

**GEOGRAPHY DEGREE PROGRAMME
STAFF-STUDENT LIAISON COMMITTEE**

13 FEBRUARY 2012

Present:

David Banks (1st Year)
Richard Bowman (3rd Year)
Jiajin Chen (1st Year)
Simon Collinson (3rd Year)
Cathy Campbell (Secretary)
Holly Gardner (1st Year)
Nick Hulton (Geography Degree Programme Convenor)
Naomi Kennedy (3rd Year)
Eric Laurier (Senior Lecturer)
Keith Liddle (4th Year)
Andrew MacLaren (3rd Year)
Calum Whiteford (Deputy Chair, 4th Year)

1. Apologies

Georgina Sneller and Holly Lohmeyer.

2. 1st Year

Earth Surface Systems Tutorials

The student reps reported that the tutorials are aimed on how to write a scientific paper. There are no opportunities for discussing the lecture topics in the tutorials. Nick responded that this approach is aimed at supporting first years learning skills; we have to try and provide a level of cover that explains what is expected of you. Nick will speak to Simon Mudd to rethink tutorial delivery and to create more opportunities to engage with the content.

Action: Nick to speak to Simon

Earth Surface Systems – Lecture Length

There were a few cases of lecturers not having enough time to go through all the material. David Stevenson had to miss out one whole topic; he has been running out of time at the end of lectures and missing out sections. Nick responded that David is new to course; when material is new it can be difficult to measure the pace. He will speak to him re: lecture time. Nick will make sure that the exam questions were covered in lectures.

Action: Nick to speak to David

3. 2nd Year

No second year reps were present.

4. 3rd Year

Quantitative Methods in Geography

The students felt that the lectures not helpful, many worked on their reports collaboratively as they did not feel confident that they understood the assignment. It was thought that they would not be able to use SPSS for their dissertation. Some students were not sure why they should include material; they were just told to do it. Working out averages seemed difficult. Students had different levels of experience so they were approaching it differently. Richard Essery was very good in the practicals.

Nick responded that he recognised there is a problem as quantitative skills are not taught in pre honours years. Next year Richard will not be delivering this course so we will have somebody new. Nick would like to re-introduce the year 2 techniques in geography course which contained quantitative skills; it was well delivered and students liked it. Unfortunately it only ran for one year as it was cancelled. There are differences in student background and interest. Nick will look at its delivery and explore the use of SPSS.

Geography of wine

A lot of readings were only available on short loan at the library; they were difficult to get hold of as there were 40 people on the course. There needs to be more books on reserve.

The Nature of Geographical Knowledge

Some students gave feedback that this course was unnecessary. The reps present disagreed and felt it was a valuable course, but felt it was too crammed. There could be more time spent on Quantitative Methods instead as that course seemed quite rushed. It was a tough semester for year 3; there were lots of essay deadlines.

Nick responded that there is a body of feeling that engagement with history a good thing and good for the soul. There is scope to think about how the course works and to explore it as an optional course. The reps thought that not many people would take it the course if it was optional.

Exam Feedback Session

There was general consensus that people did not like receiving their exam marks at the feedback session. It is difficult when the whole year group is in the room and emotions run high if people did better/worse than they thought. Some joint students had lectures and missed the opportunity to get their marks. However it was good to have the session and an opportunity to get feedback. The reps requested marks to be emailed to students before the session. Nick responded that the release of marks was constrained by Registry. We will look at the timing of the session for the next exam diet.

One lecturer told one of the reps that they had not much written in exam script as he/she had not expected many people to come to the feedback session. One rep suggested Course Organisers provide a general feedback sheet for the exam questions for the whole course. This is done in some courses such as EPG, Jan Penrose covers how to write exam essays. Nick responded that Geography was criticised for the feedback level in NSS so the sessions were created as response to the survey; but then the take up is often poor so academics question whether it is a good use of time putting on comments. There is a sense of feeling that the students are not interested in the feedback and only interested in marks. Thus the more students go to the sessions, the more likely that staff will see it as worthwhile.

Referencing

There are lots of different ways to reference; it is confusing as students try to be consistent but have been marked down for including page numbers in references. Students should be told in first year how to do it. Nick responded that there is no consistent way of doing it in academic journals etc. so students should stick to one consistent method.

Action: Nick to raise this issue with staff

Positive Comments from year 3

Geography Matters is a really good course. People are enjoying the options. There is good feedback for Ealasaid Munro; she is very helpful and approachable.

5. 4th year

Macrogeomorphology

This course went into a lot of depth very quickly, there needs to be more background, there is a lot of geology, so geographers just had to jump in. Lynda does include a feedback time in her lectures.

Action: Nick to talk to Lynda

Dissertation deadlines

Students would like more deadlines for preparing dissertations. In year 3 Research design asks students to create a plan however it is a learning process in adjusting own deadlines. There has been an issue of people going to see lecturers without having concrete ideas about topics.

Nick would like a task force to look at the dissertation as a whole and the build up from third year. There are not enough people doing physical dissertations, perhaps as there is no fieldwork until year 3. A techniques course would address these skills e.g. in mapping. However Geography dissertations win national prizes and have a high standard. There is the dissertation database for students who are stuck with topics.

Callum gave thanks on behalf of 4th years to all the academic staff; he has enjoyed his time here.

6. AOB

The reps elected Naomi Kennedy to be the Chair next year.

Nick emphasised the importance of these meetings, they are conduits to evaluate what we are doing and how to do it better. He appreciates how important it is to listen to students as a valuable resource. However the meetings are not working as well as could be; for example they are only meeting twice year so we can not address problems early enough in the session. Nick is going to set up workshops for the students to attend with staff. We will look at how best to implement the SSLC meetings next academic session.