

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

School of GeoSciences

Staff/Student Liaison Committee Meeting

Wednesday, 12th November 2014

Room 304, Crew Building

Pre-Honours

12.30pm

Present: Dr Margaret Graham (Convener), Dr Gail Jackson, Dr Ron Wilson (Co-ordinator for EES with Management), Joe Boyle (2nd Year EES Rep.), Lily Asch (2nd Year EES with Management and Field Ecology Rep.), Lauren Rudd (PoE Rep.), Karolina Czechowska (PoE Rep.), Andrew Cuthbert (PoE Rep.)

In attendance: Emma Latto (Student Support Coordinator), Meredith Corey (Committee Secretary)

Apologies: Dr Kyle Dexter

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Convener welcomed everyone to the first Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) Meeting of the year and noted the apologies sent. She introduced the members of the Committee present.

2. Minutes and 'You Said, We Did' from the SSLC Meeting on 1st April 2014

The Convener asked the Committee to comment on the Minutes from the last meeting of the SSLC. She reviewed the 'You Said, We Did' document and told students that both documents were on the School website for students to view.

She reviewed the new system course surveys to collect feedback for the SSLC meeting. There had been low uptake in students completing the surveys and asked for the student representatives for comments on why this might be. The reps said that some of them found it easier to collect and give feedback in person and also that it was a busy time in the semester for students with a number of upcoming deadlines and the surveys got lost in all the other things students had to do.

3. 2nd Year Ecological and Environmental Sciences (with Management)

3.1 Principles of Ecology (PoE)

Course Organiser: Dr Gail Jackson

Class Reps: Karolina Czechowska, Lauren Rudd, Andrew Cuthbert

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

The class representatives raised a few points:

- Some content was the same as Biology, Ecology and Environment (BEE), especially PW's lectures
- Students found it difficult to get the main point in the plant lectures

The Course Organiser (CO) said that the issue of overlap with BEE had been raised before and she had spoken with PW about it, who said that those items were central to animal biology and it was necessary to include in both courses, especially as some students who took PoE had not

done BEE; the material was expanded upon for PoE. The class reps noted that there was a lot of good feedback from the students about PW's lectures on the course overall, but that some students used to material overlap as an excuse not to attend lectures.

Other comments from the class reps were:

- Students were generally happy with the practical sessions, but some felt that the statistics were so precise that they were only following instructions, but not really understanding what they were doing. They suggested more demonstrators be present, as there had not been enough to answer all of the students' questions. The CO said that due to the large class size this year, she had requested one additional demonstrator for the third statistics session.
- It was suggested that the statistics sessions be held after the students collected data for their projects, but the CO said that students needed that information before collecting the data, but thanked the students for raising the point.
- Some students said they were unsure how the statistics material would fit into the exam. The CO said that the Minitab learning outcome was assessed via the coursework, not the exam.
- Some students felt the lecturers were not loud enough, one in particular. The Convener reminded students that it was important to raise such issues with the lecturer immediately and not wait until the SSLC meeting. The CO said she would discuss this with the lecturer.

Secretary's note: The lecturer said that she had worn the microphone for every lecture, as she was aware that this was now required by the University. However, on one day, the microphone had not worked. She had always asked students to let her know if they had any problems hearing her, but no one ever raised it.

The CO said that she might move the revision session in future because many students were not thinking about exams yet and would possibly hold it during Revision Week.

There were no further comments about the course.

3.2 Field Ecology

Course Organiser: Dr Kyle Dexter

Class Rep: Lily Asch

The class rep said that only a few students had filled out the survey about the course. The feedback from students was:

- They liked being outdoors and doing practical work
- Students asked for more support on the lab write-ups and the summer project, especially those carrying out the work abroad.
- Students asked for clearer objectives for each day and asked that demonstrators know what these are, as some demonstrators were not always clear.
- Students asked for a clear marking scheme for all assessments, i.e. the plant key, because students were told different things and some had been marked down
- Students liked the freedom of taking only two options in Semester 1 of Year 2 or of taking extra credits.

The Convener said that she had taken these comments to the CO after meeting with the class rep earlier in the semester.

The class rep also raised the issue of accommodation during the course and asked that it be made clear to students early on that they would need find their own accommodation, as some had struggled and others had had to move in the middle of the course. The Convener said she would ensure that this was included in the reminder about the course sent out in December.

There were no further comments about the course.

3.3 Year-wide items

Year Reps: Joe Boyle (EES), Lily Asch (EES with Management)

The EES student rep said that most students were very satisfied with the year and personally he preferred it to Year 1 because students were able to specialise more.

The EES with Management rep said that students were enjoying the programme. There were a lot of clashes between PoE and courses in the Business School that EES with Management students wanted to take; there were only three or four Business and Economics courses that students were able to take and many were upset that they were unable to take the marketing course, as it conflicted with PoE. The Co-ordinator of EES with Management said that there were more conflicts. It was suggested that this may have arisen with the change of day for the PoE practical session. The student rep said that she was looking into the timetable and the Convener said that the full timetable for Year 2 would be looked at soon due to other course changes.

Students felt rushed choosing courses at the start of semester and wanted to do it earlier, as Biological Sciences students chose their courses the spring before. It was noted that there was no way to formally enrol students for courses any earlier and that Biological Sciences' students still had to meet with their Personal Tutor and enrol for courses at the start of the academic year. The Convener reminded students that all students were required to be in Edinburgh for the week before the start of Semester 1 and this allowed for more time in choosing courses. She also encouraged students to look at the options for the next year earlier, as these were available online, and discuss course choices with their PT, even if they were unable to enrol early.

The EES with Management rep said that there was a disconnect between GeoSciences and the Business School and the programme Co-ordinator said this was something he was aware of and that in the past few years, there had been many fewer students on the programme. He said that Industrial Management had been specially set up for College of Science and Engineering students at his and others' request.

The Committee briefly discussed the issue that there was no specific Erasmus Exchange for EES students and the Convener said that this item was moving forward and it was hoped that an exchange might be running before long. She would update the students.

There were no further comments about 2nd year items.

4. AOCB

The Convener asked if any of the student representatives wanted to chair the SSLC meeting in future; this was a suggestion from the Head of School. Both 2nd Year reps said this was something they would be interested in. The Convener said she would meet with any student chair(s) in advance of the meeting.

There was no further business regarding pre-Honours courses or degree programmes. The Convener called that portion of the meeting closed at 1.05pm. She said that the meeting for Honours items would convene at 1.10pm.

Honours

1.10pm

Present: Dr Margaret Graham (Convener), Dr Christina Coakley, Dr Ron Wilson, Prof Mat Williams, Manuel Loeffler (4th Year EES with Management Rep.), James Watt (4th Year EES Rep.), Andrew MacLaren (Ecological Measurement Rep.), John Godlee (3rd Year EES Rep.), Christie Paterson (3rd Year EES Rep.), Dr Saran Sohi

In attendance: Emma Latto (Student Support Coordinator), Meredith Corey (Committee Secretary)

Apologies: Dr Kyle Dexter, Dr Kate Heal, Katie O'Neill (NRM Rep.)

5. Welcome and Apologies

The Convener welcomed the student reps to the first SSLC Meeting of the year and noted the apologies sent.

6. Minutes of the SSLC Meeting held on 6th March 2013

The Convener asked the Committee to comment on the Minutes from the last meeting of the SSLC. She reviewed the 'You Said, We Did' document and told students that both documents were on the School website for students to view. MG requested that the reps let all students know that they could view these documents online.

JG commented on the Junior Honours Learn page and said this was good. He asked if it would be possible to set up discussion groups on the Learn page at the start of Year 3 to allow students to exchange ideas and provide more structured discussion than a forum such as Facebook. He also said that it was useful to have access to all past dissertation topics. MC said that with the new system of posting all handbooks on the TO webpage, students in Years 1 and 2 would be able to access the Honours Handbook for any information they wanted.

7. 3rd Year Ecological Science

7.1 Ecological Measurement (EM)

Course Organiser: Prof Mat Williams

Class Rep: Andrew MacLaren

The class rep summarised the feedback from the survey:

- Students loved the field course; they felt they learned a lot and gained transferable skills
- Mixed feedback on whether students enjoyed the lectures
- Most students did not feel ready for the exam and were not sure what they would be examined on
- Some students requested not to have the group lecture set-up
- Some students felt that they were expected to do a lot coming into the course
- Some requested more on the theory and 'why'
- Students felt there were good links with other subjects, especially EEA
- Students wanted more time to complete their field notebooks
- Some concern that the assessment was worth 50% of the course mark and it was suggested that the field notebook be worth 10% of the final mark or that the Blackwood of Rannoch assessment be worth more (it was also noted that students had really liked that assessment)
- Students said it was good to work as a group to collect data and then each submit their own report.

The Course Organiser responded to the points raised and said that he would try to be clearer on 'why' students were doing the work. One of the Year 3 reps said that with only 1/5 hours of lecture

time each week, students were unclear on how they were expected to be giving the material back, although the approach was good, but that this may be impacted on by the high course level in Semester 1. MG confirmed that EEA would be moved to Year 2. The Course Organiser said that he was teaching students how to use the tools to analyse the data and did not expect them to give much back.

The student reps said that there was an issue with Excel training across the degree and asked for a general GeoSciences training course in Excel. The Convener said she would take this forward, but RW noted that he ran an Excel session in Innovation Learning Week that many students always signed up for, but attendance on the day was always low.

There were no further comments about the course.

7.2 Ecological and Environmental Analysis (EEA)

Course Organiser: Dr Saran Sohi

N.B. John Godlee covering course-related items

JG covered the main points raised by students on the course:

- Students felt lost on the Coursework 1 assignment, as the guidance provided was unclear and there were inconsistencies between what the different demonstrators said about the assessment
- The guidance on Coursework 2 was better, but it was noted that one tutor had not even known that there was a second coursework assessment
- Students said they would prefer their own computer, rather than a group table
- Students commented that the scoping visit to the Hermitage Braid had lacked direction
- Students asked that guidance be clear and consistent
- Some of the texts in the recommended reading were out of date
- Students said the statistics practicals with KD were fantastic. He provided students with specific targets and aims in the practical and the lectures linked well with the practicals
- Students were unclear on how the three separate sections of the course fit in together

The Course Organiser responded to the comments and agreed that there had been big issues with Coursework 1. He said that he had provided students with the initial specification of the assessment and also follow-up clarification. He noted that most students had done well on the first assessment. He said that in Year 3, students were encouraged to think more for themselves, but that staff were there to support them.

CC said that she was putting together a booklet for all the tutors on the course to ensure consistency. CC said that, regarding the comment about Coursework 2, all tutors had been given clear information about this assignment, but one may not have read it. She wanted to ensure the students knew that the tutors had been given the information from the staff in that instance.

The student reps requested assessment criteria for the coursework, as provided in Ecological Measurement. It was also noted that some students had found it very difficult to find a suitable paper for the first assignment.

The Convener told the students that the feedback and marks on the first assignment would be returned to students soon and reiterated that a new tutor handbook was being written. SS would also clarify the course overview. She reminded the students that the course was also compulsory for Biological Sciences (Ecology) students and that they may not have the same background as EES students.

There were no further comments about the course.

7.3 Natural Resource Management

Course Organiser: Dr Ron Wilson

Class Reps: Katie O'Neill (item covered by A MacLaren in her absence)

A MacLaren reviewed the main points from the student survey:

- Students were generally happy with the course
- Some said that they wanted more material contextualised
- The practical tasks were good
- Some had not expected so much maths and economics in the course
- Students wanted to be able to use their own computers in the Monday session, as they were able to do on Thursdays
- Students asked for a group exam revision session and to be able to see the model answers for the practice exams
- Some students wanted more guidance on the report, but other students thought it was great that they were able to choose their own topic
- Some complained that the group assignment counted for their degree, but one of the 4th Year reps said that it was good for students to learn how to work in groups

The Course Organiser responded to some of the above items. He said that there was not a lot of maths and economics in the course and said that students should read through the outcomes in DRPS, as this was all covered there. He supported continuing to use the group work stations for one of the weekly sessions. Regarding the group assignment, he reminded the students that they would have to continue to work with others after graduation. He also said that that assignment was only worth 25% of the course mark and the presentation portion of the project had to be done by groups.

There were no further comments about the course.

7.4 Year-wide issues

Year Reps: John Godlee, Christie Paterson

The Convener asked if there were any other items to raise regarding Year 3 courses or the programmes. JG reiterated the concern about clustered deadlines, but acknowledged this would improve when EEA moved to Year 2. The student reps also said that all the courses complimented each other nicely.

There were no further items regarding 3rd Year.

[JG, A MacL, SS, CP, and MW left the meeting]

8. 4th Year Ecological Science

Field Course / Professional Skills / Land-Atmosphere Interactions / Land Use and Water Resources / Land Use Policy / Conservation Management

Year Reps: James Wat (EES), Manuel Loeffler (EES with Management)

The year reps said that the results from the survey showed that all students were happy or satisfied with their academic experience. The year group was close and all were able to focus on what they were interested in.

The year reps reviewed the feedback for each course:

Field Course

- All said it was great
- Students liked the outdoor activities
- Students who did the modelling project would have liked to have internet access. MG said that it was likely that there would be internet access at the new location for the course.
- Some students felt the workload was uneven between the different groups

- Some equipment was missing for some groups because students had planned to use it in advance
- One student asked for that the deadline for the final essay be earlier in the semester

Professional Skills in Ecological and Environmental Sciences

- Students really enjoyed the style of the lectures
- They appreciated the change from purely analytical and statistical material
- They felt the 40% weighting was high for the size and difficulty of the one coursework assignment and MG said that this would be changing from the next year
- Students loved R and wanted more of it, maybe an assessment in it. CC said that this would be coming for the next year
- On the stats teaching, students wanted that same level of detail from KD earlier in the degree. MG said that the staff had looked at statistics teaching across the degree and changes were being made to streamline that teaching
- Students asked for more time to work on their presentations. CC said that the session was in the timetable, so students should have been aware of it at the start of the course, but she said that it would be highlighted earlier in the course. She reminded them that the session was to help with their presentation style and it was not assessed.
- Overall feedback about the course was very positive.

Land Use Policy

- Overall students were quite happy
- Students asked to have the lecture slides posted even earlier
- Some said they felt that they were only scratching the surface on some topics and asked if maybe there was one topic that they could spend more time on. The Course Organiser and the student reps briefly discussed how this might be done, including having only a lecture for some sessions. ML and RW agreed to discuss this further after the meeting.

Land-Atmosphere Interactions

- Students were happy that the course was being held this year. MG noted that it would not run in 2015/16 due to sabbatical.
- Students enjoyed all of the sections of the course
- Students said the assessment was appropriate, well-scoped, and well-defined

Land Use and Water Resources

- Students liked the topics and were generally happy with the course
- Students found it strange that the course was shared with the geographers (Catchment Water Resources) and some of the material that the Geography students had learned in Year 1, the EES students did not know
- Students felt the coursework assignment had a high weighting
- The Geography students had twice the word limit for their coursework component and the LUWR students wanted theirs to be the same
- Students felt there was a good topic range

Conservation Management

- Generally students were happy. They had enjoyed the field trip and outside speakers
- Some students were uncomfortable without a word limit on the coursework

Geoscience Outreach [not an EES course]

- Students said it was hard to decide a topic and they felt there was a lot of uncertainty

The student reps raised a few general items from the survey results:

- Low numbers of the students were aware of the Student Support Coordinator role, but they noted that it might just be that students were not aware this was EL's official title
- It would be good for students in Years 3 and 4 to be more aware of travel bursaries
- Students wondered if there were different marking schemes for summer and winter dissertations and MG assured them that there was not.

The year reps said that everyone was enjoying 4th Year. There were no further items regarding 4th Year.

9. AOCB

MG said that the 4th Year reps would be included in the meeting to discuss EEA.

MG asked the students if they would be willing to chair the next SSLC meeting and both agreed.

RW requested that the reps remind all students to raise issues at the time and not just wait for the SSLC.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 2.30pm.