasoning, and writing processes, each assignment should focus on a specific and limited number of skills. The remainder should be left to other courses in the degree sequence. Progression throughout the degree may involve sequential development of skills (one after another), or ever more inclusive sets of skills.

Supervision of writing projects can place heavy demands on tutors. Self and peer assessment programmes reduce this burden, especially in formative stages. They also provide regular benchmarks for monitoring progress. Regular availability of tutors for consultation is important (Race and Brown, 1993), and students should be encouraged to take an active role managing their needs (Phillips and Pugh, 1994: 93–112). Students undertaking longer-term projects normally undergo a cycle of psychological states and explicit attention to these can be a part of the supervision process (Phillips and Pugh, 1994: 72–81). Regular meetings help the student avoid a sense of isolation and help the tutor monitor progress. Criteria for tutor input should be standardized, especially where several members of staff are active in advising students for a single course (Clift and Imrie, 1981).

Students tend to see shorter assignments as less demanding. This leads to both their deferment of effort and a sense that less effort is required. Frank discussions of expectations at the start and formative assessment as the project develops can keep student effort focused on learning objectives and help to promote genuine development of skills.

5. Final examinations

This section considers the strengths and weaknesses of final examinations as an assessment tool. It also considers ways to adjust their standard design to broaden their overall value in assessment systems. In the next section, we consider alternatives.

The standard final examination is a previously unseen, time-constrained, invigilated exam undertaken following the completion of a course or at the end of an academic session. Normally the examination involves tasks in which the student recalls course content, demonstrates their mastery of methodologies developed in a course, or applies the syllabus to novel problems. Normally, students produce written scripts, and the tasks set are not subject to negotiation or reformulation. The final examination is one of the most common forms of assessment in history of science courses (*e.g.*, Steffens, 1992; 2001).

Benefits: Final examinations provide summative assessment of a student's mastery of course content and objectives. The QAA benchmark statement for history suggests several benefits of final examinations:

> We also recommend that departments give serious consideration to requiring students to write at least some essays under exam conditions which afford safeguards against plagiarism and the use of inappropriate outside assistance. This also gives students the opportunity to develop relevant life-skills such as the ability to produce coherent, reasoned and supported arguments under pressure.
> (Fletcher, *et al.*, 2000: 6)

Student entry into final examinations can be coded to allow for confidentiality of identify. This provides a sense of protection against favouritism or retribution by the examiners. Marking final examinations can be time-consuming and tedious, but the use of final examinations can reduce the overall demands on tutors for marking and support. Rust (2001) offers suggestions for streamlining this process using standardised forms.

Recommendations and Implementation: Most students will be familiar with the demands of final examinations and have at least some relevant study skills.[7] Working effectively under examination conditions is a skill that can be continuously developed. Ideally, tutors should help students with examination skills: providing them with opportunities to work through typical examinable tasks under simulated examination conditions, and then offering formative assessment on their performance. Students should not simply be thrown into final exams as though they were rites of passage. Advice for examination preparation is common in student guides. Tracy (2002) is comprehensive and especially useful. Race (1999; 2000), Nothredge (1990) and Rowntree (1998) set revision for exams within the wider context of study skills. Goodwin and Bishop (2001) offer on-line advice.

Constructing final examinations is no easy matter. Tutors first need to identify the course objectives an examination is meant to assess. Final examinations are good choices for some assessment purposes but poor choices for others. They offer an efficient means for testing low-level cognitive skills such as memorising, identifying, and describing (Biggs, 1999). They can be used to measure a student's factual grasp of

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[7] Brown, Race, and Smith (1996) describe student impressions of skills being tested in typical examinations.

course content or basic matters of chronology and substance. They also can test middle-level cognitive skills, such as a student's ability to extract generalisations or to apply concepts and methodologies developed to new information. The pressure of timed examinations tests a student's ability to process information quickly and to prioritise their ideas. These assets suggest examinations can be useful at early stages of a degree programme but less effective for assessment of higher-level cognitive skills (such as synthesis) or independent research.

Tutors should consult their colleagues and teaching assistants when drafting exams to consider four aspects of their examination scripts. Two aspects are relatively straightforward. First, clarity. Are the instructions explicit and clear? Are the questions direct and understandable? Are questions written so as to allow only one interpretation? Do questions ask for vague, open-ended work (*e.g.*, "consider" or "discuss") or specific observable actions (*e.g.*, "contrast" or "defend")? Second, realism. Are the set tasks do-able within the allotted time, within the scope of the syllabus, within what might be reasonable to expect for a course at its particular status within a degree programme?

A third aspect for consultation involves the relationship between the tasks set and the course objectives the examination is expected to assess. Tutors should be able to identify how a specific task provides a means for monitoring the stated objectives. Importantly, final examinations need not monitor all course aims and objectives by themselves; they may form only part of the overall assessment process. (This prescription can release tutors from demanding too much out of an examination paper and their students.) Tasks set in examinations without clear connections to course outcomes either should be reworked or deleted.

A final aspect for consultation involves criteria for assessment. Tutors should be able to identify their expectations for exam responses not only in terms of the narrow context of the set tasks (what constitutes an acceptable or ideal response to the task set) but also for the general context of progress towards the stated course outcomes. Model answers, rubrics and checklists are useful devices for explicitness. These should aim to provide operational definitions for various levels of mastery. Such criteria may seem tedious to construct. However, they provide helpful guidance for students seeking to prioritise their learning, and they offer a lead to students anxious to follow.

Potential problems: Final examinations receive considerable criticism (Fawthrop, 1968; Ellington, *et al.*, 1993; Race, 1995; Bauer, 1997; Fallows and Steven, 2000; more cited in Brown, 2001). Critics argue the standard final examination promotes shallow learning (such as memorising) that tends to be forgotten quickly by students. Tutors rely on final examinations for too many purposes and prefer exams for their relative convenience rather than their educational value. Tutors relying on final examinations also tend to find students poorly engaged in their classrooms. Students can score well on examinations through specialist survival techniques rather than deep understanding of course content or fulfilment of course objectives. As summative assessment, examinations provide little feedback to students and give them little guidance regarding future learning needs or ways they might improve. Final examinations cultivate few skills valued in professional careers. Critics of final examinations focus especially on issues of validity: what precisely is being assessed under examination conditions? Race and Brown (1993) compare tutor and student expectations for examinations. Solutions to these problems can be considered in sequence.

Final examinations may promote shallow learning and short-term retention when they are presented as an unsupported assessment tool detached from the learning process of a course. In some contexts, such as foundation courses, low-level cognitive skills such as memorising are important learning outcomes. In other contexts tutors rely on these skills but emphasise others in their assessment. Lower level cognitive skills have an important role to play in higher education. The criticism seems to be focused on cases where tutors promote nothing more than low-level skills in their courses. Tutors always have the option of setting tasks on examinations that provide only small rewards for low-level skills.

Students memorise as a last resort—when they feel grossly underprepared, don't know what to expect, or as a reaction to panic. Tutors can reduce the sense of panic by clearly presenting their expectations and criteria for assessment. This makes a point to identify the relative contribution low level cognitive skills will make to the overall assessment. Where these skills are crucial, tutors can prepare students with long-term attention to the revision process. This can include self and peer assessment of knowledge during tutorials, active learning in lectures, or tutorial support aimed towards identifying key information and providing contexts for its assimilation (such as through visual aids, pneumonic devices, and cognitive connections with other material in their lives).

The point about long-term attention to the revision process also relates to concerns about examinations shifting the centre of learning within a course. Students experience courses through their assessment and will even abandon the learning they achieve during the course if they don't anticipate credit for it later in the course (Harvey and Knight, 1996). Assessment by final examination can imply to students that lectures and other class activities have no value other than as they relate to that exam. Hence the dreaded question—"will this be on the exam?" —and the many complaints from tutors that students have low levels of engagement during a course. Final examinations normally sit outside a course's curriculum, little noticed until they are immanent. Tutors who use a final examination might keep the demands of the final examination ever-present during class activities and encourage students to consider their work in relation to course objectives. Some course material may provide foundation knowledge for a learning objective. Other material may provide the concepts students will be expected to analyse, or it may develop skills they will be expected to apply in another context.

Brief knowledge and skill tests can be undertaken during the course so students can assess their own degree of mastery. Such additions to course work integrate a tutor's expectations about assessment into the student's experience of a course day-to-day. Other tactics include: distributing past exam papers at the start of term and reviewing them periodically during the course, asking students to create examinable tasks (then discussing their value as measures of course outcomes and their plausible responses), issuing sample tasks for examination from time to time during the course, or managing study circles within a course (in which students can teach each other, thus taking active ownership of their learning).

Final examinations also normally sit outside a course's curriculum because the feedback students receive tends to be sparse and normally lacks formative content. Return of this information also normally is long delayed. Summative assessment of final exams can be transformed easily into formative roles. Focusing on course objectives, tutors can create rubrics or checklists for examined tasks to provide feedback that is either impressionistic or detailed (Brown, *et al.*, 1994). These can be separated from exam scripts, copied for records, and returned to students. Students wishing quick returns can provide a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Departments can focus on exam performance generally by asking students to self assess their strengths and weaknesses during revision

periods. Meeting with a personal tutor, students can compare their assessment with tutor comments and create a plan for skill development. Departmental procedures for annual surveys can direct tuition regarding the examination process. Tutors at the start of a new session can ask returning students to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses with past examinations. This provides a forum for identifying the differences in expectations one year compared with another. The overall aim should be to help students avoid relying on survival techniques and shift their focus to skill development and deep learning of course objectives.

Frequent claims that final exams cultivate few skills valued in professional careers are disputed by Fletcher, *et al.* (2000: 6), who suggest the pressure of timed and summary performance reflects workplace demands. In some ways performance under pressure is the whole point of harsh examination conditions (though this rarely is a stated course objective!). Regardless, when final examinations are used in combination with other assessment tools, the concern about narrow value is mitigated. This concern also seems to relate to examinations that assess only low-level cognitive skills. Exams can be constructed to engage any number of key skills (in whatever sense of the term, *e.g.*, Griffiths, *et al.*, 1999; Fallows and Steven, 2000; Murphy, 2001). Drawing attention to key skill connections can help students appreciate the relevance of final examinations to their personal development.

Critics of final examinations focus especially on issues of fairness and validity. On fairness, Fletcher, *et al.* (2000: 6) emphasise the importance of invigilated examinations as a check on plagiarism and unfair assistance from others. By isolating students and setting them to work on previously unseen tasks, tutors are supposed to obtain a measure of that student alone regarding their mastery of course objectives. Thus, final examinations are said to improve fairness because they subject all students to a common measure.

Critics complain that this sense of fairness is too narrow and possibly deceptive. On one level, it assumes students have equal knowledge of what tasks might be set in the examination. Underground trading of past papers and course intelligence is common, but this can be superseded by the tutor distributing documents directly. Open discussion of revision strategy and likely examination tasks can provide a level footing for all students. On another level, some students consistently perform better under examination conditions than others. This selective process takes place even in seemingly trivial aspects of examinations (dense exams favour those who can write quickly or who have a

confidence knowledge of English; commuting students have more logistic hurdles to distract them on the day of the examination than resident students; students fresh from secondary education are acclimated to examination conditions far more than students returning to higher education later in life). Tutors can design examination tasks to mitigate these factors as much as possible. On a third level, some students specialise in preparing themselves for examination conditions to the exclusion of most other types of skills or learning objectives. They might focus, for instance, on memorising and regurgitation but ignore analysis or comparison. Tutors should emphasise to students the range of skills they will monitor during examinations and set their questions accordingly. Balancing multiple tasks on an exam paper can test all students in both familiar and unfamiliar ways.

Students frequently complain their performance under examination conditions is hampered by factors such as stress and exhaustion. On stress, students can develop anxiety reducing strategies through on-line advice (*e.g.*, Goodwin and Bishop, 2001) or guides to revision (*e.g.*, Northedge, 1990; Race, 1999; Race, 2000; Tracy, 2002). Many student support or counselling centres at universities offer guidance for reducing examination anxiety (*e.g.*, US CS, 2000; CPSU SAS, 2002). Tutors can help reduce examination anxiety by increasing their sense of preparation. First, students tend to develop misconceptions about the examination process and the tasks likely to be set in a particular exam paper. Tutors should make their expectations and criteria for assessment clear. Tutors should identify the objectives monitored by an exam and discuss ways students can demonstrate their proficiency in these areas. Practice under examination conditions and peer assessment of practice work helps clarify expectations.

Exhaustion manifests typically for two main reasons. One is last-minute preparation for the examination itself. Revision requires time management and planning skills, both of which can be considered as a course develops. Course work can have explicit components directed towards assisting revision.

Another reason for exhaustion relates to the demands imposed by the examination itself. Tutors should consider the mental and physical pace they require of students during examination conditions. An exam scheduled for a three-hour period should not require students to write continuously for three hours. Time must be added not only for mental work (*e.g.*, thinking, structuring, reflecting, debating) but also for physical work (*e.g.*, slow and legible writing, outlining). Long examinations place

harsh strains on bodies. Tutors should add time for resting muscles and brains as well as for stretching. Exam settings also ignore physiological rhythms. Tutors can advise students on the effects of certain behaviours before examinations. Large infusions of caffeine, sugar, or nicotine, for instance, may seem to spark abilities but these are short term. They tend to be followed by crashes in energy levels and discomfort. In the long run, these can make the student's work more difficult.

6. Other types of exams

The standard final examination is a previously unseen, time-constrained, invigilated exam undertaken after the course. Four alternative examination settings are frequently used in higher education:

1. assessment under invigilated conditions of a previously unseen paper but students are allowed to consult their own notes (open book exams)
2. assessment under invigilated conditions based on a paper previously disclosed to students (pre-published exams)
3. assessment based on a paper distributed to students on which they may work openly and consult sources freely (take-away exams)
4. assessment by direct questioning based on submitted work, unseen questions, or a previously published script (oral exams or viva voces; see Section 7)

Benefits: Standard final examinations are useful tools for assessing low and medium level cognitive skills, but they are poor tools for assessing high-level cognitive skills. These alternative examination formats allow a tutor to set tasks that minimise low-level skills and maximise higher-level skills. They also allow a tutor to monitor proficiency over a much wider range of key skills than is possible under the conditions of isolation required by standard final exams (Rowntree, 1987; Brown and Knight, 1994).

Open book exams reduce the reward for memorisation and increase the emphasis a tutor might place on data retrieval, comprehension, relations, application, and synthesis (Heywood, 1989). Time constraints reward preparation and information management. Access to familiar material relieves student anxieties grounded in fears of failed recall or demands for arcane knowledge (Beard and Hartley, 1984; Heywood, 1989). This freedom from rote learning allows students to dedicate their study effort towards deeper learning and analytical skills (Jackson and Jaques, 1976).

Pre-published exams release students from some of the problems imposed by invigilated examinations of fixed time length. They also provide opportunities for reflection and deeper analysis in settings students find more conducive to this type of work. They allow tutors to set tasks that are more complex and allow students to access whatever resources they think are relevant to their preparation. Students can focus their skill development to specific ends. Pre-published exams encourage group work while still assessing students based on their individual mastery of learning objectives under invigilated conditions.

Take-away exams carry most advantages of pre-published exams. In addition, they allow opportunities for additional research, fact checking, collaboration, and peer assessment. They also allow some flexibility for the students in setting their own pace when engaging the tasks to be assessed. Completion of take-away exams outside invigilated settings means students can rely on familiar writing techniques and technologies. These can improve their grammar, spelling, and writing structure. This comfort contributes to the overall sense students feel about the validity of this examination process.

Alternative examination formats can be a real boost for student appraisals of fairness and for the validity of the test process (Clift and Imrie, 1981). They also set tasks that more closely simulate those demanded in professional working environments (Beard and Hartley, 1984). Promoting these skills in a degree programme will teach students how to make quick and effective use of their resources while under time pressure.

Recommendations and Implementation: Tutors must make their expectations clear when using these alternative formats. These should include expectations regarding the specific constraints and opportunities provided in the chosen format as well as the specific procedures students will be expected to follow. Tutors also should present relevant criteria for assessment. Students can be included in the process of creating these criteria.

For open book examinations, tutors must give students guidance on what material is acceptable for use in the invigilated setting. Some universities have regulations on this matter and these must be respected. When students are allowed to bring simply anything into the examination, tutors risk considerable disruption owing to the sheer volume of material likely to appear. They also risk issues of equity, as the students who acquire key sources from libraries will have an unfair

advantage over others. Only paper resources should be allowed. Tutors might set a limit on what students can bring, such as only required texts or one notebook (of fixed size) of handwritten materials. Students sometimes put a great deal of effort into exam aids when these are restricted to a fixed size and allowed only when handwritten by the student; this creates a setting for considerable active learning as they acquire, prioritise, and structure their information.

For pre-published papers, several decisions must be made to define the overall process. First, tutors must consider the length of the interval between distributing the paper and the invigilated examination itself. Papers that set complex tasks requiring background research or detailed reflection must timetable this additional work into the process. Depending on the tutor's strategy, papers can be distributed as early as the first meeting of the course or as late as the day before the scheduled exam. Distributing a pre-published paper early might help efforts to connect the examined tasks to active learning over the term. Distributing it close to the scheduled examination might relieve anxiety and provide a short opportunity for reflection, but it assumes students have revised and can set time aside in their schedule to undertake the tasks set in the pre-published paper. This short notice might increase anxiety if some material required has not been learned and it appears "too late" to sort that out. For short intervals, tutors must consider the other commitments students might have within the available time. Working students will need time to plan open periods for concentration. Students with other examinations may carry an unfairly heavy burden.

Second, tutors must ensure the pre-published paper is available to all students at the same time following instructions in course documentation. This is especially important if the interval between pre-publication and the exam is short. Extra steps should be taken to ensure no student has grounds for complaint regarding access to the pre-published paper.

Third, with pre-published papers tutors must consider whether they allow an open book format to the actual examination. If students are allowed notes, they are likely to bring completed essays ready for copying or extensive notes ready for transferral. This has implications for the validity of the exam paper as an examination of the individual student.

Finally and most important, tutors must consider the relation between the pre-published paper and the actual paper students sit under examination conditions. Options include:

1. providing students with the exact paper
2. providing students with a general description of the tasks set in the paper
3. providing students with model questions analogous to the questions set in the paper
4. providing students with a population of exact questions from which the paper will be drawn

Each approach has its advocates and critics. Cain (2002) combines 4. and 2. Providing exact questions relieves anxiety and focuses revision. It also reveals to students the range of skills expected under examination conditions. Collaboration is assumed during revision; indeed, students frequently are found dividing the work, then actively teaching each other their speciality. Questions for the paper students actually sit for the invigilated period are selected at random from the population of possible questions. Providing more questions than will appear on the examination promotes revision across the breadth of the curriculum and learning objectives regardless of what actually appears on the exam paper. Combining this strategy with one that generally describes additional tasks set in the actual exam paper provides students with enough information to prepare for the examination as a whole but deliberately tests different sets of skills on different elements of the paper. Use of 4. preserves an opportunity to test student mastery of course outcomes as individuals. These tasks tend to involve high-level cognitive skills that draw on the broad knowledge of the syllabus gained from revision of pre-published questions or an application of medium level cognitive skills to novel material.

Miller, Imbrie, and Cox (1998: 199–201) argue against 1. and 4., proposing 2.—*i.e.*, tutors should publish detailed descriptions of the questions and their objectives. In their example, a description might ask students to prepare as follows:

"In this section you will be given the names of ten key figures discussed in the course and for five of them you will be asked to identify their most important primary source, then summarise the content of that source. I will be looking for your ability to weigh different notions of value in your choice of 'most important,' and I will be looking at the depth of knowledge and overall understanding you have regarding the sources you choose to describe. A good answer will be factually correct. A great answer will present both obvious and subtle layers of meaning for the work."

For take-away exam papers, tutors should assume collaboration occurs. They also should consider how to safeguard against plagiarism and inappropriate assistance by others. Take-away papers should have a fixed and well-advertised schedule for dissemination and return. Timing issues are like those for pre-published papers. Any task requiring student access to certain resources must only be introduced when those resources are in sufficient supply for all students to access them.

Potential problems: These alternative formats for set examinations face the same potential problems as final examinations unless they are planned with care. Brown and Knight (1994) provide a general discussion.

7. Viva voce and oral examinations

Viva voce (viva) and oral examinations involve a dialogue or interview in which the student is expected to provide responses to a series of either pre-prepared questions or set topics for discussion. The tutor typically poses the questions, and then serves as examiner. Students are assessed according to criteria set before the meeting. Assessment can be either formative or summative. Written materials produced by the student can supplement these examinations, or they can form the focus of discussion. The length of interview can vary and should increase as students progress through a degree programme. Interviews should involve a permanent record of proceedings both for auditing purposes and for their formative value in debriefing.

Benefits: Vivas are a common assessment tool in some academic settings. Interviews offer a mechanism for formative assessment. Vivas frequently assist examiners when they have difficulty classifying a borderline student in terms of qualitative degree categories. They also are common in cases of suspected plagiarism or other irregularities (Brown and Knight, 1994; Carroll and Appleton, 2001), or when assessing group work where tutors are pressed to identify the extent of each student's accomplishment. Vivas allow tutors to probe the depth and breadth of student accomplishment. Vivas can supplement written material, and thus can be used to overcome student limitations with written communication (Clift and Imrie, 1981). They also can be used to test communication skills, stress management and analytical skills. Vivas have immediacy and allow personalisation.

In viva voces, students are asked to "think on their feet" (Fry, *et al.*, 1999). The ability to present oneself in such circumstances is a vital

transferable skill for any workplace. Skill development in this area is undervalued, and the rewards far outweigh the anxiety it is likely to cause.

Recommendations and Implementation: Students will need clear guidance on the procedure for a viva voce well in advance. This includes the agenda, some information on the tasks students can expect to engage, criteria for assessment, and guidance on etiquette. Students should have guidance on what materials they should revise (*e.g.*, essays or other project materials or prepared submissions) and what materials they might bring (*e.g.*, notes, outlines, or supplemental texts) to the examination. Tutors should have a clear plan for viva voces and follow the set agenda. The agenda may reveal actual questions used, or it may simple indicate a procedure to be followed. Consistent adherence to an agenda increases the validity of viva voces as an assessment tool.

Tutors should prepare their basic framework of questions in advance whether or not these are disclosed to students. Attention should be paid to the relative balance between closed questions (which require clear-cut answers and leave little room for ambiguity) and open-ended questions (which allow many possible answers and answers of indefinite length). Tutors also should clearly identify the relationship between the answers students provide and the determination of marks. Are points lost for factual errors? Can questions be skipped? Is the tutor more interested in an overall sense of ability or a display of mastery for specific tasks? Guidance in these areas increases the overall validity of viva voces, especially when comparing marks provided from one examination or examiner to the next. Students have the right to expect conditions as nearly identical as is practical. Burniston (1982) tests several aspects of viva voce structure regarding validity and reliability. Brown, Hitchman, and Yeoman (1971) test the reliability of oral examinations to work in chemistry. Tutors should plan for the content of viva voces to be compromised after the first student leaves the examination and ensure the first student has as much opportunity to do well as those undergoing examination later.

Vivas must proceed in a structured fashion. Students should be given simple questions at first or asked to deliver a prepared introduction. Questions relying on student recall of factual information can be affected by nervousness. Questions applying analytical skills can make use of props such as primary material or relevant passages from familiar secondary sources. Van Ments (1989) offers practical advice for

structuring examinations. Examiners themselves should remain flexible with the questioning but stay focused on the agenda (Fry, *et al.*, 1999). This flexibility should be combined with a "friendly but detached stance" that will put students at ease while maintaining the required official context of assessment (Brown, *et al.*, 1997). The viva voce should have clear beginning and end points and proceed without outside interruption. Attention should be paid to room conditions—seating, lighting, technical equipment, and so on—before the start. Tutors should ensure viva voces are not interrupted once begun.

Students should be encouraged to prepare for viva voces in groups. These aid student preparation. They also reduce stress and prepare students for presenting their ideas orally (Brown, *et al.*, 1997). Preparation for this kind of assessment should also allow for practice sessions for the student (and indeed staff where the task is unfamiliar). This practice can be either by means of a mock viva or by use of videotape examples during a briefing session (Brown, *et al.*, 1997). If students are familiar with the structure and likely content of the assessment, anxiety can be greatly reduced (Clift and Imrie, 1981).

Attention must be paid to producing permanent records of student performance. This can involve recording the examination or careful note taking (Clift and Imrie, 1981; Bradford and O'Connell, 1998). Students can be asked to self assess their presentation.

With planning, vivas provide excellent opportunities for formative feedback. The viva is a unique opportunity for the examiner to gain access to student thought processes and analytical skills. This can help identify weaknesses and provide opportunities to suggest improvements. Debriefing immediately following the viva will enhance its formative value and reduce the uncertainty about achievement (Race, 1995).

Potential problems: An oral exam can be potentially very stressful for the student (Clift and Imrie, 1981; Habeshaw, *et al.*, 1993). The tutors carrying out the exam must plan carefully and maintain flexibility of approach to strike a fine balance between asking challenging questions and intimidating the student and between keeping the student talking and directing the discussion. Potentially intimidating tones and room arrangements must be avoided (Habeshaw, *et al.*, 1993; Fry, *et al.*, 1999).

Staff time commitments for vivas are determined by design decisions. Time taken for the task can be minimised if the viva voce is undertaken alongside another type of assessment, for example with posters, or short essay papers. In this manner the viva itself can remain

short and serve more as a formative exercise for feedback on the written material submitted.

8. Conclusion

We realise our survey and synthesis approach only scratches the surface. We don't aim to be exhaustive. Instead, we hope to fuel discussion of the appropriateness of our choices for assessment tools in monitoring the success of our learning objectives. We want to emphasise the strengths and weaknesses of our standard tools, and we want to introduce the range of alternatives available. Rather than re-invent wheels, we have sought to bring some of the relevant literature into this discussion. Curriculum designers need not work in isolation. A wealth of material is available about assessment tools and their appropriate application. Subsequent papers in this series will consider other assessment methods, such as posters, oral presentations, and Web evaluation and construction.

9. Acknowledgements

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Project Report:
Supporting Questioning in Theology and Religious Studies

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This article is in two parts. In the first, we explore student perceptions of the conflict between following a particular faith and studying Theology and Religious Studies (TRS). This is set in the context of discussing such issues as the academic questioning agenda, multi-faith audiences, political correctness and offence. This section is based on our own observations and reflections, as well as student interviews and questionnaires. The empirical evidence presented is from a relatively small sample, designed to offer rudimentary indications, rather than a summative survey, of student responses to the issues under consideration. In the second, we propose a series of progressive exercises for use in seminars, designed to allow students to develop reflective awareness of the very nature of questioning. It is hoped that these exercises will give students more confidence and skill in posing and responding to questions, thereby improving their academic skills. At the same time, it is hoped that these exercises will make students more analytical of questions and possible responses, as well as the rationale for both. The aim here is to provide students with tools to analyse and manage experiences of conflict and offence that may arise while undertaking the academic study of religion. In both our discussion and exercises, we are interested in the practical implications of the insider/outsider problem for teaching and learning, rather than the theory or implications for research into religions.[1]

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[1] On the latter see, for example, Russell T. McCutcheon (ed.), *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: a Reader*, Cassell, London & New York 1999.

Part One: Discussion

The challenge of questioning in TRS

'Critical understanding' is a learning outcome universally valued in UK higher education, and is particularly emphasised in the self-description of humanities subjects. Yet when the subject in question is TRS, a critical approach risks undermining or at least being perceived to undermine the very subject under scrutiny. In no other subject does the academic agenda confront so fundamental an aspect of the individual's identity. When experienced as such, this confrontation can lead to some questionable responses. Students may withdraw from the academic process to protect their faith, or focus on 'safe subjects', such as philology. They may suspend critical judgement because of a lack of clarity between political correctness and non-critical thinking. In contrast, they may become alienated from their own faith background, even transferring their faith onto the academic process as a substitute worldview. Such responses may even guide career choices. At the milder level, the student may simply have an experience of unease. These responses mean that the academic study of the subject can lead to the very opposite of the explicitly intended outcome: the suppression rather than the mastery of a critical approach. Is it possible to develop the capacity for questioning and the critical faculty in TRS students in such a way that they have a greater degree of autonomy in their reactions to this process?

Asked in individual interviews about their concerns regarding asking and answering questions in class, students most commonly assumed that other students in the group knew more than they did.[2] They were therefore anxious about making a fool of themselves or taking up time more valuably filled by others. Other factors identified were that they did not fully understand what was expected; an unwillingness to challenge an authority figure (sometimes expressed in terms of offending the lecturer); and that discussions tended to move on

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[2] Students were routinely asked about this issue in one-to-one tutorials provided by one of the authors as part of 2nd/3rd year undergraduate courses during the past three years. The range of responses indicated here is derived from 58 such tutorials. The purpose of this issue being raised in the tutorials was to enhance awareness and suggest exercises to improve group participation and engagement with questions for all students, but in particular for those most lacking confidence and those who have a tendency to dominate the group.

before they had had time to formulate their thoughts. These concerns might be found in any lecture theatre, but TRS adds an additional layer of anxiety found in students' responses: the fear of exposing very personal aspects of oneself to an audience that is not necessarily sympathetic; potentially misrepresenting their beliefs in a context where statements cannot easily be recovered or withdrawn, or, on the other hand, offending against the anticipated beliefs of others, including the lecturer. Our intention here is to explore these issues, namely the experience of questioning and being questioned in higher education, and the particular difficulties posed by doing this in the TRS context.

A further related issue of concern to us as TRS teachers is whether or not the types of questions raised in TRS fulfil the quests with which students enter their degrees. If we accept that soteriological truth—whether or not we subscribe to it—is ultimately experiential, beyond the limits of shared rational argument and impossible to prove on the basis of empirical evidence, we acknowledge that those aspects of a religion often prioritised as the most fundamental by its adherents are not directly subject to academic scrutiny. Does this agnostic stance regarding the 'fundamentals' (*e.g.* the salvific experience of ultimate truth) lead us to analyse only the safe 'peripherals' (*e.g.* what people say about salvific experience of the ultimate truth)? To what extent do students enter TRS motivated by questions that are not addressed by the subject? To what extent do students feel disillusioned by the agenda of the questions that are addressed?

Student perceptions of TRS

Most of us who teach TRS will at some point have been faced by a student who finds the conflict between their personal faith and the academic study of it in some way problematic. We may have had that experience ourselves. We begin with two personal responses to the academic study of the individual's own faith that exemplify the extremes of alienation. We shall then analyse a broader range of feedback to see if this sense of alienation is that of the majority or rather of the minority, perhaps a vociferous one. The accounts are précis of real interviews. Student A is a first year, confronting and developing their responses to the conflicts they experience in TRS for the first time.[3] Student B finished their undergraduate studies some time ago, and felt that it had taken much of the intervening time to recover their faith from the

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[3] We have used the pronoun 'they' and 'their' as the possessive adjective for the singular here to remain gender neutral.

damage done by academic study. Student B nevertheless returned to pursue advanced study in TRS.

Student A:

> "I chose to do TRS to find out more about my own religion and to gain a better understanding of the religion of others. My experience of the teaching of my own faith in the first year has led me to decide to focus on language learning in my second and third year. I want to be able to gain direct access to the writings of important teachers within my tradition. I also want to avoid studying my own faith. Why should I be taught my religion by those who have no religious experience in it? How can they claim to represent a religion when they have no personal understanding? Someone with real experiential knowledge can present the truth and defend it. If people say they do not believe it, then let them prove it wrong: they can only do so with a false rationality, not my rationality. Each religion taught should be taught by someone with direct spiritual experience within the tradition. Yes, it would be practically difficult—you would need a lot of teachers. To have a religious experience in one tradition does not make one a better teacher of another tradition. The empathy it might provide for the validity of religious experience is insufficient, because they still cannot say what the experience of that religious truth is actually like."

This account expresses a tension between adhering to a faith and studying it academically, a tension that focuses on the issue of valid authority. Particularly interesting for the current discussion is that the position outlined here was the student's starting point. The student, who is high achieving, quickly developed a more considered response as a result of engaging in discussion about it. For example, the student expressed the view that a lecturer with an appreciation of the soteriological significance of one tradition might be better than one hostile to spiritual issues, even when lecturing on a faith other than his/her own. The student decided to pursue some courses in their own religion after all.

Student B:

> "I began studying Buddhism in order to explore my own faith further, but at the same time I was quite young and ready to be impressed by the experts with whom I studied. As such, I did not defend my faith even to myself and I was not particularly defensive, unlike some of the other students from a faith background. Quite soon I became disenchanted through my studies, partly because some of the texts I

read in the expectation of spirituality seemed in fact to be quite petty, but mainly because of the attitude of the teachers. They seemed to have a universal dislike of religions. Some of them appeared to regard it as their job to destroy the faith of their students, and they even claimed to have made bets on how long it would be before students who entered their degree as a monk (particularly a Buddhist monk) would disrobe. When a monk did disrobe, especially if he also got married, one of my teachers in particular would congratulate himself on a job well done. Being a 'good' student, I copied the cynicism of my teachers quite well, not having the strength of character to withstand it. However, I found that, while this approach destroyed, it did not replace what it destroyed with anything else. The vacuum was filled with a sense of intellectual superiority and academic elitism, which of course provides no framework for making moral decisions. For some students, perhaps me included initially, I think their response was to transfer the faith they had had in their religion to their academic teachers. This became apparent at a meeting arranged by those of us who were both Buddhists and students, in order to discuss what it was like to be both. There were about 15 of us, including a few interested non-Buddhists. The subject of the perceived cynicism of our teachers, two of whom were known to have been partly motivated by faith interest in their own early studies, was raised. One of the non-Buddhists asked, 'Well, if they hate it so much, why don't they do something else instead?' There were two, diametrically opposite responses from among the Buddhists. One replied, cynically, 'Because it's a job. It's well paid and they don't want to have to go back and start again. They wouldn't be able to do anything else.' The other replied, 'They do it because they are *bodhisattvas* (*i.e.* those Buddhists who have vowed to sacrifice themselves to bring others to Enlightenment).' She was completely serious. She had transferred her faith to the academics and entirely bought into their projected superiority. For me, this was the final straw that led me to withdraw from engagement with these inappropriately charismatic teachers. The lack of a framework for moral decisions had already led me to behave in ways that felt completely alien: I had ceased to recognise or like myself. It took me several years after my degree to restore fully my confidence in the validity of my faith and my application of it. A more useful theme also arose out of that meeting. Most of us acknowledged that our very engagement in the academic study of our faith was itself a symptom of a certain degree of alienation. We were already on a particular trajectory. For the monks who got married religious studies was not the turning point on the road to Damascus, but a single point on the journey after that turn had already been taken."

The perceived clash between the authority of the religion and the authority and integrity of academic teachers in TRS is again the main theme of this account, although here the focus appears to be the validity of a moral agenda rather than personal experience as such. Again, what is of particular relevance to our current discussion is that the process of discussing the conflict between study and faith, and analysing the agenda of both students and staff was a liberating experience for student B. Both students appear to have had specific, if unvoiced, expectations of their teachers in TRS which had been disappointed.[4] Discussion of the issues helped them to identify their own stance and locate themselves within the TRS spectrum.

While these experiences of the conflict between faith and academic study are strong enough to have affected significant decisions in the above two case studies, we wanted to know if the experience of a conflict between TRS and pursuing a particular religion was universal. In our survey we targeted a range of students at different levels of study, at two institutions, one of which teaches Study of Religions, the other of which combines Theology with Religious Studies. Two types of questionnaire were distributed to different groups of students. There was some overlap in the questions, but the first had more open questions while the second specifically sought students' motivation for studying TRS and whether or not students compartmentalise or 'write in bad faith'. These questionnaires were intended to provide us with indications as to whether or not the considerations we felt to be at issue in studying TRS were also perceived as such by students. The results should in no way be regarded as statistically representative, for which more thorough investigation is required. Questionnaires were returned by 50 students. Ten of these were responses to the second questionnaire.[5]

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[4] The issue of the identity and integrity of academic teachers and how possible faith or non-faith positions are reflected or denied in teaching is one that may also have an effect on students' perceptions of the place of questioning and critical appraisal in study. For example, students may find it difficult to hear critical words about faith coming from the mouths of faith adherents or ministers. This may lead to cynicism and disillusionment in some cases. This is an issue which merits further exploration; however, it cannot be explored further here.

[5] We would like to thank the students who took the time to consider the issues and return the questionnaires. We would also like to thank Siân Hawthorne, Roy Kearsley and Toby Mayer for enabling us to survey a relatively broad spectrum of the student body.

Slightly over half of those who expressed an opinion on the subject (21) did not think the study of religion was entirely compatible with the spiritual or religious pursuit of the religion studied, while 18 thought it was compatible. Students were more likely to view the two as incompatible if they were questioned as part of a course on religion and gender, *i.e.* on a course specifically focused on questioning religious authorities and assessing claims of universal truth and infallibility. Some students explained the reasons for their view that they are incompatible. They highlighted the introduction of doubt about the infallibility of aspects of one's religion; misunderstanding and consequent misrepresentation on the part of lecturers who do not practise the faith on which they lecture; an unstated assumption that personal religiosity should be suppressed for 'academic' purposes; and the view that some faiths deliberately prevent full engagement with academic study. These indicate four areas of incompatibility: undermining authorities within the faith with a historical/outsider perspective; misrepresentation through the outsider perspective; the suppression or compartmentalisation of the insider position to maintain the outsider stance; and the refusal of the insider to countenance the outsider perspective. Those who expanded on their view that the two stances are compatible highlighted two main reasons for this: that academic study and spiritual pursuit of a religion are such different approaches that the former cannot touch the latter; and that finding out more about one's own or another religion increases one's understanding in a positive way. Three respondents indicated that academic study was a useful and appropriate component of pursuing one's faith, although insufficient in itself.

Most respondents thought that academic study of religions could undermine religious belief (33, in contrast to 7 who did not). However, half of these qualified their statements with a range of comments along the following lines: that undermining faith was a good thing; that whether or not it was possible depended on such factors as whether or not the faith had a poor foundation and whether one was already on a trajectory out of the religion. One student mentioned how distressing it could be to find out about the corruption and violence in the history of a religion. A couple of students mentioned the potential confusion of academic knowledge for faith. A few pointed out the hostility of some TRS lecturers to religion and one pointed out the preoccupation of academia with reducing the supernatural to the explainable. Two students also identified manipulative motives and the projection of academia as a substitute superior worldview, a point related to the danger

of academic knowledge becoming a 'false faith' mentioned above. Two students highlighted the dangers of "a liberal perspective".

Before we conclude from this that TRS should be avoided by anyone wishing to maintain a spiritual perspective, we should note that an even higher number of respondents (35 in contrast to 5) thought TRS could affirm religious belief. Three key reasons were given: it broadens and enriches one's understanding; questioning one's beliefs means one accepts them on the basis of reasoning as well as faith; awareness of the similarity of other faiths confirms one's own beliefs as universal as well as making one more accepting of others' beliefs.

While half of students identified changes in their religious views since taking up TRS, most identified this as a positive outcome: that their views were strengthened or that they were more accepting of other religions or of religion generally. In the words of one student who did not come to study from a particular faith perspective: "I do not dismiss the concept of religious or spiritual practice any more." Some students stated that they were now less likely to identify with a particular religion because what they valued in their own could also be found in others. These findings, while perhaps hard to test in a formal context, affirm aspirations expressed in the TRS benchmarking statement that TRS graduates develop an empathetic understanding of other worldviews as a result of their degree.[6] It also suggests that the analysis of religions in TRS does not induce a dismissive attitude to religion in most students, as might have been anticipated. Interestingly, 7 out of the 10 students asked reported that they felt they were still formulating their beliefs.

In terms of whether or not TRS degree schemes raised the questions students had anticipated exploring in their studies, an exactly equal number (40%) said they did to those who said they did not. 20% claimed that they had no prior expectations. Nevertheless, nearly half of the group that did not feel the questions raised were those they had anticipated also indicated that the questions raised were better than anticipated, and a fifth identified the unexpected nature of their studies as the complexity and level of theory over engagement with specific

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[6] We are thinking here of such outcomes as "Discipline Specific and Intellectual Skills ... Focal 1: Be able to represent views other than the student's own sensitively and intelligently with fairness and integrity, while as appropriate expressing their own identity without denigration of others, through critical engagement in a spirit of generosity, openness and empathy." *Theology and Religious Studies Subject Benchmarking Statement,* Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Gloucester 2000, p. 11.

religions. This means that just over 10% were specifically dissatisfied with the questions raised in the academic study of religion.

Impact of student diversity on the challenge of TRS teaching

The range of expressed religious belief among the student body is in itself significant in assessing the reasons for these experiences of the incompatibility between academic study and pursuing a faith. In teaching religious studies, one is presenting the 'other', the subject under study. In doing so, one is empathetically engaging with the internal structure of that other and interpreting it and its significance to the audience which thinks within another, external structure. Whether one personally begins from inside or outside the tradition, one is translating from one structure to the other. This task is challenging in itself, but it becomes more complicated by far when the 'other' is also the audience, and the audience has no single structure of reference, as in the case in today's multicultural, multi-religious, worldview-eclectic student body. Putting someone's own experience or view back to them in one's own words is notoriously fraught with dangers. If one only speaks to and of oneself, one continues to apply only internal structures, thereby failing to communicate the other to the audience. In this way one only confirms one's own worldview. (Of course, some argue that this is what we do anyway.) By what mechanism can one translate to several different audiences within different structures and with different historical authorities, when one may only communicate to them collectively in a single speech in their joint company? The following chart indicates the range of faith positions found within our student body. Significantly, while there were more people who identified themselves as Christian than as of another religion, no single religion was dominant in our sample. Roman Catholics seemed to indicate themselves as such, rather than as Christian, but have been included under 'Christian' here. We should note that most indications of a specific religious affiliation were heavily qualified, and that most respondents would presumably therefore find their position in the table below a gross over- simplification. This is of significance in the problems outlined above, because of the different voices within a single named affiliation, even if one is, for example, teaching a Theology subject to an entirely Christian group.

Statement re Religion	No. of respondents (out of 50)
Chose not to indicate religion	4
Indicated had no religious affiliation	9
Buddhist/Buddhist leanings	9
Christian/Christian leanings	16
Consciously eclectic	3
General South Asian religions/Hindu leanings	2
Jewish	1
Materialist	1
Muslim	2
New Age	1
Non-denominational belief in a universal deity	2

Offence

In connection with the increased challenge of teaching TRS presented by this diversity in the student body, one strand of the complex of issues running through the reflections which led us to conduct this study is concerned with 'offence'. We are particularly interested in the nature and value of 'taking offence' at questions raised about a student's (or lecturer's) own faith. With this in mind, questions were included in the two questionnaires addressing this issue more or less directly. The next paragraph summarises the authors' initial reflections on aspects of 'offence' in the TRS context. This is followed by a summary of pointers arising from our survey, which we see as the initial orientation-finding phase in what should probably be an ongoing investigation into this issue.

The assumption of a single, Judeo-Christian religious background for all TRS students has in theory long been untenable, as is confirmed by the statistics on students' backgrounds recorded above. Nevertheless, all three authors had heard current student complaint that an assumption of a Christian background still pertained in some classes on Christianity. The religious diversity among students comes not just from more or less easily identified ethnic 'minorities' but also from converts whose ethnicity has no relationship to their expressed belief. The assumption complained about was that some lecturers assumed a Christian orientation among white students.

Among those aware of the multi-religious audience and desiring to avoid offence, the view and expectation of both students and staff seems to be that the safest position for teachers in TRS is a neutral one of relativist agnosticism: presenting different religious groups as holding to a truth that 'works for them' expressive of an aspiration to engage in 'objective' intellectual discourse in which we claim to 'teach about' rather than 'teach' the subject. This might seem at odds with the committed, value-laden nature of the subject, which is often what attracts students to its study. This position tends to be adopted in its defensive form rather than as a positive hermeneutic strategy, although it clearly implies one if examined critically itself. From a teacher's perspective, we had gained a strong impression that some converts expressed a greater degree of sensitivity on religious matters than so-called ethnic representatives, and we are interested by the specific causes of this in a TRS context.

In popular (*i.e.* non-TRS) discourse, perhaps reflecting the perceived collapse of universal values in the post-modern period, 'passion', *i.e.* the capacity for intense emotion and ease to anger, has become an increasingly common term of approbation: "The Welsh are so passionate about their language!", "He was a passionate defender of his cause!", "What was so wonderful about Barbara Castle was her passion!" Here the term functions to establish personal and cultural authenticity—to be passionate about anything is deemed worthy, and to mark out the passionate person from the apathetic, lacklustre, aimless norm. In the religious sphere, similarly, passion is often seen as a positive attribute. Religious sensitivity, as the capacity for offence, thus becomes a badge of honour for the religious party who establishes their credentials as a holy, spiritual or religious person by the depth and vociferousness of their offence. In the political sphere, offence takes this popular discourse a further step, by linking positive notions about passion revealing 'commitment' and authentic religious belief, to the

liberal humanistic agenda of freedom of speech and freedom from persecution. The often unstated legal background to this is British blasphemy law (in practice not extended beyond the defence of Anglicanism), in which blasphemy is deemed to have taken place not when certain statements are made, but when an individual or individuals take offence at certain statements being made. This context can be seen as facilitating the independent role of 'zealotry' in any religious tradition.

At its worst, 'offence' can determine an unspoken agenda regarding debate in TRS. Unacknowledged fear of offending particular religious interest groups has the potential to distort the assumed universal commitment to critical questioning in the Humanities. Offence cannot be dismissed as a factor in the dynamic of TRS teaching, as much as anything because of its potential for disruption at class and institutional levels.

Is there a positive place for 'offence' in TRS? This could be answered in two ways. Instances of offence were considered to have been positive points of intellectual and personal growth by all the authors, who agreed that this could be the 'least comfortable form of learning', but at the same time, the most productive. There is also the possibility that the taking of offence can act as a brake on the more cynical degrees of the questioning agenda, although it is by no means our view that offence is the best such restraint. All the authors have positive personal religious positions, and so these views are not expressed through indifference or hostility to religious belief.

It remained an open question as to how the individual teacher should deal with offence in the classroom. Clearly the intellectual issues need to be separated from those of physical safety and legal responsibility.

Student Experience of Offence

The following is a brief summary of comments potentially relevant to the subject of offence elicited from the questionnaires. These results are not offered as statistically significant, but instead as suggestive of the value of further research in this topic. The majority of respondents were second or third year Honours students.

38 students responded to the first of the following questions about offence, most also responded to some of the four follow-up questions:
1. Have you ever found anything that happened as part of a study of religions course religiously offensive?
2. Was it offensive to you personally or to others?

3. Were staff or fellow students the source of the offence?
4. Was it mildly or seriously offensive?
5. What was the nature of the offence?

Twenty-one of these said they had never experienced anything religiously offensive in their courses. Of the seventeen who said they had, four experienced the offence as serious. Six people indicated that both staff and students had caused offence. Four indicated that only fellow students were the source of the offence, while three that only staff had caused offence. One person indicated particular textbooks as the only source of offence. One of the three respondents who indicated that the offence was only to themselves personally raised the question, "How do I know whether or not someone else's offence is religious?" However, ten students had taken offence on behalf of others, two of these exclusively so.

Causes of offence included the following, given in order of frequency. Some students did not specify, or not fully enough for us to be reasonably clear about their views, while some gave more than one answer.

- assumption of a (Christian) faith background—4
- lecturer/ students specifically ridiculing beliefs of students—4
- stereotyping/uninformed presentation of a religion—3
- social cliques based on religious background—3
- the assumption of one form of a specific religion as higher than other forms—2
- lack of awareness of religions or perspective outside the lecturer's own focus—2
- intolerance or dogmatism among fellow students—2
- lecturers assuming that a literal belief in the bible was immature/unacademic—2
- general anti-Christian ethos—2
- general anti-religion ethos—2
- offensive on basis of gender or sexuality—2
- general anti-Muslim ethos—1

Two Buddhists expressed offence at the teaching of their own religion on the grounds of presumed invalid assumptions or lack of personal experience of Buddhism on the part of their teachers and/or fellow students. Interestingly, in doing so, they expressly made the very same invalid assumptions. Although converts and therefore not immediately

identifiable as from an ethnic background where one might stereotypically anticipate Buddhist affiliation, they assumed they were in a minority. Buddhism was in fact the most commonly expressed religious interest among students in the group and the owned faith background of at least one of the lecturers in question.

Only the second questionnaire specifically asked students whether they avoided modules on their own faith, found modules of their own faith or other faiths uncomfortable, or ever wrote in 'bad faith'. Here it is important to bear in mind that only 10 responses to this questionnaire were returned. 3 of the respondents, all Christian, experienced discomfort in studying their own religion. 3 experienced discomfort studying the religions of others, of whom 2 volunteered that they are Christian. 4 students indicated that they wrote essays in bad faith, *i.e.* "in a voice or from a perspective that you adopt for academic purposes, but with which you do not agree?" However, 3 of these thought this could be a good experience, while just 1 person thought it was bad because it they felt unable to express their personal beliefs.

In the first questionnaire students were asked whether they though it was better to be taught by a) a lecturer who is a member of the faith about which they lecture, or b) by one who is not a member of that faith. The responses elicited indicated flaws in this question. For example, some students assumed that a lecturer who is a member of the faith meant a non-academic. Therefore, the second questionnaire rephrased the question giving 4 options: "Do you think courses about specific faiths should be taught by: practitioners, academics, both, people who are both."

As far as we can judge from the responses given, bearing in mind the flaws in our questioning, preferences were divided as follows:

Courses about specific faiths should be taught by:	No. of respondents (out of 50)
practitioners	1
academics	8
both practitioners and academics	7
people who are both practitioners and academics	17
irrelevant, only subject knowledge *etc.* matters	11
no expressed opinion	6

The range of comments and reasons given for the judgements made on this topic suggest this is worthy of further investigation. For example,

some students thought that an academic should not lecture on their own religion. Those who thought it was irrelevant prioritised different qualities as the most important: subject knowledge, empathy, absence of empathy/bias, knowledge of their own underlying assumptions, enthusiasm and the ability to teach well. A couple of those who indicated that they preferred lecturers from the faith background on which they taught indicated that they were aware of their own bias. They acknowledged that they liked the lecturers in question because what they said was more likely to be in accordance with their own opinions since they were of the same faith.

An addition to a reflexive TRS syllabus?

The most informative aspect of the exercises undertaken here is not the individual responses to the questionnaires, but the length of those responses and the enthusiastic welcome expressed for the discussion of this issue. Several students took time to add notes or make comments of appreciation that the topic had been raised at all. The responses included sophisticated considerations of the issues far beyond what can be included in this brief discussion. This suggests that the issues raised here are significant considerations to many students of TRS. There is clearly a debate on these topics going on either consciously or unconsciously in the minds of many students, a debate that is to a large extent untapped and unacknowledged in TRS curricula. TRS departments could usefully include these topics in the syllabus because they are directly relevant to TRS and as a means of harnessing energy into active student debate. Where explicit sustained critical awareness of the subject is currently included in TRS curricula it tends to be included in the abstract: about the views and application of particular theories, rather than as an immediately practical issue. Recent trends to define the subject and to develop curricula to provide students with a reflexive understanding of what is involved in TRS have moved curricula towards the teaching of theory and methodologies of religion. While this is often welcome and does increase critical awareness of scholarship in the subject, it can sometimes prove alienating. It seems to us that reflection on the practical implications of studying TRS along the lines proposed here is an alternative or additional means of developing the desired reflexivity. It could be used, for example, to frame more theoretical debates, by providing students with direct experience of why theory about the study of religion is worthy of investigation. The following section provides

exercises on questioning that might be used as part of this process of reflection.

Part Two – Exercises

Asking Questions—Introduction to the exercises

Asking questions generally and adopting a critical attitude to all aspects of the study of religions is part of the taken for granted worldview of teachers. However, we perhaps forget that our interrogatory habits and assumptions are themselves open to critical evaluation. Furthermore, the habits of questioning and being critical have to be learned at some point. We cannot assume that students will understand the value or purpose of critical questioning, let alone be able to engage positively with asking or responding to questions, simply by osmosis. The philosophy and craft of engaging in and with critical questioning needs to be taught actively if students are to be given equal opportunity to develop these skills. If students understand the processes involved in questioning and are able to analyse questions, they are more likely to develop confidence and skill in their use of and responses to different types of questions.

Our suggestion is that students need to be worked through a series of stages in which they build up a self-conscious, articulate appraisal of the place of questioning within higher education generally and religious studies in particular. This process is probably most appropriately undertaken in the first year. It would most obviously fit best with general courses introducing students to methods in religious and theological studies. However, the questions raised in each stage could be adopted and adapted in a variety of courses according to the needs of teachers and students. It might, indeed, be very helpful to come back to them at the end of a three-year course to see whether students had changed their perspectives.

Below, we simply outline the stages and place beneath them the questions that might be raised. We envisage that teachers might choose to work through some or all of these questions in classes or seminar groups, either in well-defined blocks or perhaps in regular short slots. Many of the questions can be worked on by individuals as class preparation, or they could be adopted for use in twos, small groups, or even whole classes. The important thing for any teacher proposing to use them is that it should be made quite clear to students in advance to what extent they will be required to share their answers with others, and in what ways. This will sustain confidence and trust among learners. There is a good case for saying that students should only be required to

share what they wish and so activities that go beyond the individual should not violate that boundary. The words 'critical' and 'questioning' are, at least in many people's minds, very threatening, particularly in the context of studying TRS. The whole purpose of creating a critical syllabus about questioning will be defeated if learners are not secure in feeling that they know what is being asked of them and what use will be made of their contributions.

The Stages of the Exercise—brief overview

The stages outlined in this hypothetical syllabus of exercises on questioning in TRS move from a focus on individual learners and where they start from in terms of knowledge and experience of questioning to a more objective and subject-centred consideration of the nature of questions and questioning particularly in TRS. Even at the latter end of the scale, the learner's experience and attitudes are of great importance; part of the purpose of working through this syllabus is to deepen students' awareness of their own place and attitudes within this discipline.

Stage 1: Student experience and attitudes towards questions and questioning. It is important to be learner centred if one wants individuals to know themselves and understand their own responses to questions and questioning. The first part of the questioning syllabus therefore asks learners to reflect upon themselves and their own experience so that they can articulate their own pre-understandings about these matters. No previous teaching or specific knowledge is required.

Stage 2: Questioning in the academic context. This stage of the process encourages students to continue to reflect on their own experience and pre-understandings about questions and questioning, but also invites them to reflect upon the general academic context in which they are now situated. The range and nature of the questions asked also begins to introduce reflection specifically on questions that might arise particularly in religious studies without requiring specific 'owned' answers about the content of these questions from new students.

Stage 3: The nature and purpose of questions and questioning. It is often assumed that students understand why questions and critical appraisal are part of classroom teaching. In this part of the syllabus, students are required to think about the nature and purpose of questioning and how they might

assess, and respond to, different kinds of questions. The movement towards greater breadth and context is continued in very general terms.

Stage 4: Questioning in religion and religious studies. By this point, probably well into a first semester, it is appropriate to invite students to begin to reflect more directly upon the nature and functioning of questions and questioning in relation to religion and religious faith. Students should by now be a) familiar with reflecting upon their own experience and b) reasonably confident about sharing their views with others. So they should be ready to begin to address critical issues and challenges of faith and ideology (or the lack of it) within this discipline.

Stage 5: Challenge and offence in religion and religious studies. The final stage of this introduction to questioning encourages students to push their critical thinking about questioning and questions within the discipline to the point where they consider the nature of offence. What sort of questions and statements cause or might cause offence in religious studies? What are the reasons for this? Can one distinguish between challenging and offending religious views? How does this impact on students as individuals and as a group?

The Stages of the Exercises for Students with Explanatory Comments[7]

Stage 1. Student experience and attitudes towards questions and questioning

Questioning
Throughout your university career you will be asked questions verbally and in writing. You will also be encouraged to ask questions of teachers and material. The aim of this process is to help you to learn better and to think critically for yourself. If you learn to ask the right sorts of questions it is hoped that you will become a critical independent thinker better able to evaluate and find things out for yourself in future.

So much for the theory. In practice, some people find questions and questioning uncongenial or difficult. The aim of this exercise is to help you to think a little bit about the nature of questions and questioning so that you understand your own reactions and feelings about them better. This might enable you to decide better how much

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[7] It is our suggestion that TRS lecturers feel free to use the exercises as offered here or to adapt them.

you want to join in posing and answering questions during and after your education.

We start with your own feelings, interest and difficulties in dealing with questions so you can take stock of your own reactions and recognise your own style. You may want to change this, at least some of the time, once you can articulate it more accurately to yourself. Then we will go on to look at the reasons why questioning is used in education and what you and others might get out of it.

But first, it is worth stating the following: *A genuine question, whether written or spoken, is a demand requiring a response.*

A question literally asks something of you; it may require energy and willingness to respond. You can always decide not to respond to a demand. If you do respond it will take some work and effort, however slight. The reason for pointing this out is that, by definition, questions are bound to be demanding! Any demand may be unwanted, intrusive or unwelcome. It is not surprising, therefore, that some people may feel that they don't like them. Perhaps you feel that way yourself. Let's move on to examine your attitude to being questioned and how you deal with the apparent demand for some kind of response or answer.

Your attitudes and responses to questions and their effects on you

Some people love posing and answering questions, others seem to shy away from them. The purpose of the first part of this exercise is to help you to recognise how you feel about and respond to questions.

Spend a few minutes jotting down notes in response to the following questions. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers to the questions. They are there simply to help you think about your own experience and responses, so don't get hung up if you find them meaningless or too difficult, just move on.

1. Would you say that you were a person who likes *asking* questions? What sort of questions do you like to ask? Write down a few examples if you can. It might help to answer this point if you were to think about the sorts of conversations you have with other people in everyday life.

2. Would you say that you are a person who likes *answering* questions? Can you give examples of the sorts of questions that you like considering or being asked? Again, it might help to think about the sorts of real life conversations and experiences that you have had.

3. In what sort of contexts and with what sorts of people do you feel happy and confident to ask and answer questions? (*e.g.* with friends, with fellow students, at home, with strangers, in the police station, in the pub, with your family, in the classroom, with a telesales person, *etc.*)

4. In what sorts of contexts and with what sorts of people do you feel less happy and confident? (*e.g.* with friends, with fellow students, at home, with strangers, in the police station, in the pub, with your family, in the classroom, with a telesales person, *etc.*)

5. Comparing your answers to the last 2 questions, what do you think are the main differences between the people and contexts that enable or inhibit your engagement in questioning and answering?

6. Who are the people and what are the contexts that you find most inhibiting for posing and answering questions? What is your worst nightmare context for this activity? (*e.g.*, being interrogated by the police in a prison cell, having to answer a question in a room full of strangers, *etc.*)

7. Is it more difficult to be asked questions by some individuals or kinds of people than by others? List the individuals and types of people that you would most like to avoid in this context.

Stage 2. Questioning in the academic context

1. How do you feel when someone (teacher or fellow student) asks you a question in an academic context? Casting your mind over your experience, you may be able to think of a variety of responses that you have had. Write down some examples of your best and worst moments in answering questions—why do you think some experiences may have been positive and others more difficult?

2. Do you worry about being asked questions in the academic context? Can you say why you might feel anxious?

3. If you do not worry about being asked questions in the academic context, why do you think this is?

4. How do you feel about being asked questions in public by teachers or lecturers? Why do you think you have the feelings you have?

5. Look down the list of questions below. Underneath each one write a comment on how you would feel about being asked the question in a lecture or seminar. How would you react to the questioner? Try to say why you would have this feeling/reaction. Please note whether any particular

questions make you feel uncomfortable or threatened in any way and try to note down why. Some of them would probably never be asked, but try to think through your reactions anyway.

- Do you believe in God?
- Are you gay or straight?
- What kind of god or gods do you believe in?
- So you're a Buddhist, are you?
- Are you a vegetarian?
- Would you like the window closed or open?
- So that's your view is it?
- What were the names of the 12 tribes of ancient Israel?
- What are the ethical implications of holding a theistic or non-theistic religious viewpoint?
- What is today's date please?
- Surely you can't really believe in re-incarnation?
- What do you think about the possibilities of life after death?
- Where's your homework?
- Who is the Dalai Lama?

Possible Feedback[8]: You would probably be able to answer some of these questions with one-word answers quite easily and willingly, *e.g.*, What is today's date? This sort of question requires common knowledge. Also, you probably wouldn't be too worried if you didn't know the answer.

Others you might find more difficult to answer if you do not have specific subject knowledge, *e.g.*, What were the names of the 12 tribes of Israel? This might be because you do not really have the knowledge to answer it, perhaps because you have not yet covered the ground taught. Answering this kind of question requires subject knowledge.

Questions such as, What are the ethical implications of holding a theistic or non-theistic religious viewpoint? probably require a lengthy answer with a good deal of supporting subject knowledge. You are unlikely to know the answer to a question like this if you have not studied a subject in depth.

Questions such as, What do you think about the possibilities of life after death? are elicitative questions to which there is no right or

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[8] We have included 'possible feedback' on these sections to provide a commentary on the nature of the questions.

wrong answer. The questioner may be trying to engender a general discussion in which people offer different points of view and they may not need much pre- or subject knowledge to be able to engage with the question.

Some questions may be difficult to answer because they seem very personal or threatening, *e.g.*, Are you gay or straight? What kind of god or gods do you believe in? You might feel that they are so invasive that they are inappropriate and that you are not willing to answer them, particularly in a public context.

Some questions, *e.g.* Where's your homework? may be unwelcome because they imply a failure on your part to fulfil an obligation or expectation, depending on tone and context.

Yet other questions do not really seem to require an answer: So you're a Buddhist, are you? and, Surely you can't really believe in reincarnation? These questions are basically rhetorical questions where the questioner is trying to make a point, perhaps in an aggressive manner, not to elicit an answer.

The point of asking you to consider your reactions to these questions is to make it clear to you that different kinds of questions are asked and they may produce very different personal responses. Whether or not, and in what way you respond to questions like these may depend on:

- your knowledge
- your understanding of the subject
- whether or not you feel the question is relevant in the context in which it is posed
- whether you understand the purpose and nature of the question
- whether or not you feel the question is intrusive or threatening
- whether you feel competent to answer the question in terms of knowledge
- whether you feel confident in terms of your oral skills to share your knowledge and views in public
- whether or not you feel that your audience/the reception of your answer will be sympathetic

It may also depend on who is asking you the question, whether you think they or your fellows know more about the subject than you do, and your sense of obligation and values about yourself, your faith stance (if you have one) and your peers.

The purpose of this first part of the exercise has been to help you to think through how you deal with and feel about questions and questioning, particularly in the academic context. Next, we will go on to consider the purpose of questioning in the academic context.

Stage 3. The nature and purpose of questions and questioning

The purpose of this part of the exercise is to help you to think about why questions are asked in the academic context and how you might respond to the invitation to answer or ask questions.

Please jot down brief answers to the following questions.

1. Why do teachers ask questions?

Possible feedback: To amuse themselves, to humiliate students by revealing their ignorance, to engage people in discussion and dialogue, to elicit basic information, to check whether people know things, to check people have been listening/ have done a piece of preparation, to find out if people understand things, to help people develop their oral skills in public, to gain a variety of perspectives on an issue or subject, to help people to learn to think 'on their feet', to deepen critical analysis of the subject under consideration, to give students an opportunity to air their doubts or opinions.

2. What do you think might be the advantages and disadvantages for you as a student of attempting to answer questions?

Possible feedback: Advantages: Allows you to share your views, to articulate more clearly what you think, to have your views challenged and deepened by other learners, to have experience of speaking in public so building your confidence, to have your understanding, knowledge and vocabulary checked, to build a mutual learning environment with others, to allow others to learn from you. Disadvantages: May expose ignorance, may be 'wrong' answer or a 'silly' point, may not be taken seriously, risks exposure to others, may make you feel 'stupid', may attract criticism and rejection of others for your point of view *etc.*

3. When do you think it is appropriate to ask questions of others (teachers and fellow learners)?

Possible feedback: When you don't understand things, feel that what you have been told is wrong or unclear, need more information, want to extend a line of enquiry, discussion or thought, want the views, knowledge and opinions of others, want to show an interest, *etc*.

4. Do you think there are times and circumstances when it is appropriate not to answer questions?

Possible feedback: If people ask rhetorical or meaningless questions, if questions seem inappropriately personal, if questions are being used as a means of aggressive interrogation rather than elicitative enquiry, if questions do not have an answer and discussing ways to an answer does not seem productive, if what is needed is more knowledge, not more discussion, *etc*.

5. What is a 'good' question? *i.e.*, What do you think are the sorts of questions that are most useful?

Possible feedback: Depends on purpose and context of question, but generally questions that elicit information and viewpoints are open-ended in contrast to those that require one word, yes or no answers.

6. Is a question ever neutral?

Possible feedback: even by raising a question one may be suggesting that the topic is worthy of attention, or that the interaction it engenders is worth having. Some questions presuppose a certain worldview, a premise or type of relationship, which one may either inadvertently or intentionally agree to by answering in the anticipated manner or even by answering at all.

Finally
• remember that probably the most difficult but often most honest and useful answers to any questions are, I do not know, and I do not understand
• you always have a right to remain silent, but if you never speak you may not learn so much, nor contribute much to the education of others.

Stage 4: Questioning in religion and religious studies

The following questions are about the interaction between the academic study of religion and the personal pursuit of a particular faith for religious or spiritual reasons.

A. Choosing to study TRS

1. What led you to study TRS at university? (You may have more than one reason.) What had you hoped to get out of the academic study of religions?

2. Has the academic study of religions been what you expected so far? If not, explain how it is different and whether these differences are good or bad in your view.

3. Did you have questions about religion(s) when you came to university? If so, are the questions that are addressed in your courses in line with those questions, or different from what you expected? In what way? What do you think about this?

B. Studying TRS and personal beliefs

1. Would you say you are still formulating your personal beliefs?

2. Do you expect your university studies to help you in understanding your personal beliefs?

3. Do you expect your university studies to augment your personal beliefs? Do you think academic study can affirm or augment religious belief?

4. Do you expect your university studies to be 'at odds' with your personal beliefs? Do you think academic study can undermine religious belief? If so, what do you think about that?

5. Do you think academic study of religion is entirely compatible with pursuing that religion for spiritual/religious purposes?

6. *When you started*: Did you come to the academic study of religions with a particular faith perspective? What was it? (remember you do not need to answer this or any other personal question if you do not want to) Is this the same or different from your religious background, *i.e.* that of your family/community?

7. *Now*: Has your faith perspective altered during your studies? If so, was this as a result of studying religions or for other reasons? What led to these changes?

8. If you do not have a religious faith, do you have a non-religious set of beliefs? Do you think they have altered during your studies? If so, in what way and what led to these changes?

C. The Academic Agenda

1. What do you think your teachers most want in your work? What do you think you have to do to get good grades in TRS?

2. Thinking about your answers to the above question, are the answers (*i.e.* what teachers most want and what gets good grades) compatible with what is most important for you in your work? If not, how are they different?

3. Does the academic student of religion ask the same questions as a follower of a particular religion? How are the questions similar, how different?

4. Could (or is) the academic agenda ever be taken as an alternative worldview—a kind of religion or faith? If so, what does it do that is similar to a religion? What does it lack, or in what way is it dissimilar? What do you think of this?

D. Lecturers and fellow students, and their faith backgrounds

1. Think about being taught TRS and who teaches you. Do you think courses about specific faiths should be taught by:
   - Practitioners who are a member of the faith on which they lecture, but are not academics in the subject.
   - Academics who are not a member of the faith on which they lecture.
   - Academics who are a member of the faith on which they lecture.
   - Academics who have no religious affiliation at all.
   - Academics who have a religious affiliation, but not the one on which they lecture.
   - A combination of the above, name a) + b) + c) + d) + e) (*delete as appropriate*).
   - The faith background of the lecturer is irrelevant.

2. Thinking about your answers to the above, what led you to make those selections? What are the characteristics you think are most important in a lecturer on a specific religion? Why did you reject certain types of teacher in your selection?

3. Thinking about a lecturer's interaction with their subject, do you know whether or not a lecturer is from a particular faith background? Do you *think* you know or know *for certain*? How do you know? Did you ask? If so, why? If not, why not? If you asked, did you find the lecturer willing or unwilling to answer? Is it important to know?

4. If a lecturer holds a particular faith or comes from a particular faith background do you think that necessarily affects the quality or integrity of their teaching on the subject in general or that religion in particular? Does the religion in question affect your views on this?

5. If a lecturer is NOT from a particular faith background do you think that necessarily affects the quality or integrity of their teaching on the subject?

6. Do you always know whether or not fellow students hold a particular faith or come from a particular faith background? Do you ask? If so, why? If not, why not? Have you ever asked and found fellow students willing or unwilling to answer? Is it important to know?

7. Has the religion of a lecturer or fellow students ever affected how you feel about studying TRS with them, or TRS in general? If so, how?

8. Are any of the above questions or your answers to them equally relevant in the academic study of any subject other than TRS?

E. Managing academic study and personal world view

1. Do you study modules about your own faith?

2. Do you ever find modules about your own faith tradition uncomfortable? If so, what is the nature of your discomfort?

3. Do you ever find modules about other faith traditions uncomfortable? If so, what is the nature of your discomfort?

4. Is the academic study of your subject ever in conflict with your personal beliefs or views? If so, how do you handle this?

5. Do you ever compartmentalise, *e.g.* are you a Buddhist, Muslim or Christian in one context, but a historian of religion in another? What leads one to do this? What do you think about it?

6. Do you ever try to influence the teaching or the discussion on a course? If so, how? If not, would you ever like to do so? In what way?

7. Do you ever avoid modules about your own faith? If so, why? Have you always done so?

8. Do you work at your studies in bad faith, *i.e.* do you write essays *etc.* in a voice or from a perspective that you adopt for academic purposes, but with which you do not agree? If your answer to this question is YES, what do you think about this? Is it good or bad? Do you like it or dislike it? Do you think it is useful or not useful? Any other comment?

9. Do you think it can be beneficial to have one's faith perspective challenged in academic discourse? If so, in what ways? Is it ever detrimental to have one's faith perspective challenged in academic discourse? If so, in what ways?

10. Have you ever found anything that happened or was said as part of a study of religions course religiously offensive? If your answer to this question is YES, was the offence to yourself or to others? By staff, by fellow students or in the literature or other materials you have used as part of the course? Mildly or seriously? What do you consider to be the nature (or the cause) of the offence? Do you think the same content could have been learned without offence? (Can you say how?)

Stage 5. Challenge and offence in religion and religious studies

Brief Introduction to this stage. This exercise is offered in the form of questions that can be put to a teacher/student group. The overall purpose of this exercise is to increase group and individual understanding of feelings of offence in religious experience, rather than direct the group towards a particular view about religious offence. It cannot be assumed, of course, that teachers are themselves above and beyond issues of offence and it is possible to envisage this exercise being performed in the context of CPD. The questions are grouped as explorations of aspects of or themes in religious offence. There are six such sections. A brief rationale is provided for each section. Questions could be tackled individually or as a group. The session leader will need to pay close attention to the dynamic of the group and the sensitivities of individuals within it. This awareness should also determine the balance of public discussion with private reflection in the exercise.

A. An introductory exploration of the group's experience of offence, eliciting observations on: the frequency of feelings of offence; the relationship between offence arising from religion and from other concerns.

1. Have you ever felt offended?

2. Have you often felt offended?

3. If yes, was it ever in relation to a religious matter?

4. If you have felt offence regarding a religious matter, was it in relation to your current religion or have your beliefs changed in the meantime?

5. Is it possible to take offence if you do not have a religion yourself? Is religion the only cause of ideological offence? If not, then write down any other possible basis for offence.

6. If your answer is 'no, religion is not the only basis for ideological offence', then can you define how religion differs from the other bases of ideological offence you have identified?

7. If you do not and have never felt religious offence, can you think of an instance of feeling offended at all? If so, can you say how the beliefs that were 'offended' differed from religious beliefs?

B. An exploration of the nature of change in religious belief and the distinction between positive challenge and negative offence.

1. Have your beliefs or any aspect of your beliefs ever changed during the course of your life? If 'yes' note down briefly any features that have changed.

2. If your beliefs have changed in any aspect over time, can you identify the source of such changes? For example, have your ideas been influenced by another person, by reading, by study, by experience, *e.g.* by meeting other people, by a bereavement, by travel, or by some kind of religious or other activity.

3. Is it possible that your beliefs have changed or improved through them being challenged? For example, has a person in authority or a peer ever challenged your understanding and made you think differently about a matter?

C. The interpersonal and community dimension of religious offence, exploring the extent to which the individual's experience of offence is determined or supported by their sense of community.

1. Is the feeling of offence yours personally, or shared with a community?

2. Does it make a difference who is in your company at the time of offence? If so, can you work out why?

3. Are there others who especially have expectations that you should feel this offence? Who are they and why are they interested in your responses of offence?

4. Is it important for that feeling that there are others who feel the same?

5. Is that feeling sustainable if no one else knows about the offending statement?

6. If no one else feels that feeling, is it sustainable?

7. Would you feel differently if you heard or read the offending statement in private with no-one else around, or if you heard or read it in the company of others (*e.g.* your religious community, your fellow students, your family, your friends, your social group, your employers, complete strangers)?

8. Can you take offence on behalf of other people? Do you need their assent to be offended on their behalf, or can you be offended unilaterally? Have you ever been offended on someone else's behalf? Did they mind/approve? Did they know? Did you know personally the people on whose behalf you took offence?

9. Has anyone ever been offended on your behalf as far as you are aware? Were you pleased or offended? Did you share the feeling of offence or were you separate from it?

D. A longer exploration of the inner psychology of religious offence, including examination of the 'inner trajectory' of religious offence.

1. Can you identify a statement regarding a religious tradition at which you would take or have taken offence? Write it down for your own reference. (You do not have to show it to anybody, now or at any future time, and the session leader and other participants do not have to know what you have written.)

2. Are you unhappy at writing this statement down? If you are unhappy about this, remember that it is someone else's statement, not yours. If you are not

prepared to write it down, then for the purposes of this exercise, try to remember the exact form of words used, in the same way you would if you had to write it down.

3. Think for a moment about your feeling of offence. Can you identify what makes up this feeling of offence? Do you feel any of the following: injury, anger, humiliation, disgust, resentment, fear, hatred, injustice, pride, satisfaction, duty, or any other specific feeling? Write down any one of these feelings that you do or have experienced in relation to the statement you recalled in question 1. above.

Let's take just one of the components of the feeling of offence that you have identified and think about it a bit more.

1. What is the source of that feeling? For example, are you offended by the use of individual words in the offending statement, or by the overall meaning of the statement?

2. Can that specific feeling get stronger, and if so what would make it stronger? Does this happen inevitably?

3. Can that feeling grow less, and if so what would make it grow less? Does this happen inevitably?

4. Do you play any part in the increase or decrease of that feeling? Do you at some point make a choice to let the feeling go, or to reinvigorate it?

5. If you cannot do anything about the offending statement, what do you do about your personal feelings of offence? Do you make a pragmatic decision to let them go, or do you make a decision to hold on to them, or do you do something else?

6. Can it ever be pleasant to feel offence? Do you ever feel good that you are taking a stand?

7. Is there any aspect of taking offence that is unpleasant? For example, is it: tiring, alienating; does it distract you from experiences that are better or preferable; does it make you angry and is it pleasant or unpleasant to be angry?

E. Being the 'offender'! So far the focus of this exercise has been the person offended, but it is important to remember that there is also the person who has caused the offence.

1. Have you ever offended someone else over a religious matter? Was this intentional or unintentional?

2. If intentional, can you explain why?

3. If unintentional, do you think in retrospect that you should modify your behaviour so as not to repeat the offence? Do you think that the offended party was over sensitive? Do you think that the offended party misunderstood you?

4. Have you ever felt a desire to offend someone else over a religious matter? How do you understand this desire?

5. Do you think it can be justified to offend someone in this way? If so, how do you do so?

F. An exploration of the outer or collective trajectory of religious offence.
1. What do you think is the function of offence? Can it be valuable and if so for what reason?

2. What do you think are the typical results of offence in the religious context? Are these results desirable or undesirable?

3. Should offence in individuals or groups be restrained or unrestrained? To what extent should individuals or society take account of religious offence? How could such restraint be exercised or implemented?

4. To what extent should concern over religious offence determine personal behaviour or public policy?

5. Should concern over religious offence influence the educational process? If so, how? If not, how do we deal with people who become offended?

6. Can one person's belief be another person's cause of offence? If so, how can these conflicting values be reconciled or negotiated in the TRS context?

7. Does education have a role to play in the issue of offence? If so, what role? If not, why not? Who should set the educational agenda in religious studies, and why?

Project Report:
Using Independent Study Groups with Philosophy Students

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1. Aims[1]

We cannot teach philosophy through lectures alone. Lectures can play an important role in introducing issues and literature, but reading, writing and discussion are also required. So lectures are usually supplemented by tutorials or seminars—these provide a forum for discussion, an incentive for reading, and preparation for writing. But whilst lecturing to an audience of scores or hundreds can be very effective, tutorials become less and less useful as the number of people involved increases. It takes more confidence to speak in front of a larger group; under-prepared students can more easily 'hide'; and it is more difficult to sustain a fruitful discussion. We do not expect a group of ten or fifteen people to maintain a single conversation when gathered together for dinner, or in the pub; no wonder then that this proves difficult in the seminar room.

Smaller groups seem more effective, but given limited resources we must choose between large, frequent tutorials, or small, infrequent tutorials. For example, the time allocated to a recent course allowed me to lecture once a week to all seventy-five students, and in addition offer weekly 'tutorials' in groups of fifteen, or fortnightly meetings in groups of eight, or three-weekly meetings in groups of five. Which to choose? Whilst there are disadvantages to meeting in groups of fifteen, there are advantages to meeting frequently. Misunderstandings can be cleared up more quickly, lectures are fresh in everyone's mind, there is more discussion time, and it is my impression that more reading gets done if

smaller amounts are expected weekly instead of larger amounts less frequently. A system of frequent meetings also means that if a student misses a meeting or fails to prepare properly, the consequences are less serious (this can also be a disadvantage, since it is evident to students). In general, though, fairly frequent meetings seem preferable.[2]

It would therefore be great to find a way of making larger seminars more effective. The purpose of this report is to describe and evaluate a system I have used this year for the first time, one that involves students meeting in small 'study groups' without a tutor, discussing the seminar material in advance of the main seminar, and then emailing each other about their findings. Whilst the system was new to me, it is not an original idea, nor is it the only way of attempting to deal with larger groups. However, I hope that this record of my trials, together with the results of student questionnaires, will be of use to some other teachers of philosophy. On balance, I think that the system was a success, and I plan to use it in the future.

2. Apparatus

I tried the study group system with two courses at the University of St Andrews in 2001-02. In the first semester Epistemology had an enrolment of seventy-five third- and fourth-year students, mostly taking either Single Honours philosophy or Joint Honours with another subject, but this number also included a few visiting students from overseas. The standard length of the undergraduate degree here is four years, and most students pursue three different subjects during their first two years. I taught this course alone. In the second semester Metaphysics had an enrolment of eighty, including many of the students who had taken Epistemology. I shared the lecturing for this course with my colleague Josh Parsons. Another colleague, Stephen Read, took three seminar groups, whilst Josh and I took one seminar group each. Both of these courses were 'core' courses, which means that many students were required to take them, rather than opting to do so. Each course carried fifteen credits, intended to amount to one quarter of a student's workload for the relevant eleven-week semester. Each course was

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2 In consultative meetings in my department, honours (3rd/4th year undergraduate) students consistently express a preference for more frequent tutorials, even at the cost of meeting in larger groups. On the other hand, participants at such meetings, although they represent their fellow students, are of course in another sense unrepresentative. And pre-honours students often express preferences for as few commitments as possible.

assessed by means of an essay plus a two-hour examination. For each course, I recommended purchase of a single anthology (containing mostly journal articles from the last forty years), from which seminar readings were drawn. For each course, there was a weekly lecture lasting one hour for all students.

3. Methods

At the first lecture, students were asked to sign up for a weekly seminar time that suited them. I explained the study group system, and stressed that the system was new to me and that I would be willing to adapt the system during the semester, or even abandon it if necessary. Each seminar group (of around fifteen students) would be split into three 'study groups' of five or so students—students could contact me if they had preferences about this. Two or three sets of students contacted me, asking to be placed together; nobody asked to be kept away from anyone; one student asked at the outset to be excused from the study groups because of family responsibilities, and I agreed to this.

Lectures took place a few days before seminars. Between the lecture and the seminar, the study group was expected to meet at a time and place of their choice, discuss the set reading, then compose a one-page report to be emailed to the other members of their seminar group (*i.e.* fifteen or so students in total), plus the tutor. Since we are warned against revealing personal information, I asked everyone to sign a consent form permitting me to distribute each student's email address to others in the same seminar group. In principle, then, every student would receive three emailed reports before the seminar, including the report produced by his/her own study group.

Initially, I allocated different reading on the same topic to the different study groups within a seminar group. The idea was that each student would read and discuss one article carefully, and read reports on a further two articles. The seminar would range across the three articles and different students would be able to contribute to discussion from different perspectives. It was not to be so. After a couple of very flat seminars, I asked one group what was wrong. Students explained that they didn't feel confident about discussing material that they hadn't read, and that they found it hard to get a sense of the other articles just from reading other students' reports. They felt that the seminar had in effect been divided into three temporal parts, in which I discussed each piece of reading.

I changed the plan so that all fifteen students in a given seminar group were expected to read the same article, although one seminar group wanted to continue the division-of-intellectual-labour system, and so we did. Some students then became anxious that we would not cover enough material, but in fact it was evident from essays and exam scripts that conscientious students at least had gone on to read the 'neglected' articles after the seminar discussion of the main article, treating these in the usual way as supplementary reading. And on the whole, discussion picked up once we had made this change.

Use of email seemed more problematic than I had expected (although questionnaire returns later suggested that the majority of students liked using email; perhaps those who had problems were more vocal). Although nobody refused to send and read email, many found it difficult or at least inconvenient to print emails, and few seemed to know how to handle attachments. We introduced a no-attachments rule. This may be a local phenomenon, since the standard way for students to access their university email accounts is via PINE, and it is not entirely straightforward to print emails or open attachments in this way.

As a compromise, and in response to student requests, I began to print out reports myself, and put them into the library where they were available to students to read and/or photocopy. This created complications and extra work. First, turnaround time was tight, which placed constraints on my own timetable on the day before the seminar. Second, students occasionally removed reports from the library, causing other students to complain to the librarian and/or me. Third, I began to write a few comments and corrections on reports, which reassured both authors and readers of reports, but took up time. When I later gave up this practice, students complained that they couldn't see the point of reading 'unvetted' reports (I will discuss this issue further below). Finally, the recourse to red pen, photocopier and ringbinder rather took the hi-tech gloss off the project.[3]

I made one other fairly significant change as the course progressed, again in response to student requests: I began to set questions on the reading, as a way of helping students to structure their reading, their study group meetings, and their reports. Whilst I presented

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[3] In the second semester course, Metaphysics, I did not use this library system, and relied only on email, partly because I did not want to impose burdens on my colleagues who were running seminar groups, and partly because I hoped that the report system would become self-sustaining. In the section that follows, I will compare student responses to the two systems.

the questions as optional, most groups adopted the question-answer format for their reports, which improved the quality of weaker reports, but decreased the quality of reports from the stronger groups. Of course, much depends on the questions set: initially I asked just descriptive questions, but better results were obtained when I also asked evaluative questions (*e.g.* 'how successful are X's arguments for Y?' as well as 'what point is X trying to make in section 2?')

4. Results

Towards the end of each course, I distributed anonymous questionnaires, asking questions about how the study groups had worked in practice, about how they had affected seminars, and about how students had perceived the course more generally. (I also asked them to fill out our usual evaluation forms, which ask about lecture quality, library provision and so on). Details of questionnaire responses are given in the appendices. In the present section I will give a more qualitative description of these results, together with my own impressions of how the system worked. I will focus on the results for the first semester course (Epistemology), partly because I obtained more questionnaire responses there, but I will also discuss some differences in student responses to the two courses. In the concluding section of the paper, I will explain how I would use the system in future, and mention some possible extensions of the system.

In the first semester, students typically said that their study groups met every week or most weeks, that the meetings lasted for an hour or so, and that usually just one person was missing. I had had the impression that most groups were meeting less frequently, but the questionnaire result suggests instead that groups sometimes met without producing a report as evidence of the meeting. The issue of attendance is a tricky one, since the tutor cannot monitor attendance except by requiring students to inform on one another. This seems to me to be unacceptable. I usually enquired gently after missing reports, but it would certainly be possible to be more forceful about this.

However, many students felt strongly about 'freeloaders'. One student asked after a couple of weeks to be moved to a different group, complaining that others in the study group were disorganised and ill prepared; I granted this request. Conscientious students often felt that those who either didn't turn up for study groups, or else turned up unprepared were profiting unfairly from their labours. To a certain extent, I think this is a misconception—students who missed the

meetings, or did not prepare were unlikely to get much out of the seminars, and students who showed up well prepared would get some benefit from both the preparation and the discussion. Nevertheless, it is beneficial for the individual if other group members are well prepared, and some students clearly felt frustrated by their peers.

It was the issue of perceived freeloading that made me reluctant to insist on reports being produced every week. The students tended to take it in turns to write the report (with the exception of one group who had access to a laptop and wrote the reports collectively during their lengthy meetings). If I had put more emphasis on the reports being produced weekly, this would presumably have resulted either in internal arguments or else in some students writing a disproportionate number of reports. Any student who wrote a weekly report would have benefited a great deal, but at the expense of a lot of bad feeling, I suspect. I could have required that each student submit at least two reports during the semester, but this would have detracted from the aim of making groups feel collectively responsible for their reports.

In arranging groups, I indulged in a little light setting, attempting for example to place strong students together (sometimes) and to distribute less conscientious students and overseas students (separately) amongst the groups rather than clustering them together. In consequence (I think) only one group completely collapsed, and that was one of the very few where students had asked to be placed together. The groups in which I attempted to collect some of the stronger students produced some very successful reports, and seemed to have particularly fruitful discussions. The possibility of thus manipulating group membership raises interesting political and moral issues, worth discussing elsewhere.

Most students on the course didn't know one another when the course began. In the first semester, I set the study group system going by introducing the students to one another at their first seminar; thus, the first study group meeting discussed material for the second seminar. Everyone who answered the questionnaire that semester claimed that his or her study group met at least once. In the second semester, I did not introduce the members of the study groups to one another explicitly (although we did the usual round-the-table introductions), but just distributed the relevant email addresses and asked them to arrange meetings. Some groups in the second semester never met at all, and in future I would follow the strategy I used in the first semester, thus forcing at least one face-to-face initial meeting.

Several groups had difficulty finding a place to meet. I offered to book rooms for those who wanted them, and some groups took me up on this offer, but our teaching accommodation is in heavy demand and I would not have been able to find space for every group. Our accommodation is designed for lectures and tutorials, not for large numbers of meetings of small groups of students, and if the study group system became more common, we would need to think about whether the university could provide rooms bookable by students themselves for this sort of meeting.

Other groups had difficulty finding a mutually convenient time to meet during the couple of days between the initial lecture on a topic and the deadline for emailing that week's report. St Andrews is a small town where most students live within 20 minutes walk of one another. But not all students live in the town. Students from the local region, including a disproportionate number of mature students, often live at some distance from St Andrews, which made them reluctant to travel in for a meeting unless they had other classes that day, and also prone to resenting freeloaders. Some students had heavy commitments to paid work, to family responsibilities or to extra-curricular activities, and some just resented the imposition of more structure onto their time. This raises the question of whether study groups should be presented as an 'optional extra' for those who want them, and I will return to this question in my concluding section.

Reports were read fairly often, but not religiously, and students were more likely to read reports produced by their own study group than those produced by others in the seminar.[4] On the other hand, the state of the library ring binder suggested that many students consulted the filed reports only when revising for the exam (*i.e.* after they had filled out the questionnaire) so reports may eventually have been quite widely read. Students were keen on my 'marking' the reports—when I did so I usually just corrected glaring errors and highlighted interesting remarks, but even this minimal intervention seemed welcome. I did not often explicitly refer to student reports during the seminars, though perhaps this would have increased the status of the reports, and encouraged students to read them more carefully before the seminar. I think the main benefits of the

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[4] Unfortunately, however, the wording of my question was ambiguous. I wanted to know what proportion of *reports* the student had read, but the question could easily have been taken to ask about the proportion of *weeks* in which the student had read a report. Thus a student might have read every available report, yet not answered 'always', on the grounds that reports were not always available.

study group system come from the discussions themselves, and from the preparation of the reports; so whether or not they are read is less important (although many claimed to find them at least 'quite useful'). However, the prospect of other students reading the reports is presumably an incentive to producing good reports, and promotes the sense of a collective enterprise.

Most people who participated in the study groups thought that they were either 'very useful' or 'quite useful' in helping them understand the reading material and the broader subject matter. But there was an even stronger feeling that the study groups had been useful in motivating students to read. First, the study group meeting set a 'pre-deadline' for the seminar, giving the student two chances to get the reading done before the main seminar. Second, and more importantly, students repeatedly remarked to me that, in effect, they had realised that if no-one prepares for a tutor-led tutorial, the tutor hauls them through, but if no-one prepares for a study group meeting, then the meeting cannot function. I find this very encouraging, since it indicates that the study groups gave students a sense of responsibility for their learning.

Many examination scripts and most essays showed evidence of an unusually close reading of the set articles. Even weaker students tended to structure their essay around a key article, rather than follow the structure of a textbook. I had the sense that for most students, the bulk of their work for these courses had involved careful reading of articles from the relevant anthology, and I view this as an important success. Of course, not everyone managed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the issues using this method, and many people complained about the difficulty of the material (on both courses). But whilst they may have learnt a little less epistemology and metaphysics than they would have done otherwise, I think that the experience of working hard on some tough material will have improved both their philosophical skills and their transferable skills related to reading and comprehension.

Many students said they were more likely to contribute to the seminars as a result of the study groups. The comments on this issue were even more encouraging (see the appendices). Those who felt more likely to contribute remarked either that the increased total discussion time gave them more of a chance to think of something to say—a good sign that they were simply thinking more—and/or that the opportunity to try out their ideas or express their confusions to friendly students who didn't find them ridiculous made them more confident in the larger group. Of those who said that the study groups made no difference,

some were negative about the groups, whilst others said either that they were too shy to speak regardless of the context, or else that they were confident enough to speak in any group. In a few cases it seemed that shy students had let their ideas filter out through their study groups. Although it would be preferable for those students to develop the confidence to speak in seminars, it is better that they contribute via study groups than that they not contribute at all.

Asked whether they would join a study group if it were optional, about half of the regular attendees in the first semester said 'yes', whilst very few recorded a definite 'no'—most regular attendees in the second semester said 'yes', but there were fewer regular attendees in total. Someone wrote 'probably not, but it would be better if I did since I'm too lazy.' In the first semester, plenty said they would want to stick with the same people in future, although in fact this sentiment was not borne out in the second semester, when few students actively asked to be placed with particular others. Some were very critical of their fellow group members, whilst some said that they had liked their group but fancied a change.

Finally, although most students made comments about the study group system, it is striking that in both semesters relatively few mentioned any aspect of the study group system when asked to cite the best thing and the worst thing about the course as a whole: it was much more common to cite the lectures, the topics covered or the reading material (David Lewis featured as both the best thing and the worst thing about the metaphysics course, on different questionnaires).

There seemed to be less enthusiasm about the study groups in the second semester than there was in the first, and the system seemed to have operated less extensively, although I obtained fewer questionnaire returns in the second semester, so comparisons are only approximate. Why this difference? There were several significant differences between the two courses—the first was taught entirely by one person, whilst the second was team-taught; there were different students on the two courses (although there was substantial overlap); the first semester course was focused on a few interrelated topics, whilst the second semester course was more wide-ranging. However, with respect to the study groups, there were two main practical differences, which I have already mentioned, and which may have contributed to the waning of enthusiasm. In the first, but not the second semester, I introduced study group members to one another explicitly at the first seminar, rather than expecting them to find each other by email. This got the groups off to a

good start. In addition, in the first but not the second semester, I usually marked the group reports and made them available in the library for students to consult. This increased the attention paid to the reports, and made the students feel they were getting feedback on their work.

5. Conclusions

Based on conversations, questionnaire returns, my experiences in class, and the work I read, I have no doubt that many students benefited a great deal from the study group system. But there are questions of detail about how best to operate the system, and there is also an important question about those students who did not benefit, either because other students had let them down, or because they simply preferred to work alone. I will deal with these issues in turn, and then consider some possible extensions of the system.

Even students who were broadly positive about the study groups seemed to need some outside impetus to get them going, including face-to-face introductions and the offer of rooms in which to meet. The monitoring of reports also seems to be important both to give students the continuing impression that the study groups are a central part of the course, and to make them feel that freeloading groups are under at least some pressure to perform. Minimally this monitoring can take the form of simply enquiring after missing reports, but it also seems important to many students that the reports are read and checked.

Of course, this requires extra time on the part of the tutor. More positively, report checking is an attractive way of providing some feedback to students on work that is not assessed, without taking on the task of regular marking of individuals' work. It also has the advantage that reports are nominally 'owned' by the group, so that everyone can share responsibility for errors, and share the glory when the report is praised. Given time constraints, I would therefore be inclined to put more effort into report-marking in future, but to schedule slightly fewer seminars—for example, 'skipping' a seminar in the week that essays are due (when students typically fail to attend, or fail to prepare thoroughly in any case).

Students who were negative about the study groups generally fell into one of two groups. Either they wanted to participate but felt let down by other students (because their group had completely collapsed, or they felt exploited), or else they just did not want to participate. The first issue, of freeloading, is perhaps the most problematic element of the study group system, and I haven't worked out a clear solution. One or

two freeloaders in a group do not create a genuine problem if conscientious students can be persuaded that nothing is being gained for free: in future I would try to make it clear at the outset that those who do not contribute are in fact not benefiting much from their peers. But if under-prepared or absent students dominate a study group, then constructive discussion is undermined and the problem is genuine.

A partial solution is to make it clear to students that they can ask to switch groups. This is a useful quick fix, but it has its limitations: some students may be embarrassed to complain about their peers; study groups need to be kept small if they are to function properly; and in most cases it will be impractical for students to switch seminars, so alternatives are limited. And it means that the less motivated or less well-organised students are abandoned to their fates. Perhaps this is fair enough: all students have access to the seminars and lectures, and if they do not make the most of this additional opportunity, then perhaps, that's just too bad. There are, of course, much larger issues here, about the extent to which students should take responsibility for their own studies.

Finally, there are students who simply don't want to participate, either because they prefer to study alone, or else because they have other commitments and want to keep as much control as possible over their timetable. In future, I would allow students to opt out of the study group system from the outset, provided that they explain their reasons for doing so. If numbers are small, this should create no problems, but if a substantial number of students wish to opt out, it might be preferable to collect them together in traditionally run seminars, so that other seminars consist entirely of study-group participants. I think that an opt-out system is preferable to an opt-in system, since many students were persuaded of the value of the study groups only through participation. A department might operate an opt-out system for core courses, so that most students experience study groups at least once, followed by an opt-in system for subsequent courses when students can make an informed judgement about participation.

How might the system be extended in future? One option would be to do so through the department, so that students typically attend study groups for more than one course in a given week—if study groups are a good thing, then more study groups sound like a better thing, but this would increase both the demands upon meeting space and the difficulty for students in arranging meeting times. Another option would be to extend the system to less advanced students—in my institution, at least, this would heighten the problem of freeloaders, since there is

typically a larger proportion of an unmotivated student in pre-honours classes. A third option would be to explore ways of assessing study group work—so far as I can see, this would be counterproductive, since the study groups are intended to provide a friendly, low-pressure environment. However, I am in general unfamiliar with methods of group assessment, so there may be possibilities for others here.

In summary: given large frequent seminars, study groups are a welcome addition and improve student learning in most cases. However, they do bring some extra work for the tutor. Moreover, care must be taken with the details of arrangements, and provision should be made for those students who have principled reasons for opting out. I have not explored the question of whether the use of large frequent seminars plus study groups is preferable to less frequent but smaller seminars, since my aim was to find a way of improving the large frequent seminars. The study groups have proved to be a successful way of engaging large numbers of students with some complex philosophical material.

Appendix 1. Questionnaire Results for the First Semester

In the first semester course (Epistemology)—the class size was 75, and I obtained 57 responses (though not everyone answered every question). Other students were either absent when I handed out the questionnaires, or else didn't fill them in. Presumably, then, students with a negative attitude towards this course in particular, or towards their studies in general, are underrepresented in these responses. I have given the data as raw numbers, rather than as percentages.

1. How often did your study group meet? (57 responses)
Every week: 33 Most weeks: 14 About half the weeks: 5 Hardly ever: 5 Never: 0

In analysing responses to all the remaining questions, I have distinguished between students who said their study group met every week or most weeks (*Frequent meeters*), and those who said they met about half the weeks or hardly ever (*Infrequent meeters*).

2. At a typical study group meeting, how many people were missing?
Frequent meeters (47 responses):
No-one: 8 One person: 26 Two people: 10 Three people: 2 Four people: 1
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
No-one: 1 One person: 3 Two people: 3 Three people: 1 Four people: 2

3. How long did your study group meetings usually last?
Frequent meeters (47 responses):
Less than 30 minutes: 1 30-60 minutes: 23 60-90minutes:15 over 90 minutes: 8

Several people who said they met for longer than 90 minutes explained that they had written the group report collectively on a laptop during the study group meeting.

Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Less than 30 minutes: 0   30-60 minutes: 7   60-90 minutes: 3   over 90 minutes: 0

4. When you wrote a report, how long did it usually take you?
Frequent meeters (47 responses):
Less than 10 minutes: 0   10-30 minutes: 5   30-60 minutes:21   60-90 minutes: 14
more than 90 minutes: 7
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Less than 10 minutes: 0   10-30 minutes: 0 30-60 minutes:7 60-90 minutes: 3
more than 90 minutes: 0

5. How often had you done the set reading before your study group meeting?
Frequent meeters (47 responses):
Always: 16   Most times: 26   Some times: 4   Never: 1
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Always: 2   Most times: 4   Some times: 3   Never: 1

6. How often had you done the set reading before the main seminar?
Frequent meeters (47 responses):
Always: 24   Most times: 18   Some times: 3   Never: 2
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Always: 3   Most times: 5   Some times: 0   Never: 2

7. How often did you read your group's report (when you didn't write it)?
Frequent meeters (47 responses):
Always: 13   Most times: 14   Some times: 15   Never: 5
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Always: 3   Most times: 5   Some times: 0   Never: 2

8. How often did you read other groups' reports?
Frequent meeters (47 responses):
Always: 8   Most times: 18   Some times: 18   Never: 3
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Always: 1   Most times: 3   Some times: 6   Never: 0

9. When you read reports did you use email or the library?
Frequent meeters (47 responses):
Email: 33   Library: 8   Both: 5
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Email: 5   Library: 2   Both: 3

Please explain your choice: Those who preferred email usually cited convenience, and often had email access at home. Those who preferred the library said that they liked to read hard copy, that they didn't have easy access to email and/or that they were not comfortable using computers. One respondent also remarked that in the library s/he

had access to reports from seminar groups other than her own, whereas email circulation was restricted to a single seminar group.

Thinking about possible benefits from this system...
10. For helping you understand the set reading material, the study groups were:
Frequent meeters (47 responses):
Very useful: 18   Quite useful: 21   Not much use: 6   Confusing: 2
'very useful as long as everyone had read it - otherwise spent ages on unimportant points'
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Very useful: 0   Quite useful: 5   Not much use: 5   Confusing: 0

11. For helping you understand issues more generally, the study groups were:
Frequent meeters (47 responses):
Very useful: 16   Quite useful: 21   Not much use: 9   Confusing: 1
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Very useful: 0   Quite useful: 4   Not much use: 5   Confusing: 1

12. For motivating you to do the reading, the study groups were:
Frequent meeters (47 responses):
Very useful: 24   Quite useful: 17   Not much use: 5   Demotivating: 1
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Very useful: 1   Quite useful: 5   Not much use: 1   Demotivating: 3

13. When you read the reports from your study group, they were:
Frequent meeters (45 responses):
Very useful: 9   Quite useful: 23   Not much use: 11 Confusing: 1   Never read: 1
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Very useful: 0   Quite useful: 6   Not much use: 1   Confusing: 3   Never read: 0

14. When you read the reports from other study groups, they were:
Frequent meeters (45 responses):
Very useful: 6   Quite useful: 29   Not much use: 8   Confusing: 1   Never read: 1
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Very useful: 1   Quite useful: 5   Not much use: 1   Confusing: 3   Never read: 0

15. Did the study groups make you more/less likely to speak in seminars?
Frequent meeters (45 responses):
Much more likely: 9   A bit more likely: 14   Made no difference: 21
Less likely: 1
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Much more likely: 1   A bit more likely: 2   Made no difference: 5
Less likely: 2

Please explain your answer to the previous question:
Much more likely...
'Gets you used to speaking up. Shows you that your comments aren't as stupid as you think'; 'It is easier to admit confusion to a small group of peers, and once you learn that it is common confusion, you don't feel silly addressing it in seminar'; 'Having worked

through the material well and thought more about in discussion - helped bring up points to raise in class'; 'Debating the same area the second time gives you a chance to speak about more developed ideas'; 'Spent more time on the reading for the seminar so felt I knew more about it'; 'Study groups gave me an idea of what I understood or didn't understand, so more likely to raise my questions without feeling alone in the matter'; 'I got to know people in my group so was confident that I was on the right lines or at least 3 other people would agree!'; 'What I said in seminars was the ideas I came up with in study group'; 'Especially when I had written the report, I had much more of an idea';

A bit more likely...
'Gives opportunity to discuss ideas and get others' feedback'; 'Having discussed the issues already with several of the other students perhaps made me a bit more confident in the seminars'; 'If I have a better idea of what I'm talking about, I'm more likely to speak and discussing things beforehand - makes things clearer'; 'I prefer to listen to what others say - I already know what I think'; 'You had a better grasp of the material and therefore more likely to make comments'; 'Feel you understand more'; 'Even if you didn't understand the topic you could always question it with more authority after study group meetings'; 'The study groups made me more confident that my own thoughts were valid and agreeable with other people's'; 'Not usually forward within a group unless sure of subject'; 'But I still prefer just listening. When we are asked very obvious questions, people can feel patronized and that's why we are often slow in answering'; 'I knew that I definitely had some idea of what I was talking about'; 'They gave me more chance to think about the readings and form opinions, so I'd have things to say in the seminar'; 'Well, I think I spoke quite a bit in class - at least more than most, although I probably would have done this anyway. The study groups made me a bit more confident about *what* I was saying'; 'A bit more likely to start with, though this tailed off towards the end'; 'Already had ideas before coming to the seminar';

Made no difference...
'Unless someone from my group made the point I was going to it didn't stop me except perhaps a few problems solved in study group'; 'Not a confident student so I never speak in seminars anyway'; 'I tend to talk a lot anyway, but it did make me feel more confident'; 'I don't feel that my understanding of the articles was altered much by the study group attendance'; 'Most useful points were in our report, or mentioned by other group members'; 'I'm not normally scared to speak in seminars any more. If I understand the work and I have a point that I think is appropriate I would make it regardless'; 'It depends on whether I read the text, by myself *or* with other people'; 'I do the reading with or without the group. If I've read it, I am prepared to speak in seminars'; 'I still hate talking in seminars particularly when I don't understand the subject'; 'I have too much to say anyway'; 'I talk a great deal regardless'; 'It was helpful to have a more intimate group in which to speak, and clarified many things, but did not seem relevant to whether or not I would speak in seminars. Maybe it will in the long run'; 'If I've done the reading, I'll talk. If I haven't, I won't, so it makes little difference'; 'I feel quite shy to speak in front of larger groups regardless of whether I have already had a meeting on the topic'; 'I speak when I wanna, period!';

Less likely...
'Having gone over the material so much I felt drained'; 'Felt slightly intimidated'.

16. If study groups were an 'optional extra' would you choose to join one?
Frequent meeters (45 responses):
Yes: 22   Maybe: 17   No: 6
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Yes: 3   Maybe: 5   No: 2

17. Would you want to stay in the same group of people on a future course?
Frequent meeters (45 responses):
Yes: 18   Don't mind: 18   No: 9
Infrequent meeters (10 responses):
Yes: 2   Don't mind: 4   No: 4

Finally, I asked students what was the best thing, and what the worst, about the course as a whole. Eleven students (out of 57) mentioned aspects of the study groups under 'best', and eleven mentioned them under 'worst'. Most students commented on other aspects of the course, including lectures, handouts, reading material and topics. This suggests that the study groups did not dominate students' perceptions of the course.

I also asked for general comments, and those related to the study groups included:
'The first two study group meetings were rather confused and probably a waste of time. However, as we became more familiar with the study group system I found the time much more well-spent'; 'Study group system sometimes meant that only one person ended up doing all the work, depending on the type of group you were in'; 'In study group scenarios, it seems like whoever shouts loudest gets heard'; 'I like them'; 'It's been much more interesting than I thought it would be, and the study groups were really helpful despite initial doubts'; 'Best thing: the fact that each topic was discussed on 3 occasions, in lecture, study group and seminar meant that I gained a better understanding'; 'I felt more comfortable knowing other students in the group'; 'I found the process of writing the group report more educative than the actual meetings'; 'I think study groups should be smaller in size'; 'Personally I prefer reading and thinking about a piece of reading by myself for a while before I talk about it. So unless everybody was well prepared for the study group it wasn't very useful'; 'Definitely should be introduced and imposed on other courses. Very useful to have other people's emails'; 'Study groups are great but discussing the reading because we had to write a report was distracting, limiting and often frustrating. I would rather have a free-flowing conversation about the readings'; 'Much time spent wandering about trying to find somewhere to have our discussion…'; 'Study groups being compulsory put added pressure on to attend extra class and have to do additional work. Pressure spoilt the idea of being able to get together and chat informally about the subject'; 'The study groups were very useful in making me do some work…Perhaps if one person from each group had to give a short presentation/summary of their report, people might be more likely to get the reports done'; 'I felt that it didn't really work because although I was willing to put the time and effort in, others in my group often didn't turn up/didn't do the reading. I had to do both my reports on my own'; 'I hate the university email system'; 'Study groups really compromised my personal time/work management';

Appendix 2: Questionnaire Results for the Second Semester

In the second semester course (Metaphysics), the class size was 80, and I obtained 40 responses. The relatively low response rate was due to the fact that I handed out the questionnaires at the final lecture, which covered a topic which would not be discussed in any seminar—many students decided not to bother with this lecture. Again, conscientious students are likely to be over-represented here. I have given the data as raw numbers, rather than as percentages.

1. How often did your study group meet?
Every week: 4   Most weeks: 17   Half the weeks: 9 Hardly ever: 7   Never: 4
'Every week at first, but dropped off as essays became due'; 'About half the weeks, we found it difficult to find times where all of us could meet'; 'I never met them, I don't even know who they are!'

In analysing the following responses, I have distinguished between (a) students who said their study group met every or most weeks (b) those who said they met about half the weeks or hardly ever and, where relevant, (c) those who said they never met with their study group.

2. Would you have liked your study group to have met more often than it did?
Frequent meeters (21 responses):
Yes: 4   No: 13   Don't mind: 4
Infrequent meeters (16 responses):
Yes: 10   No: 1   Don't mind: 5
Never met (4 responses):
Yes:1   No: 1   Don't mind: 2

3. At a typical study group meeting, how many people were missing?
Frequent meeters (21 responses):
No-one: 1   One person: 14   Two people: 4
Three people: 0   Four people: 2
Infrequent meeters (14 responses):
No-one: 0   One person: 5   Two people: 8
Three people: 0   Four people: 1

4. How long did your study group meetings usually last?
Frequent meeters (21 responses):
Less than 30 minutes: 2   30-60 minutes: 10
60-90 minutes: 9   more than 90 minutes: 0
Infrequent meeters (14 responses):
Less than 30 minutes: 1   30-60 minutes: 13
60-90 minutes: 2   more than 90 minutes: 0

5. When you wrote a report, how long did it usually take you?
Frequent meeters (21 responses):
Less than 10 minutes: 0   10-30 minutes: 7   30-60 minutes: 7
60-90 minutes: 6   longer: 1
Infrequent meeters (14 responses):

Less than 10 minutes: 0   10-30 minutes: 5   30-60 minutes: 6
60-90 minutes: 3   longer: 0

6. How often had you done the set reading before your study group meeting?
Frequent meeters (21 responses):
Always: 7   Most times: 11   Some times: 2   Never: 1
Infrequent meeters (15 responses):
Always: 8   Most times: 6   Some times: 1   Never: 0

7. How often had you done the set reading before the main seminar?
Frequent meeters (21 responses):
Always: 7   Most times: 12   Some times: 2   Never: 0
Infrequent meeters (14 responses):
Always: 6   Most times: 5   Some times: 3   Never: 0
Never met (4 responses):
Always: 1   Most times: 2   Some times: 1   Never: 0

8. How often did you read your group's report (when you didn't write it)?
Frequent meeters (20 responses):
Always: 5   Most times: 3   Some times: 10   Never: 2
Infrequent meeters (15 responses):
Always: 6   Most times: 2   Some times: 2   Never: 5
'N/A since only 2 of us ever submitted reports'

9. How often did you read other groups' reports?
Frequent meeters (21 responses):
Always: 2   Most times: 5   Some times: 10   Never: 4
Infrequent meeters (15 responses):
Always: 3   Most times: 4   Some times: 4   Never: 4

Thinking about possible benefits from this system…
10. For helping you understand the set reading material, the study groups were:
Frequent meeters (21 responses):
Very useful: 6   Quite useful: 12 Not much use: 1 Confusing: 1
Infrequent meeters (15 responses):
Very useful: 1   Quite useful: 9   Not much use: 4 Confusing: 1

11. For helping you understand issues more generally, the study groups were:
Frequent meeters (21 responses):
Very useful: 4   Quite useful: 12 Not much use: 4 Confusing: 1
Infrequent meeters (15 responses):
Very useful: 1   Quite useful: 7   Not much use: 6 Confusing: 1

12. For motivating you to do the reading, the study groups were:
Frequent meeters (21 responses):
Very useful: 6   Quite useful: 10 Not much use: 3 Demotivating: 2
Infrequent meeters (15 responses):
Very useful: 6   Quite useful: 5   Not much use: 4 Demotivating: 0

13. When you read the reports from your study groups, they were:
Frequent meeters (20 responses):
Very useful: 4   Quite useful: 10   Not much use: 5 Confusing: 1   Never read: 0
Infrequent meeters (15 responses):
Very useful: 1   Quite useful: 5   Not much use: 5 Confusing: 0   Never read: 4
'Quite useful in reminding me of what we'd discussed in the study group. They'd be more useful if [the tutor] had checked them over to correct any mistakes etc.'

14. When you read the reports from other study groups, they were:
Frequent meeters (16 responses, since several people didn't notice the questions on the back):
Very useful: 2   Quite useful: 9   Not much use: 3 Confusing: 1   Never read: 1
Infrequent meeters (15 responses):
Very useful: 1   Quite useful: 5   Not much use: 4 Confusing: 2   Never read: 3
Never met (4 responses):
Very useful: 1   Quite useful: 0   Not much use: 0 Confusing: 1   Never read: 2

15. Did the study groups make you more/less likely to speak in seminars?
Frequent meeters (15 responses):
Much more likely: 1   A bit more likely: 5
Made no difference: 8   Less likely: 1
Infrequent meeters (15 responses):
Much more likely: 0   A bit more likely: 7
Made no difference: 8   Less likely: 0

Please explain your answer to the previous question:
A bit more likely...
'Confidence in material. Issues that had been discussed we felt free to ask questions'; 'Because I had definitely done the reading and knew what we were talking about'; 'Able to get ideas together before the seminar and made me do the reading'; 'They made me feel a bit more confident with the material and the members of my seminar group'; 'I always knew what I'd like to say, but hate speaking in class still!'; 'I was better prepared for the discussion'; 'It's useful in that you have thought a bit about the reading prior to the seminar so you may have more ideas about it. I only speak in the seminar if I know what I'm saying makes sense, but I am not afraid to do so'; 'more confident about the concepts at hand'; 'Definite questions and comments already raised by the things we talked about in groups - already had ideas'; 'It seems a bit pointless to just go through the questions in the seminar. We've written our answers in the email, and if the tutor marks them there's no need to go over every question again'

Made no difference...
'Had we met more often it might have made a difference'; 'Depends on the week's material'; 'Seminar groups were quite large and intimidating'; 'I would read or not read depending on available time—I will chip in when I feel I have a relevant point regardless of preparation';

16. If study groups were an 'optional extra' would you choose to join one?
Frequent meeters (16 responses);
Yes: 11   Maybe: 4   No: 1
Infrequent meeters (16 responses):

Yes: 4   Maybe: 9   No: 3
Never met (4 responses):
Yes: 1   Maybe: 1   No: 2

17. Would you want to stay in the same group of people on a future course?
Frequent meeters (15 responses):
Yes: 4   Don't mind: 6   No: 5
Infrequent meeters (16 responses):
Yes: 2   Don't mind: 3   No: 11

Finally, I asked students what the best thing was, and what the worst, about the course as a whole. Four students (of a possible 40) mentioned aspects of the study groups under 'best', and four mentioned them under 'worst'. Most students commented on other aspects of the course, including lectures, handouts, reading material and topics. Again, this suggests that the study groups did not dominate students' perceptions of the course.

I also asked for general comments, and those related to the study groups included:
'Study groups are not a good way of studying for everyone; my workload/timetable for doing the reading earlier hampered my reading for other modules. They should be optional'; 'Study groups are unlikely to work if they are organised externally, they should form naturally if they're what students want'; 'The reason our study group failed to get organised was that no one individual took responsibility to plan meetings. We were 5 strangers whose schedules conflicted emailing each other with 'well, when do *you* want to meet?' so eventually we all just gave up'; 'I wrote too many reports'; 'Annoying when certain groups or people within groups did not make the effort, but the discussions in study groups were much more helpful than seminars'; 'Study group reports would be more useful if they were marked. What is the point in us writing a report if what we are writing has completely missed the point of the article or topic? If others are going to read the reports too it isn't going to help them either. The study groups are worthwhile but if no-one gives feedback on reports, there is no further motivation other than personal gain [!] for groups to meet'; 'To encourage proper writing of email reports, we need to believe they will be read by the tutor and marked if possible, although I appreciate that may be a lot of trouble.'

Discussion:
Some Reflections on Recent Philosophy Teaching Scholarship

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I. Introduction

For six months I have been employed by the PRS-LTSN as an Academic Reviewer. This position has involved reading and reviewing past volumes of the American journal *Teaching Philosophy* as well as material from a number of other sources. In particular, I have read the entire contents of over six volumes of *Teaching Philosophy*, some 129 articles, and out of those 129 I have written reviews of 76.[1] The following remarks are general reflections on the scholarship devoted to the teaching of philosophy that I have encountered in *Teaching Philosophy*. They are not meant as comments on the quality of this particular journal or on the judgements of its editors but rather as more general comments on the state of existing research devoted to the teaching of philosophy. I shall follow these comments with some suggestions regarding areas where future work may be helpful.

II. Central Themes of Existing Scholarship

The range of topics discussed in the existing literature is surprisingly narrow. In my 'sample' of 129 articles only a handful of themes emerge. These include:

- personal reflections on what it means to be a philosophy teacher;
- teaching applied ethics to medicine, law, and business students;
- minor technical problems in logic teaching;

- gender and race issues when teaching philosophy (especially the history of philosophy);
- how to inspire students in a first year introductory course, many of whom may not intend to study philosophy to degree level;
- how to improve the quality of student writing.

Naturally, there are other contributions that fall outside of these categories, but nevertheless the majority of the articles that I have read fall into one or other of these groups. I shall comment on each in turn.

a) Personal Reflections

Personal reflections about an individual's own experiences teaching philosophy are generally of limited value.[2] More often than not, the poorest material falls into this category. Such contributions rarely offer either theoretical insights or practical suggestions. Consequently, the majority of articles that fell into this category were not reviewed. Only one caught my attention: a personal reminiscence by a senior academic about her own education in Cambridge under Wittgenstein and Moore.[3] What was especially interesting about this piece was the way in which— when considered *as teachers*—the sober and scholarly Moore appeared in a significantly more favourable light than the creative and passionate Wittgenstein did. Being a good philosopher and being a good teacher are two quite different things. It is by no means obvious that they will always coincide. Indeed, attempting to be both at once may, at times, create a number of tensions.

b) Applied Ethics

A considerable proportion of the existing scholarship is only tangentially concerned with teaching philosophy itself. By this I refer to those articles devoted to the teaching of medical ethics, business ethics, legal ethics, and the like.[4] These subjects are taught both by staff in philosophy

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[2] Examples include Jon N. Torgerson, "Why I Teach Philosophy", *Teaching Philosophy*, 13 (1990), 3-11; Joel Marks, "Teaching Philosophy, Being a Philosopher", *Teaching Philosophy*, 16 (1993), 99-104; Ladelle McWhorter, "Can a Postmodern Philosopher Teach Modern Philosophy?", *Teaching Philosophy*, 23 (2000), 1-13; Robert C. Solomon, "What is Called Thinking? Teaching the Joy of Philosophy", *Teaching Philosophy*, 24 (2001), 205-18.

[3] See Alice Ambrose, "Moore and Wittgenstein as Teachers", *Teaching Philosophy*, 12 (1989), 107-13.

[4] See *e.g.* Joseph S. Ellin, "Confidentiality in the Teaching of Medical Ethics: A Case Report", *Teaching Philosophy*, 8 (1985), 1-12; Joseph D. Allegretti & Charles J. Dougherty,

departments and by 'ethicists' within other departments. Often they appear to involve little more than the teaching of the professional codes of conduct for the relevant subject: 'lawyers should not lie because it brings the profession into disrepute'. Such material obviously has little bearing on wider issues in philosophy pedagogy.

Indeed, one of the better articles that I have read in this category argues that the teaching of the ethics of another discipline should be left to staff from that discipline rather than given to a philosopher.[5] The philosopher should perhaps play the role of the mentor or consultant, training academics from other disciplines how to teach ethics, but not actually teaching applied ethics themselves. For although a philosopher may be an expert in the complexities of moral theory, they are less likely to be familiar with the sorts of moral problems and dilemmas that are unique to a particular profession.

Another article reports the problems that can arise when philosophers do attempt to teach professional ethics.[6] A class of otherwise happy and motivated law students was reduced to a state of existential crisis after a compulsory course in applied legal ethics. The philosopher teaching the class managed to convince them that the adversarial legal system was inherently unjust and immoral. Some students quit law in favour of some other non-vocational subject (to the horror or their parents) while others became depressed by the morally dubious future career that they had chosen for themselves. In sum, the literature devoted to applied and professional ethics suggests that

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"Teaching Ethics in Law School", *Teaching Philosophy*, 8 (1985), 13-25; David R. Hiley & William G. Layton, "Team-Teaching with the Corporate Executive", *Teaching Philosophy*, 8 (1985), 27-31; Michael Yeo, "*Primum Non Nocere*: The Ethics of Teaching Medical Ethics", *Teaching Philosophy*, 12 (1989), 23-34; Michael Davis, "Who Can Teach Workplace Ethics?", *Teaching Philosophy*, 13 (1990), 21-38; Morton Winston, "Ethics Committee Simulations", *Teaching Philosophy*, 13 (1990), 127-40; Ellen R. Klein, "From Classroom to Boardroom: Teaching Practical Ethics Outside the Academy", *Teaching Philosophy*, 16 (1993), 123-30; Michael Davis, "Developing and Using Cases to Teach Practical Ethics", *Teaching Philosophy*, 20 (1997), 353-85; Michael C. Loui, "Fieldwork and Cooperative Learning in Professional Ethics", *Teaching Philosophy*, 23 (2000), 139-56; Heather J. Gert, "Two Ways to Teach Premedical Students the Ethical Value of Discussion and Information Gathering", *Teaching Philosophy*, 24 (2001), 233-40.

[5] See Michael Davis, "Who Can Teach Workplace Ethics?", *Teaching Philosophy*, 13 (1990), 21-38. Note also the same author's "Ethics Across the Curriculum: Teaching Professional Responsibility in Teaching Courses", *Teaching Philosophy*, 16 (1993), 205-35.

[6] See Joseph D. Allegretti & Charles J. Dougherty, "Teaching Ethics in Law School", *Teaching Philosophy*, 8 (1985), 13-25.

philosophers should think carefully before leaving the confines of their own departments.[7]

c) Logic

Articles devoted to the teaching of logic constitute a substantial proportion of the existing literature. These are rarely general reflections upon the problem of teaching a formal language to humanities students. Rather they usually take the form of a very specific suggestion designed to help the teacher explain a particular logical concept or procedure.[8] Yet many of the suggestions made in this literature appear (to me, a non-logician) to propose an alternative just as complex as the problem they purport to address, if not more so. Teaching logic no doubt has its own pedagogical issues and these clearly deserve attention. But the literature to date appears to be of somewhat limited value.

d) Gender and Race

A number of authors in *Teaching Philosophy* share a passionate concern with issues surrounding gender and race.[9] These authors appear to be

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[7] There are, of course, other ways in which one might introduce philosophy to, say, law students. In my review of Allegretti & Dougherty I suggest that rather than teach 'professional ethics' it might be more interesting and productive to teach 'philosophy of law', *i.e.* philosophical reflection on the nature of justice, the foundations of legal authority, and the like. This would give law students a chance to engage in serious philosophical discussion about their subject.

[8] See *e.g.* Wayne Grennan, "Testing Syllogisms with Venn-Equivalent Truth-Table Methods", *Teaching Philosophy*, 8 (1985), 237-39; Robert L. Armstrong & Lawrence W. Howe, "A Euler Test for Syllogisms", *Teaching Philosophy*, 13 (1990), 39-46; Mike Donn, "Help in Finding Missing Premises", *Teaching Philosophy*, 13 (1990), 159-64; Mark T. Nelson, "Promises and Material Conditionals", *Teaching Philosophy*, 16 (1993), 155-56; Howard Pospesel, "The Method of Propositional Analogues", *Teaching Philosophy*, 16 (1993), 157-63; Donald Wayne Viney, "Logic Crystallized", *Teaching Philosophy*, 20 (1997), 143-54; Morgan Forbes, "Peirce's Existential Graphs: A Practical Alternative to Truth Tables for Critical Thinkers", *Teaching Philosophy*, 20 (1997), 387-400; Marvin J. Croy, "Problem Solving, Working Backwards, and Graphic Proof Representation", *Teaching Philosophy*, 23 (2000), 169-87; Leigh S. Cauman, "On Conditional Proof in Elementary Logic", *Teaching Philosophy*, 23 (2000), 353-57; David Socher, "The Textbook Case of Affirming the Consequent", *Teaching Philosophy*, 24 (2001), 241-51.

[9] See *e.g.* Ofelia Schutte, "Overcoming Ethnocentrism in the Philosophy Classroom", *Teaching Philosophy*, 8 (1985), 137-44; Phyllis Woloshin, "Text Selection and Moral Obligation", *Teaching Philosophy*, 8 (1985), 221-27 ; John Immerwahr, "Incorporating Gender Issues in Modern Philosophy Courses", *Teaching Philosophy*, 13 (1990), 241-52; John Immerwahr & Michael Burke, "Race and the Modern Philosophy Course", *Teaching Philosophy*, 16 (1993), 21-34; Olufemi Taiwo, "On Diversifying the Philosophy Curriculum", *Teaching Philosophy*, 16 (1993), 287-99; Valerie Broin, "Integrating Critical

especially concerned about the content of a typical American 'Introduction to Philosophy' course. Such courses usually take the form of a history of early modern philosophy, focusing upon philosophers such as Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant—'seven dead white European males' as a number of contributors refer to them.[10]

It is of course important to be sensitive to issues surrounding gender and race bias but some of the suggestions that have been made in an attempt to introduce diversity into the study of the history of Western philosophy appear to be of limited value. It is a harsh fact that there are unlikely to be, for instance, many first rate female or African philosophers from the seventeenth century awaiting rediscovery. This simply reflects the social conditions of that period and I doubt that there is little that the modern teacher of philosophy can do in order to overcome the dominance of white men in the history of early modern philosophy. There have been a number of important female philosophers in past centuries, one notable example being Anne Conway.[11] There are, thanks to improving social and cultural conditions, considerably more today.

Attempts to broaden the traditional canon of early modern Western philosophy may have limited success. However one area where there has been *real* neglect is in the history of Islamic philosophy, something not mentioned in any of the articles that I have read. Avicenna and Averroes—as they were known to the Latin West—formed vital influences on the development of later medieval philosophy yet they rarely figure in the range of courses usually offered to undergraduates.[12] Our Western predecessors acknowledged their philosophical importance, but do we? We should certainly acknowledge their historical importance. There may be a number of reasons for this neglect, including the challenges of the Arabic language for a beginner

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Analysis: Philosophy with Multicultural and Gender Focus", *Teaching Philosophy*, 16 (1993), 301-14; Kayley Vernallis, "Pearls of Wisdom: An Exercise in Promoting Multicultural Understanding and Philosophical Engagement", *Teaching Philosophy*, 23 (2000), 43-51.

[10] See John Immerwahr, "Incorporating Gender Issues in Modern Philosophy Courses", *Teaching Philosophy*, 13 (1990), p. 241.

[11] See ibid., pp. 248-49.

[12] Modern scholarship prefers to use their transliterated Arabic names, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes).

and the relative lack of textbooks and translations.[13] However, it may also reflect the general lack of attention received by medieval philosophy in general.

A separate issue, however, is the bias that one finds *within* texts from the history of Western philosophy. Hume's sexism or Locke's slave ownership are topics that may well benefit from class discussion, especially if they run the risk of becoming barriers between students and the philosophical material at hand. But perhaps the most important way to address issues of gender and race in the classroom is to make sure that all of one's students are assessed solely with reference to their intellectual abilities. One hopes that this is already standard practice.

e) Motivating Students

One of the central concerns for authors in *Teaching Philosophy* is how one might inspire students of other subjects who are taking a compulsory introductory philosophy course.[14] One comes away with the impression that in the US there is a large army of philosophy teachers who only teach these sorts of courses, often in universities and colleges that do not offer full philosophy degrees. Indeed, reading articles devoted to this problem is perhaps the surest way to become convinced that philosophers should not attempt to offer general philosophy courses to undergraduates of other disciplines who probably do not want them.[15] I imagine that there is no more depressing a teaching experience than being faced with a class of students not one of whom wants to be taught. It may be that there are some, say, Engineering students with a genuine

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[13] One impressive work that deserves note is Seyyed Hossein Nasr & Oliver Leaman, eds, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Routledge History of World Philosophies 1 (London: Routledge, 1996), with a paperback edition issued in 2001.

[14] See *e.g.* Derek Harrison, "Keeping it Alive", *Teaching Philosophy*, 8 (1985), 201-06; Daniel Cohen, "Putting Paradoxes to Pedagogical Use in Philosophy", *Teaching Philosophy*, 8 (1985), 309-17; Patrick McKee, "Philosophy and Wisdom", *Teaching Philosophy*, 13 (1990), 325-30; Larry S. Bowlden, "'They Read Novels, Don't They?' Using Novels in Teaching Philosophy", *Teaching Philosophy*, 13 (1990), 359-64; William B. Irvine, "Teaching Without Books", *Teaching Philosophy*, 16 (1993), 35-46; Eugene V. Torisky Jr., "Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun*: Literature in the Philosophy Classroom", *Teaching Philosophy*, 23 (2000), 255-68.

[15] This is quite distinct, however, from the suggestion that philosophy departments should offer tailored courses to students in other departments, such as 'philosophy of biology' for biology students, for instance.

interest in philosophy; I suspect that there are considerably more who just want to get on with studying their preferred subject.[16]

Some of the suggestions that have been made in these sorts of articles may nevertheless be of value. They include some more obvious tactics for encouraging discussion in the seminar room, the use of non-academic material such as films and novels, and a range of other devices designed to make seventeenth century epistemology (apparently the core of such introductory courses) relevant to the lives of twenty-first century teenagers. In the UK, where compulsory introductory courses for students from other disciplines are less common, this problem may well be less acute. After all, in theory all UK philosophy undergraduates have opted to be so due to at least some passing interest in the subject. If there is any pedagogical issue to be addressed here, it is simply that of finding how to relate students' preconceptions about philosophy as a subject (*i.e.* why they chose to study it) with the academic conception of the subject (*i.e.* what a typical department teaches). All that is needed, then, is a little staff-student dialogue. Staff need to find out *why* students choose to study philosophy and then use this knowledge to help them orientate (but not water-down) their courses.

f) Student Writing

The material in this final category probably has the widest significance for philosophy teaching in the UK. This material is concerned with the quality of student writing and how one might improve it.[17]

Indeed, by far the best article that I have read out of the 129 is devoted to this subject. It is also, perhaps tellingly, one of the few articles written by a philosopher with whose name I was already familiar: Jonathan Bennett.[18] This beautifully crafted essay is full of modest yet useful advice that I would recommend to both teachers and students of philosophy. It is packed with that special sort of 'common sense' that, while many might acknowledge as obvious, fewer manage to follow in

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[16] For more on compulsory humanities courses see my review of Jane Freimiller, "The One Page Philosopher: Short Writing Assignments for Introductory Classes", *Teaching Philosophy*, 20 (1997), 269-76, forthcoming at 'www.prs-ltsn.leeds.ac.uk/philosophy/reviews/articles/'.

[17] Beyond the articles discussed below, note also Stephen Fishman, "Writing and Philosophy", *Teaching Philosophy*, 12 (1989), 361-74; Gerald J. Erion, "Thinking Critically about College Writing: The Analogy between Arguments and Essays", *Teaching Philosophy*, 23 (2000), 53-61.

[18] See Jonathan Bennett & Samuel Gorovitz, "Improving Academic Writing", *Teaching Philosophy*, 20 (1997), 105-20.

their own practice. For instance, Bennett and his co-author Gorovitz suggest the following: do not use formal notation unless absolutely necessary; avoid abbreviations and acronyms; overcome the need to refer forwards in a paper by reordering the material; give clear and charitable accounts of other philosophers' ideas; produce abstracts of your work, even if you are not required to do so; use subheadings and breaks in the text, but do so carefully. This is the sort of practical advice that students need. But well-meant advice is not enough on its own. What they really need is some sort of training in writing and editing their own work.

One method that has been suggested in three different articles is peer review of preliminary essay drafts.[19] Students rarely revise their own work before submission, often leaving it until the last minute. These three authors all suggest the following approach: ask students to bring in a first draft of their essays to a seminar approximately one week before the deadline. Split the students into pairs and have them read each other's work. The authors vary as to the precise form that this exercise might take. Students could focus upon the clarity of the work they read or the substance of the arguments. It has also been suggested that students bring a second copy of their first draft and submit this to the teacher for comparison with the final version. This sort of approach has a number of benefits: students are forced to start work well before the final deadline; they receive critical feedback; their work is proofread for them; they get to read some of their contemporaries work and compare it with their own. Perhaps most importantly of all, teachers are likely to receive significantly better final work to read without the time-consuming task of marking each essay twice themselves (a prospect simply impractical for many). Although I have not had the opportunity to experiment with this approach myself yet, I do think that it is worth considering. It is a simple and reportedly effective way to help students improve their written work.

III. Future Directions

Much of the existing scholarship betrays its US origins. In the UK one does not generally have to offer a complete introduction to philosophy in

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[19] See Stanley J. Werne, "Taking Rough Drafts Seriously", *Teaching Philosophy*, 16 (1993), 47-57; Jeffrey K. McDonough, "Rough Drafts without Tears: A Guide to a Manageable Procedure for Improving Student Writing", *Teaching Philosophy*, 23 (2000), 127-37; Juli Eflin, "Improving Student Papers in 'Introduction to Philosophy' Courses", in T. Kasachkoff, ed., *In the Socratic Tradition: Essays on Teaching Philosophy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 47-53.

a single course to a large audience, many of whose members have enrolled only in order to fulfil a humanities requirement. Many of the problems that figure in the existing American scholarship reflect the particular pressures that face its authors.

There is, then, a need for further scholarship devoted to the teaching of philosophy that reflects the peculiarities of the British system and the specific needs of students studying in UK higher education. In what follows I shall focus upon what I take to be some important general issues for future work to address. It would be impracticable here to catalogue all of the various specialist issues (in, for example, logic, history of philosophy, ethics, or philosophy of religion) that deserve further attention. I leave that to experts in the respective areas.

a) Metaphilosophical Questions

One thing that is noticeable by its absence in the existing scholarship is theoretical reflection concerning the teaching of philosophy. The majority of articles that I have read centre around a narrative account of personal experiences in the classroom of the form 'last year I experimented by doing x and the students seemed to enjoy it'. But there is little abstract thought about, say, different philosophical methods, or the significance of metaphilosophy for questions concerning how best to teach philosophy. I suggest that metaphilosophical questions should always be in the background of any pedagogical research. For how can one determine how best to teach philosophy if one does not first decide what philosophy is? And as we all know, philosophers are not always quick to agree about what they think philosophy is or what it is supposed to achieve. Obviously there are no straightforward answers to such questions but one would at least expect philosophers (of all people) to be sensitive to such concerns. At the very least one might expect each philosopher to be able to give some sort of account of what it is that they think they are doing under the label 'philosophy', and so what it is that they claim to be teaching.

Perhaps such comments are unfair. Perhaps pedagogical research should concern itself with more down to earth matters, such as how to encourage timid students to contribute to seminar discussions, or how to support students who see formal logic as a repetition of the algebra classes at school that they hated. Perhaps. Such practical matters should no doubt form part of future scholarship devoted to philosophy teaching. But more abstract consideration of the nature of the task at hand seems equally appropriate and its absence is somewhat surprising.

b) Different Teaching Methods

In much of the existing literature there appears to be an assumption that there exists one generally preferred teaching method for philosophy: 'the Socratic method'. This method has been expertly defined in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*:

> The question-and-answer method of philosophizing (dialectic) used by Socrates in Plato's early dialogues (*e.g. Euthyphro*), often in conjunction with pretended ignorance (Socratic irony), whereby a self-professed expert's over-confident claim to knowledge is subverted.[20]

Brickhouse and Smith, commenting upon popular references to Socratic method, add that:

> The questions he [Socrates] asks, are, moreover, always "leading" questions; we never see Socrates asking questions when he does not at least appear to have some answer already in mind.[21]

Much of the existing scholarship simply assumes that this is the best way to teach philosophy. Occasionally this methodological issue is addressed directly. In particular, it has been argued that the teacher of philosophy should not make explicit his or her own philosophical beliefs when teaching a course on, say, ethics.[22] If the teacher states in class that he or she can see no good reason why abortion should be banned, this might discourage students from exploring the issue for themselves. Some students might take such a statement to be a definitive pronouncement and bow to the teacher's superior wisdom, enshrined as it is by the authority conferred on the teacher by his or her academic position. Other students, less naïve and more pragmatic, might decide not to risk arguing against the teacher's publicly proclaimed views in case they are

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[20] Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 837. This particular entry is by Andrew Belsey.
[21] Thomas C. Brickhouse & Nicholas D. Smith, *Plato's Socrates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 3. As it happens, I doubt that this is what the historical Socrates did. I take Socrates' professions of ignorance in the early Platonic dialogues to be genuine and so do not believe that Socrates himself ever engaged in what has come to be known as 'Socratic method'. Indeed, Brickhouse and Smith have come to the same conclusion (see ibid.). However, that is not my primary concern here.
[22] See Mike W. Martin, "Advocating Values: Professionalism in Teaching Ethics", *Teaching Philosophy*, 20 (1997), 19-34. Note also Joel Marks, "Teaching Philosophy, Being a Philosopher", *Teaching Philosophy*, 16 (1993), 99-104, esp. p. 100.

marked down for their disagreement. Or they might simply assume that if they do not agree with the teacher then they—the young and inexperienced students—have missed something important in the debate.

So, for all of these pedagogical reasons, it has been suggested that teachers should not make known their own philosophical beliefs. Instead, they should adopt the 'Socratic method' in which the teacher gently encourages his or her students, guiding them through a question and answer discussion until, by their own means, they come to a conclusion that the teacher has already reached. By using this method, it is argued, students are introduced to arguments both for and against a particular issue and are encouraged to explore those arguments for themselves, examining their relative merits. An intellectual space is created, so to speak, in which students can explore their own thoughts on a philosophical topic without being forced to frame those thoughts with reference to the opinions of the teacher. Students learn how to do philosophy, and not what the teacher happens to think about the issue under discussion.

This sounds all very well but I have a number of concerns about this approach to teaching philosophy:

1. Philosophers have opinions about philosophical issues. Many of these opinions are passionately held and vigorously defended. There is something disingenuous about pretending to one's students that one's own philosophical beliefs do not exist or are, in some sense, irrelevant to the discussion. If a teacher has strong arguments for or against a particular philosophical position then why should he or she not share them?

2. There is no such thing as impartiality, especially when one is dealing with academic philosophers. If a teacher of philosophy has a strongly held opinion on a particular issue then that will inevitably influence how he or she discusses that issue in class. Perhaps some opposing arguments will be overlooked; perhaps others will be dismissed without a fair hearing. No matter how impartial the teacher tries to be, his or her beliefs on a particular topic are bound to affect the way in which that topic is taught. Surely, it is better to be honest and open about those beliefs. Students have a far better chance of compensating for any bias when it is explicitly stated than they do when it remains hidden.

3. If the teacher of philosophy does not express an opinion on a topic under discussion then the students might think that the question is not especially important, that the teacher has no opinions, or that no particular opinion is better than any other. The lack of explicit commitment over the issue may lead students to devalue both the issues under discussion and the intellectual credentials of their teacher. If the teacher does not appear to care about whether, say, belief in God is justifiable or not, why should the students?

These potential problems with 'Socratic method' are rarely addressed in the existing literature and this is an area where further work may be especially useful. It is often assumed that the 'Socratic method' is simply *the* method for teaching philosophy. But this is merely an assumption. In the light of the problems that I have outlined, I suggest an alternative to the Socratic method. This is quite straightforward: the teacher of philosophy should put forward in class his or her own considered belief concerning the philosophical issue under discussion, supporting it with those arguments that have convinced them that this is the most reasonable position to take on the subject.[23] If, for instance, the topic under discussion in a practical ethics class is abortion, then the teacher should make clear his or her own position with regard to this subject, and should say *why* he or she finds this position the most plausible one to adopt. By doing this, students will know precisely what the teacher believes, what the teacher thinks counts as a reasonable argument with regard to this topic, and how one might construct an argument for or against a particular position.

　　　　Now, proponents of the Socratic method might immediately object that this might intimidate new students who will lack the confidence to question the bold assertions of their teachers, let alone to challenge them in class. Yet what is important is that the teacher does not claim that this is the end of the matter. If one proclaims one's own opinions in class, along with the reasons why one holds those opinions, then there is no reason why this should preclude any further debate. So

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[23] Here I am in agreement with Hugh Wilder (cited in Martin, ibid., p. 22) whose own method involves "explicitly stating to the student that I believe his or her claim is false, explaining why I believe it is false, arguing with the student about its truth value, and finally giving a low grade if necessary". Martin dismisses such an approach as "coercion". On the contrary, it sounds to me like an excellent example of serious philosophical engagement with one's students.

long as the teacher makes it clear that other arguments may be advanced for opposing positions (and perhaps directs students to literature advancing such positions), then why should he or she not be open with the class about his or her own philosophical beliefs? Indeed, the challenge for the students then becomes to find objections to the teacher's position, to try to convince the teacher to change his or her mind—in other words, to engage in serious philosophical debate.

The problems that proponents of the Socratic method claim to find with this alternative approach are really only the problems associated with poor, closed-minded, teachers. Such teachers would no doubt be equally poor using other methods, including the Socratic method. Any teacher of philosophy who enjoys open philosophical debate and respects the force of good arguments should be able to express his or her own opinions in class without closing off further debate. "I believe that it is acceptable to kill other human beings whenever they threaten to diminish my own well being. Convince me otherwise." Why should the teacher not open a course on ethics with such a statement if he or she actually believes it?[24] If a teacher begins with the assumption that all of their beliefs are correct and that their students will never be able to convince them otherwise, then that teacher should not be teaching philosophy, whatever method they might choose to employ.

As for intimidation, I suggest that this is often a product of a teacher's temperament rather than the method by which they teach.[25] This is obviously an issue to which teachers of philosophy should be sensitive, but there is no necessary connection between teachers openly expressing their philosophical beliefs in class and students being intimidated by those teachers, so long as it is made clear that students are encouraged to challenge those beliefs. One should also note that if the method that I outline here were adopted by a number of teachers in the same department then students would soon be exposed to the invariably opposing beliefs of the various members of faculty. And if students are faced with contradictory claims made by two or more figures invested

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[24] For an account of the use of provocative philosophical claims as foundations for classroom discussions see William B. Irvine, "Teaching Without Books", *Teaching Philosophy*, 16 (1993), 35-46, esp. pp. 40-41. Irvine's approach is to make deliberately provocative statements such as 'I defend cannibalism' rather than to make an open declaration of personal philosophical beliefs. Yet I imagine that the average academic philosopher will have a number of genuine beliefs that an audience of philosophical apprentices might find quite unsettling.

[25] However cultural differences may also be an issue here, especially when dealing with overseas students.

with institutional authority, then it should not take them too long to realise that not all of them can be correct.[26]

Of course, the method that I outline here does share something important in common with the Socratic method, namely that it is teaching by discussion rather than by lecture. Some may understand the phrase 'Socratic method' as just this, namely philosophy as open debate rather than scholastic learning or dogmatic preaching. Obviously I have no objection to open philosophical debate. But I do have some reservations about dishonesty in philosophical debate. In other words, I object to what has come to be known as 'Socratic irony'. For a discussion to be truly open, everyone needs to make plain their own position and their own arguments in favour of that position. Students will only learn to engage in such open philosophical debate if they have the opportunity to experience it in class. For that to happen, the teacher must be open about his or her own philosophical beliefs.

I have tried to outline some objections to what has come to be known as Socratic method and have sketched an alternative approach. These are obviously only preliminary contributions to what I suggest is needed, namely an explicit examination of those assumptions that many philosophers appear to share (in the existing scholarship, at least) about teaching methods in philosophy.

c) Training Graduate Teaching Assistants

In Bennett and Gorovitz's excellent article already mentioned above, the authors draw attention to the fact that graduate teaching assistants rarely receive any detailed training before being thrown in at the deep end.[27] In the UK it is increasingly common for institutions to offer short training programmes for teaching assistants. However these are usually generic and so brief that they are unable to offer any substantial guidance. One gets the impression that these courses are designed solely to meet certain bureaucratic 'teaching quality' requirements than actually to help those who are required to attend them.

Bennett and Gorovitz's remarks relate primarily to marking essays. Martin Benjamin has outlined a more substantial programme for training philosophy teaching assistants, designed as a term long seminar

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[26] This last point derives from a conversation with Michael Eardley. Faced with such a situation some students may become confused or unsure of the situation and so may require support.

[27] See Jonathan Bennett & Samuel Gorovitz, "Improving Academic Writing", *Teaching Philosophy*, 20 (1997), esp. p. 117.

course addressing a series of pedagogical topics in some detail.[28] The format of Benjamin's course is highly appropriate, namely seminars based around discussions of existing articles (primarily in *Teaching Philosophy*), a format already well familiar to the typical philosophy graduate student. Although a term long course may be impracticable for many departments, it may be possible to digest Benjamin's course into an intensive session over a few days. This is perhaps where the PRS-LTSN may be able to help, by organising short courses for graduate teaching assistants from a number of different departments. It goes without saying that such training is an excellent investment for the future, as at least some of today's teaching assistants will become tomorrow's lecturers.

d) Teaching Students to Write Well

Philosophers have tended to view with suspicion a concern with 'style' instead of 'content' ever since Plato, even though Plato himself was a master of written language. It is perhaps now time to acknowledge in our teaching practice that such an attitude is unhelpful. Instead we should perhaps turn to John of Salisbury who argued in his pedagogical treatise the *Metalogicon* that the study of both rhetoric and logic is essential to a philosophical education. In response to those who claim that philosophy 'is concerned not with words, but with facts', John argues that the art of eloquence is vital if one is to express such facts clearly.[29] Here he follows another ancient philosopher: Cicero. According to Cicero, the sharp division between philosophy and eloquence dates to (Plato's) Socrates.[30] Although Cicero acknowledges that 'wisdom lacking power of expression' is preferable to 'talkative folly', he doubts the value of the 'tongue-tied silence of the man who knows the facts but cannot explain them in language'.[31] Instead he holds up the ideal of the 'eloquent philosopher', one who is identical to the 'wise orator'. One might say that one skill without the other is of little value. However, one could go

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[28] See Martin Benjamin, "A Seminar on Teaching Philosophy", in T. Kasachkoff, ed., *In the Socratic Tradition: Essays on Teaching Philosophy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 259-68.

[29] See Daniel D. McGarry, *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), esp. pp. 24-27.

[30] See Cicero *De Oratore*, esp. 3.56-61, 3.69-73, 3.140-143.

[31] Cicero *De Oratore* 3.142, following the Loeb Classical Library translation by H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942).

further and suggest that thinking clearly and writing clearly cannot really be divorced from one another.

I would argue that teaching students how to write well is one of the most important pedagogical issues for philosophy. It is surprising how little attention is paid to the skill of writing well in philosophy departments, not only given the fact that this is the medium by which students are assessed, but also given the central place that language has occupied in twentieth century philosophy (both 'Analytic' and 'Continental'). If a student's ability to argue philosophically is judged via their ability to write philosophy, then the task of teaching them to argue well is, for all practical purposes, the same as the task of teaching them to write well. Moreover, the ability to write well is one of the most important transferable skills that a philosophy student has the opportunity to gain from his or her degree. An outsider might well expect philosophy graduates to have a more sophisticated command of the English language than other graduates, being able to manipulate abstract concepts and to make complex arguments.[32] But they will only do so if this skill is taught. Videos, multimedia presentations, role-playing; these are all very well but the mark of a decent philosophical education is the ability to argue well. And such arguments do not exist in the ether, so to speak; they are expressed in language and, in particular, in written language. Indeed, it is by written language that students are assessed at the end of their degrees, whether it be in examinations or via course work.

In the light of my own experience as an undergraduate student, a graduate student, and a teacher, I would suggest that teaching students how to write well should be every philosophy teacher's highest priority. Determining how best to achieve this should become the most important issue for those concerned with philosophy pedagogy. How many times has one heard the phrase 's/he is a very able student but they let themselves down on paper'. But such students do not let themselves down; *we* let them down by not teaching them how to argue effectively in their written work. No doubt many academic philosophers will acknowledge that their task as teachers of philosophy is not to transmit a body of knowledge but rather to develop certain critical skills. I suggest that 'writing' should be included among those skills.

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[32] Obviously graduates of other disciplines will also be able to do these things, but insofar as philosophy is a subject primarily devoted to the analysis of complex arguments it would not be unreasonable to suppose that a philosophy graduate would be especially skilled in presenting such arguments in both written and verbal language.

IV. In Conclusion

After reading well over 2000 pages of scholarship concerned with teaching philosophy I have come to the following conclusions. If one defines philosophy as a critical analysis of one's existing opinions and the attempt to replace those opinions with rationally ground beliefs, then teaching philosophy should involve teaching the skills necessary to accomplish this.[33] A successful philosophical education, then, will be one at the end of which one's students are able to call into question their own unexamined presuppositions and to think rationally for themselves. These are at least my own conceptions of philosophy and the function of a philosophical education.[34] The question, then, becomes this: how does the teacher of philosophy develop the necessary skills in order to achieve this in his or her students? As I have already noted, rational thought is assessed by rational output, so to speak. Success is measured by a student's ability to argue rationally in an essay or to complete correctly a logic exercise. So, the practical question is this: how can the teacher of philosophy train his or her students to produce coherently argued essays? I contend that many of the pedagogical techniques that crop up in the existing literature—computer programs, role-playing, videos, novels, and so on—are all of limited value. What is necessary is that students are taught to write well. What we need are books with titles such as 'how to write a philosophy essay' and first year philosophy courses in which learning how to write well is a central objective.[35] One or two paragraphs at the end of a course handbook simply will not do.

In sum, then, we need to go back to basics. We need to focus upon those student skills that some may complain should have been mastered at school. We need to make a realistic assessment of the skills that students already have and pay attention to those that require further development. We need to acknowledge that teaching students how to construct a decent paragraph is not a remedial activity that, in an ideal world, should not be necessary. Rather, it is an essential part of any

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[33] I have no intention to draw any technical distinction between 'opinion' and 'belief' here. The only distinction I want to make is between *unexamined* and *examined* opinions or beliefs.

[34] No doubt there are other conceptions that may be equally plausible.

[35] In the past I have recommended to students Thomas S. Kane, *The New Oxford Guide to Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) as a good 'back to basics' introduction to essay writing. What are needed, I suggest, are introductory philosophy courses in which a book such as this is actually assigned as a textbook alongside more the typical fare and in which students are examined on their writing skills alongside their grasp of the philosophical content of the course.

training designed to teach students how to argue clearly and effectively. If our aim is to teach students how to think then we must accept that it will also be our task to teach them how to write.

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