

## **Earth Science Staff Student Liaison Meeting**

**Wednesday 23 November 2011 2pm**

**The Museum, Grant Institute**

### **DRAFT MINUTES**

**Present:** Linda Kirstein (Chair), Geoff Bromiley, Alastair Robertson, Chris McDermott, Emma Latto (minutes), Caroline Chestnutt (GEP), Emmeline Hoogland (Natural Hazards), Sophie Bolton (3<sup>rd</sup> year Geology), Julia Docherty (3<sup>rd</sup> year GPG), Ruth Saint (3<sup>rd</sup> year EG), Melissa Gray (3<sup>rd</sup> year Geophysics & Meteorology), Catriona Spencer & Alex Cooke (4<sup>th</sup> year Geology), Jenny Kirkpatrick (4<sup>th</sup> year GPG), Sylvia Gitau

**Apologies:** Rachel Wood, Bryne Ngwenya, Andrew Curtis, Godfrey Fitton, Simon Harley

### **Introduction**

LK welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the purpose was to gain as much feedback from the class reps as possible about their courses and their experience throughout semester 1. We welcome all feedback good and bad and will take all comments on board.

### **Global Environmental Processes – Caroline Chestnutt**

- Could lecture notes for be available on WebCT sooner?
- Lab notes would be useful if they were available on WebCT as well.
- If appendix of what is expected in a good lab report was available students would find this very useful.
- A good example of a PRECIS to refer to would be useful – some students bit unsure of what was expected from the PRECIS.
- Query about exam answers being available, LK confirmed that exam answers were not available, only previous exam questions.

### **Natural Hazards – Emmeline Hoogland**

- Tutorial questions don't seem to be planned well, some confusion during classes.
- There has been some confusion about the essay, some more information/guidance would be useful.

- Some students have found it difficult getting to KB for the hand in's, especially as the classes and practical classes have all been held in the central area.
- Some students have reported problems with being charged twice for printing in Darwin Library, Emma to see if she can contact staff at library to follow up.

### **Earth Dynamics**

Reps not at meeting, Emma has emailed to ask for feedback to be sent. Caroline Chestnutt commented that the questions in tutorials were amongst information and perhaps not as clear as they could be.

Feedback received from Marcin Stanek:

- Darren and Kit (demonstrators) were very professional and helpful and especially Darren did an extraordinary job explaining the core concepts, expanding our knowledge to the extent which was higher than the level expected in the workbook and providing constructive feedback and support with most demanding skills.
- The major complaint was about the length of practicals 8, 9 and 10 which took way more than 3 hours to complete for 90% of the group members; the solution that was proposed by some students was either cutting the number of repetitive exercises down or asking the students to attend two practicals a week as it is essential for students who wish to plan they work ahead to know how much time will be required to complete each practical (rather than making them think the course demands three hours of practicals a week).
- The way questions and instructions in practicals are formulated was another important issue, especially for non native speakers. Tricky language and unclear layout makes it harder (and more time consuming) to understand essential concepts and requirements, it would be very helpful to work through the questions with a group of non native speakers to see what causes most problems and what solutions would be best.

### **Stratigraphy & Sedimentology**

Rep not at meeting, Emma has emailed to ask for feedback to be sent.

**3<sup>rd</sup> year – Sophie Bolton (Geology), Julia Docherty (GPG), Ruth Saint (EG)**

The reps for the 3 degrees reported together as a lot of their feedback was related to same courses.

### **Structural Geology**

- Hard course, students felt that things were not clear and more explanation was needed in lectures. Lecture slides could have more information and flow a bit

better. Use of microphones in lecture theatre would help those students at the back who may be struggling to hear.

- Students felt it was unfair that they work hard on practicals every week and only 1 will be marked, even though equal work has gone into them all.
- Concern was raised that in the practical classes demonstrators were not able to answer some questions. Students understand that course has been taken over by new course organiser but find that practicals are confusing with conflicting information from demonstrators.
- As the 3<sup>rd</sup> year is large group students feel they could do with more demonstrators in the classes as the ones that are there are stretched trying to help the number of students. The practical class being split into 2 is not working for this course, students are asked to leave before they finished working and they feel that they are losing out on valuable learning time.
- Drop in sessions and more time at end of practicals to ask questions would be helpful.

### **Palaeontology**

- Fieldtrips great, students found valuable.
- Simon Jung's lectures before Kate Darling's would be better.
- Hand in deadlines close to exams, making revision time tight.
- Simon Jung set 2 practical assessments that students could hand in for feedback. Group feedback was given to everyone regardless of if they hand work in so students didn't feel compelled to hand the work in.

### **Igneous & Metamorphic Petrology**

- Students enjoy this course, lecture notes are great and informative.

### **Chemical Geology**

- Students enjoyed course, demonstrators great.

### **Sedimentology**

- Students enjoyed course, demonstrators great.

### **Quantitative Methods**

- Julia raised concerns with the course and that GPG students weren't trained for it. They felt they weren't given enough direction and didn't find it useful, and asked if it could be an option course instead of compulsory? LK advised that the course was good learning tool for doing the 4<sup>th</sup> year dissertations that's why it was compulsory.

### **Field Course in Tropical Marine & Terrestrial Geoscience**

- Ruth said that the 3<sup>rd</sup> year EG students were worried that the Jamaica trip was late on and close to exam diet. Action has been taken by Sarah McAllister and

Mike Summerfield to ask exam office to timetable any exams that will be affected towards end of diet so as students have enough revision time. This needs to be followed up by TO and LK.

### **Hydrogeology 1: Applied Hydrogeology**

- Good course content, lecture very detailed with maths was this necessary. CMD responded and said yes it was relevant to the all students taking the course.

### **Introduction to Physical Volcanology**

- Good course, students enjoying it. Field trip excellent.

### **General Comments**

- Some more basic chemistry in pre-honours years would be helpful before they get to 3<sup>rd</sup> year. Chemical Principles course great and helpful, but it was felt that students would like to know more before they start 3<sup>rd</sup> year.
- Mineral ID sheet issued earlier would also be helpful.
- More maths in pre-honours years.
- Computer screens in labs don't always work.
- Better microscope camera in lab, sometimes hard to recognise different minerals/colours etc on screen.
- Some GPG students felt that some lectures forget that they haven't done some of the work that the geologists have.
- Coursework marks/weightings across the courses are not balanced.
- Can emails be sent out to let students know when marked work is back for them to look at.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Year Geophysics + Degrees – Melissa Gray**

The Geophysics degrees have had their own SSLC meeting so Melissa is going to summarise the Earth Science courses for us.

- Aquatics option good.
- Options are limited for the GP students in 3<sup>rd</sup> year as they have not the pre-requisite courses for a lot the course offered. Could there be a list issued which tells them which courses are available to them?
- Computational Modelling has improved this year, Course organiser more hands on and available for questions during practical class.
- Mathematical Methods was good course, all feedback received had been positive.
- Measurement techniques was raised as a concern for the students, they would like more guidance and feedback from course organiser. Students feel they don't have enough knowledge/guidance for using the computer software. More feedback and detail from each experiment would be useful.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Year Geology – Catriona Spencer & Alex Cooke**

- Lectures are up on WebCT quickly after lectures, this is great as students value WebCT as a resource.
- Could marking criteria be available online? AHFR said that this was not possible as staff mark from their knowledge and experience. LK commented that for dissertation marking there was a criteria that could be made available.
- 4<sup>th</sup> year was a bit slow to start, could the Portfolio be brought forward to start of semester 1? November has a lot of deadlines for work and makes the work load heavy, could the 24 hour essay and seminar be moved? LK commented that there was possibility that the 24 hour essay could be moved to week 11 in future years.
- Sylvia asked what the logic was behind the 24 hour essay as she had been asking around and was not aware of any other department having a 4000 word 24 hour essay. LK explained that it was a challenge similar to what may get issued in work within industry where you need to set the work up, collect data etc and submit within short time scale to experience working under pressure. Students from previous years have found the essay a valuable part of their studies and that it was a useful skill to have. Sylvia asked if there could be better communication on the purpose of the essay.
- For the Transkills course it was thought that Endnote and other skills such as GIS and ARC etc could be introduced earlier so students were not trying to learn new skills while doing their dissertations. LK confirmed that from now on GIS will be introduced in the new 1<sup>st</sup> year course Reading the Geological Record and that more options will be available that will have GIS in them. LK also confirmed that there were talks with Geography to allow Geology/GPG students more access to their option courses. It was felt that some promotion/advertising of where courses will take you would be useful.
- Alex asked if there was any GIS in the MEarthSci programme, GB confirmed there was.
- Some guidance where students are shown programs that can be used for producing dissertation maps would be useful, maybe a session could be run in January?
- A suggestion of a kit being issued/bought in the 1<sup>st</sup> year was put forward and students taught to use everything in the kit so as they know what everything is for etc.
- Fieldtrips have been great throughout the 4 years, though maybe more in the first year so as students get chance meet more people across the other degree programmes.
- School/department small and students have found staff contact good and approachable.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> year GPG – Jenny Kirkpatrick**

- GPG students felt that they were sometimes overlooked, there have been clashes with 24 hour essay and transkills.
- Students would like to have the non assessed seminars earlier in semester with more feedback available.

- In EME students felt they may be disadvantaged by not having John Underhill give his lectures. AHFR confirmed that his lectures will be reconvened next semester so as students are not disadvantaged.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> year Environmental Geoscience – Maeve Glover**

Feedback from Maeve Glover.

##### ***E.P.I.***

There is a lot of praise for this course; many students have said it was the most enjoyable course of the year. However, many students are dissatisfied with the marking, specifically there seems to be a general feeling that there is a lack of uniformity in the marking and comments. For example, with regards to presentations different lecturers seem to have different opinions on what makes a good slide show (too much text, not enough text, colour etc.) which students feel is more down to personal opinion. A way to improve this would be to provide a template/basic outline at the beginning of the course so lecturers could focus more on presentation skills and information. Also comments have been made on the fact that the last seminars are too close to the end of term and the week gap was unfair as some students had 2 weeks to prepare instead of 5 days. However, these are minor issues and in general everyone really enjoyed the course and thought it was really well taught with excellent guest speakers and a valuable way of gaining some insight into broader environmental issues.

##### ***Oban***

There have been mixed reviews for the Oban course. The majority of students enjoyed it and feel like going out and collecting the data then producing a report was a really worthwhile experience and, like Jamaica, what our degree is all about. However a significant number felt that the days we were actually collecting the data needed to be more hands on; much of the time was spent watching lecturers etc. do the work. Also students are dissatisfied with the amount of work and general guidance with respect to reports with regards to the fact that it was a 10 credit course. The course should be worth more or the work load decreased.

##### ***A.E.G.***

Our class feel that there was a lot of information in this course that wasn't very well synthesized. The lectures were very heavy and quite difficult and many felt overwhelmed by the amount we were expected to absorb in one lecture (this is mainly for Greg's lectures). Perhaps these should be split into smaller sessions or Greg could provide a more in-depth summary at the end of the lecture? It was difficult to absorb all the information while attempting to write notes.

##### ***E.G. Projects***

The main comments on this course involve the lack of consistency in dissertation advice. I think some students feel like they are not receiving enough guidance and that they should not have to go to the course organiser to deal with issues; their own supervisors need to take a more hands-on role when problems arise. Perhaps part of

the course should include regular meeting with a supervisor every few weeks? Also with regards to Bryne and Greg's lab-based dissertations; 4 weeks in the summer is not enough and this needs to be revised to 6 weeks minimum. There are no complaints about the amount of work itself, more that students would have preferred to have done more work in the summer leaving them with more time to review and write their dissertations during the semester.

### ***Optional courses***

We are aware that these have only been introduced but students still feel like there should be a wider range of courses which are more applicable to our degree.

Students studying remote sensing are of the opinion that the course is "difficult to get into". Specifically, "All courses are very well taught, including Remote Sensing. Brian Barrett is ace, and although the course itself is pretty lightweight and difficult for EG'ers to get into, it's well run. A more science-heavy option might be better suited, rather than trying to cater to human geographer's students' needs."

With regards to GIS the two students seem happy with both the 10credit and 20credit options, especially the 10 credit option; "The 5 week GIS course is perfect for folk in our position as you get all the technical computer/software skills the course can offer and get to skip some of the more boring theory stuff. The Lecture William Mackness is a top lad, not really got a bad word about his lecturing. The guys in GIS labs really know their stuff but getting any information/help from them is sometimes like getting blood from a stone."

No comments have been made about land use.

### ***Feedback on reports***

There seems to be a lack of consistency in feedback from different lecturers. Lecturers like Greg and Sandy give really great feedback, however with some markers we only receive a grade. The most useful feedback we receive from Greg and Sandy is at the end of our reports when they summarize exactly what they liked about the report/presentation and areas where improvement was necessary. It would be good if an effort was made by all lectures to provide a paragraph with constructive criticism. We know there has been an on-going issue with feedback for the university as a whole; however we feel that the feedback improved dramatically in third year and feedback in first year and second year needs to be majorly improved.

### ***General Comments***

Most of the class are really enjoying the course this semester. We think the standard of teaching is excellent and are really impressed with the involvement of the lecturers with students. In general the course organisers and support staff are really helpful and efficient in dealing with problems.