

Earth Science Staff Student Liaison Meeting

Wednesday 7 November 2012 2pm

The Museum, Grant Institute

MINUTES

Present: Linda Kirstein (Chair), Chris McDermott, Mikael Attal, Godfrey Fitton, David Stevenson, Simon Tett, Bryne Ngwenya, Ian Main, Andrew Curtis, Simon Harley, Emma Latto (minutes)

Introduction

LK welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the purpose was to gain as much feedback from the class reps as possible about their courses and their experience throughout semester 1. All feedback/comments will be considered for response and ultimately improving the student experience.

Earth Dynamics

- Students enjoying course.
- Students found the field trips useful to the course. They were pleased that the first trip field notebooks were not marked as part of the assessment as the feedback provided guidance on how to improve note taking.

Global Environmental Processes

- Lecture materials good, well taught and explained. It was however felt that it would have been useful to have the Chemistry lectures earlier in the course.
- Practical classes are difficult, working with new equipment and the process of creating a report was at times confusing, more explanations of what is expected would be useful. A lab example would be good to use for reference.
 - BN responded that there was an example in the lab that students can look at.
- It was asked if the practical classes could start later in the course instead of week 2.
 - BN confirmed that the course team were having discussions about this.
- It was asked if a marking scheme was available for the practical marking,
 - BN responded that all the demonstrators have clear instructions on marking the work, and that extra time in labs should be used to discuss questions with demonstrators about marking etc.
- It was asked if we could confirm that the course was 1st year only.

Global Tectonics & Sedimentology

- The tectonics lectures were interesting but a bit fast.
- 3 lectures in one week was felt to be too much.
- The course at times is hard to follow, students can recognise the links to first year courses but feel the jump is perhaps too steep.
- No exam format has been given as yet and as course is new there are no past exams to work with.

AP - LK to ask course organiser to talk through examples of exam questions etc and to be explicitly clear on format and what is expected.

Natural Hazards

- Marking for tutorials came back too late so no feedback was given in time for next assignment.
- The submission deadline for project is the same as the submission date for Principles of Ecology.
- Student who sat the exam last year felt that 2 hours wasn't long enough to cope with the content in the exam.

AP – LK to follow up with course organiser re the submission deadline clash and what information was given to students in the handbook at start of semester so that they could plan their time more effectively.

Meteorology: Atmosphere and Environment

- Good course students enjoy it.
- The course works well with the Physics timetable and with Geology.
- The students are happy with the lectures which cover a lot in a short space of time and the practical classes were all good and exciting. A problem with the quality of graph paper was mentioned.
 - DS said this is being looked into by course team.
- More feedback on the mid-term assessment would be appreciated.
 - DS responded that he is writing some generic feedback for the class.
- The assignment was clear and relevant to what was being taught.
- It was asked if there would be some revision lectures.
 - DS confirmed that he would be running a session at end of course.
- It was noted that some of the geography students taking the course were struggling with the maths.

3rd Yr Environmental Geoscience, Geology & Physical Geography and Geology

- Inchnadamph trip received positive feedback and the opportunities for interactions with classmates were good.
- The work balance between Geology and Geomorphology was good.

- The 3rd year GPG fluvial exercise was intense and there was little time to do it in, could the schedule be examined to have this aspect extended?
- The evening workloads were intense.

Chemical Geology

- Lots of different lecturers and the communication between them didn't seem to be effective as there was a lot of repetition or not enough content.
- It was felt that the morning and afternoon sessions didn't link together well.
- Students mentioned that some found the calculations difficult and that they spend a long time thinking about them, then forget why and they found this off putting.

Igneous & Metamorphic Petrology

- The GPG students asked why the course was not compulsory to them.
 - LK responded that the course is now a core course in the third year.
- Students found JGF's section of the course great but they asked if the lecture slides could be put on Learn.
- The 2 hour practical was felt to be a bit short at 2 hours, could it be divided out and not so rushed?
- Could all materials go online?
 - JGF responded that all handouts are available in class and via email if students contact him directly.
 - JGF confirmed that he would be running a catch up session.
- Students did express that they were concerned that the course was 100% exam and this put lots of pressure and stress on them.

Aquatic Systems

- Some students struggling with the chemical and maths side and wished they had more of this work in 1st and 2nd year.
- It was noted by the Geophysics students who took the course that they had not encountered any problems.

Hydrogeology 1: Applied Hydrogeology

- Students enjoy course but found the 3 hour lecture time quite long, could this be split into 2 sessions?
- The handouts and slides can be difficult to follow and understand at times.
- It was suggested that the fieldtrip wasn't relevant to Geology and GPG students.
 - CMcD responded that there were a number of engineers on the course so the trip was relevant and useful to course.
- Students were concerned about the exam and having looked at past papers they feel the map section will be the hardest part and they asked for extra help and examples.
 - CMcD responded that there was a lecture coming up that is devoted to this area.

Structural Geology

- The lecture slides and handouts need improvement, more explanation on them would be appreciated.
- Lecturer talked too fast at times, he explained some things really well but not necessarily relevant to course.
- Students are often asked to look up things without relevant guidance.
- Lab handouts were not clear and the work was not possible to complete in allocated time. Course organiser and demonstrators leave so they weren't there to answer questions at end.
- Would it be possible to have catch up sessions?
- Concerns raised that only 1 practical is assessed.

AP – LK to speak with course organiser to confirm catch up sessions and discuss the concerns over practical assessment.

Palaeontology

- Excellent course with amazing field work
- Dick Kroon is fantastic as course organiser, students love his enthusiasm

Environmental Geosciences 3

- 5 courses in semester 1, good linkage and course relate to each other.
- Students would like a briefing session in semester 1 on the dissertation and what topics may be on offer and what is expected etc.
 - BN happy to do this and advised students that there was something coming up in week 11 for them.

Geology & Physical Geography 3

- Not had feedback on Eroding Landscapes and other Geography courses.
- A clearer description for the Glaciers course (Frontiers in Physical Geography 2) of what is wanted and not wanted in the assessed work is requested.

AP – LK to follow this up with course organiser

Geophysics 3+

- Thermodynamics was a good and very useful course.

Measurement Techniques

- Good course, students enjoying it.
- Can feedback be given for 2nd assessment? This was very useful for 1st assessment and would like the same again.

Computational Modelling for Geophysicists

- The 3 hour lab classes have a lot of information, could there be a 5 minute break midway please?

Mathematical Methods

- Handouts in class were useful.
- Would like model answers.
 - HP confirmed that this was something he was working on and would be distributed in due course.
- Students would like an exam at end of course so as assessment is not on coursework along.
 - HP confirmed he thought the same and that he has requested to Board of Studies that this be introduced.

Fields and Waves

- Good course and handouts in class were informative.

Geophysics+ 4

- Course link well and students have choices

Transkills for Geophysicists

- Due to the timing of the fieldtrip on this course, students missed a week of compulsory classes in Atmospheric Dynamics and Atmospheric Physics which they feel is a disadvantage to them.
- The course organiser for Atmospheric Physics gave catch up sessions for the work missed, but this has not happened for Atmospheric Dynamics and students feel this is unfair to them.
 - HP responded that this is a serious timetabling issues but we are restricted as the field trip is run in collaboration with Universities in France and Germany, however the strong feedback from this year group will be considered.
- The students felt that the trip was useful and the skills they learned will be good for use in their future careers.
- The assessment is a 4 page report and it was asked if it would be possible for the diagrams to go in the appendix to leave more room for writing report.
 - AC responded that the idea of the report is to prepare students for writing reports in their careers where they will be restricted so this was good practice for them and shouldn't be changed.

Atmospheric Dynamics

- The 4 tutorial sessions were run well.
- Some of the lectures were too fast paced.
 - HP is teaching on behalf of staff on sabbatical and agreed and said he would pass on this feedback.

Atmospheric Physics

- Students enjoy the tutorials and asked if there could be more?
- Can the books required be put on reserve in library?
- It was felt that some explanations in lectures were not always clear.
- It was noted that demonstrators were not used in tutorials and that that having some there would be helpful.

Geomagnetism

- Course being delivered by BGS staff and they are great at giving examples and for giving help. Everyone is enthused with the course.

Seismology

- Good course, heavy in maths and might be good to have tutorials throughout course to help everyone keep up.
- Students enjoyed Ian Main's first lecture and are looking forward to more.

Climate Modelling

- 2 hour sessions would be better for the amount of information delivered.
- More introduction to the project would be useful.
- Would be useful to know how much maths they should be doing.
- Interesting course.

Geophysics Projects

- Students were disappointed at lack of geophysics projects, they are a large year group and would have liked more.
- It was felt that submitting their project choices should be done earlier than week 1 as it can be week 4 before students have opportunity to meet with supervisors due to the fieldtrip etc.

Helmsdale Trip (3rd year 2011/12)

- Trip was useful, perhaps hard at start for the Geophysics and Meteorology students. The skills learned were good and useful.
- All students enjoyed the practical session run by JRU and found it a very useful experience.

4th Year Geology & Physical Geography and Geology

Evolution of the Modern Earth

- 24 hour essay good way to teach students how to manage time.
- It was felt that the essay should be worth more than 2 credits as it was a good experience.
- The 24 hour essay clashed with the seminars so the timetabling of all the seminars was brought up as a problem. The same was noted for 24 hour essay and the portfolio.
- It was asked if the non-assessed practice seminar could be used if the assessed seminar did not go as planned.
- The information on Learn is very jumbled up with no order to lecture notes. (*Katie has been onto Learn and tidied up a bit*)
- The GPG students asked why they were not given time to do extra work on dissertations while Geology students were presenting their mapping seminars.

- LK responded that she had not been aware early enough of this issue for any action to be taken but will investigate alternative strategy for next year.

AP – LK to look at timetabling of seminars and possibility of moving the 24 hour essay to more suitable time slot within the semester.

GPG Dissertation

- It was reported that a few students had had problems with getting back their proposals and still had problems MA responded that these students should have contacted him as course organiser to discuss any difficulties before now.
 - MA has contacted relevant students.

Geology & Physical Geography

- Course choices are an issue, most geology options are in semester 2 which clashes with some geography options.
- The students felt that at times their degree was being run to fit with Geology and they were being disadvantaged in some way.
- It was mentioned that students had problems accessing journals in library.
 - LK asked if they could find out which journals so as this could be looked at.
- The focus on presentations this year was very good and the feedback was useful.
- General feedback sessions are good but only if staff are available for questions etc.
- The year group felt that there were not enough compulsory geology courses in their 1st and 2nd year.
- The Ores course in 3rd year was one of their favourite courses, however they had to hand in a proof report but no feedback was given on this.

AP – LK to contact course organiser to see if feedback would be possible.

Geology

- More course options with more Ore, Min and Pet, not enough hard rock options in 4th year.
- Quota's for courses should be given in course books for information and student planning .

Formation & Evolution of Continents

- Lectures good, everyone enjoying course.

Geology Dissertation

- Students would like to have known who their advisor was before they went on fieldwork.
- Some felt there was no guidance on what standard of work was required or what was required from thin sections.
- It would have been good if it had been advertised that thin sections could have been handing in over summer, this could have saved the backlog forming in September.
- More feedback on proposals etc would have been good.

Environmental Geosciences 4

- Environmental Techniques and Application gave good opportunity to use software – more sessions on Sigma plot would be appreciated.
- Field trips have all been good and useful.
- Some students struggled with working over summer when they had jobs to do to help pay for fees etc.
- There seemed to be confusion about dissertation and lab work had to be done and a clearer timeline would be good.
 - BN responded that he had made up a booklet that gave clear guidelines in it.
- Option courses were ok, though some students annoyed about remote sensing course.

A.O.B

Greg Cowie noted that he had noticed an increase in recording devices, not just audio but video recording and asked if this was a new thing. This didn't include those students who had permission from disability office to record lectures which is fine, it is other students and concern was raised about what they may be doing with these clips out with the study purposes.

AP – LK to follow up with TO for clear guidance