

GEOGRAPHY DEGREE PROGRAMME
STUDENT STAFF LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETING

5 NOVEMBER 2014

DRAFT MINUTES

Present: Eilish Barnes (2nd Year), James Beaven (Student Chair), Cathy Campbell (Student Support Coordinator), Nick Hulton (Degree Programme Convenor), Campbell Keith (3rd Year), Eric Laurier (Senior Lecturer), Anthony Newton (Lecturer), Magali Roy (2nd Year).

Apologies: Meredith Adams (2nd Year), Razann Al Ghusein (1st Year), Kerrie Craig (4th Year), Patrycja Jastrzebska (4th Year), Sara Missaghian-Schirazi (2nd Year), Rachel Murchison (1st Year).

1. Organisation of S.S.L.C.

The Head of School, Sandy Tudhope, has suggested that students should chair the SSLC as this would give more control to the student body. Nick has agreed to handover to James as of today. There will be a change of structure of the meetings; less time for course matters and more time allocated to broader themes. There will be ongoing dialogue with course organisers to address issues raised.

5. Beans System

It proved difficult to manage the Beans system this year and to balance the class size of options with student satisfaction with their allocation. The cap size was discussed at the last Geography Degree Programme meeting. It was decided that class sizes should be no more than 40. Students need to be aware of, and be engaged in, the process so they have control of getting the option that they want. One suggestion is to introduce a second step to the bidding process; first bid so people can see how popular course is and then adjust bid as necessary. Remainder beans could be refunded so that students could then place a higher bid on the course they want. The system would be more transparent but also more complex.

6. Royal Geographical Society Ambassadors Scheme

The R.G.S. has approached Geography to participate in their Ambassadors Scheme. It would provide an opportunity to students to be ambassadors for geography; to do activities e.g. outreach and to promote geography as a discipline. R.G.S. would provide training. One option would be to provide this via GeogSoc or the Geography Degree Programme could introduce this as a Year 4 option. The scheme could be piloted for next semester and possibly introduced as option in 2015/16.

7. 1st Year

There were no first year reps present. The feedback for Human Geography was generally positive, with mixed views on the tutorials. Students asked for clearer guidelines at the beginning about what the expectations are in terms of amount of reading and preparation.

8. 2nd Year

Fundamental Methods in Geography

There were positive comments about the fieldtrip; students really enjoyed getting into field, socialising and putting theory into practice. The students on the first fieldtrip were not sure if the data gathering was going to be used for the portfolio so not everyone was prepared and not all brought notebooks. Nick noted that staff identified this as a problem in the first fieldtrip, so there was more emphasise to clarify this on the second and third trips.

Students felt the lecture content is important but some found it insubstantial as they have covered this material in school and would like more depth. They suggested that the course could be reduced to 10 credits or be taken as compulsory non-credit course. Some student would find it more motivational to hand in assessments throughout the FMIG course.

Nick thanked Reps for the useful feedback; course organisers are trying to achieve a consistent baseline for honours. FMIG has a role of feeding in to future year curriculum as students have struggled with Quantitative Methods; so there needs to be a balance. A survey was taken at the last FMIG lecture so the C.Os is going to take this feedback into account when planning the course content next year.

Economic and Political Geography

The feedback for this course was overwhelmingly positive; students are enjoying lectures, and appreciate the tutorials and weekly ready summaries which help them actively engage with topics and keep motivated. The essay questions do not include all the topics covered in lectures.

Environmental Sensitivity and Change

Students found the tutorial work was quite heavy as they had to read over 100 pages, and struggled to get prep done in time for tutorials. Nick asked if it could be that students aren't sure of expectations - the new 1st year course Physical Geography will include one topic on how to read papers.

9. 3rd Year

Quantitative Methods in Geography

There is a lot of material covered quickly in class, with no time for students to absorb what is being said. There is a high level of assumed knowledge, students don't understand what's being covered and don't feel the lecturer is approachable. The 2 hour lecture starting at 9am is difficult as there is no break.

Action: Nick will talk to the C.O. to look at recovering material for assessment. Comments will also be passed on to the working party that's looking at the delivery of 3rd Year core courses.

The Nature of Geographical Knowledge

The C.O. is approachable, and has offered extended office hours. The course has become more meaningful as time goes on.

10. 4th Year

Research Electives

There was mostly positive feedback for these courses. Students on Western Isles felt that the regroup in October was very late and would have been useful if offered earlier. The Archives course leaves little time to do any research as students are still being taught concepts in week 6.

Action: Nick will talk to the C.O. of the Archives course about preloading instructional elements.

Dissertation Conference

The conference was well received, but there were varying levels of support from the supervisors. Some were not attentive during presentations.

Action: Nick to feedback this issue to the G.D.P.

General issue

Some students aren't sure who their new PTs are going to be, they didn't know their PTs were going on sabbatical next Semester.

11. Honours Options courses

There has been a lot of positive feedback for most Options including Glacial Processes, Values and the Environment, Principles of G.I.S, and Remote Sensing. The Decolonization course is also very popular but students would like more opportunities for discussion, and the hand in date for the final submission is the same day at the N.O.G.K. exam.

The lectures Kate Symons gave for Socionature were very enjoyable. The degree essay was due on Monday 3rd November but students were not given time to meet with the C.O. to discuss their essays beforehand as he was absent. Presentations were to feed into the essay but they are being held on the 11th November, after the essay is due. Students asked for tutorials or allotted time in class to allow discussion but the C.O. advised that this had been blocked on the grounds of insufficient funding.

Nick explained that the principle of Options courses is that staff teach the topics themselves. The general rule is that tutorial support is provided for core courses but for options staff need to organise this and decide on structure e.g. webcasts, discussion, lectures or provide a tutorial after the class. In this case the request for a tutor was declined as other options don't have this provision.

Action: Nick to talk to C.O to see if the essay deadline can be changed for Decolonization course.

12. AOB

Eric advised students that a Nationwide marking boycott starts tomorrow (6th November), the School isn't sure of the level of participation by staff or duration of boycott. More information will be available on the E.U.S.A. website.

13. Next meeting

11am, Wednesday 28th January 2015, 2.05 Ogilvie Room (Drummond Street).