

**GEOGRAPHY DEGREE PROGRAMME  
STAFF-STUDENT LIAISON COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY 27 OCTOBER 2011**

**Present:**

David Banks (1st Year)  
Richard Bowman (3rd Year)  
Srijani Chatterjee (2nd Year)  
Jiajin Chen (1st Year)  
Simon Collinson (3rd Year)  
Cathy Campbell (Secretary)  
Andy Dugmore (Geography Degree Programme Convenor)  
Holly Gardner (1st Year)  
Franklin Ginn (Course Organiser, The Nature of Geographical Knowledge)  
Naomi Kennedy (3rd Year)  
Eric Laurier (Course Organiser, Qualitative Methods)  
Keith Liddle (4th Year)  
Leonardo Lopez Monreal Clark (2nd Year)  
Andrew MacLaren (3rd Year)  
Laura Sloan (2nd Year)  
Georgina Sneller (Chair, 4th Year)  
Hannah Webb (2nd Year)  
Merry Wright (1st Year)

**1. Apologies**

Henry Farrar-Bell

**2. 1st Year**

*Human Geography IT Project*

Some students were unhappy that the class essay and IT practical do not count as part of the final course mark. The IT project took a disproportionate amount of time and that meant less time to do the degree essay. Year 2 students on the course as an elective were surprised by the large workload and felt it was hindering. The honours reps commented that third year is a massive jump up and emphasised the importance of self learning and getting used to doing things by yourself in first year. The IT practical was thought to be useful for subjects in later years. Staff commented that class work that doesn't count to degree marks is important as it provides opportunities for learning without risk, where possible failure doesn't harm the degree result.

The class were uncertain as to the exam topics. The honours reps suggested having a look at past papers which are available online. Andy recommended that students should take past papers as a guide but to remember the pitfalls of rote learning 'model answers'- these do not apply to similar questions on the same topic. In general exams are set to selectively test aspects of the course -the whole course content is not examined but the whole course content should be known.

*Student Reps*

The reps reported that it was difficult to get to know each other in first year and people did not know who the reps were. There should be more academic activities or a field trip as not everyone can make GeogSoc meetings. Andy responded that the teaching programme review is re-evaluating the curriculum- and fieldwork is being planned for a revised pre-honours programme. This year there will be joint activities in the new Innovative Learning Week that are aimed to encourage interaction across the year groups.

**3. 2nd Year**

*Economic and Political Geography*

The tutorial reader was very useful, time saving and good to have 'something tangible in your hands'. It would be really useful if this was available for other courses particularly for first years. Andy responded that some course organisers preferred not to be limited

by a reader and to widen the scope of reading. The honours students thought it would be good to learn how to look for journals etc in the library and it was a great skill.

#### *Lecture timing*

The *Economic and Political Geography* lectures are at 9am and this is affecting the attendance which is awful. The reps proposed a new time slot later in the day. The lecturers are very good and enthusiastic so it is a real shame that people do not turn up. There are attendance sheets this year but other people can sign in for other people. Other University's have electronic attendance reporting. Andy responded that the timetable has to fit with other subjects across two Colleges, so it would be very difficult to change- and while starting the working day at 9am maybe an effort, it is what is expected by employers.

#### *Economic and Political Geography essay topics and reading*

There is no reading list for the essay. Georgie advised that there is no text book for later courses, just broad reading and that students will get used to working without lists. Finding the relevant literature is a key skill- and is made much easier by online search engines. Pre-honours years are a good time to develop skills in searching for relevant literature.

### **4. 3rd Year**

#### *The Nature of Geographical Knowledge*

There was a bit of confusion about the structure of the course. The last lecture, on relativity, time and space, did not seem to relate to other topics although Brian was superb lecturer. Franklin responded that this is challenging course; it is teaching about knowledge in a way that students have not been asked to do before. The last lecture will be a synthesis so he will clarify the key points and pull everything together.

The reps reported that the contribution of some students to tutorials was poor. Georgie suggested that Iain Woodhouse's style of tutorial was useful, he asked people a specific question and they would have to attempt to answer.

Some students thought that the tutorials were too long (2 hours). Franklin responded that he will encourage tutors to use the 2<sup>nd</sup> hour to talk about coursework or other issues. Franklin would like feedback from the students on what readings they found helpful.

#### *Qualitative Methods in Geography*

Pete & Steph (tutors on the course) were great- they provided context on the use of QM for by talking about their research. The readings were all available which was good. The students appreciated Eric's quick response to emails and they thought he was really helpful.

It was suggested that there should be more choice of topics for the essay instead of just one topic (ethnographic observation). Eric replied that he had tried to slim the essay choice down in response to student feedback from last year. He will review this issue when planning next year's session.

### **5. 4th year**

#### *Balance of human/physical geography courses*

The students thought that there should be more physical geography options and that the choice this year was not as good as last. Andy responded that there is an equal balance of physical and human options- and in general there is more demand for human topics. The degree programmes are not 'physical' or 'human' geography degrees as such; they are about geography as a unified discipline and so there is a balance of options on offer. The staff made great effort to offer as broad a range of options as possible; there are new teaching posts in the pipeline that will potentially further enhance options of offer..

#### *Options*

Some courses have tutorials but others do e.g. Principles of GIS has 5 tutorials while Geography of Wine does not have any. Options vary (that is deliberate) this is why it's important for students about to choose options to research them first – and talk to others who have already taken the options.

#### *Essay Standards*

There was some confusion as to whether all courses applied a 10% rule on essay length, using italics, or whether or not to use Harvard referencing. The staff present commented that word limits are mandatory (as set by each course) and should be stuck to; the 10% rule is a myth. Variations in the detail of referencing do occur- this a reflection of practices that exist in academic publishing- if in doubt clarification should be sought from the course organiser.

**Action: Andy will follow up the issue of standardised referencing with the Examinations Committee**

#### *Student study space*

Reps raised the issue of the availability of desk space. Students can use the Geography meeting rooms by booking it via the main office or just going in if it is free.

#### *General Positive Feedback*

The reps reported that 'everyone is loving 4<sup>th</sup> year', especially the fieldtrips; people had felt apprehensive about the trips but then thought they were 'amazing'.

#### *Performance Statistics*

The issue of whether individual students could look at their performance compared to others for each course was raised. Andy commented that this would be considered by the degree programme committee.

**Action: Andy raise with the Geography Degree Programme Committee**

#### **6. AOB**

The GeogSoc Winter Ceilidh is on 26<sup>th</sup> November. New leaders are needed for the GeogSoc so please consider this and come along to the meetings.