

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

School of GeoSciences

Staff/Student Liaison Committee Meeting

Wednesday, 10th March 2015

Room 304, Crew Building

Pre-Honours

10.00am

Present: Dr Margaret Graham (Convener), Dr Saran Sohi (SWAP Course Organiser), Dr Carly Maynard (SSE Course Assistant), Joe Boyle (2nd Year EES Rep.), Daniel Leigh (SSE Class Rep.), Galena Toteva (SWAP Class Rep.)

In attendance: Alasdair Howie (Committee Secretary)

Apologies: Lily Asch (2nd Year EES with Management Rep.)

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Convener welcomed everyone to the second Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) Meeting of the year and noted the apologies sent. The members of the Committee present introduced themselves and Joe Boyle, acting as Student Chair, then took over the meeting.

2. Minutes from the SSLC Meeting on 12th November 2014

The Student Chair asked the Committee to comment on the Minutes from the last meeting of the SSLC. The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

3. 1st Year Ecological and Environmental Sciences (with Management)

The 1st year rep. was not present at the meeting so no issues were raised or discussed.

4. 2nd Year Ecological and Environmental Sciences (with Management)

4.1 Soil, Water and Atmospheric Processes (SWAP)

Course Organiser: Dr Saran Sohi

Class Rep: Galena Toteva

Overall there were no major concerns about the course; most students were happy with the content and overall the feedback was positive.

The class representative raised the following points:

- Tutorials would benefit from model answers in future;
- Students found practicals helpful and asked if they could be longer
- Email reminders to individual groups would be better than to the whole class
- School of Biological Sciences (SBS) students were struggling with some physics

The Course Organiser (CO) said that the above issues would be dealt with as far as they could be; due to timetabling constraints, however, longer practicals would not be possible. The CO recognised that some students from outside the School may struggle with certain aspects of the course content but suggested that most of these students take SWAP as an optional course.

Model answers for tutorial questions will be provided in future and the CO will look in to how easy/viable it is to email individual groups and will introduce this if possible. The CO also pointed out that the difference in field sites will be reflected in the coursework results but that is the point of different sites.

The CO also encouraged students to approach academic staff during the course if they had any issues they wished to discuss about the course.

4.2 Sustainability, Society and Environment (SSE)

Course Organiser: Dr Simon Shackley

Class Rep: Daniel Leigh

The class representative addressed several points about the course:

- The course material overlaps with a lot of other sustainability courses so some students feel they are not benefitting from this course
- The pace of the course was a bit slow for some students. The course has a mix of 1st and 2nd year students and some 2nd years felt that it was at a lower level than other 2nd year courses.
- Tutorials were too short and content was quite vague. Online discussion forums would be good to supplement the tutorials.
- Different lecturers cover the same topics and overlap on content.
- A late change to the instructions on essay hand-in confused some students.

Dr Carly Maynard, the Course Assistant, commented on the above issues and highlighted that there will likely be some overlap with other sustainability course content and especially students who focus on sustainability will find this. Dr Maynard also suggested that the tutorials would be different from those encountered on other courses because the course is less scientific and so a more discursive tutorial is what is being aimed for. Dr Maynard will feed comments back to the CO and ensure that a discussion forum is introduced either via LEARN or on social media.

4.3 Year-wide issues

Year Reps: Joe Boyle (EES), Lily Asch (EES with Management) – not present but sent comments

The EES with Management Rep. indicated that most of the year liked the Field Ecology course and its content. It was beneficial to hold this in the current time-slot, outwith semester 2.

Some clashes were reported for EES with Management students between Business courses and SWAP. International Business and Marketing courses both clashed with SWAP. The EES with Management degree programme convenor was looking into this issue and would liaise with the SWAP CO where necessary.

The SWAP Rep reported that attendance in class was low later in semester 2, perhaps due to clashes. She reported that a clash with Environmental Chemistry was also an issue.

ACTION: MG and RW to look into all clashes with both course teams (EES and EES with Management)

All rep's felt that Innovative Learning Week was not beneficial to students. Those who attended felt that other School's programmes were more interesting than GeoSciences. Field trip events in ILW were good but there was not much uptake even for these amongst pre-honours students. The EES Reps suggested that the advertisement of events should take place during semester 1, not at the start of semester 2.

5. AOCB

There being no further business regarding pre-honours courses or degree programmes, the Convener called that portion of the meeting to a close at 10.50am.

Honours

11.00am

Present: Dr Margaret Graham (Convener), Dr Caroline Nichol, Dr Ondrej Masek, James Watt (4th Year EES Rep.), Ivan Pazpaldzhiev (4th Year EES Rep.), Andrew MacLaren (Environmental Pollution Rep.), John Godlee (3rd Year EES Rep.), Christie Paterson (3rd Year EES Rep.),

In attendance: Emma Latto (Student Support Coordinator), Alasdair Howie (Committee Secretary)

Apologies: Manuel Loeffler (4th Year EES with Management Rep.)

6. Welcome and Apologies

The Convener welcomed everyone to the second Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) Meeting of the year and noted the apologies sent. The members of the Committee present introduced themselves and James Watt, acting as Student Chair, then took over the meeting.

7. Minutes from the SSLC Meeting on 12th November 2014

The Student Chair asked the Committee to comment on the Minutes from the last meeting of the SSLC. The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

8. 3rd Year Ecological and Environmental Sciences (with Management)

8.1 Environmental Pollution (EP)

Course Organiser: Dr Margaret Graham

Class Rep: Andrew MacLaren

The class rep summarised the feedback from the class:

- Students felt that some of the atmospheric lectures were over-running or, when delivered within the time-slot, were cramming material in where it was not necessary. Student commented that there appears to be an assumption by some staff teaching on the course (David Stevenson was mentioned) that the students need more background than they do actually need. The class rep suggested that this material could be dropped to give more time for lectures not to be rushed.
- Class rep reported that one student asked to see the marks distribution as they felt the essay marking was inconsistent.
- Class rep stated that some of the class felt the feedback champion sessions did not work and that smaller groups would be more beneficial.
- Some of the class questioned how the CEH trip linked to the course as a whole. However, Christie Paterson (Year 3 rep) commented that she found the trip experience invaluable for her degree and future planning and thought that it would have been better placed earlier in the year, i.e as part of another course.
- The class rep reported that students stated they did not have enough time to choose topics for essay questions.

The Course Organiser responded to the points raised and highlighted that some changes would be made to the course in future years to reflect feedback. For the remainder of the course, she would ensure that lectures did not overrun. There had been a change of personnel this year and this may have resulted in the extra background material. MG stated that she personally moderated the essay marks and felt that there was no inconsistency between markers. Caroline Nichol explained more about the moderation process within the School. Finally, she would investigate the possibility of including the field trip and more real-world interaction earlier in the degree stream and will look at the atmospheric lecture content for future years' course delivery.

8.2 Year-wide issues

Year Reps: John Godlee, Christie Paterson

John Godlee reported that, following the feedback session, some students felt that the marking for Ecological Measurement was harsh and students did not see the benefit of awarding low marks across the board for one particular course.

JG also stated that to revise for Ecological and Environmental Analysis, students needed more access to recorded lectures, especially Kyle Dexter's lectures as they did not have much detail and were proving difficult to revise. Suggestion that lectures are recorded (video capture) and made available again before exam. [The Course is delivered in Semester 1 but examined at end of Semester 2.]

Year 3 students reported that they were nervous about dissertation preparation and would benefit from a session on how to approach the dissertation.

Christie Paterson asked that notification is sent to students early in the year to let them know about printing credit that is available to them on the Crew Building printers.

MG responded to the above comments:

- Mat Williams is aware of Ecological Measurement marking issue raised by the class and is reviewing for next academic year. For the current session, the External Examiners will also scrutinise the coursework marks and the moderation process.
- The EEA course team and MG will meet at the end of 2014/15 academic year to review the course. CN highlighted that EEA will be moved to 2nd year from 2015/16 onwards (3rd year version will also be delivered for the last time in 2015/16).
- CN is looking to offer a group session on dissertation preparation for all 3rd year students during semester 1. She currently delivers this to her tutees only but will open this up to more students. MG highlighted that Kate Heal also delivers an event in ILW on dissertation preparation. **ACTION: Semester 1 whole-afternoon session on dissertation preparation for Year 3 students, to incorporate CN tutee session and KH ILW event, to be offered from 2015/16 onwards.**

There were no further items regarding 3rd Year.

9. 4th Year Ecological and Environmental Sciences (with Management) Effective Project Planning and Management / Current Issue in Ecology

Year Reps: James Watt (EES), Ivan Paspaldzhiev (EES)

The year reps indicated that most Year 4 students were happy although some had stated that Dissertation supervisors were not always available or easily contactable. CN encouraged any student who noticed a pattern emerging to contact MG, CN or TO staff.

The year reps reviewed the feedback for each course:

9.1 Effective Project Planning and Management

- Most students happy with the course
- Lecture material was quite dry and at times difficult to follow. IP suggested that an exercise involving students rather than chalk and talk lectures might help students understand material more clearly.
- JW stated that lots of examples were useful but that the example sheets could have been more explicit.

The returning course organiser for next year (currently on sabbatical), will look at comments and materials with MG and OM.

ACTION: MG and OM to look at course with AMcL

9.2 Current Issues in Ecology

- Students enjoyed the course
- In-depth topics
- SBS students on course felt that lecturers using the phrase “As you should know...” make them wary of not knowing material the lecturers think they should, especially given that they have less exposure to social policy. IP suggested that lecturers could highlight some material that is assumed to be well-known by the EES class to help SBS students on course. Ecology students would also find this beneficial.
- JW and IP commented that the class appreciated a research theme emerging throughout the duration of the course.
- The class appreciated the interactive nature of the course and the practical skills acquired

CN responded to the class rep comments and stated that the course team were aware of the course appealing to a wide range of students and therefore it was difficult to prepare material to suit all students. CN was happy that students enjoyed the course.

10. AOCB

A further discussion on ILW took place.

Andrew MacLaren went to some ILW events outside of the School and enjoyed the opportunity to learn new skills.

John Godlee stated that it was hard to encourage fellow students to participate in ILW.

General agreement that Science Café was a success and very beneficial for EES Synoptic exam.

Year 3 reps stated that interview session in ILW needed an environmental topic. A masters-level topic could also be introduced.

MG encouraged class reps to highlight the You Said, We Did web page to colleagues.

There being no further business regarding honours courses or degree programmes, the Convener called the meeting to a close at 12.05 pm.