

## **Assoc Prof Brian Farrell**

*Department of History*



Assoc Prof Brian Farrell combines a hands-on approach to teaching with a high degree of intellectual rigour and an impressive versatility. He has taught modules at all four levels of the undergraduate curriculum as well as the graduate level and has proved effective and stimulating in all of them. Although his training and, indeed, his “first love” are clearly in the field of military history, he has expanded his teaching interests to include various aspects of European history, imperialism, and colonialism and has been directly involved with developing new modules in these areas. He is closely involved with students’ academic work as well as their personal lives.

One of the hallmarks of Brian’s pedagogy is the wide range of approaches he uses in his teaching. Group presentations, debates, and role-playing are a frequent component of his modules, and his high standards ensure that these exercises are effective and fruitful. Most recently, he has experimented with online tutorials and the use of full-length films in one of his modules. His incorporation of field trips (both within Singapore and overseas) has become a particularly important aspect of his teaching, and one which has been immensely valuable for the learning process. During the 2007/08 academic year, he led students on field trips to Vietnam, Melaka, and Sarawak. The value of these field trips and the time, effort, and expense he puts into them cannot be overemphasized. At the same time, he expects students to be able to write and argue effectively and provides detailed and comprehensive feedback for every written assignment.

Brian has also been heavily involved with graduate students both as scholars and as tutors and has played an important role in helping them to balance their responsibilities in these two capacities. He has also been a key player in curriculum development, where his extensive experience teaching different levels of modules and his regular contact with students ‘at the grassroots’ are much needed for planning new modules and shaping the department’s curriculum as a whole.

Brian could certainly be described as a ‘no-nonsense’ teacher who is rigorous and even demanding in his teaching. These traits are balanced by a strong sense of fairness and justice and a willingness to go the extra mile for a student in trouble. Students know that they cannot get by with poorly done assignments or half-baked excuses, but they also know that he will be a solid rock for them in times of trouble. A few years ago his modules attracted mainly male students drawn to the “military” element, but more recently his group of “loyal followers” has a much better gender balance, as female students have come to appreciate the quality of his teaching and mentoring. Despite his somewhat formidable reputation among students, he is one of the most popular and – even more important – highly respected lecturers in the History Department, and he unquestionably deserves another ATEA.