

Theories and Textual Practices

Project Report

A Principal's Teaching Award Scheme (PTAS) Project

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Executive summary

Theories and Textual Practices aimed to create a structured, peer-led programme for literature postgraduate researchers in LLC to help them better engage with the theoretical framework underpinning their research areas at the start of their degree programmes. It catered specifically to researchers working with literary texts, but was also relevant to those engaging with critical and cultural theory. It aimed to add value to the comprehensive curricular review of LLC's doctoral training that was underway in 2015/16 by addressing academic needs that were not met by the formal regime that then comprised of course-based training and one-on-one supervision. By inviting suggestions from current postgraduate students and assessing their requirements, the project utilised the expertise of upper-year PhD students to design and lead the series of workshops. It aimed to also establish a constructive and collaborative postgraduate environment across LLC by connecting researchers working on similar topics of interest.

The project ran July 2015 – June 2016 inclusive. The project was led by Dr Robert Irvine (Principal Investigator), and supported and documented by two research assistants, Muireann Crowley and Yanbing Er (PhD candidates, English Literature).

Dr Robert Irvine (English Literature)
Muireann Crowley (English Literature)
Yanbing Er (English Literature)

Project development

Consultation process (focus group – survey circulated)

We held a 90-minute focus group on Friday 7 August 2015 with 10 PhD students in the LLC. Invitations to the focus group were circulated a week earlier, and those who could not attend in person were invited to complete an online form. Students were asked to reflect on their experience and opinions of the current research methods training in the school, which included sharing their thoughts on existing provision, and suggesting further areas for improvement. Students were also asked to discuss their engagement with theory in their research, and identify which theoretical areas they deemed most useful for the seminars on the initiative.

The 3 main theoretical areas of interest that emerged out of our focus group were:

1. Feminist and Gender Studies
2. Postcolonial and Diaspora Studies
3. Marxist criticism and the Frankfurt School

Recruitment process for tutors

On 24 August 2015, we put out an email invite through the LLC mailing list with a call for applicants who would be interested to tutor on the initiative. We attached a comprehensive document of guidance notes to the invitation, which included details on the aims of the project, the structure of each seminar, a detailed timeline for the project, and tutor eligibility and remuneration. We also extended the invitation personally to postdoctoral researchers whom we knew were working in the relevant areas. We also emphasised that the project would be an intensive commitment between September 2015 and February 2016. Prospective tutors were advised to apply for one area of theory, and as a proposed team of two to three people.

Prospective tutors were provided with an application form, which asked for the following information:

1. Research interests or current projects of tutors
2. Details for proposed seminar, which included:
 - a. Abstract and justification for lecture
 - b. Critical concepts and points of discussion
 - c. Indicative reading list of 5 core texts
 - d. Justification of overall seminar
 - e. Statement of interest

We indicated the 3 areas of interest of theory that we had ascertained from the focus group session on the application form, with the last left open-ended for any other area of expertise that prospective tutors would bring.

We received applications from prospective tutors on the following 4 topics:

1. Feminist and Gender Studies
2. Postcolonial and Diaspora Studies
3. Marxist Criticism and the Frankfurt School
4. Digital Methods and Cultures

Due to the fact that we received only 4 applications for the 4 different topics, we did not have to discriminate between applications. We could proceed immediately with briefing the tutors, as well as drafting an invitation for participants.

Website development

In July 2015, we started working with the HSS Web Team to conceptualise our website at <http://theorytext.llc.ed.ac.uk>. The website would contain information on the project, the proposed schedule for the seminars, information on the tutors on each seminar, and an FAQ on the initiative. It would also serve as a repository for our resources (reading lists, podcast recordings, etc) when the seminars ended.

The website would also contain the application form for students interested in participating in each seminar.

Currently, the website continues to be available as an open-access resource repository for the various documents the tutors prepared for their seminars. We have also since uploaded podcasts for each lecture.

Recruitment process for participants

We circulated a call out to postgraduate students in the LLC in October 2015. This was done via email through the respective mailing lists, as well as on posters in the postgraduate offices / study rooms, and through word-of-mouth. We also had relevant members of staff forward the invitation to students whom they knew were working in the areas of theory.

Those students interested in participating one or more of the seminars were directed to our website to fill in the form. Students were asked for their programme and year of study, and a 250-word statement of interest.

Applications were evaluated by the organisers of the initiative. They were also forwarded to the tutors of each seminar after the deadline had passed. In line with the broader aims of the project, postgraduate research students were given priority if the seminar was oversubscribed.

We received a total of 34 applications for the seminars in this first round, for the maximum of 48 spaces that were available (12 per seminar). One seminar—Feminist and Gender Studies—was oversubscribed, and selection was carried out in line with the aims of the project. Since we also had additional spaces available for the remaining 3 seminars, we circulated our invitation beyond the LLC to postgraduate students in ECA, HCA and PPLS.

The final numbers of registered participants for each seminar were:

1. Postcolonial and Diaspora Studies – 11
2. Feminist and Gender Studies – 13
3. Marxist Criticism and the Frankfurt School – 13
4. Digital Methods and Cultures – 8

Students were notified of the outcome of their applications by the tutors of each seminar, on 30 October 2015. Participants were also then arranged into groups in anticipation of the group presentation segment of the seminar.

Seminar development and preparation

In September 2015, we met up with our confirmed tutors to speak about the project and the duties that it would entail over the next few months.

The brief timeline of events was as follows:

21 October 2015	Lecture preparation workshop with Dr Amy Burge at the Institute for Academic Development
	The organisers arranged this session to help tutors prepare for the introductory lecture that they had to write The topics covered included the purposes/aims of a lecture, the different styles/types of lectures, and how to design a lecture Tutors were also asked to bring materials that they had provided for their lectures to share at the session This was also an opportunity for tutors to meet their peers
6 November 2015	Tutors made arrangements for group presentations
	Participants in each seminar were arranged into groups of 3-4 each Tutors were asked to provide 2-3 key readings for each critical concept they would cover during the group presentation session Guiding questions were also to be provided alongside these readings Each presentation was slated to be 15 minutes, with discussion time allocated after
11 December 2015	Tutors sent organisers a draft of their lecture
11 January 2016	Tutors provided resource materials for website
	Annotated bibliography, general reading list, teaching strategy, finalised seminar schedule

We held 2 drop-in sessions for the tutors to clarify any doubts they had about the initiative and their seminars in November and December 2015.

We also gave tutors the opportunity to meet with members of staff to check on their seminar resource materials and lectures.

Analysis and reflection

We did not manage to secure a fully-formed application for the Postcolonial and Diaspora Studies seminar. This was due to a number of reasons, most clearly because the PhD students specialising in that area had other commitments. As such, we asked a second-year PhD student to devise the seminar as the lead tutor, and enlisted the help of other PhD students to support her long the way. We conducted a brainstorming session with these students present to come up with resources for the reading lists, for instance, as well as topics to include in the lecture. They would also present at the New Directions segment of the seminar on the actual day.

We are glad to have extended the invitation to postgraduate students outside of the LLC. Initially carried out because we lacked enough participants for some of the seminars, these students from other schools brought varied insight to each seminar, and greatly enriched the discussions. This also prompted a dialogue between students between LLC, ECA, and HCA who were working on similar topics, albeit in different research areas.

We needed to cater to the different needs of our our tutors and the diverse ways in which they were thinking of running their seminars. While the majority of them were happy to work with our proposed seminar schedule, one group in particular—the Marxist Criticism and Frankfurt School seminar—decided to run their seminar slightly differently. This involved reorganising parts of our proposed schedule. We acknowledged that they could organise their seminar differently as long as the needs of their participants were met, and in line with the general aims of the project. As such, we arranged for additional time with them to speak about the rationale behind these changes before letting them proceed.

While the website contains a significant amount of information and stands as a valuable page for resources on critical theory and peer-led pedagogical methods, it is not receiving much traffic because the initiative is effectively over for the year. As such, there is no current publicity on the project. We are now exploring avenues to sustain traffic to the website. This includes developing the initiative as a self-study Learn course for the following year, continuing to promote the initiative on social media outlets such as Twitter, and encouraging supervisors to new postgraduate students to use the website as a resource to develop their research interests.

Seminar delivery

Location and scheduling

The seminars took place on consecutive Saturdays in January and February 2016: 16 January, 23 January, 30 January, and 6 February. The seminars were scheduled on Saturdays due to the impossibility of booking a room on a weekday during term-time. Room G.2 in 19 George Square was used for three of the four seminars due to the absence of servitor costs associated with using the space. This was not ideal, however, as 19 George Square is an inaccessible space. We used Room G.05 in 50 George Square was used for the Feminist and Gender Studies seminar to allow a wheelchair-user participant to attend. Servitor costs apply to 50 George Square room usage over the weekend, which was not originally factored into our budget, and so prohibited our use of that space for the duration of the project. Each seminar took place between 9am and 6pm with breaks at two tea/coffee breaks and an hour-long lunch break.

Structure

Three of the four seminars (Postcolonial and Diasporic Studies; Feminist and Gender Studies; Digital Methods and Cultures) followed the following structure:

- 0900 - 0930 Welcome with tea & coffee
- 0930 - 1100 **Introductory lecture**
- 1100 - 1130 Coffee break
- 1130 - 1300 **Key concepts and texts**
Participant group presentations
- 1300 - 1400 Lunch
- 1400 - 1500 **New directions**
- 1500 - 1530 Coffee break
- 1530 - 1700 **Practices and applications**
Individual participant presentations on proposed or current research

The Marxist Criticism and the Frankfurt School tutors reconfigured the same core elements into the following structure:

0900 - 0930	Welcome with tea & coffee
0930 - 1100	Introductory lecture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical Materialism and the Literary Imagination • The Politics of the Literary Text • The Role of the Critic
1100 - 1130	Coffee break
1130 - 1300	Key concepts and texts What does Culture do? Culture and Economics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of Core Reading and Questions • Participant Group Presentation • New Directions Presentation (San Martin): 'Necessity and agency in

	historical materialism' • Individual presentations on research followed by group discussion
1300 - 1400	Lunch
1400 - 1500	Key concepts and texts Where's your Ideology? Ideology and Imagination • Discussion of Core Reading and Questions • Participant Group Presentation • New Directions Presentation (Di Sotto): 'Seeing, knowing, acting: the place of trauma in neoliberal ideology' • Individual presentations on research followed by group discussion
1500 - 1530	Coffee break
1530 - 1700	Key concepts and texts When is Utopia? Utopia and Revolution • Discussion of Core Reading and Questions • Participant Group Presentation • New Directions Presentation (Leveque): 'Aesthetics, Intellectuals, and Elites: the "Corporatism of the Universal" for writers and readers.' • Individual presentations on research followed by group discussion

Attendance

In terms of attendance, there was a relatively low drop-out rate from the seminars. Most drop-outs were identified early through their engagement, or lack thereof, with group assignments and projects. Where possible the project research assistants supported the seminar tutors in publicising such gaps. The Digital Methods and Cultures seminar was the most adversely affected by last-minute withdrawals, as it affected the ability of participants to contribute to and prepare for the seminar.

Catering and refreshments

Tea/coffee catering was provided by Edinburgh First. Sandwiches, salads, fruit bowls and cakes were provided by Milk Café catering.

Tutor survey feedback

In total, we had 8 tutors which comprised of 50% current PhD candidates and 50% postdoctoral researchers. The experience that the tutors had in teaching at the undergraduate level was varied. 12.5% of the tutors had no tutoring experience, 25% had less than 1 year of experience, 25% had 1-3 years of teaching experience, and 37.5% had more than 3 years of teaching experience.

Main reasons for signing up for this initiative

The respondents gave several reasons for signing up for this initiative. Since tutors were encouraged to apply in groups, they worked broadly in the same subject area. As such, one of the main reasons was that it provided a good way of learning about current issues and trends in the subject area from their peers, and therefore expand their own knowledge of their research interests.

Another main reason why tutors signed up was that the initiative provided an opportunity to develop resources and write lectures for the seminars. This was not something they could go on a pre-Honours undergraduate course. As such, this allowed them to gain for experience designing courses at the Honours, or even postgraduate level. This also had a trickle-down effect because it also expanded their skills for pedagogical provision on the pre-Honours level.

Finally, and due to the funding provided by PTAS, the initiative presented an opportunity for extra paid teaching experience within their own research interests.

Feedback of experience of tutoring on the initiative

100% of the tutors reflected a positive experience of tutoring on the initiative.

The tutors identified several areas that were beneficial for their own needs. These can broadly be divided into pedagogical and professional, and personal benefits.

In the former category, the tutors found writing the lecture, as well as preparing for the additional research materials the most useful. This is because these tasks allowed them to consolidate their knowledge on the research area and gain an overall understanding of the field. This also allowed them to gain the experience of writing and delivering a long lecture, which would be a skill required of academic jobs, as well as obtain an invaluable perspective of being a beginner to the field. As such, the initiative was good teaching practice for the tutors overall, allowing them to improve their teaching and planning skills, and gain a greater confidence in teaching.

In terms of their own personal development, the tutors found that being involved in the initiative allowed them to develop new knowledge in the research area. Because the project was also a largely collaborative one with both co-tutors and participants in the seminar, it allowed them to find new research contacts for collaborative purposes.

Main overall benefits of initiative for postgraduates in LLC

The tutors were in agreement that the initiative provided an excellent training and peer-learning experience for postgraduate students in the LLC and beyond. The seminars were structured in a more concrete format as compared to the research methods training seminars currently provided, but were also more practical and relaxed in that they were taught by fellow peers, and early career academics.

There was also time allocated in the seminars for participants to present and discuss their own research projects, and get feedback directly and quickly from tutors and peers who are familiar with the same research area they are working in.

The tutors believed that the seminars fostered a more collaborative research culture and environment by giving postgraduate students the opportunity to meet with colleagues with similar interests. This would therefore nurture a community of researchers in the university. They reflected that many participants had, for instance, gained more concrete ideas as to what their future dissertations would focus on, or that the seminars had even helped them to decide on their research topic.

More generally speaking, the initiative presented a very good opportunity for a more advanced level teaching beyond the current provision allowed to them.

Suggestions for continuation next year

In this section of the survey, the tutors were asked to suggest how they thought the project could be continued in the following year. The response was divided between two main suggestions: to be offered in the same format next year (50%), or to be offered as an option within the LLC Research Methods course (50%).

Half of them cited that the seminars be offered in the same format because of the success it had attained this year. However, since the PTAS Funding is only available for this academic year, and also because the original organisers will be leaving the university in the next, we were not sure of the possibility of this happening.

Half of the respondents also suggested that the initiative be offered as an option within the LLC Research Methods course. The course is currently structured in the second semester of the academic year as a diverse offering of workshops held by different full-time faculty members, and span across the different disciplines in the School. However, attendance at these existing workshops constitute academic units, and count towards postgraduate degree programmes, although they are not graded. We are therefore unsure of how this PTAS initiative might fit in with existing concrete academic organisation.

Participants feedback survey

In total, approximately 34 postgraduate students participated in the Theories and Textual Practices seminars with some students attending more than one seminar. Of the four seminars, all but the Digital Methods and Cultures seminar were fully subscribed in the first instance. The latter seminar attracted participants from ECA and PPLS, allowing for interdisciplinary discussion and exchange.

15 participants completed the feedback survey at the project's end, which accounts for a response rate of approximately 50%. Respondents were drawn evenly from the three types of postgraduate programmes:

- MSc (Taught) 33%
- MSc (Research) 27%
- PhD 40%

Of the PhD students who participated, 100% were in the first or second year of study.

Prior knowledge and expectations

Many respondents identified an absence of focussed theory and criticism courses within the School, particularly within the Research Methods workshop programme. As one respondent stated: "The Research Methods course offered throughout the year (both Semesters) was more 'practical' rather than theoretical in outlook, while IAD courses are too general and not subject-specific enough". Respondents also identified the opportunity to meet with their peers and explore the critical field in an informal area.

60% of respondents described their engagement with the theoretical field as "Moderate: I have read/studied some of the canonical texts in the field but am unfamiliar with how they fit into a wider conversation or recent developments". 33% of respondents described their engagement as "Minimal: I have read one of the canonical texts in this field, but in isolation."

When asked for details on their expectations of the seminar, many respondents indicated they expected their past reading to be put into context and gain a greater understanding of the extant field. 80% of respondents agreed that the seminar(s) had met their expectations and 20% indicated the seminar(s) had "somewhat" met their expectations. 100% felt their knowledge of the field had improved as a result of the seminar and 100% believed it would have a positive impact on their research project.

Seminar structure, content and administration

Each seminar consisted of an introductory lecture, group presentations by participants, 'new directions' presentations by seminar tutors, and individual presentations by participants. 73% of respondents deemed this structure to be "very effective" whereas 27% deemed it "somewhat effective". 53% of respondents identified the 'new directions' presentations as the most instructive or enlightening element of the day followed by the introductory lecture with 33%. When asked which aspect of the day was the least instructive or enlightening, 53% identified the group presentations, 27% identified the 'new directions' presentations, and 20% identified the individual presentations.

In terms of the assigned reading and discussion questions, 73% deemed them 'very good' and 27% deemed them 'good'. Respondents rated the tutors' overall facilitation and direction of the seminar as 'very good' (80%) or 'good' (20%). Similarly, they rated the overall management and administration of the seminar as 'very good' (87%) or 'good' (13%).

Resources

The project website hosted various materials and resources pertinent to the four seminars. As of the time of the survey, 73% of had consulted the project website. Of this number, most had consulted the general reading list (93%) followed by the annotated bibliography (53%) and teaching strategy document (27%). With regards to the online resource, respondents stated they would most readily recommend the annotated bibliography (47%) followed by the general reading list (40%) and introductory lecture recording (13%).

Project afterlife

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to comment on the particular benefits of peer-led teaching and whether or how these seminars should be offered in future years. When asked whether they deemed there to be a particular benefit to peer-led teaching, 93% responded 'yes'. Respondents cited PhD students and early career researchers having "more realistic ideas about the actual needs of students [so they can] offer more innovative ideas" while others noted that it encouraged them to "see that research and learning is not just about student-tutors, but it can actually happen among peers". Others pointed to the relative informality and relaxed atmosphere of the day fostered by the relative equality, although some respondents did feel that "the right seasoned academics would also be able to offer the same supportive environment".

All respondents (100%) agreed that the seminars should be offered again. However, respondents were divided as to the most appropriate or effective way in which the seminars could be delivered in future: 47% believed it should be offered as part of the LLC Research Methods course workshop programme while 47% believed it should be offered in the exact same manner. A very small minority (6%) chose the 'Redesigned as a self-paced course delivered via LEARN' option. All respondents (100%) agreed that postgraduate students should be paid for organising and delivering training event such as this.

Project findings and conclusions

Based on the results of our surveys of both tutors and participants, and our own observation of the project's genesis, reception, and execution, we have arrived at the following findings:

1. Theories and Textual Practices offered a qualitatively different learning experience through its use of peer-led teaching and learning.
 - a. Participants were particularly appreciative of the informal atmosphere a peer-led seminar created as well as the opportunity to hear from those who had "just been through it". It also facilitated the development of links between subject areas and cohorts on the basis of a shared research interest.
 - b. The initiative presented tutors with a very good opportunity for more advanced level teaching that was currently available to them. This allowed them to develop professional skills for the future.
2. Theories and Textual Practices created an online repository of resource materials that were created by the tutors of each seminar.
 - a. This currently serves as a reference page for LLC postgraduate students, and the link of the website will be included in future versions of the postgraduate handbook for continued traffic.
 - b. The resource materials were prepared by tutors on the initiative, which allowed them to consolidate their knowledge of the research field, and gain an overall understanding of the area. Again, this was also an essential aspect of their professional development.
3. Theories and Textual Practices addressed a perceived gap in existing training and short courses offered to LLC postgraduate students.
 - a. The intensity of the seminars allowed participants to quickly familiarise themselves with a chosen critical field and within sufficient guideposts to indicate further study.
 - b. Although the innovative format offered by this initiative went some way to addressing this gap, it is not practicable to integrate it meaningfully into existing LLC research preparation training offered without further investment of resources.
4. Theories and Textual Practices presented an innovative paid opportunity for postgraduates in the LLC.
 - a. The funding provided by the PTAS grant allowed us to remunerate our tutors appropriately for their work. This was an important gesture that illustrated the value of such peer-led work.

Theories and Textual Practices was a successful example of a peer-led learning initiative for postgraduate researchers. In order to integrate this initiative and its resources into existing structures within LLC, follow-on funding to develop the appropriate frameworks. While such integration was not within the scope of the present project, Theories and Textual Practices provides an excellent example of the benefits of student-led course design and training initiatives at postgraduate level.

Appendix 1: Tutors' feedback

Name:

Lena Wanggren
 Pablo San Martín
 Yanbing Er
 Sibyl Adam
 Laura Chapot
 Dorothy Butchard
 James Leveque
 Marc Di Sotto

What is your educational status or background?

PhD candidate	4	50%
Postdoctoral researcher	4	50%

Which Theories and Textual Practices seminar did you tutor on?

Postcolonial and Diasporic Studies	1	12.5%
Feminist and Gender Studies	2	25%
Marxist Criticism and the Frankfurt School	3	37.5%
Digital Methods and Cultures	2	25%

How did you hear about Theories and Textual Practices?

Email	1	12.5%
Word of mouth	5	62.5%
Poster	0	0%
Social Media (Twitter/Facebook)	0	0%
Other	2	25%

Tutoring expectations and experience

Prior to this initiative, how much teaching experience at the university level have you had?

No experience	1	12.5%
Less than 1 year	2	25%
1-3 years	2	25%
3 years or more	3	37.5%
Other	0	0%

Please give some reasons why you signed up to tutor on the Theories and Textual Practices initiative.

<p>Great way of learning with and from peers about current research trends a practices. Love teaching and feminism (obviously) so for myself this was a great experience.</p>
<p>I really liked the idea of a peer-led workshop on theory and methodology for postgraduate research students. I have bee interested in aesthetic and literary theory in general since very early, and I wanted to share my knowledge and contribute to the development of my peers. The idea of preparing a lecture was challenging and motivating for me, as I had never given one before. Moreover, planning a whole day with different kinds of activities gave me the opportunity to exercise my pedagogical skills in a larger scale and in a more flexible way than tutoring for Enlgish literature courses for undergraduates. I also learnt a lot myself discussing with the other tutors, and from participants during the workshop as well.</p>
<p>I think that specific content based research methods seminars are quite important in helping to establish a good foundation for lower-year PhDs. I also thought that the peer-based approach was interesting and would be very effective. There was no similar initiative being offered by the school.</p>
<p>One of the main appeals of the project was the opportunity to have extra paid teaching experience within my own research interests. This is hardly ever available for PhD students so it really was unique. It definitely helped me to re-think the critical canon formation in my area. I was aware that I had a specific responsibility as a tutor to give a fair and representative state of the field but in such a way that enabled the participants to approach everything with a critical eye. I was also aware of the diverse educational and cultural backgrounds of the participants and how much this could inform their presentations and learning experience. The project allowed such freedom that I could really make the most of this. Indeed, I think the participants appreciated the open nature of the day (without lecturing staff present).</p>
<p>I started working with digital methods for my research rather recently, and was mostly self-taught. Developing resources and lectures/presentations for this seminar really helped me consolidate my knowledge on this new area. It also helped me gain more confidence in talking about these aspects of my research (especially presenting to postgraduate students was particularly challenging and rewarding - and I could not have gained this type of experience at this stage in my career if I had not been involved in a project like this). I also think this project fills a gap in research training for postgrads within the LLC - considering the diversity of background and knowledges of the LLC student cohort it is surprising that there are not more provisions for initial introductions to theory and researching skills for new postgraduates. I found it particularly valuable that the workshops were led by postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers as this helps foster a sense of community and vibrant exchanges within the postgraduate/postdoctoral community (although more explicit involvement and support from staff would also have been welcome).</p>
<p>I liked the focus on sharing expertise with peers/colleagues - I think this is a great initiative for bringing together individuals at several different stages of postgraduate / postdoctoral study. It also offered the chance to develop my skills in communicating with students at Masters and PhD level. In the case of our workshop, I hoped that the thematic approach would prompt a truly interdisciplinary environment, which has new</p>

challenges and rewards - and is not something you usually get when teaching at undergraduate level.

It was a new opportunity to teach literary theory in a field that I'm interested in. I was hoping to be able to take complex ideas and explain them in more comprehensible ways. I also was interested in researching the history Marxism and Marxist theory in particular. I think it might give me a better capability to integrate the teaching of literary theory and research practices.

I was interested to gain more experience designing courses, teaching at postgraduate level, lecturing. I also supported the aims of the project to introduce more opportunities to engage with literary theory at postgrad level.

How would you rate your experience of your involvement in this project?

Very positive	6	75%
Somewhat positive	2	25%
Neutral	0	0%
Somewhat negative	0	0%
Very negative	0	0%

Which aspect(s) of teaching/preparing for the seminar did you find most helpful for your professional needs?

Writing the lecture	8	100%
Preparing resource materials prior to the seminar	8	100%
Facilitating discussion among participants	4	50%
Sharing about my current research	4	50%
Other	2	25%

Please specify reasons why.

All teaching and peer learning is good practice! Planning an entire day rather than just one seminar was probably the most exciting and rewarding element.

I had never written a lecture before, and the fact that we planned it as a group and with the possibility of consulting with a member of staff made it less stressful than it otherwise would have been. Creating a reading list, an annotated bibliography, and activities for group discussion around key concepts helped me develop my teaching skills in a way that is not possible teaching pre-honour courses. Facilitating theoretical discussion at this level was also a new experience for me; but, although it flowed naturally most of the time, it was difficult to tell what I could have done differently to improve it. It was good to have the opportunity to talk about the methodological aspects of my PhD with other people who were interested in them. It is a good exercise, which gave me clarity, and the questions posed by participants helped me specify certain things that I had not made explicit. I learnt a lot from the other tutors in the discussions we had as we prepared the workshop.

I think preparing for all these aspects of the seminar were overall very useful in both specific content research as well as professional skills development as a PhD students. These skills are all transferable to various aspects of becoming a good academic as well.

Writing the lecture was tough but really made me feel a lot more confident about my knowledge and ability to teach. I felt more confident about preparing the resources although this was more time consuming than I initially assumed. I think I struggled to facilitate discussion at times because I have no teaching experience and was facilitating it on my own. But this is my own fault!

Writing the lecture and developing reading lists and additional material really helped me consolidate my knowledge on this topic and gain an overall view of the field. Also getting to know new and current researchers interested in the same topics and methods as me renewed my excitement of working within this area.

- It was the first time I've written a longer lecture so it was a good opportunity to practice. I found the workshop on writing lectures very helpful and it meant that I was confident when I came to write my lecture. - Preparing resource material led me to think about my subject from the perspective of beginners / near-beginners, and this was very instructive for me.

I don't have much experience giving longer lectures (conference papers excepted) and it was useful to try to narrow down a lecture topic to some clear and manageable points.

Mainly the opportunity for new experience of things I hadn't done before, or hadn't done to that level before.

In your opinion, what were the main overall benefits of this initiative to yourself as a tutor and early-career researcher?

Good teaching practice, new research contacts and collaboration.

Taking part in this initiative helped me mostly to improve my teaching and planning skills, and this has in turn made me a more confident tutor. The fact that I have prepared and given part of a lecture, and planned a whole-day seminar on research methods and at postgraduate level, will no doubt prove to be invaluable experience for the future and improve my employability.

I think it gave me more confidence overall to write a lecture, facilitate a discussion, recommend reading materials, and in the future, plan an independent course. All this was helpful in putting my project into perspective and consolidating the theoretical knowledge I had. I also got to share about my research with peers, and got to know more about their work as well!

In terms of professional development, I feel it has given me greater confidence in my ability to teach in my area. Re-reading selected extracts for the day (the same ones that the participants engaged with for their group presentations) has definitely helped my research - it made me re-engage with a few ideas that I had earlier dismissed.

The main overall benefits of participating in this initiative for me would be that it has boosted my confidence within my our area of researcher and as a tutor. It was also extremely stimulating and comforting to meet other students interested in this area and to see the diversity of work being done within this area of study.

- Responses to new research I presented in the 'New Directions' session was helpful in developing my topic. - The intersections between my approach to the topic and that of

my co-organiser were great; I learned a lot from the process of bringing our two approaches together, and it showed me how fantastic collaboration can be as a way of developing ideas. I hope to do more projects like this in the future.

It gave me some more conference/workshop planning skills. I have a better grasp of the theoretical field that I would like to specialize in.

It was definitely a useful experience to have an idea of planning the material and structure of a course, and to see how the plans worked out in practice.

As a tutor, how sufficient did you find the prior training and preparation that was provided for you?

Very sufficient	4	50%
Somewhat sufficient	3	37.5%
Somewhat insufficient	1	12.5%
Very insufficient	0	0%

Please specify reasons why.

(did not attend any of them, as I didn't have time (plus try not to do unpaid work) / didn't think I would need them)

The workshop held by Dr Amy Burge was useful to get some tips and ask very general questions about lecture planning. However, I really missed having the original briefing meeting that didn't take place, or the possibility of having an earlier meeting with a member of staff to discuss the group activities and the lecture structure and content more concretely.

I think I would have liked more sessions with other tutors to discuss our plans for the day because this would have really encouraged a sharing of pedagogical plans/materials. This would also have fostered a much more collaborative environment between tutors, instead of just between the tutors and participants of each seminar session.

I think the training was fine. My initial nervousness about the project only came from doing it by myself, having had no prior university teaching experience. I recognise that this was also not ideal for the project organisers or participants. I think perhaps having other tutors to bounce ideas off, to help facilitate participant discussion or to check the resources would have been helpful. I felt having the presence of other tutors there (either for the whole day or half the day) may have been slightly odd for the participants seeing as they weren't actually facilitating it. There a miscommunication about the original organisation of my theory day and it was no one's fault. But it definitely affected my initial organisation of it and it may have confused the participants. I really hope it did not effect their experience! For instance, the other tutors not knowing what had happened for the full day or what the presentations had been on - but I felt like I couldn't pester them with information and help for the rest of the day because they all said they didn't have time to help out beyond their particular research talks. It was an awkward situation. This was only a small issue and again, it was no one's fault!

The lecture writing workshop by Amy Burge was very useful as always. Perhaps an improvement for the future could be greater involvement and support from staff within

the school (either giving feedback on the material / presentations - or attending the event itself).
Excellent training and preparation, very thorough support from the organisers throughout the project - I was impressed. I actually felt there was more support preparing for this workshop than for some of the professional teaching I've done. The only extra thing I can think of that might have helped is more formal advice on criteria for designing reading lists.
I wasn't able to attend the lecture.
The training was useful, but without already having experience of lecturing, it was quite limited. Having had that experience now, the training would make more sense. Perhaps a more practical approach could be more useful.

As a tutor, how did you find the organisation and communication of the project by the organisers?

Very organised and clear	5	62.5%
Somewhat organised and clear	3	37.5%
Not very organised and clear	0	0%
Very disorganised and unclear	0	0%

Please specify reasons why.

Muireann and Yanbing are fantastic organisers, and the whole event ran super-smoothly, as did all the preparatory work and information.
The emails were very informative and organisers always replied to all of our queries very quickly. However, some things are just difficult to explain in writing. For example, we didn't understand what was expected from the teaching strategy document until very late. As mentioned before, it would have made a big difference to have a meeting in person at an early stage.
Certain deadlines for resource materials kept getting pushed back, so there wasn't a definite date for all of them to be due.
The organisers were great and very supportive. The only issue was a miscommunication in the original organisation of the day, as detailed above. This miscommunication was probably my fault because I was not upfront with the other tutors from the beginning about what they wanted to be involved with.
The project was clearly organised from the start - with a specific structure and timetable to follow. This helped tutors follow a step by step process to develop the seminar and resources. But there was also the possibility of flexibility so that each workshops could develop its own framework and schedule more adapted to its specific needs.
Very clear at all times, nicely structured timelines and the organisers replied swiftly and constructively to any queries. I did find I spent some time searching back through emails for certain information - perhaps a wiki or resource list on the website with deadlines and links to docs would be handy.
It wasn't always clear to us why some of the requirements, such as the various bibliographies were necessary at such an early stage.
We always knew what and when things were expected of us. At the beginning we felt a bit over-managed, as we could only commit so much time to the project, but overall it

was a positive experience. In future, now that we have a better idea of what is involved, it might be useful to make it clearer as to the expectations of the final day, and what can be reasonably achieved with the time and resources devoted to it.

Seminar structure, content and administration

As a tutor, how effective did you find the seminar structure for your participants?

Very effective	6	75%
Somewhat effective	2	25%
Not effective	0	0%

Please explain your answer.

It was perfect, a good amount of lecture / discussion / sharing of both the fundamentals of the field and of new research trajectories.
I think those four core elements work very well together, and complement each other. We tried mixing them in each block to change roles more often, and make the debate more dynamic. I think that was successful. However, we should have emphasised that group presentation were meant to be shorter (up to 10 minutes), since most of the time I felt we didn't have enough time to develop all the ideas that came up during the discussions.
More structure or guidance given to participants for the individual presentation segment.
I think it was an effective plan as it meant there could be more discussion at the end of the day when the participants were more comfortable with each other. I think it was a great idea to have the afternoon more casual and less structured with the new directions talks and individual presentations, and the participants seemed to respond well to this.
This structure provides a good mix of types of interaction. The lecture allows for setting up the groundwork and identifying key areas. new Directions presentations are a useful complement to go deeper into a specific area or show the diverse applicability of theories discussed. The discussion-based sessions are invaluable to get the participants to start appropriating and applying the new ideas they are developing. It is however key that participants come prepared (and varying levels of preparation at times impeded the discussion).
If re-doing the workshop, I would structure it this way (1) Semi-formal introductions for all participants (introduce themselves, their research, reasons for interest in day) (2) Lecture (3) Reading discussion, in groups - no group presentations. Instead, a very short introduction (5 mins) of key themes in the texts by the workshop leaders, followed by seminar-style discussion. (4) Individual Participant Presentations/Reflections (5) New Directions (6) Concluding remarks The main difference here: (1) A more inclusive introductory session for participants - people tend not to circulate during tea and coffee, this gives a chance for participants to get to know each other at the start, and identify others with related research. (2) Moving 'new directions' to the end. This is mainly a practical suggestion - participants tended to be exhausted by the end of the day, and some are nervous. This gives a chance for them to share their research while still fairly alert. Also means New Directions talks could also incorporate responses to participants' research (at speakers' discretion of course). This makes sense for our topic (Digital Methods & Cultures) because it's pretty much all 'new directions' - altho may not work so well for others.
Once we were able to take the structure and make it our own, it worked well. So I think the ability to keep it open was important.

I think there were too many presentation tasks during the seminar which limited the amount of time for discussion, but also limited the time for the group to get to know each other. I think we could have probably had a better icebreaker at the beginning to get people talking sooner - maybe putting the lecture later on. I would also be tempted to use a set text of some sort as a reference point for the discussion.

What do you think was the most useful aspect of the seminar for your participants?

Introductory lecture	5	62.5%
Group presentations	3	37.5%
New directions presentations	0	0%
Individual presentations and discussion	0	0%

Please explain your answer.

All of them! Probably lectures and group presentations above the other, since they helped students grapple with basic concepts within the field (and students told us that this was what they needed).

I think the introductory lecture was well planned, and it provided a good starting point for most of the discussions during the day. However, the two first group presentations were also very well prepared, and we could appreciate that participants learnt a lot during the process and that the questions we sent them had been useful. The last presentation was just a summary of the texts, which did not have a general structure, was too long and a bit tedious.

I believe this gave a good and concise overview of the theoretical field.

They seemed comfortable with each other already as they had to meet to do their group presentations beforehand. They seemed to really engage well with the texts and bring them up at other points in the day. Many participants also said that their group readings had inspired new ideas and directions in their own essays and dissertations. In fact, many of them brought up their group presentations and their responses to them in their individual presentations when discussing their own research.

Digital Methods and Cultures is a relatively new and sometimes confusing field - the lecture was perhaps most helpful as an initial gateway into this area of study (and there was various levels of content in the lecture - from basic/introductory to more involved and complex).

It's hard to say, but based on feedback during the day, participants were very enthusiastic indeed about the lecture - several said they felt it introduced complex topics in a comprehensible way. The other thing many participants mentioned was the reading list and annotated bibliography. Also the discussion sessions through the day seemed to be sparking new ideas and different approaches.

I think they liked the lectures quite a bit, although we haven't gotten our feedback forms back yet.

I think this was a useful exercise which got allowed the groups to share a lot of different ideas very quickly. The groups themselves seemed to have found the process of preparing the presentation interesting, and it was a good complement to the lecture - I would be tempted to explore the connection between these two elements more carefully in future.

What do you think was the least useful aspect of the seminar for your participants?

Introductory lecture	1	12.5%
Group presentations	3	37.5%
New directions presentations	2	25%
Individual presentations and discussion	2	25%

Please explain your answer.

This was also very useful, and I had several participants tell me afterwards so. So I think it should definitely stay, as it gives students a chance to look at what older peers might be doing later on, and see what is ongoing in the field currently.

I don't really want to answer this question as I think all four aspects were very useful for participants. However, given the scope of the questions and the nature of the debate that ensued, I fear the New Directions presentations might have been too specific for some of them.

There wasn't a huge amount of guidance for participants doing their individual presentation, so I guess I would have implemented this to make the discussion more constructive and less meandering. (This was mainly because the different participants all came from different levels of expertise.) I would also have liked a more 'structured' discussion, although I'm not sure how much this could have been enforced without making the seminar more pedantic.

Either my lecture or the new directions presentations. I think my lecture was very heavy and a bit overwhelming! Although I purposely did that because I was not sure the level of knowledge and because I wanted to concentrate on breadth over depth. Also because I knew they could access the lecture afterwards. The new directions presentations were definitely interesting for the participants and there was lively discussion. I also found it easier to facilitate discussion precisely because the other tutors were there and I knew they would respond well. The only thing is they obviously cover very specific research interests so if participants weren't that interested, then they may not have responded as well to them. Although I think it was good for them to see research 'in action'!

There were different levels of preparation within the participants which sometimes impeded discussion. Perhaps, emphasising that participants have to come prepared and will be the ones managing and guiding the discussion needed to be emphasised further. And I could have prepared more myself to help guide and structure the discussion.

We found our participants were quite resistant to the idea of group presentations, and we didn't end up using this format. They wanted to cover the readings in a more discursive way, and group discussion worked very well as a means of doing this.

I thought that the engagement with the readings that we set was very uneven. And some of the groups didn't feel like a group effort, but a series of individual presentation.

There's always an awkwardness about presenting research ideas, many of the participants hadn't prepared anything, and some had over-prepared. I would be tempted to replace this with smaller group discussions.

In your opinion, what were the main overall benefits of this initiative to postgraduates in LLC?

Excellent training and peer learning for and by early-career researchers in LLC. I understand that a lot of students at this level miss having seminars like this, so a fantastic and much-needed project. And yes, certainly great for fostering a more collaborative research culture and environment in the school.

I think this initiative did indeed fill in a gap in the existing research method training provision for postgraduate students at LLC. The fact that it was peer-led and including the more concrete "workshop" format (i.e. with time allocated exclusively for participants to present and discuss their own research projects) definitely provided a new learning modality for postgraduate students at early and not so early stages, which was both more practical and relaxed than the current provision. Overall, the environment was collaborative and friendly, and it gave everybody the opportunity to meet colleagues with similar research interests.

I think it provided a distillation of the various theoretical fields for PGs who were not already familiar with them, but also points of departure for those who were. Tutors got to better develop their pedagogical skills. More importantly I think the peer-to-peer engagement was very constructive to both tutors and participants, and allowed for a space of collaboration.

It's definitely a great initiative and truly unique. Both the academic and social aspects were appreciated by participants, especially research masters and first year PhD students. It just gives them another chance to meet other students and engage in discussions. It definitely fills in many gaps! For instance, many of the masters students would not have had the opportunity to be able to present their own research before (albeit, informally and brief) and get feedback and ideas from their peers. Many of the participants were aware of the theoretical basis for the day from doing a masters course on Empire and this day enabled them to delve deeper into the theory and be able to engage with new texts. There was a great emphasis on collaboration throughout the day and this definitely greatly a productive and friendly atmosphere. If it can be repeated in future years, I think the impact will continue to be felt in the postgraduate community.

I think this project fills a gap in research training for postgrads within the LLC - considering the diversity of background and knowledges of the LLC student cohort it is surprising that there are not more provisions for initial introductions to theory and researching skills for new postgraduates. I found it particularly valuable that the workshops were led by postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers as this helps foster a sense of community and vibrant exchanges within the postgraduate/postdoctoral community - within LLC but also across different schools - (although more explicit involvement and support from staff would also have been welcome).

It certainly filled a gap - several participants commented that it had brought them into contact with people and approaches that they may not have been aware of otherwise. Participants in the early stages of their research said they had found it useful in situating their approach and helping them to develop ideas for their topic.

Expanding their teaching abilities and opening up discussion on literary theory in the LLC.

The main benefit, I think, was the chance to discuss the work that they do at a more theoretical level, reflecting on the process and assumptions of their research. It is rare to have this kind of discussion in a formal setting.

How would you rate the overall management and administration of the seminar?

Very good	7	87.5%
Good	1	12.5%
Poor	0	0%
Very poor	0	0%

Please explain your answer.

All fab!
The organisers took care that the seminar ran smoothly during the day, and did a good job in reminding us when we were going out of schedule. The venue, catering, and materials were all perfect. I understand that they already have a lot to do, but maybe they could have contributed more actively to one of the activities so that the participants would have had a chance to get to know them better.
-
The organisers were perfect and I don't think they could have done more! Excellent healthy catering, the room had a good set up, and they were supportive through the day.
N/A
The organisation was exemplary: excellent structure and guidance - and very accommodating (eg printing our materials on the morning of the workshop - thank you!). Our workshop didn't keep precisely to schedule, because lecture elements in the morning took longer than anticipated - this was down to the teachers not the organisers.
I think having more meetings (which obviously pertains to scheduling) prior to the day would have been useful.
Everything ran very smoothly

Resources

As a tutor, which of these materials do you think will be the most useful for your participants, as well as to the general student population?

Introductory lecture recording (when available)	1	12.5%
General reading list	7	87.5%
Annotated bibliography	0	0%
Teaching strategy	0	0%

If you think any additional resources would have been helpful, then please specify here.

Handout or slides to lecture online (I know they had paper copies)
Handout
Perhaps the group presentation hand outs?

Please tell us more about your experience in putting the resources together.

Great, a very enjoyable and rewarding day, a great way to be able to structure a whole day around one's area of expertise. All the training needed was offered.
The most useful experience at this stage was to plan a lecture collectively with two other people. I had prepared reading lists and annotated bibliographies before, but the scope of these was larger this time, and also the fact that I had to prepare them with other people helped me develop my group work skills. Perhaps a meeting with a member of staff interested in similar issues would have been useful to discuss the structure and content of the lecture at an earlier stage.
The most difficult part of this was being limited by the number of pages specified by the organisers. Otherwise it was very useful to consolidate my understanding of the field, and look specifically for contemporary developments.
It was definitely a productive experience for future professional needs, although as I was organising the day on my own I definitely felt the pressure of that! But it was do-able and enjoyable, and definitely helped me develop my pedagogical skills. Even just the experience of speaking for 90 mins (the lecture) was really useful!
Putting together the reading list was very time-consuming, and perhaps further guidance could've been helpful. However, it was also useful for my own research as I regularly prepare reading lists for topics I explore.
It was useful to think about this topic from the point of view of a beginner - it helped to assimilate my own knowledge. I will also learn from this experience, for example participants found one of the texts I'd suggested very challenging indeed - I will bear this in mind for future projects.
It took quite a lot of time, and there were many moments when it felt that we had collectively exhausted our knowledge and began including resources that we weren't familiar with or confident about.
It was an interesting but labour intensive process, much more than I had anticipated. To cover such a broad topic effectively requires more than just the background knowledge you bring to a topic, and more than just assembling what you already know.

How do you best think that traffic to the website could be sustained?

Publicising on social media	5	83.3%
Made available on LLC website	6	100%
Publicising by department members in research methods/theory-specific courses	5	83.3%
Publicising by reading groups in the university	3	50%
Other	1	16.7%

Project afterlife

Theories and Textual Practices was designed, delivered and led primarily by PhD students as well as by early career researchers (<7 years from graduation). Do you think there is a particular benefit to postgraduate students leading and teaching their peers in this way?

Yes	8	100%
No	0	0%
Don't know	0	0%

Please explain your answer.

Teaching is one of the best ways to learn, not just from students and peers but also for oneself (e.g. putting together a lecture or a lesson plan requires one to consider what are the main issues of a field, etc).
Yes, of course, as mentioned above. From the point of view of the tutors, it is an excellent opportunity to develop their research skills. From the point of view of the participants, it is a more relaxed atmosphere to discuss their research projects concretely.
I think it fosters a non-competitive, open, and collaborative environment and establishes a rapport that is important in helping to nurture a community of researchers in the university.
As it is peer led, the atmosphere is more collaborative and comfortable than if led by lecturers. The time commitment is not too much so it is a good extra activity.
I think it really helps to foster lively discussions on the day. I think it also helped demystify the research process and enable participants ask some more pragmatic and practical questions they might not have felt comfortable asking otherwise. As for the tutors, it helps develop lecturing skills that would otherwise not be accessible to us, and generally helped me boost my confidence and renew my excitement in my own research interests.
For teachers: Makes you aware of your own expertise, develops new pedagogical skills, helps to clarify and reorganise existing research. For participants: Means the research is very current, is encouraging and informative for postgraduates who are in earlier stages and still formulating their projects, shows what is possible and introduces new skills and methods. As a recently graduated PhD student, I noticed several participants asked me for tips about developing their project, and asked about my experience of pursuing my subject in the later stages of PhD and afterwards. This suggests that there's a lot of benefit in late PhD/early career sharing their recent experiences with those in earlier stages of similar research.
Yes, I think the workshop atmosphere, where the participants are responsible for presenting and doing work would be good.
It builds a sense of community between people at similar stages in their work... shouldn't be underestimated... It can also feel more collaborative than a more traditional lecture/seminar course...

Do you think these seminars should be offered again?

Yes	8	100%
No	0	0%

If yes, which of the following would be the most appropriate or effective way of delivering the seminars?

Offered within the LLC Research Methods core course, e.g. as one of the second semester option workshops.	5	71.4%
Redesigned as a self-paced online course delivered via LEARN	0	0%
Offered in the exact same format	2	28.6%
Other	0	0%

If you chose 'Other' and would like to expand on your response to the previous question, please continue your suggestions here.

Same format would also be good.
I think it would be great if this could be offered as a LLC research methods course, but am not sure as to how this would work in terms of concrete academic administration.
Perhaps somewhere between options one and three: it should be done in person (so as an online course it might take away some of the major benefits - like meeting new people etc.). It would be helpful if it was more endorsed by the school - but making it a requirement might take away from the atmosphere and flexible organisation of the course (and also restricts it to having it open to other schools, and perhaps to students at different levels in their studies).

Additional comments

If you have any additional feedback on the Theories and Textual Practices initiative, please write it in the space provided below.

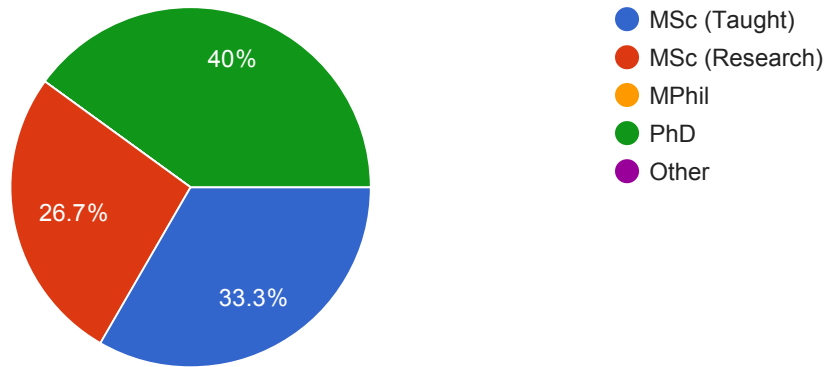
Fantastic work by the organisers, much appreciated by both students and tutors! The school should be grateful to have such enthusiastic and capable people!
It was a truly innovative idea and definitely a success in practice! Well done organisers!
It was a great experience - I learned a lot. Many thanks to Muireann and Yanbing for the initiative and excellent organisation.

Appendix 2: Participants' feedback

About you

Which type of postgraduate programme are you enrolled on?

(15 responses)



What is your programme's title?

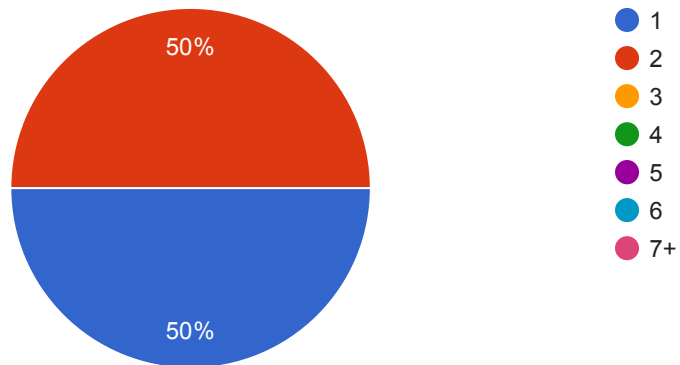
PhD English Literature x 4
PhD Translation Studies
PhD Medieval Studies
MSc Literature and Modernity x 2
MScR Scottish Ethnology
MSc Renaissance Literature
MScR in English Literature
MScR Scandinavian Studies
English Literature: United States Literature
PhD Comparative Literature
MSc Social Research
Msc U.S. Literature

What was your undergraduate degree?

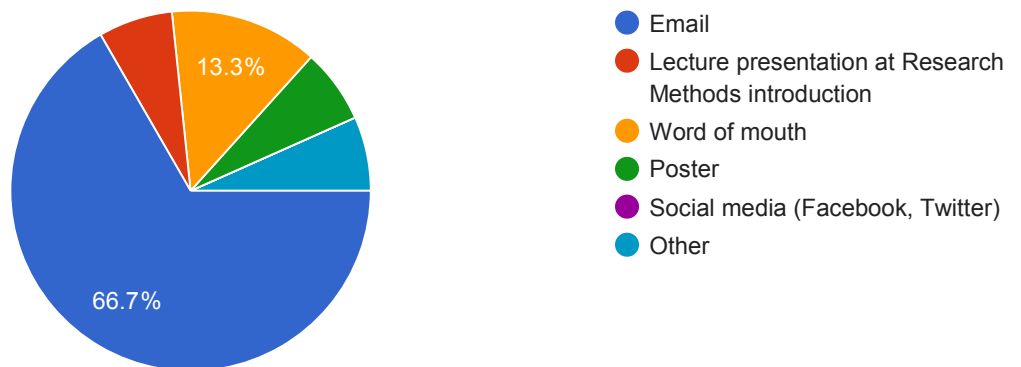
MSc Translation Studies
BA (Hons) English Literature, minor in Linguistics
Bachelor of Arts (Hons)
Bachelor of Arts
English Literature and Scottish Ethnology MA (Hons) English Literature english Literature
English Language and Literature
MA Scandinavian Studies/English Literature
BA (English)
BA French & German
English and Sociology

Eng Lit
BA
English Literature and Modern History

If you are a PhD student, which year are you in?



How did you hear about Theories and Textual Practices?



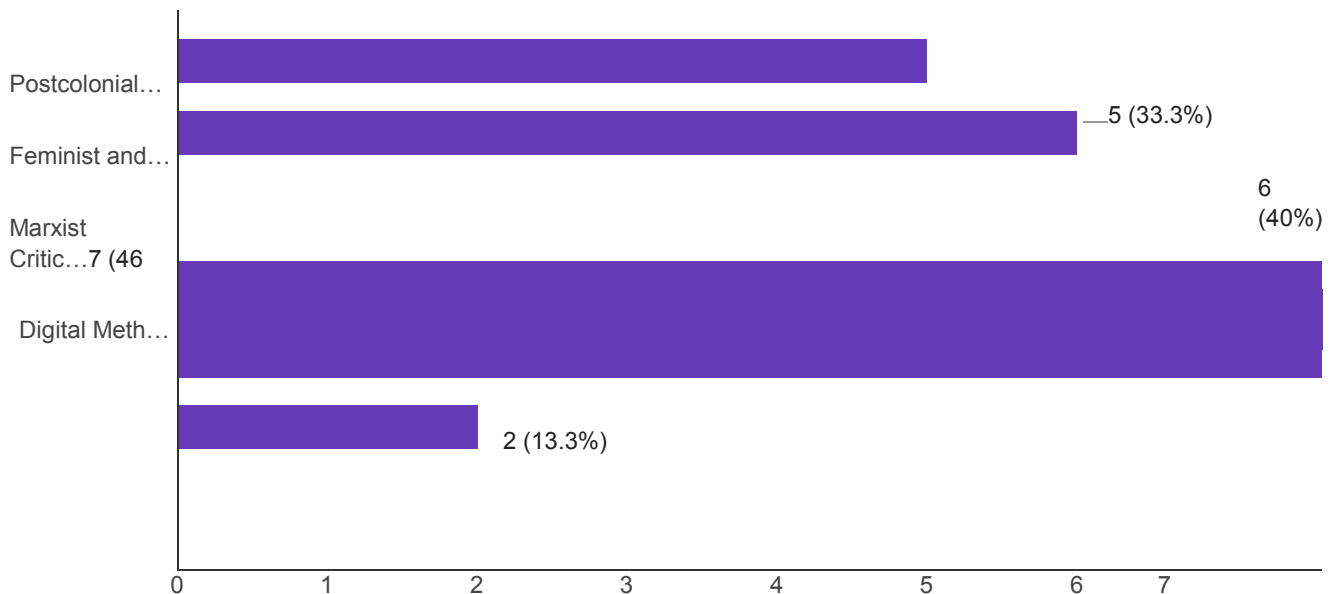
Prior knowledge and expectations

Why did you sign-up to participate in this initiative? (15 responses)

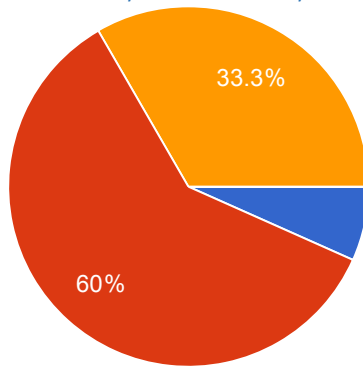
My doctoral research turned towards queer theory throughout my first year, and I felt a background in gender studies is essential in understanding the basics of it.
The seminar certainly addresses a gap in the Research Methods training. I feel that I gained an adequate grounding in literary and critical theory during my undergraduate and Masters degrees, through formal instruction, reading for essays, and learning from my peers' essays and presentations -- however, this seminar was still a great opportunity for me to address a gap in my reading and understanding on a topic I'm particularly interested in.
Of all the training opportunities I've had at the University of Edinburgh, I think this was of the highest quality. The tutors may not have presented themselves as experts, but the variety of opinion was very valuable; and the time, energy, and thought that tutors and organisers had put into preparing the seminar was evident.
Gender theory is important to my work, but I am largely self-taught in the area, and I signed up because I wanted to discuss these issues in a semi-formal setting. It also appealed to me that it was intensive (ie all day rather than spread out)
I was having a course called Modernism and Empire and found postcolonial studies very interesting and would like to learn more about it. As for Feminist and Gender Studies. I am always interested in gender issue and two of the papers I wrote for the courses here were from feminist perspective. But I knew little about the theory stuff so I expected to learn more about it from the seminar.
Having completed an 'Ideology and Literature' course during my undergraduate studies, I signed up for the initiative with an active interest in the field. In terms of a gap, my school (School of Scottish Studies) within the LLC do not explicitly offer a course in Marxist theory and criticism. However, there is scope to make suggestions in the final semester and part of my qualification now involves a wider view of cultural production.
I was hoping that this seminar would be more theoretically intensive than other courses on offer, with a specific theoretical and critical focus on feminism and gender studies. Feminist and gender studies tend to be taught either as one-off thematic points in seminars, or studied as part of a
contemporary/postmodernist course that was not within my own period interests. The Research Methods course offered throughout the year (both Semesters) was more 'practical' rather than theoretical in outlook, while IAD courses are too general and not subject-specific enough.
I am personally interested in the field, but there is an existing gap of theoretical courses offered in LLC
Marxist criticism is relevant to my planned dissertation. I signed up because the workshop presented an opportunity for focussed work and discussion in that area. There was a little overlap with the Critical Theory seminar series I'm taking, but in such a way that the workshop functioned as a helpful development rather than being redundant.
I signed up because my research project is rooted in theoretical diaspora and postcolonial insights. For me, it was a great opportunity to expand my reading list, learn more about important critics, and especially, meet my peers and discuss issues related with them. As my Masters is not taught, I don't know about any gaps, but for the seminar definitely served as research methods training.

The seminar definitely fills in the gap of Research Methods because in such course offered by LLC has no postcolonial Studies workshop. However, in other Postcolonial courses offered by the school, there might be some points overlapped with the seminar. Even so, the seminar strengthens my prior understandings of the theories and illuminates the current trends which the formal course cannot cover, such as critique of the publishing or the theories of multiculturalism.
I was keen to have an opportunity to discuss an aspect of literary theory that doesn't directly relate to my studies in an informal but productive atmosphere.
I'm interested in digital culture. I'm also interested in using more interdisciplinary, humanities-related work in social science but I don't have too much of a chance to explore that within SPS.
I've also simply not been to a seminar like this before and thought it would be a good opportunity.
The seminars seemed like an excellent idea, and addressed a gap in current postgrad course offering. The small scale seminar structure was important in allowing for discussion. The combination of lectures and group discussion was excellent
I hope this seminar would help me familiarize the theory and texts.
I think it does address the gap in current curriculum in LLC and research methods training. It's very general, extensive and allows us to know more researchers in LLC.
To get a better grounding in Marxist criticism, and to get an idea about contemporary debates/research in the area

Which Theories and Textual Practices seminar(s) did you attend?



How would you describe your engagement with this theoretical field prior to the seminar?



- Extensive: it is the primary theoretic field that I draw upon in my research
- Moderate: I have read/studied some of the canonical texts in the field but am unfamiliar with how they fit into...
- Minimal: I have read one or two canonical texts in this field but in isolation.
- None: I had no knowledge of this field of theory prior to this seminar.

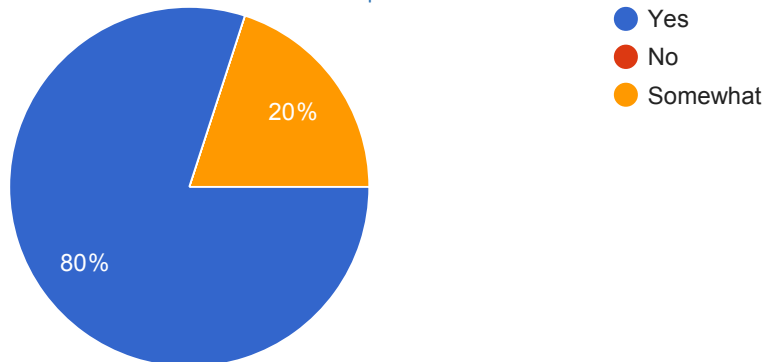
What did you expect to have learned or accomplished by the end of the seminar?

I was looking for a concise, structuralised introduction to gender theory and feminism to aid my current research.
To put my previous reading in the field into context; to understand the relation between the field and my primary field of study; to begin thinking about how the field might enrich my research and induct the argument of my dissertation; to gain a sense of the historical development of the field within the academy.
A more widely rounded view of the field, especially recent developments within it. A greater understanding of how others apply 'academic' feminism to their work and beyond.
I expected to have a general idea of how the theories develop with several guru figures highlighted and what is the latest research.
As I had read and engaged with Jameson, Marx and Lukacs prior to the seminar, I was hoping to advance my knowledge of these texts and their implications. Specifically, I wanted to be able to apply these theories outwith the field of literature into the field of folklore.
To have a better sense of extant scholarship in the field, as well as a comprehensive list of canonical texts, alongside a better understanding of how cultural theory might align with critical practice and literary studies.
Enrich my knowledge in aspects of Marxism
A greater sense of where Marxist critical study is at the moment, a better grounding in some of the vocabulary and ways of thinking attached to the field, a better sense of how certain aspects of Marxist theory might be applied.
overview over the most important ideas overview over the current critical debate widening of my critical horizon
I would gain more insights in the existed/ well-known theories. I would gain more knowledge of which texts/ trends are concerned with the issue.
I hoped to have an overview of the field including recent contributions.
How digital methods are applied to research and inspire new research questions
Digital technology and society
Where to go to get practical training in digital humanities
I feel I have a clearer overview of the topics, and I found the course leaders reflections on their own practice extremely useful.

I hope after attending the seminar I can know the framework of the theory and the application situation.

I wasn't sure - perhaps to have a better idea about how my own work fitted in?

Did the seminar meet these expectations?



In what way did the seminar meet your expectations? (15 responses)

The first two parts of the seminar explained in a simple, understandable way both the history of feminism and literary theory connected to it.

Presentations from the tutors, and their answers to extra questions, were particularly helpful.

It was a great platform for discussion and Lena and Yanbing gave great overviews of the field, including recent innovations and applications.

Both seminars began with introductory talks which were very helpful for me to have a better look at the theory development chronically and get a general idea of the ongoing academic as well as practical dialogue. Later we've got the chance to hear different people's researches. They all sounded engaging and it was inspiring to see other people's commitment to their own projects.

I feel I have a firmer grasp of modern Marxist critical practices. I also found the idea of the 'Culture Industry' very useful.

The seminar was extremely well taught, informative and well organised. The instructors were knowledgeable about the subject area and intuitive as tutors, facilitating group discussions while keeping the focus of the course on point. Despite the fact that the course was only a day long, with a lot of material to cover, we went through key concepts and theories succinctly and efficiently.

All participants were well qualified and promoted knowledge exchange

I feel more assured in using Marxist terminology and encouraged to research further into Marxist criticism. Hearing about the seminar-leaders' research was interesting in terms of how Marxist criticism is being applied now.

great introductory lecture giving the key terms and names plus history

very interesting speakers presenting their own research, showing what is going on in the field at the moment

intense close reading and debate prior to the seminar in smaller groups: these texts were absolutely relevant to my research and actually helped a lot

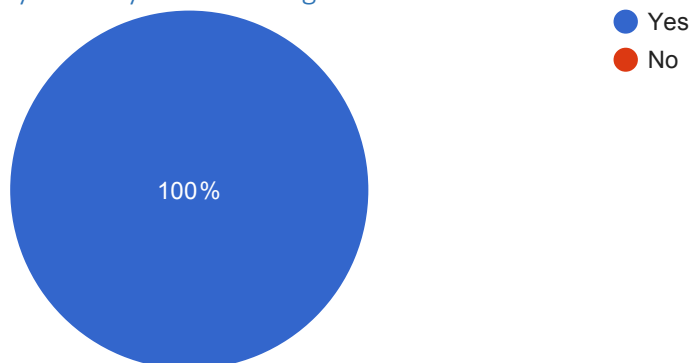
It provides me extensive knowledge of the field. The lecture by Sibyl and presentations of research projects by PhD candidates are especially good.
There was a good overview of the central texts.
It covered it all, not only in the scheduled lectures and presentations but also in conversation.
A comprehensive overview of the topic was provided.
Through the introductory materials, I know the basic theory and readings in the field of research. I also know the development of the theory and the branches when it comes to the application.
The core readings were really useful - as were the lectures from the presenters

In what way did the seminar NOT meet your expectations?

I would have welcomed slightly more theoretical background, however the rest of the seminar was equally interesting and very helpful.
I understand that this would have made the seminar more expensive to organise, but it would have been great to have had 'coursepacks' with all the readings given to participants. I felt there needed to be a safeguard against less thorough participant presentations, and would have preferred to have read all the excerpts ahead of the seminar, rather than only the ones specific to my group.
I thought there might be a little more time to discuss our own research, but it was sufficient.
I didn't know most of the participants would be PhD candidates. But that was a good thing. As a master I could learn a lot from PhD students, in terms of either knowledge or research experience. All was good.
Well, I left with more questions than answers! But that was expected (on my part).
The end of the session was reserved to allow participants to discuss their own research topic. This quickly took a 'sociological' rather than a literary turn. This may have been due to a lack of preparation on the participants' part - but it went on for too long and lacked relevance.
Only few people attended
I think there could have been a greater sense of what the key disputes at the moment within Marxist criticism and between it and other fields at the moment. A greater sense of how the field of Marxist criticism has evolved/changed might also have been helpful.
I could have done with a bit more debate after everyone introduced their own fields of research
None.
There was not an extensive consideration of the more problematic aspects of postcolonial studies.
Just more raw, undetailed examples of projects scholars have been doing in digital humanities would be interesting and inspiring.
Perhaps more smaller group work within the actual day would be useful: and would help facilitate more discussion.
Sometimes the theory application is very general or specific. I cannot fully understanding how it deals with the text and theory. As to the theory introduction, I hope it could be more systematic and applicable.

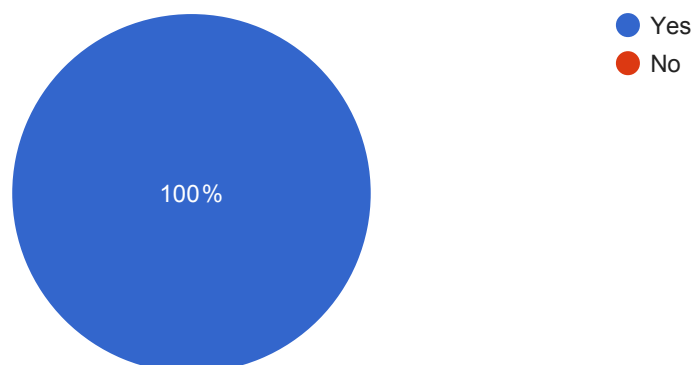
It would have been good to have a bit more group discussion on the day - to discuss ideas in smaller groups, and to think more about how our own work fitted in.

Do you feel your knowledge of this theoretical field has improved as a result of this seminar?



Do you think that attendance at this seminar will have a positive impact on your research project?

(15 responses)



In your opinion, what did you think the main benefits of this initiative were to yourself as a postgraduate student?

(15 responses)

I have a much clearer picture of the development of feminist movements and gender theory in literature.

Yes to all three! (Also see answer to the question 'What did you expect to have learned or accomplished by the end of the seminar?')

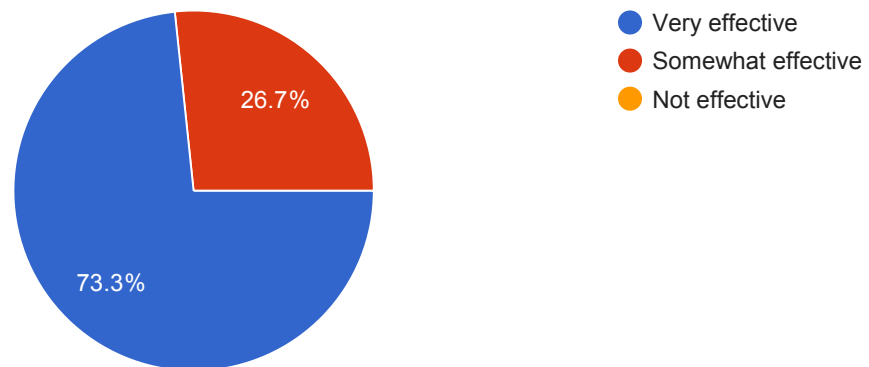
A better grasp of the theoretical field, definitely.

For me, apart from having a better grasp of the theoretical background of both postcolonial and gender studies, what I appreciate most is meet people who have already been committed to their projects and really worked on them. It was my first glimpse of the academia and I felt much inspired after talking to them.

As above really - I feel that I will be more confident in engaging with the material that we covered. This in turn will allow me to defend my methodology more coherently.
I have definitely developed more confidence in this theoretical field, with a better grasp of the critical trajectory. Ideas brought forward during the seminar will certainly supplement and enrich my own research.
I enriched my grasp of the field i am working in
The encouragement to close-read a text in preparation for the class and to try to work out my own thoughts on it was helpful. More practically, it has suggested avenues for research relevant to my dissertation.
the widening of my critical horizon, being introduced to important texts in team work (that's always different than sitting at home and trying to make sense on your own)
for me it felt like a door into the apparently very vibrant postgrad community within LLC, for example hearing about this reading group (border lines, I think), now I want to go
I can see what could be read into the works I'm interested more deeply and widely.
Somewhat enhanced background knowledge of literary theory. Meeting other postgraduates.
Several days after the seminar, I discussed my new dissertation idea during my first meeting with my potential supervisor. The seminar has led directly to my choice of topic. I had previously been unsure of my topic and was vaguely considering studying environmentalist discourses, but this seminar made me realize how fascinated I am with the implications of media technology. Media technology is actually a really salient substantive area for the type of research I want to conduct, and questions in it would be quite personal and relevant to my own life.
I do have a better grasp of the theoretical field, and enjoyed the opportunity for some structured research (being asked questions rather than having to think of the questions myself!).
Yes, I'm inspired by a lot of ideas in the seminar. It's very helpful when I meet with fellow postgraduates working in the similar area. Sometimes those phd students really help me in overcoming some research difficulties.
To gain an overview of the main work in the area and to think more about my own work in relation to this.

Seminar structure, content and administration

How effective did you find the seminar structure?



Please explain your answer (15 responses)

I found the seminar well-planned both time-wise and in terms of structure, the day was certainly exhausting but never boring and didn't feel like too much would be going on.
Presentations could have been shorter, focusing on definitions and good summaries of the excerpts with key quotes, leaving more time for a more structured discussion rather than relatively unstructured Q&A.
Maybe a little more time for the last section would have been good.
Personally I like the structure. We've got introduction, group and individual presentation and researchers' speeches. I like the way the individual presentations were put in the end. That way we usually ended in a very warm discussion.
The presentations by James, Marc and Pablo were an effective way to introduce concepts that fueled our discussions between the group and individual presentations. I think these participant presentations were key; by limiting the time available, I felt that I was able to condense complex ideas into concise summaries and this helped to make them more manageable on the day.
The introductory lecture was well structured - brief but informative. Group presentations were well organised. The new directions presentations were engagingly presented, with a good balance between 'theory' (Yanbing's) and 'practice' (Lena's).
Everything was well set with this structure
I found it quite difficult to keep attention at all times when a lot of the workshop consisted of spoken presentations. I think I would have liked more time spent on discussion.
I particularly enjoyed all the lectures/papers, but as said before, I would have liked a bit more room for discussion
The structure is well-organised. However, it could be improved if the lecture section is extended. There are a lot in such short time.
The opening lecture was very long and a bit sprawling. Perhaps it could have been broken up or structured differently.
I really, really like the informality of this seminar. I was very glad to find out the participants were not making prepared, formal presentations, and that the mode of the

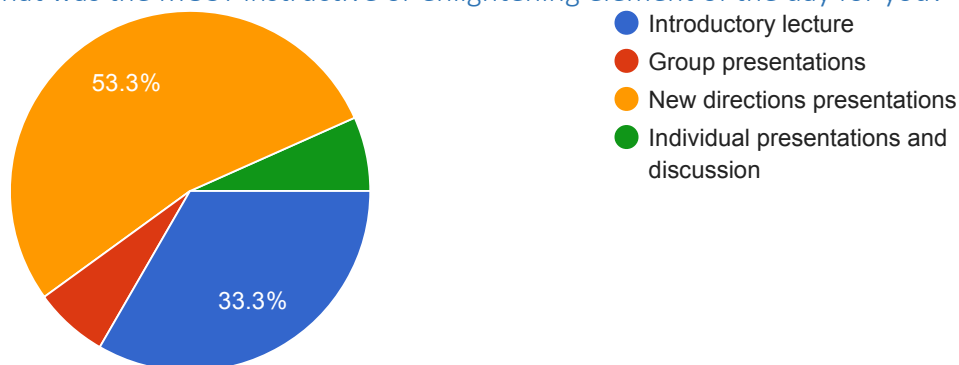
talk was casual. This made me feel comfortable getting involved, and it was a fun day rather than dry and 'academic.' I definitely felt that the dialogue was aided by the friendly atmosphere. I would not have gotten as much out of the discussions, and would not have benefited so much from the supportive demeanor of the other participants, if the seminar were more formal and structured.

smaller group work on the day (maybe just splitting full group in half for 15 mins here and there to discuss specific issues)

The third part could be improved because some seminars do not involve such kind of part. Besides, I think some good application essays or dissertations could also be recommended on the reading list.

I think it would have been useful to have all students talking about their own research in a clump together, with a discussion afterwards, rather than breaking it up throughout the day.

What was the MOST instructive or enlightening element of the day for you?



Please explain your answer. (15 responses)

I was mostly looking for a short, easy to use chronology of key ideas, which was excellently presented in the first lecture.

Reminded me of what I already knew about the field, introduced me to some new ideas, and helped put all the other presentations in a wider context.

I really, really enjoyed Lena's talk on Hollaback - such a great initiative and a great presentation. I also found it really inspiring to hear about Yanbing's project. Such great new work being done in the field allowed me to reflect on what I had read, and consider how it might be applied, both practically and to my own work.

For Postcolonial seminar, the introductory lecture might be more instructive. The guest speakers' researches sounded very interesting but some of them are involved with literature of other countries which are a bit too peripheral and unfamiliar for me to understand. As for Feminist and Gender Studies, both introductory lectures and new directions presentations were very helpful. Especially Lena's talk about Edinburgh Hollaback is the first time I knew about the actual feminist activity.

The current research offered by James, Marc and Pablo were particularly useful for me as they provided an insight into how doctoral candidates arrange their thoughts and target their research.

I especially enjoyed Yanbing's presentation. Her project is very interesting, relevant and promising - and she has read extensively around the field, which comes through in her confident presentation style.

Discussion is always more effective, because it enables different perspectives or opinions to be elaborated and contrasted

While the preparation for the group presentation was very helpful, I found the new directions presentations more interesting to listen to than the others, perhaps because they foregrounded applications of the theories discussed.

always interesting to see what others do who work in a similar field, how they approach primary texts and critical material, how varied the field actually is

It shows the very current debate in the field. Moreover, I can see how those theories we learn are actually applied in research.

Despite its pitfalls, the lecture provided a fair introduction to the field.

All of the day was instructive and enlightening, really. The introductory lecture provided me with a background on the topic which encouraged my interest and prompted me to jot down some related dissertation ideas right on the spot, so I suppose it had the most lasting direct effect on my own research.

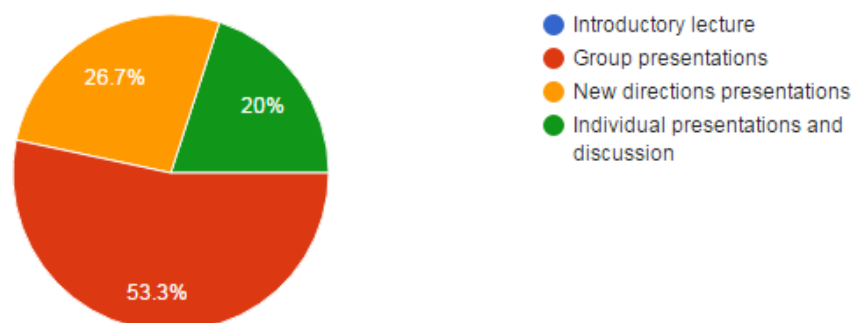
Secondly, the individual presentations were the first time I really engaged with people this way about their research and mine, since I'm just a taught masters. It was really encouraging to meet 'real people' speaking so openly and in a friendly manner about their work to an audience of fellow students and researchers. These discussions made me feel more comfortable with research, really! Everyone was very supportive.

I found this really useful..seeing how people were applying the theory in practice.

I think since the group presentations are what I have been involved. It helps me to better apprehend what's referred in the reading. However, due to the unfamiliarity with others' presentation, sometimes it's beyond my scope of knowledge to understand others' ideas and presentations.

The introductory lecture and the new directions presentations were the most useful - as they covered issues and questions that I had in my mind beforehand.

What was the LEAST instructive or enlightening element of the day for you?



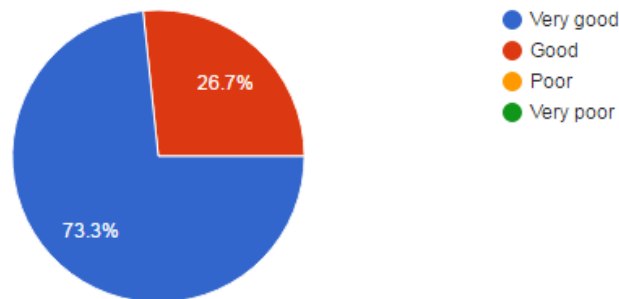
Please explain your answer. (15 responses)

Only because they were sometimes difficult to follow as would be expected from a group project, and could be easily fixed if I had looked into the provided materials for other groups prior to the seminar.
I think it would have been more helpful for the New directions to have presented a short section of a work in progress, so that we could actually see Marxist literary analysis in action, as this was something missing from the seminar.
This part was still good, but not as good as the other sections.
Personal reason. Got nervous and preoccupied with my group presentation so didn't pay enough attention to other groups.
I think the "more informal" remit of the participants took something away from these presentations (myself included...).
Many participants did not seem to have a clear research line of inquiry in mind, and wandered off into sociological observations that did not lead to particularly helpful or productive discussions. They were in the minority though - I mostly enjoyed listening to others' research interest, and the direction in which their work was progressing.
The intentions were understandable, but i doubt it gave insight to people working in the area
I took some interesting material from these presentations, but I think I probably would have taken more from them if they had been shorter and more focussed.
the presentations weren't always as clear as I expected them to be, so I got a bit lost Because our understandings might still be unclear on the matter.
The group presentations were not all particularly well prepared and/or to the point.
They were just the least generalizable or something, if I had to pick an answer.
I found it all instructive - but maybe group presentations should have been more carefully restricted time wise. (In Marxism seminar, they took up a bit too much time, and perhaps weren't wholly useful to those listening)
The new directions presentations is cancelled, so I don't have more comment on it.
Both the individual presentations and the group presentations were useful - but there could have been more of a chance for group discussions (in pairs or smaller groups - as the whole group discussion was a bit intimidating and ended up being dominated by the same individuals)

How would you rate the selection of assigned reading and discussion questions?

How would you rate the selection of assigned reading and discussion questions?

(15 responses)



Please explain your answer. (11 responses)

The reading assigned to my group was representative and easy to follow in terms of central ideas.

It wasn't too much, and was interesting. I didn't envy some of the other groups, though!

Inspiring readings. I used for my dissertation topic.

Our ideology reading ranged from the accessible (Eagleton) to the more slippery (Zizek). I found this range of material offered an easy way into the field, but also allowed for more complex discussion and evaluation.

The assigned reading was short, accessible and informative. Many sections by canonical writers were assigned, and they were made available online. They were major works in the particular subfield.

I think, given the advised lengths of the presentation, the questions could have benefited from being filed down a bit. I found them useful when looking at the text myself, but they didn't always seem to translate to clear or concise oral presentations.

important key texts, different fields within the field

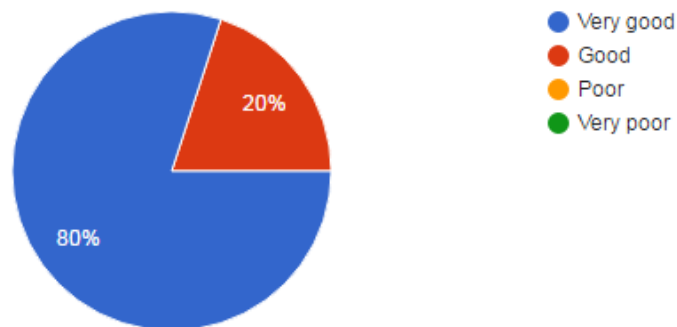
Varied on the issue.

The speculative computing article didn't seem very relevant to the sorts of topics we covered, but I guess it broadened the range of what I thought digital humanities included.

The article about Moretti was surely provocative; I had not heard of him before and found him a little shocking.

I think the four seminars are so good in providing us with good reading materials and discussion questions. However, due to the fact that the last seminar assigns for the reading and questions after the New Year and a little bit late, I don't have time to prepare for it in January and Feb. But these questions are of high quality.

How would you rate the tutors' overall facilitation and direction of the seminar?
(15 responses)



Please explain your answer. (15 responses)

I think they both did a fantastic job at both leading the seminar and keeping it in line with its aims.

Tutors were knowledgeable and friendly. Sometimes a little quick to dismiss ideas from outside their expertise, and slow to question participants about their own areas of knowledge. Transfer of ideas tended to be one-sided in the Q&A.

Lena and Yanbing were great. They fostered discussion, but knew when to come in and voice their own opinions in a constructive way.

Tutors for both Postcolonial and Gender studies are really helpful! They offered a lot of help! Especially Yanbing!

The day went very smoothly; Marc, James and Pablo were clearly engaged and very approachable. All three offered pertinent feedback but at the same time did not dominate our discussions.

Tutors facilitated the seminars very skillfully.

All tutors were well qualified in the field and facilitated the work of younger researchers

Able and interested in the subject. I think I would have appreciated more feedback from them on the group presentation.

you were just in charge, in a very understated, nice way, all went smoothly

The seminar is well-organised and clear with directions it aims.

Impose the time limits on presentations a little more strictly.

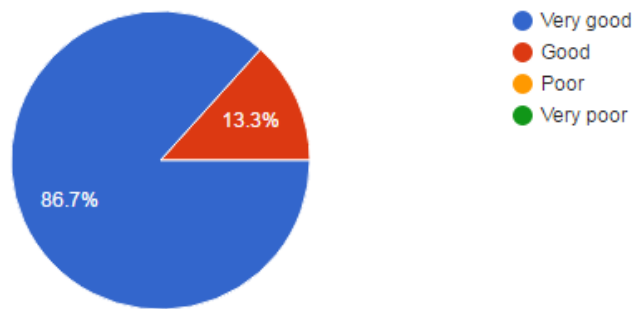
They were welcoming and friendly and made me feel comfortable despite me not being as advanced in research as the other participants. They seem knowledgeable.

all very good.

I'm impressed by Yanbin and ??? who appeared in every seminar and prepared us with food. Yanbin helped me a lot in discussing with me on my research and providing me with suggestions.

Excellent - approachable, knowledgeable, easy to follow, etc

How would you rate the overall management and administration of the seminar?



Please explain your answer. (9 responses)

I have attended several university organised seminar and this was one of the best organised ones, I especially appreciated all the personal emails to remind us of everything that would need to be done.

Even though the day was long, I didn't feel it was too much. The room was great, as was the food! I really liked the post-its :)

All was good.

The overall environment was very welcoming and supportive. Also the hospitality was excellent with plenty refreshments (the food from Milk was especially good!).

Very good. Thank you!

The workshop felt well-organized and the texts for analysis were sent to us well in advance.

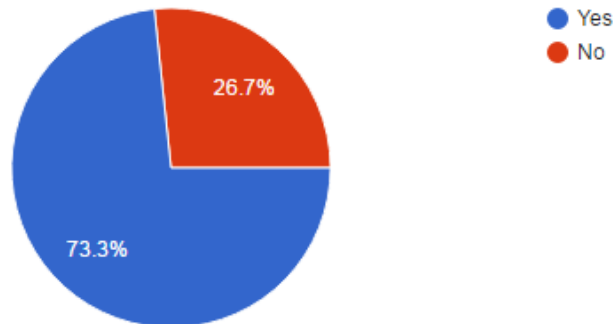
all good, I guess I would let people know where the venue is a little bit earlier than a day before

Everything is well-organised, except the room was a bit cold in the afternoon. It seemed the heaters had stopped working after lunch.

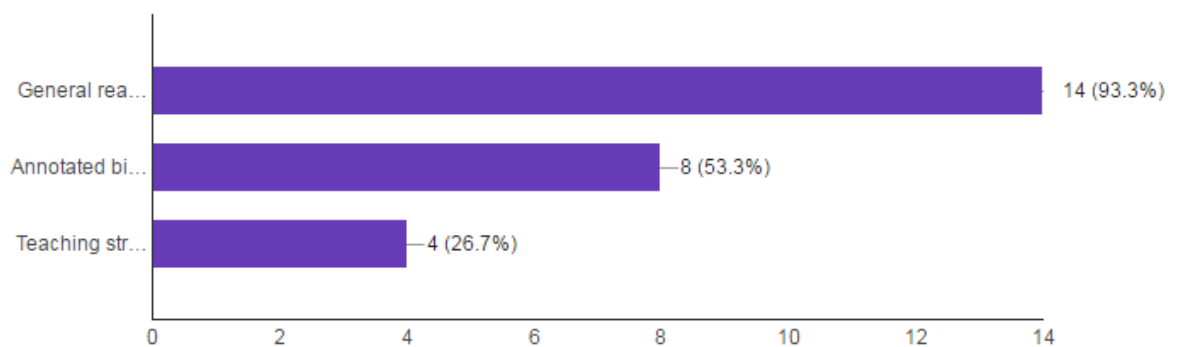
I'm impressed by each seminar on management and administration. However, I hope the organizers could be more professional in the introductory and individual presentation part. I mean, when it comes to public presentation, it combines the elements of public speech and persuasion. Sometimes the speakers are just read in public. It's a little bit boring.

Resources

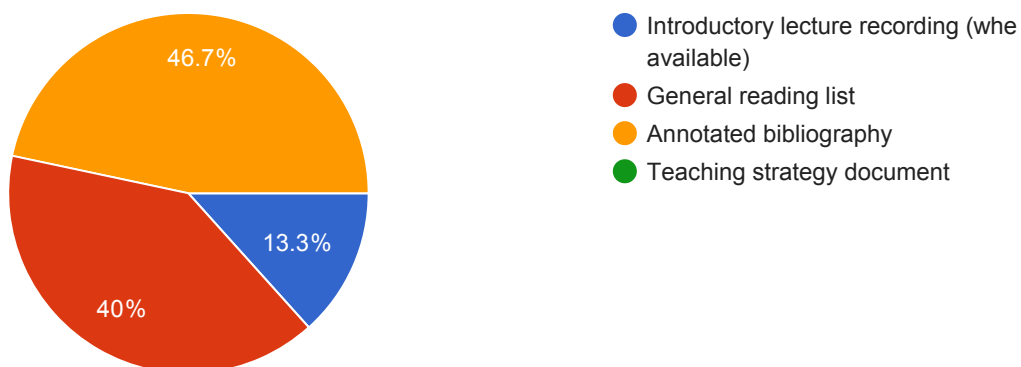
Have you consulted the additional materials on the Theories and Textual Practices website?
(15 responses)



Which of these materials have you consulted? (15 responses)



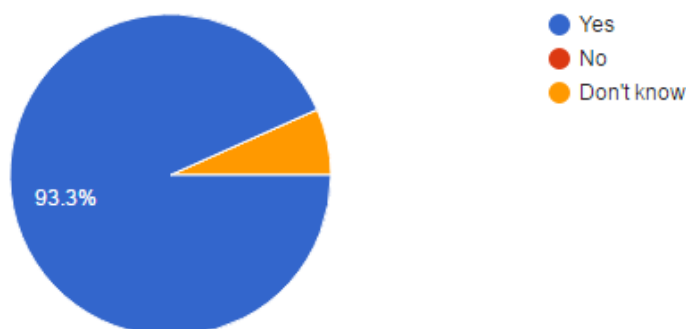
Which of the online resources would you most readily recommend to others?
(15 responses)



Project afterlife

Theories and Textual Practices was designed, delivered and led primarily by PhD students as well as by early career researchers (<7 years from graduation). Do you think there is a particular benefit to postgraduate students leading and teaching their peers in this way?

(15 responses)



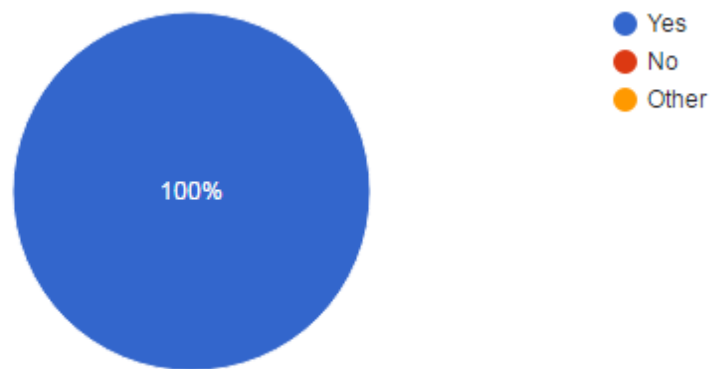
Please explain your answer. (15 responses)

I think PhD students and early career researchers often have much more realistic ideas about the actual needs of students and can offer more innovative ideas.
--
It was really inspiring to hear from people completing their own work in the field. I also felt really comfortable/not intimidated on the day, which was important!
As a master student, I learned a lot from my seniors and peers. We can make use of the chance to learn about their research projects which would be inspiring as well as their academic experience.
I think the right seasoned academics would also be able to offer the same supportive environment.
It develops professional skills (ie. public speaking, organising seminars/conferences etc.), while maintaining an accessible dynamic between participants and instructors.
Minor age gaps permits more free and balanced discussion and exchange of ideas. When discussing their research, the lessons applicable to my own felt more immediate.
it gives the impression that you are part of a peer group keeps learning/discussing within a relaxed atmosphere, yet professional
It makes me see that research and learning is not just about students-tutors, but it can actually happen among peers.
It is useful experience both teaching and learning from one another at this level.
If I were a PhD student I would want such experience in teaching. As a participant, I also felt engaged in the discussions in a way I wouldn't in traditional formats led by professors.
This is a really excellent initiative, and should be continued. The fact it is led by people with a fresh understanding of the needs of postgrad students makes a lot of sense.

They will learn a lot in introducing the students the basic knowledge about the theory. But it's not enough because it would be more helpful if they know more about the application or give us the samples of application. The introductory part and reading could also be more systematic.

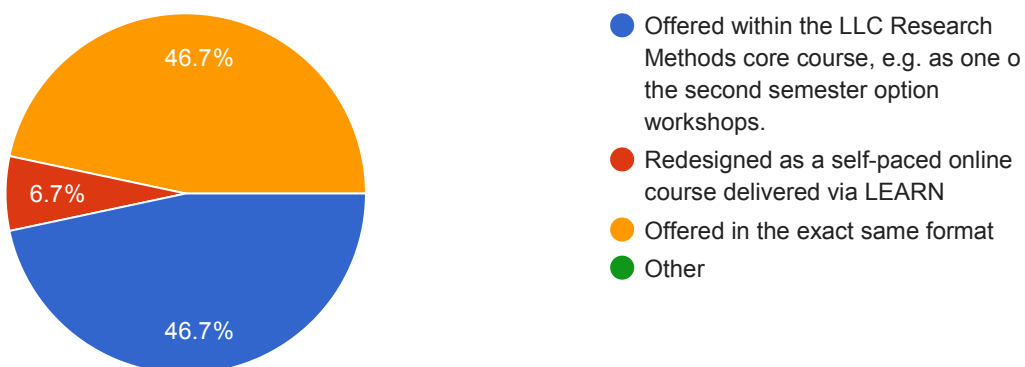
It was really useful to hear from PhD students who are a bit further on about how they have used these theories - and also as to how they are beginning to think about postdocs, etc.

Do you think these seminars should be offered again? (15 responses)



If yes, which of the following would be the most appropriate or effective way of delivering the seminars?

(15 responses)



If you chose 'Other' and would like to expand on your response to the previous question, please continue your suggestions here.

(2 responses)

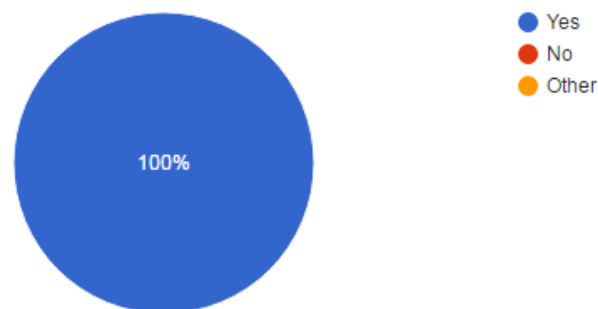
I chose "Offered in the exact same format." If it was an LLC core course, I would probably not have been able to benefit from the digital humanities seminar so much as a student outside LLC. In fact I think the event should have been announced to people from my school, SPS, since some of my fellow social science students would probably find it also very helpful and interesting. I've met a masters student in my school who is interested in the relationship between different cultures and their engagement with digital technology, another who is studying the use of social media, and one who asked me for more information when I said I was attending this seminar but I told her I think I took the last slot.

A self-paced online course sounds like it could be really useful for more practical, methodological training in digital humanities, and I might use that if it were offered. However, an asynchronous online format would somewhat ironically make it harder to have the fluid sort of conversations that we did.

not sure how to answer this because I think formalising it by offering within Research Methods would be helpful - I think the current learning provision can be a bit piecemeal and hard to access, and this would help that. But that might necessitate much larger groups which wouldn't work as well.

Do you agree that postgraduate students should be paid for organising and delivering training such as these seminars?

(15 responses)



Many participants have expressed a desire to continue the discussions begun in the seminar. If you would be interested in joining or forming a related reading group, please indicate which theoretical field would interest you.

(13 responses)

