

**Sociology Staff-Student Liaison meeting
20th November 2013**

Minutes

Present: Charlotte Mohn (yr 4)
Martin Lam (yr 4)
Nicola Allison (yr 3)
Melissa Bridgwood (yr 1)

Staff: Ross Bond (Chair)
Karen Dargo (Mins)

1. Introductions

Ross welcomed all to meeting. Apologies were received from Marie Larsson and Ilinca Barsan. Introductions were made around table. It was noted that there were no representatives from year 2.

2. Purpose of/ground rules for SSLC

The purpose of our Staff-Student Liaison meeting is to give students the opportunity to raise issues with staff via their class reps. Staff use this meeting to feedback the result of discussions and decisions which will affect students and update on previously raised issues.

There will be a second Staff-Student Liaison meeting in semester 2 and Ross advised that a student rep should chair this. If you would like to volunteer to do this please speak to Ross.

3. Staff items:

Ross will circulate the minutes of the last SSLC meeting. The matters arising from this meeting are:

- There is still a bottleneck of Year 3 deadlines. One solution to this might be that the hand-in dates for the compulsory courses, DDSR and Social Theory, be staggered. This possibility will be explored with Karen and teaching staff.
- Year 3 had wanted to see last year's work on the course DDSR as a guide to a type of assessment that was relatively unfamiliar. Staff were reluctant to do this as it was felt that this could be prescriptive and would prevent students from experimenting and doing things differently. The DDSR formative assignment was introduced as a way for students to submit work that will not be formally assessed but used to assess whether they are on the right path.
- The Introduction to Project meeting was not well attended by staff last year. There was a huge improvement this year as staff were encouraged to attend and there were only two who couldn't make it.
- The electronic marking system, ELMA has been introduced. Sociology used PebblePad last year and ELMA is an improvement on this. Feedback from students is that they liked ELMA and that it was easy to use, especially if students took the time to read the instructions fully. First years liked ELMA.

Ross advised that eventually Personal Tutors would be able to see all feedback sheets for students across the school.

- The refurbishment of CMB is ongoing. There are plans for the basement to be made more student-friendly but this appears to have been delayed. Students had requested lockers for bags but these were likely to be for laptops only. Any refurbishment to the building is most likely to take place over the summer break but Ross is not aware of any definite plans.
- The Curriculum has changed this year with the introduction of the Fundamentals course for 1st years – Fundamentals will also be run for year 2 students next year with a possible roll-out to Honours years in future. Next year will see the revamp of Year 2 with SPE 2 and SPT 2 being replaced by the full year Sociology 2 course which will encompass elements of SPE and SPT. A new degree, Global and International Sociology has also recruited its first students in 2013-14.
- The meeting discussed the pre-circulated proposal to change the Sociology Honours Project submission deadline, This would certainly not affect current senior honours students who will submit in January and possibly not those in year 3 who are about to begin their projects. The first cohort to be affected would most likely be current second years. Bringing the date forward to December would mean less variability in the final date by which students were able to receive feedback on their draft reports from their supervisors. It is also hoped that an earlier submission date would see better attendance at all courses in the first week of semester 2, which would benefit students and staff. Other advantages would be that students could enjoy the winter holiday without having to work on their projects, and that their marked projects and feedback could be returned at an earlier date. Students asked why the date was January now? Ross advised that it was so that students could use the holiday period to complete the project but this was an historic date set before semesters when all assessments were submitted at the end of the academic year. If we did move to a December hand-in, the holiday period could still be available for any students who had special circumstances justifying a later submission. Current year 3 students like January hand-in. Students felt that in junior honours having three semester 2 courses and working on the project at the same time is a lot and asked if we could be more flexible and split the project over years 3 and 4 and do two optional courses in each of semester 2 in junior honours and semester 1 in senior honours. Ross recognised that our expectations in semester 2 of junior honours were quite high but on the other hand many students benefitted from having only one optional course in semester 1 of senior honours when they were completing their project (although it is also true that some students feel isolated during this period for the same reason). Ross will report students' views to the staff meeting, but any capacity for change will probably be strictly limited by wider University regulations on the normal number of credits taken each academic year and in each semester. Ross advised that the November meeting to introduce students to the project and potential supervisors would also be moved forward if the submission deadline were changed. Students agreed that many students can't get started on their project over the summer.

4. Student items:

Ross asked the reps for general feedback/items by year:

Year 1

1. Melissa reported that first years felt that the readings were all good and easily accessible on Learn. They appreciated having them on Learn rather than having to track them down as this saved so much time. There was a suggestion that core readings could be identified for each week so that tutorials could be more focussed. There was an issue with Unit 3 readings not opening and Prezi slides also did not open for everyone.
2. First years were happy with the Fundamentals sessions and found them useful – especially session on accessing library. Some students felt that Fundamentals were too long and it was difficult to stay engaged for 2 hrs.
3. There was an issue with the timing of the Sociology 1A take-home exam with this taking place very soon after the Transnationalism unit ends and this is an important unit. It leaves very little time to read for Transnationalism and revise for exam. Ross explained that the Take Home Exam was outside of the exam period but that there might be some flexibility for it to be moved back a bit. The timing of the exam would be reviewed with staff.

Year 3

1. Nicola said that students were generally happy with 2 hour lectures – 80/20 split in opinion. Again, some students found it hard to stay engaged for the 2 hours and it was good that there was a break.
2. Students' experience of the Social Theory course was very positive on the whole although they noticed that the attendance rate seemed to go down after students picked their essay question.
3. Some students were not aware of what was expected of them in Designing and Doing Social Research. However even though the formative essay was short the feedback was extensive and very helpful. This helped with Wiki report not just the long essay.
4. Students were enjoying the Intimate Relationships course, especially the lectures by Gil which were very good.
5. One tutor was working to contract and essay marks delayed as a result, but students appreciated that they had been kept informed about the reasons behind the delay.

Ross was happy to hear that the formative essay was appreciated and of use with assessed work. He will feed back to Angus.

Year 4

1. Charlotte and Martin sent a survey to 4th year students and received positive feedback although there were only a small number of responses. The survey asked about courses, resources, assignments, lecturers and PT meetings, support and facilities. Students who replied were happy with the quality of assessments, levels of academic support and dept facilities. Students would like individual exam feedback and welcomed PT's being able to see all feedback, when this happens. There was though a general sense that electronic marking had improved feedback considerably. Recommended journals could sometimes not be accessed and the quality of photocopying could be poor.
2. Students on the Globalization course felt that the lecturer was very good but the content sometimes leaned too much toward political as opposed to sociological material

Ross advised that in year 1 & 2 exam feedback tended to be generic feedback about performance as a whole and also about each individual exam question. With the move to more Take Home Exams there might be greater opportunity for personal feedback.

General Issues

Some students reported that they still felt somewhat out of their depth with the material on the Doing Survey Research core course. Ross confirmed that the School has won funding to improve and increase teaching of Quantitative Methods at all levels so that in future this type of material will be less novel for year 3 students. The aim in future is to equip all Sociology students with stronger QM skills and there will also be a new Sociology with QM degree.

Nicola asked if there was a reason we did not do Podcasts of lectures as they would be very useful. Ross will raise this issue with staff, although from previous discussions there are issues related to the intellectual property of lectures, their uncontrolled online dissemination, and possibly a negative effect on lecture attendance.

Charlotte advised that year 4 felt that they were not involved in decisions. Could students be consulted more, for instance in the decision re date for project hand-in.

Any Other Business

Reminder to speak to Ross if you want to chair Sem 2 meeting.

Date of next meeting to be advised – most likely around week 10 in semester 2