

**MINUTES OF STAFF-STUDENT LIAISON COMMITTEE
NOVEMBER 20TH, 2009**

PRESENT: Oliver Colgan, David Fauchier, Alivia Bray, Jennifer Stout

CONVENOR: Nick Prior

[NOTE: THERE WERE NO FOURTH YEAR REPS IN ATTENDANCE BUT THE CONVENOR DID RECEIVE FEEDBACK VIA EMAIL FROM ONE REP]

APOLOGIES: Tirion Seymour (yr 4), Lyndsay Stewart (yr 4), Janine Gall (yr 1)

MINUTES: Nick Prior

MATTERS ARISING: there were no matters arising

FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT: OVERALL DISCUSSION

The meeting began with a general discussion around the issue of feedback. This was in the light of on-going discussions regarding how to improve student feedback in SSPS and recent attempts to improve and reflect upon feedback mechanisms.

In general, reps were positive about the timeliness and quality of feedback.

Assessment-wise, second year reps were conscious of some ambiguity in how performance in tutorials was being assessed. Reps perceived a lack of clarity in the kinds of criteria tutors were using to assess participation – for instance, whether it was the quality of tutees' remarks or their quantity that mattered most. The merits of compulsory presentations were discussed, including the value of assessing short 5-minute summaries of readings based upon 2 or 3 pre-set questions.

Praise was given to tutors who set aside essay writing sessions based on or including scrutinizing sample essays from previous years as well as setting mocking exam papers.

ACTION: NP TO COMMUNICATE TO RELEVANT CONVENORS

Some consternation was expressed around the issue of word counts and whether the "10% rule" was enforced consistently across all courses and years. Reps asked whether word counts could be expanded in the shorter (25%) pieces, even by 200 words or so, to allow for some greater breadth in answers.

ACTION: NP TO RAISE AND CLARIFY AT STAFF MEETING

EXAMS

The first year rep present at the meeting was uncertain about which topics were going to be covered in the Soc1a exam and requested a topic-by-topic syllabus checklist for units 3 and 4 to allow students to revise more effectively for the exam.

ACTION: NP AND JH HAVE UPLOADED REVISION DOCUMENTS TO WEBCT AND AN ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE TO CLARIFY EXAM COVERAGE

CHRYSTAL MACMILLAN BUILDING

Reps recognised the quality, modernity and airiness of the new building but were unsure how entitled they were to use the computer labs and other facilities “hidden” in the basement of the building. Some announcement of their entitlement to use the space would be welcome.

One rep suggested that the foyer’s handing-in/information boxes looked “ridiculous” and all reps pointed to the need for a water fountain in the foyer.

Reps were also supportive of more sociology-specific information on the 6th floor and encouraging of attempts to improve the ambience.

ACTION: NP TO COMMUNICATE TO RELEVANT STAFF FOR ACTION

YEAR BY YEAR FEEDBACK

FOURTH YEAR

Rep asked if tutorials could be organised in circles rather than linear rows to encourage and facilitate conversation.

Could it be made clear at what point next year degree results for current 4th years will be released?

THIRD YEAR

Reps expressed overall satisfaction with the teaching, curriculum and organisation. Some students felt a bit “out of their depth” in Contemporary Issues in Social Theory and felt they might have benefited from extra help, student-led tutorials and/or a less formal space to discuss the content.

SECOND YEAR

Students are generally happy with and interested in the course and there is lots of positive feedback. WebCT is an effective means of managing course information and materials and is particularly well maintained in sociology.

Some suggestions were made to enhance the learning experience in Soc2.

- 1) A smaller time gap between WebCT slides being uploaded and lectures.
- 2) Ebooks are generally not seen as user-friendly or effective due to time outs, high demand and poor navigation.
- 3) The current lecture theatre makes for a rather impersonal and cold environment when the size/content calls out for something more small scale.

FIRST YEAR

Feedback was, on the whole, very positive. The course was well organised, reps thought it was the best course for putting content on WebCT and particular praise was reserved for the social experiments / games.

Some enhancements were suggested

- 1) Unit 2 (Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll) was not as inspiring as it could have been.
- 2) More key readings needed to be online.
- 3) A syllabus / topic list for help with exams would be helpful.
- 4) To make the terminology less abstract, some students would find recommended dictionaries or a glossary of terms beneficial.

A general discussion was had of the relative merits of audio recording lectures to post online for subsequent consultation and revision. To avoid undermining attendance at lectures it was suggested that this might happen two weeks after the lecture or just before exams.

Other lecture formats were discussed including using multi-choice “buzzers” for students to participate in lecture content and a “timeline” of discipline-specific developments, such as in theory or broader historical processes.

ACTION: NP TO COMMUNICATE IDEAS TO STAFF AND COURSE CONVENORS