

History and Philosophy of Science and Medicine Part III: Senior Examiner's Report 2020-21

Overall results

The Part III course was taken by 15 students this year. Of these, 9 achieved First Class I (70+) and 5 Upper-Second Class II.i (60-69); one student was awarded a Declaration of Deserved Honours by the Examination Access Mitigation Committee. There were no Third Classes (40-49) or fails. Because of disruptions due to Covid-19, the number of answers required for the Set Essay component of the course was reduced from two to one, and the deadline for Dissertation was extended by one week until 8 June.

The gender distribution of overall performances is as follows:

Class	Female	Male	Total
First Class (70-79)	3	6	9
Upper-Second Class (60-69)	2	3	5
Lower-Second Class (50-59)	0	0	0
Pass	0	0	0
Declaration of Deserved Honours	1	0	1
Total	6	9	15

A slightly higher proportion of male students achieved first class marks than female students and is worth noting, though it is difficult to identify statistical trends given the small cohort.

The examiners followed University guidelines in ensuring cohort equity to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 (see Assessment Bulletin 4, May 2021) by checking that the class distribution for this year's cohort of students was broadly in line with that of the last three years before the pandemic (2016/2017, 2017/2018, 2018/2019). Distributions for 2020-1 exceeded the average for 2016-19 so no adjustment was necessary.

Prizes

The 11th Peter Lipton prize for the best overall performance on Part III was awarded jointly to Zak Lakota-Baldwin and Charlotte Zimmel. The Bronowski Prize for the best overall performance in the first half of the Part III was awarded to Zak Lakota-Baldwin.

External examiner

Dr Chiara Ambrosio (UCL) continued for a second year as External Examiner for the Part III and MPhil. Once again, Chiara noted that she was impressed by 'the quality, diversity and calibre' of student work. She also praised the assessors' reports as 'fair, constructive and supportive', saying that she views the quality of this feedback is 'absolutely crucial to the students' flourishing'. Chiara regarded the actions taken to provide support during the pandemic as effective, thanked us for clear documentation and efficient organization of her workload and generally praised the continued functioning of the examinations process despite the ongoing disruption of the pandemic.

Recommendations

The examining process worked smoothly, especially considering the time pressure that some assessors were under, which was exacerbated by changes to coursework deadlines and extensions. In cases where there was a spread of marks or an agreed mark that fell below a boundary, the External Examiner found it helpful when assessors gave an explanation in the

confidential comments about how they arrived at their agreed mark. The letter to assessors was amended to encourage them to do so in such cases. In general, the process itself has again proven robust enough to withstand the ongoing uncertainty and disruptions due to Covid-19 across the academic year and no changes are recommended.

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