

SOCIOLOGY: STAFF-STUDENT LIAISON COMMITTEE

19/11/10

PRESENT

Maureen Capron (third year), Ross Mackenzie (third year), Amy Berrett (fourth year), Clare Taylor (fourth year), Uday Jain (first year), Jonathan Reed (first year), Sarah Rae (third year), Nick Prior (convenor)

APOLOGIES

There were no apologies, although it was noted that no second year reps were in attendance

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Taken as accurate

MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising

YEAR BY YEAR FEEDBACK

-A general discussion was had about the desirability of team-taught courses – i.e., courses where a team of lecturers delivered the course content, rather than it falling to a smaller number of staff.

-Some reps spoke of the potential confusion caused by chopping and changing lectures, giving rise to a disjointed feel of the course. On the other hand, some reps felt that having two or three lecturers, kept things fresh, kept students focused and introduced new points of view.

Year 1

-There was positive feedback on the content and delivery of lectures, praise for the organisation of WebCT materials and for dividing the course up into units. The course was positively compared with politics in terms of organisation and interest, although it was suggested that as far as powerpoint slides were concerned, it was desirable to have less writing per slide and more images.

-It was suggested that having an exam revision check list on WebCT was helpful as was a tutorial dedicated to looking at past papers / model answers.

-There was also support for utilizing iTunes to record lectures and a brief discussion was had on the merits and demerits of doing so, including reducing lecture attendance. It was suggested that one way round this would be to have lectures posted a couple of weeks before the exam. On the whole, the idea received positive support, particularly as an aid to revision.

Action: NP to feed these ideas into subject area and school level discussions on content and curriculum.

Update: the issue of recording and making available video recordings of lectures has prompted an ongoing school-wide discussion, briefing papers and agenda items on committees, with outcomes expected in the near future.

Year 2

-No representative present. However, a discussion was had over the merits of grading tutorial participation (a practice currently undertaken in second year). Most reps thought his was a positive thing, encouraging the essential life skills of talking, debating and articulating oneself. It also constituted good preparation for the project presentation option in year 4.

Action: issue of grading tutorials was raised and discussed at the staff meeting, and the course convenor of the second year was informed of the positive response to grading tutorial participation. The subject area will continue to monitor feedback from second years on grading tutorials.

Year 3

-Reps spoke to some of the issues in Designing and Doing Social Research (DDSR) this year. Some reps thought there was lack of information given on how to write a report (particularly important as both parts of the assessment took the form of reports). Some reps thought that feedback could be better in this course, although others said that the “feedback in general is good”. Some reps reported that the epistemology/ontology lecture was unclear and that there was a mismatch between the content of the lecture and the explanation of these concepts given by the tutor.

-Social Theory was praised on the whole, with particular praise for the organisation of WebCT.

-Reps suggested that a university-wide or subject-area session on “writing an essay” would be useful, with examples given of good and bad essays. It was noted that some tutors/lecturers did this, but that it wasn’t consistent across the board.

Action: convenor to pass on these issues and concerns to the relevant course convenors and members of staff.

Year 4

-There was praise for having a dissertation bank in Sue’s office for students to consult when thinking about and developing their projects.

-Reps also welcomed the new feedback sheet, with added space for marker’s comments on what was strong / weak in the essay, although it’s always welcome to have more detailed comments on why certain aspects of essays are considered “weak” and how to improve in subsequent assignments.

-It was noted that some honours courses were taught in 2 hour blocks without a break, when a break was considered desirable. It was also suggested that an hour lecture followed by a 45 minute tutorial worked best.

-Reps noted that the lack of continuity in dissertation supervisors across honours years, whilst inevitable, caused some problems to students. It was particularly problematic when students were given new supervisors towards the end of the process and/or when writing up.

-It was reported that the micro lab in CMB was often hired out usurping undergrads from their workstations. It was also stated that the printers frequently did not work or were faulty.

Action: NP will report these issues to the subject area and relevent staff

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

-There was particular acknowledgement from honours students across both years of the important role that Sue Renton, played in the life of the subject area, in supporting students administratively and pastorally.

-Overall, reps said there were some "fantastic people" in the subject area and appreciated the hard work and effort put into making sociology a thriving, interesting and well organised subject area to study in.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

May 2011, to be arranged