

## **NST Part III History and Philosophy of Science (HPS)**

### **Senior Examiner's Report 2014-15**

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#### **Overall results**

There were 16 students who began the HPS Part III course, 13 of whom completed it. The Senior Examiner has not received any formal communications concerning reasons for non-completion.

Of those who completed the course, 5 achieved overall First Class marks (70 or above), 3 High II.i (67-69), 4 (lower) II.i (60-66), and 1 II.ii (50-59). This was a very similar distribution to last year's.

In line with the departmental agreement to monitor gender-based trends in student performance, we note the following breakdown of results. This year the performance of male students was substantially better overall than that of female students (while last year the distribution was almost exactly even). We do not have a good explanation for this. Two of the female students who received (lower) II.i marks experienced significant personal problems during the year, and might have done much better if it hadn't been for those problems; however, we did make reasonable accommodations with deadlines in each case.

Class	Female	Male	Total
First (70 or above)	0	5	5
High II.i (67-69)	1	2	3
(lower) II.i (60-66)	4	0	4
II.ii (50-59)	0	1	1
Total	5	8	13

There are no significant trends that the Senior Examiner has detected on the basis of other demographic or disability categories. We will continue monitoring.

#### **Prizes**

The Lipton Prize, for best overall performance on the Part III course, was awarded to Benjamin Taylor.

#### **External examiner**

This was the second year in which Dr Emma Tobin (University College London) served as external examiner for the Part III course. At the examiners' meetings she commended the students for the high quality of their work, the examiners for the quality and quantity of feedback, and the departmental administration for the efficiency of the procedures. The internal examiners were very grateful for Dr Tobin's help with the process, as she examined a large amount of work under

tight time-constraints and gave judicious and insightful verdicts in cases of internal disagreements. Dr Tobin will continue as external examiner next year.

### **Recommendations**

1. We should continue the practice of having the Senior and Ordinary Examiners take a first pass at proposing examiners for essays and dissertations (which are then confirmed or amended by the Degree Committee). They should also continue to seek input in this process from the Director of Graduate Studies and the supervisors involved.

2. The Part III examination process was anonymised (in terms of the identity of students) for the first time in 2014-15. It was generally agreed that the anonymised process worked well, even though in many cases the anonymity broke down due to various circumstantial details being inevitably known to examiners, given the small number of students in the cohort and the close working relationships that teaching staff develop with the students in the department.

3. In line with comments from the external examiner, it seems clear that there is still more work to be done in using the full range of marks. Another review of the marking scheme might be in order, in case there are unrealistic expectations being conveyed in the descriptions of the mark bands.

4. Discontent continues with the practice of dropping 2 of 10 possible topics for the set-essay examination. This issue is under discussion.

5. Reflecting feedback from students and supervisors, it has been decided to switch the order of the Critical Literature Review and the Research Paper. The Research Paper will now be the first piece of work undertaken by the students, and the Critical Literature Review will come just before the Dissertation, with the intention that it should actually constitute preliminary research for the Dissertation wherever possible.