

Programme Council Modern International and Transnational History

Time and place: February 19th 12.15 – 14.00 (Zoom)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://ui0.zoom.us/j/66730247180?pwd=WklublVwbndwMmh3bk5EWXNDa1Urdz09>

Present: Daniel Maul, Toufoul Abou-Hodeib, Steinar A. Sæther, Hilde H. Waage, Hanne H. Vik, Magne O. Rønningen and Monika Birkeland (ref.). Student representatives: Morten A. Forbord and Bjørn Schirmer-Nilsen

Orientation items:

1. Brief on status

Daniel welcomed the Program Council, made a short introduction on the plan for the day before a round presentation among the members of the council. Daniel and Monika made a summary of the past semester, which has been going ok despite all the challenges that come with full digital teaching in particular for the newly accepted students of MITRA 4. The students and the teachers have missed the social part of the programme and look forward to new openings. As for the MITRA 3 who have gone through their 3rd semester “field term” while all have done their History Project or Internship in the fall of 2020, only one student went abroad. 1/3 did the internship in Norway, and 2/3 did the History Project. Many found it challenging even with the alterations we made to make it work.

2. Admissions to the program fall 2020 – see attachment

Quick brief on the numbers. Nothing out of the ordinary, but the MITRA4 class has fewer students than the MITRA3 class. The gender ratio among those accepted into the programme has been for the first time in favor of the women, but after a couple of the students withdrew before the start of the studies, it's now close to 50/50, which still is a clear improvement on some prior intakes.

Discussion items:

1. The students have the word

- **Digital/Hybrid teaching:** According to the student representatives, it has been working well with a full digital semester, given the situation. Still students experience the lack of opportunities to meet in person in class as challenging - Not only with regards to “everyday campus life”, but also in terms of a slightly poorer learning outcome. They therefore wish for some physical/hybrid teaching as soon as it is possible.

Monika and Daniel reported that the opening of the UiO Campus/physical teaching is not up to us at IAKH. As we planned for before Christmas, we will open up for hybrid teaching as soon as we can and general circumstances allow for. The majority of teachers at MITRA would like to have physical teaching in the classroom, which is in line with the Program Council at HIS decision to aim for hybrid teaching as soon as possible. We have rooms ready for when campus is reopened again.

- **Information on field term and master thesis:** The students experience that the information on the supervision of the master's thesis and the application process is not clear enough and/or given early enough. Many felt it came very sudden when they had to have a project idea and suggestion for supervisor ready before the deadline in February. It is also mentioned that the scope of a MITRA thesis can be made clearer earlier, as some students come from other disciplines than History.

Monika and Daniel assure the students that this is a well-known issue, and somewhat difficult to tackle as the balance of letting the students settle in the field before choosing, and on the other side giving enough direction early enough, is a delicate one to maintain. The Program Council suggests that we aim to move some of the elements in the second semester to the first, for example in connection to MITRA4020. We can also try to be clearer on this point in the beginning of the first semester (for instance on the start of studies day) and explain how one should tackle this.

- **Courses, some suggestions for improvements:** Students pointed to fact that the some of MITRA students come from other disciplines than History and how this sometimes creates misunderstandings/challenges. Many experience that they feel they are expected to know stuff they do not know with a background from for instance studies in International Relations etc. It was described by some as being "asked to swim in the deep ocean before knowing how to swim". MITRA4020: Unclear as to what the requirements are, and the purpose of the course itself. MITRA4421: Here the criticism is in line with what all the previous MITRA generations (and some teachers) have been saying for a long time; it is perceived as less rewarding than the other MITRA courses, it feels too much like a bachelor course. The main lecturer is unavailable, and the curriculum seems to be bigger than it should. The idea is good, and the seminars with Marc Wiggam where functioning very well.

Daniel raised the questions of whether the students think something they learn in MITRA420 could be taken out, but really, it is all about adding some elements, as mentioned earlier especially in connection to/with the master's thesis. MITRA4421: All things mentioned are well known and taken into consideration when the course was revised in 2019. Du to COVID the new arrangements were put on hold in 2020. The changes made entail for example: fewer lectures, more seminars and changing exam form to a term paper instead of a home exam. We believe these changes will answer to most of the criticism raised.

- **The COVID-situation and how it affects student's ability to study and their mental health:**
The MITRA students, as all others, are experiencing that the COVID situation is taking its toll and the student representatives asked whether IAKH is aware of it/has a plan.

We are fully aware and trying to follow up on the individual cases, but the situation is hard on the staff as well. We are always looking into how we can facilitate for the ones struggling, but it is agreed on that in this situation most students benefit from a closer follow up rather than more "slack". The students are encouraged to take initiative and use/apply for "progammidler" in order to strengthen the social cohesion under the circumstances.

- **Communication - follow-up during field term semester and information flow in general/ Internships/ MITRA4400 – some questions on the exam form as well as the relationship with the university during this time:**

The feedback/criticism can be summed up in that some of the students have felt left out and/or experienced long waiting times while waiting for feedback by the staff during the preparation and the work on MITRA4400 and MITRA4450. They feel the information in advance, as to what the paper/report should be must be clearer and that the actual paper in MITRA4400 seems “disconnected” from the daily life of the internship. A general “what to expect and what is expected” would be appreciated.

After the students have started the field term semester, there are no “natural” place to meet for the administration and the students, but we can certainly try to create some “check-in” places for the student to have a reason to get in touch with both study counselor and supervisor so that he/she feels more in touch with UiO. For example by adding some obligatory activities in connection with the paper/work. The agreement made with the workplace says that they should be involved with choosing the theme, so if the student makes sure this is followed up on, the paper might automatically become more relevant for the actual work. We take this criticism very seriously and hope that it will be easier once the situation goes back to normal again. IAKH will look into how the requirements and exam can be more closely linked with each other and made clearer before the semester begins. Daniel also points out that the feeling of the exam being disconnected from the work at the placement might be linked to COVID, as this was not an issue with the two earlier generations.

-> **A general critic with regards to the exams in the fall: some students has waited for months to get there explanations:** This is of course not as it should be. One of the reasons is that the new system where the students can click the button in StudentWeb has led to a much higher number of requests for explanations. Hanne mentions that teachers are not getting any extra hours for writing them either. Another is that the system doesn't let the teacher know, but they actively need to log on and check, this takes a little time to get used to.

- Clarification and sharpening of the study's focus
- Methods and Theory-reform
- Opportunities for interdisciplinary in education
- Possibility for optional modules or free/optional courses:

The students report that some feel the way MITRA is portrayed at the program pages is not quite how it is in “real life”, and the programme is not living up to its potential. The connection between the programme and working life could be strengthened, for instance by bringing in more outside partners in the teaching. The “realhistorie” component could to some degree be supplemented with “applied history”. Some feels there is a lack of a bridge between what they learn and how to apply it in the workplace.

The program council has a little trouble with understanding this criticism, as the practical aspect is a prominent part of the MITRA architecture. We can still aim to strengthen our existing contacts, for example with Karrieresenteret in our revised OASEH project, and are trying to connect more closely all of our programs to what the working community and life are in need of. Students are encouraged to get in touch with Karoline Opsahl with ideas in this regard.

2. **Master theses and the Covid-restrictions to archives – our policy? (Not discussed as a separate point, but addressed to a degree under previous points)**