

GEOGRAPHY DEGREE PROGRAMME
STUDENT-STAFF LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETING

17 OCTOBER 2013

MINUTES

Present: Faten Adam (Student Support Co-ordinator), Lynne Addison (Student Chair), Jessica Breen (2nd Year), Nick Hulton (Geography Degree Programme Convenor), Tara Lohnmann (2nd Year), Sarah Manson (4th Year), Deborah Ingram (4th Year), Beth Muir (Secretary), Josephine Van Den Brink (3rd Year), Lucy Edgington (1st Year), Vicky Ponce-Hardy (4th Year).

Apologies:

1. Welcome

2. Apologies

Meredith Adams, Eilish Barnes, James Beaven, Maria-Therese Chitnis, Viola Heinrich, Holly Gardner, Franklin Ginn, Jacob Grapendal, Emmeline Hoogland, Patrycja Jastrzebska, Isabella Krabbe, Eric Laurier.

3. Matters Arising.

T.P.R

Nick reminded students about the T.P.R (Teaching Programme Review) that will be held on the 21st and 22nd November. The T.P.R. is a review of the degree programmes and how they are delivered to students, this happens every 5 years.

It will include a Student Rep from E.U.S.A, two external members (from another university), Personal Tutors, staff from the Teaching Organisation, and current Geography students.

All items suggested in the last S.S.L.C. will be part of the review, and a mix of Geography students will be asked to get involved (Student Reps and those not usually involved in feedback activities). Nick asked the Reps present at the meeting to suggest any other students that might like to get involved, and advised the Reps that Sarah McAllister may contact them about taking part.

4. 3rd Years

Amsterdam

The feedback for this course was largely positive with many students expressing how much they enjoyed the course, however they also felt they needed a 1st or 2nd year fieldwork course to prepare for the trip. Students queried why travel by ferry is compulsory, as many of them had to fly back up to Edinburgh to meet up with the rest of the group first (which

added costs and the travel time required). Students also felt the assessment they were set could be more closely related to the practical work they did on the trip.

Nature of Geographical Knowledge

Students noted a few issues – they felt that they had limited contact time for a 20 credit level course, and it was difficult in submitting the reading log which was due at the same time as the Amsterdam essay. The reading log also doesn't count towards the final mark for the course.

The degree essay topic is very open and tutors haven't been able to assist with this. Students asked for more guidance, the use of example essays would be useful. Some students also stated that this course was more suited for Human rather than Physical Geographers.

Nick advised the Reps that the clash of hand in dates between NOGK and Amsterdam may have been due to staff setting hand in times without awareness of the conflict. The purpose of feedback which isn't marked is meant to be forward thinking feedback which aids students learning.

Geography Fieldwork for Joint Honours

Dissertations in Geography are more difficult without fieldwork experience. Nick advised that Joint Honours students will be able to do Electives in 4th year from next year, but they would take one less Options course.

Timetabling for Options courses

There were only three Human Geography courses this Semester, and two start immediately after the lecture for Qualitative Methods. Some students with disabilities found it difficult to sit down for four hours.

Personal Tutor continuity

A number of students have had three different P.Ts in their degree so far. Nick advised that this is due to a big period of transition: some P.Ts now have MSc tutees, some staff have left, and some staff have returned or are new starts.

5. 1st Years

Human Geography

The tutorials for this course are once a fortnight, some students would like to have them every week. The tutorials seem less organised compared to other courses, and tutor consistency needs to improve. Students on the course asked for clarification of the assessment criteria. Reps also highlighted the positive feedback for the course, 1st years really enjoyed the content.

Nick will feedback to the C.O. with the Reps comments.

6. 2nd Years

Economic and Political Geography

A long reading list was provided but there was no prioritisation. There is no standardisation of tutorials, different questions are focused on in different tutorials, and not all questions are covered. Power points of the lectures haven't been made available.

Nick advised the Student Reps that the idea is that students have a choice of tutorial subjects instead of the tutors dictating. Nick will remind the C.O. about uploading the lectures on to the Learn page.

Environmental Sensitivity and Change

There are no set readings for the tutorials, only topics, and the course content also feels disjointed. Lectures uploaded by the C.O. are Word documents, so the graphs are unreadable. However the staff are really enthusiastic about their own areas.

Nick will feedback to the C.O. about the course content and the power points.

7. 4th Years

Dissertation

a) Conference

Students feels this was pulled out of the air, and that they haven't had enough information about what is required for the presentation.

Nick explained the idea behind the conference – students will benefit from preparing for their Dissertation earlier in the year and it will help prevent last minute preparation in Semester 2, they will also get feedback and peer reviews of their topic. The date of the Conference was moved to avoid clashing with the Careers Fair. Nick acknowledged that some students were positive or negative about doing the conference, and apologised for the lack of information earlier in the year.

Submitting a copy of the presentation online, and doing it in person is to cover students who either feel more confident doing a presentation or submitting the online presentation, to give a level playing field for different strengths. The School also requires a paper trail of what students have submitted.

Nick will discuss the issues raised with Tom who is the Dissertation Co-ordinator.

b) Supervision

Students have had mixed levels of help from their supervisors, e.g. Dan Swanton held a group discussion for his supervisees which they found really useful. Some supervisors only have one or two students, so there isn't the same feedback or interaction. Students also feel that 4 hours contact time isn't enough.

Staff have noted that some students attend their meetings but others do not. Nick reiterated that the set contact time is a minimum of 4 hours and these meetings should be used carefully.

Fieldwork

a) Western Isles

Students would like more academic support during the trip, and more contact time afterwards. They were also unsure about the hand in date for their degree assessment.

b) Iceland

Students would find it useful to have more information about Glaciers as many don't do Physical Geography or the Glacier Options course before the trip. It would also help to get the handbook before the trip (including details of the equipment they will be using), and if some of their final course mark came from the fieldwork they do during the trip.

Nick will remind C.O. to send message out about deadline for Western Isles, and confirms he is planning changes to the Iceland course e.g. greater clarity on Glaciers or a more Human Geography focus.

Researching with People

A lot of students thought they would be looking at focus groups etc, which could be used for their dissertations. They would like to have a more practical element in the course. Students are also unsure about the assessment criteria.

Principles of G.I.S.

There was no handbook or set reading list provided for this course (reading suggestions were only included in the lectures). Students have found the course very interesting but find the reading difficult. They also did not know about the class essay as there was no handbook.

Geographies of Development and Socionature

There has been a lot of confusion about the assessments for this course, as well as the deadline for the degree essay. Students have found the course content isn't very focused, there is poor time management in the lectures, and they have also had one lecture via Skype.

Nick confirmed that the assessment which was set out in the handbook was not the same as had been advertised on the D.R.P.S, the Options/U.G. Handbook, or what had passed through the Board of Studies. He apologises for the difficulty and confusion these problems caused for the students on the course. Nick has clarified the requirements of the course and assessment details with the C.O.

8. AOB

Contact time and office hours

Not all staff have this information displayed on their doors. Students would find it useful if they did, or if office hour information was displayed in the central hall. Reps also highlighted the inconsistent contact hours for different courses.

Nick will send a reminder to staff to display their office hours on their doors, and clarify how students can best contact them. Nick also highlighted that core courses like NOGK require more support and contact time compared to others. The curriculum is under review;

changes being considered include a 2nd year methods course which would have fieldwork, a 1st year course that combined Human and Physical Geography, and streamlining 3rd year core courses which would create room for another Option.

There will also be another Human Geography fieldtrip running next year as the current 2nd year is much bigger.