

Feedback for Event 1

Student 1

What were the three best things about this course?

My favourite three things were the location, Katie Price's session and the simple fact of connecting with so many other people whose work was similar-yet-different.

What would you change or improve?

If I have an improvement to suggest it's that after that excellent introduction session to the library itself it was a shame not to be a little more encouraged to get into it. I know that isn't what the week was for, but when that one session did get cancelled on Thursday I was actually quite happy, because working in there was a real treat. I also thought that some of the sessions (particularly the one Martin lead about Literature and Science) felt a little rushed (although Martin himself was excellent and it was great to meet him).

These are very small reservations though. I had a fantastic week and am extremely grateful for everything.

Student 2

What were the three best things about this course?

A) The Workshops

- 1) Charlotte Sleigh's workshop on empiricism and the novel, especially the role of truth claims. It has given me the confidence to pursue an argument about the role of Henry Oldenburg in the Royal Society that I was inching towards.
- 2) Sharon Ruston's session on disciplines. It highlighted the role of training and I particularly value the phrases 'very hard' and 'interdisciplinary sludge' which Jamie and Will, I think, came up with.
- 3) Martin Willis on Literature and Science for working through the debate/story of the last twenty years. This was very new and incredibly useful.
- 4) Jerome's session doing a text with non historians was a much richer experience.

B) The daunting but well focused reading pack.

C) My fellow students, who were interesting, funny and reminded me to start working properly.

What would you change or improve?

The only thing I would change is that would have been nice to have a list of

names, subjects and universities for cribbing when I forgot peoples names.

Thank you again. It was a great privilege to be there.

Student 3

What were the three best things about this course?

I really enjoyed the session on "Literary Darwinism" because I felt the contentions were right at the heart of the interdisciplinarity project, but I realise this was only made possible by the previous sessions on "Mono-, Inter-, Multi-disciplinarity" and "Literature and Science" – I felt these three sessions made the core of the course. Other sessions, while interesting in their own right (and relevant), felt more peripheral.

I found the opportunity for an extended period of group working on Literary Darwinism (on the Thursday, because one of the sessions was cancelled) particularly interesting and productive – I found some of the other pieces of group work a little short for formulating a response, though I appreciate there were restrictions.

The facilitation of the entire programme, including in particular the atmosphere and values that underpinned every session, was exceptional.

What would you change or improve?

It's partly self interest, but I would like to see interdisciplinarity in educational research represented in a future event (I have an idea for a possible speaker too...)

I suppose it's a problem of attendees' expenses, but it could be useful if the length of future events was varied – sometimes residential and sometimes a day or a half day. It might enable participation in a session of specific interest, without contending with applicants particularly interested in a session on another day at the same event.

Student 4

What were the three best things about this course?

1. I thought the course content was fantastic and structured really well. All the lectures were brilliant, and coming away I felt that I had been given insight into a really wide range of ideas and debates that I otherwise would not have been introduced to at my institution. The selected readings we were given before the course were excellent, really giving a flavour of the debates and problems we were to discuss (it was great to have them in paper form and to know where they fitted into the course too).

2. I felt that we were given enough information to be able to chat through issues together which was great, and often something that research students don't usually have opportunity to do. There were enough breaks for the group to get to know one another which I think really helped these discussions. The encouraging, supportive atmosphere was also really appreciated.

3. It was brilliant to have such a diverse set of staff. Seeing how different academics approach the issues of Science, Literature and Medicine was really inspiring.

4. I found it useful to have to reflect on my own research throughout the sessions

What would you change or improve?

1. I enjoyed being able to chat through set questions in small groups so my ideas were more formed. This actually usually happened, but sometimes in wider group discussion when time was short, I found it hard to keep up to speed, or perhaps I was slowing down at these points! I think actually this may have been because there was so much material to cover, so maybe just a small downside to a general upside – it was great to have covered so much!

Student 5

What were the three best things about this course?

The people, the setting and the intellectual content. I liked the fact that the attendees were almost all from different institutions in different geographic settings (though, naturally, quite a number were studying in London). There was also a great diversity in subject areas - the conference was not dominated by any one discipline, be it history, literature or philosophy, and this was refreshing.

The setting was close to ideal. Having a quiet but intellectually engaging atmosphere in which to discuss the relevant issues made it all that much more enjoyable. St. Deiniol's is clearly a special place. Being snowed in was a nice touch - it's probably difficult to replicate that, however ;)

The plenary lectures and workshops again showed a refreshing amount of diversity. It was good that one was not overwhelmed with any one particular discipline or approach at the expense of others. In fact (naturally?) I felt I learned the most from those lectures/discussions which were anchored outside my own field.

Finally, I really enjoyed our final day in Manchester. That was a great change of scenery and quite helpful in learning about the magnificent John Rylands Library (which I still can't believe I hadn't heard of until then) and the public-oriented facets of the MOSI. Very enjoyable and fruitful for me.

What would you change or improve?

It would have been helpful to have, in our welcome packets or at the very first orientation session, a list of all the attendees, their home institutions, email addresses, and a brief summary of their research interests, including thesis title (and perhaps one fun non-academic fact about each participant). I realise most of this information was already available on the web, but it would have been convenient to have a 'cheat sheet' to aid in our becoming acquainted with everyone else.

The only other suggestion I have would be to limit the length of some of the lectures/sessions. This is not terribly important and to some extent unavoidable, but - I'm sure I was not the only one who struggled to remain focused throughout the 90 minute talks, especially if they occurred in the same morning or afternoon. Having said that, group work was a good way to change the pace and to re-energise us.

Student 6

What were the three best things about this course?

- The variety of readings – covered specific theories and themes, as well as entertaining pieces, both literary and historical
- The tutors and speakers – on every level – all were very professional, approachable, friendly with excellent lectures and well-run workshops
- The setting – great opportunity to use the library, homely and relaxing atmosphere, meant good integration between students and tutors alike, allowed for continued discussion beyond the workshops themselves

What would you change or improve?

- Nothing!

Student 7

What were the three best things about this course?

* Clearly substantial preparation was involved in setting background reading lists and creating the social space. This enabled students to arrive 'warm', having already considered the same series of critical texts, and thus created the preconditions necessary for the excellent seminar sessions.

* The plenary lectures were of a very high quality.

* The learning environment was very open and without pressure. I felt this stimulated very exciting debate among the students and academics on equal terms. This is a quality difficult to describe, but when I felt unsure or was

shown to be wrong, I did not feel embarrassed or unwilling to re-enter discussion.

What would you change or improve?

* The material used was heavily weighted to nineteenth-century texts. Not necessarily an issue, and this of course reflects existing critical attention. Indeed the predominance of the nineteenth century was discussed as potentially problematical, so we were sensitive to this issue. This is not to suggest other periods were not given adequate attention.

* The days were quite long - effectively 9am to 9pm. Perhaps more breaks we needed than we had (or rather fewer in number but longer in duration).

* I'm not confident that the accommodation costs were warranted - of course since this was not charged to students it's less of concern to me.

These are minor points and more broadly I have no criticisms whatsoever, just thanks to the organisers.

Student 8

What were the three best things about this course?

1. The diversity of topics and the approachability of all scholars present.
2. The choice of location
3. The way in which writing a blog has made me think about where my Ph.D. might be positioned in relation to other contemporary academic discourse. This is especially pertinent since my work is multi-disciplinary.

What would you change or improve?

I feel that very little could be done to improve the event and I have nothing to complain about. I am struggling to answer this request. However, there was a dearth of scientists, I felt. How far that can be remedied, I am not sure, but I feel that we were top-heavy with English students.

Student 9

What were the three best things about this course?

It is difficult to choose just three things that made this course so valuable and enriching. The people – both students and speakers – were the best part. Everyone was so supportive and easy going. I definitely think that Sharon Ruston created an environment that was both intellectually stimulating and comfortable. The lectures were fascinating and the discussions that followed were always interesting. I am so thankful I had this opportunity and was able to be around such wonderful people who shared similar research interests. I think the presentations were useful because it gave us a chance to hear about such varied and unique topics in the field of literature, science and medicine.

Although I am a bit intimidated by the online social space I am so glad to be a part of it and I think it is a great way to keep the conversation going.

What would you change or improve?

Nothing

Student 10

What were the three best things about this course?

1. Exposure to different methodologies and disciplines
2. Broad and stimulating subject material
3. Fascinating guest speakers and delegates

What would you change or improve?

Very little – I thought the event was well run and extremely successful. The only thing that didn't go to plan was the weather, but there's not much we can do about that! If the snow hadn't forced changes to the timetable, the event would have been perfect.

Student 11

What were the three best things about this course?

- listening to such a range of presentations from academic peers, which helped to give a sense of the variety of the field we are working in
- solid base of teaching throughout (including reading material we were provided with)
- development of a working community

What would you change or improve?

- more chance to work in groups for longer periods of time (this was felt to work particularly well when we had a whole session for discussion on Thursday)
- I wondered if more of the presentations could have been filled in early on in the week, partly to lessen the build up of nerves, and partly because I found it easier to relate to other people once I had heard their presentations/ they had heard mine.

Student 12

What were the three best things about this course?

- 1) Getting to know a group of PhD students working in similar areas

- 2) The intensity of the programme, which allowed for all sorts of connections to be made between different sessions
- 3) The social space. It's a great way of bouncing around ideas and continuing the community we established online.

What would you change or improve?

1) On the last day we withdrew to different rooms in small groups to discuss literary Darwinism. I think this approach worked really well, allowing for more discussion and debate, and encouraging the quieter members of the group to voice their opinions. I think this contributed to a great general discussion led by David Amigoni, so maybe this approach could be used more in the workshop sessions

This is actually all I can think of in terms of improving the experience! It was fantastic, thank you so much!

Student 13

What were the three best things about this course?

Location - Gladstone's library reminded us there are various locations in which sources can be found, it allowed for a real bonding experience between students and accommodation and food was top-notch!

Varied seminars and speakers - the diversity of speakers and readings revealed the various methodological and theoretical approaches to literary and historical study.

The mixture of lectures, seminars, and tours - I appreciated the different teaching modes.

What would you change or improve?

A list of the attendees and their academic affiliation to be given on the first day

Different rooms for lectures and seminars - the one room in St. Deiniol's felt slightly monotonous

A place to store luggage in Manchester before the tours at MOSI and JRUL

Student 14

What were the three best things about this course?

- The opportunities to interact with speakers and each other in workshops
- The combination of theoretically focused sessions with lectures on how these theories might be applied
- The openness, friendliness, and approachability of the course organisers

What would you change or improve?

Nothing! Everything was extremely well organised and the interdisciplinary focus and range of historical periods covered, meant that we were given a very thorough introduction to the subject.

Student 15What were the three best things about this course?

- Residential aspect of the course - lots of time for discussion, and a total emersion in PhD level study - a massive bonus for us part-timers!
- Stephanie Snow's lecture - an excellent overview of the history of medicine - really allowed the wider context of medical developments to be explored.
- Student presentations - it was nerve-wracking (especially being first!), but valuable to have others with different perspectives provide critique on your work.

What would you change or improve?

- Straight lectures - I found it really hard to concentrate on lectures where information was read out. Interactive sessions forced engagement and helped me to learn more, especially with such a full programme.
- Slightly less pre-course reading - HUGE amount of reading, so little time!
- Nothing else!

Student 16What were the three best things about this course?

1. I feel like I'm stating the obvious to say that the high calibre of all the speakers was at the heart of how amazing and thought-provoking the first LitSciMed event was, but I shall state it anyway, because it is true.
2. The interactive/group work model for many of the sessions was very helpful. Actually talking with scholars from different disciplines has a lot to be said for it, and I think there were times when simply discussing the subject in mixed groups forced us confront disciplinary boundaries and limits in ways that we don't experience them when simply treating them as theoreticals.
3. The museum trip to Manchester was a wonderful coda to the entire event. I honestly hadn't expected it to be, but the change in pace to doing something which humanities scholars never really do - going out as a group of researchers and study artefacts - really complemented the theory work on which we had focussed.

What would you change or improve?

1. I was sorry for the interference of the snow, because the material was so fascinating. However, it had a silver lining, because I did find that mentally keeping on top of everything for the week was intense work.

I'd done the reading in advance, but with the new ideas we were bringing up every day I still found I needed to spend a few hours rereading the night before each session, so perhaps a slight change in the ratio of reading hours to hours in session, or even a more detailed outline of the sort of questions we'd be considering for each reading in advance might help with that.

(I know I'm slower to process my own opinions on things than some though, so if nobody else found this to be an issue, please forget I ever mentioned it!)

2. I did feel at the end that one thing we hadn't fully explored was whether it's possible to look at these questions through scientist-goggles. Or whether they were essentially humanities-style questions, and thus not transportable. I wished at times that we had some scientists, or perhaps philosophers of science to offer a perspective on those questions from the point of view of somebody who has consciously considered science as a discipline from the inside.

3. I honestly can't think of a third.

Student 17

What were the three best things about this course?

Variety of the background of fellow PhD students and their excellent associated presentations; broad discussions during the sessions, rather than being too narrow, which led to very open, inclusive debates; the excellent balance between plenary and discussion sessions, which ensured that there was the right amount of both teaching and participation

What would you change or improve?

The reading load would have been fine if it had been able to be distributed a further month in advance (it was possible to get through it all, but not at a sufficient level of detail); although it was undoubtedly a Good Thing that the programme was intensive, it would have been good to have had a little more time to explore the resources at the Library itself - I wasn't left with enough time to either search the catalogue thoroughly or to investigate the preliminary results; the session at MOSI seemed to lack focus - it appeared to be more closely related to museology and the properties of museum space and exhibitions rather than to the use of material culture and objects in researching Litscimed - perhaps it would have been better to have had fewer readings for the other sessions and then add in a couple of readings for this, particularly for those unfamiliar with using objects.