

Sociology Student Forum
Tuesday 5th December 2017
12.00 – 2.00pm
Participants: 12 students, 3 members of staff
Mins: Karen Dargo

1. Teaching Programme Review

Dr Rachel Howell presented an overview of the Sociology Teaching Programme Review (TPR) which will take place in February 2018 and explained how students can get involved. Each academic department is reviewed externally at 5 year intervals and this review will cover all Sociology owned degrees. The review team consists of two academic staff from Edinburgh Uni (but outwith Sociology department), two Sociology specialists from other universities and one student reviewer from outside Edinburgh uni. This review takes place against a background of a 25% increase in Sociology /Sustainable Development students since the last review and no commensurate increase in academic and support staff or estates and facilities.

Sociology have requested that the review focus on 3 remit items:

- pedagogy in a context of increasing class sizes
- how to best facilitate PG Tutor development
- how to encourage and support a sense of cohesive cohorts (suggested by students)

The issues students have asked the TPR to look at are:

- concern about increasing class sizes
- how to encourage participation in tutorials
- how useful is Fundamentals 1
- increase relevance of career events
- diversification of reading lists

Review meetings will take place on 12th and 13th February 2018 and the department are looking for students to meet with the review team to discuss the issues raised on:

- Monday 12th February, 1pm – 2.30pm (3rd and 4th year students)
- Tuesday 13th February, 12.45pm – 2.15pm (1st and 2nd year students)

Lunch will be provided at both meetings. If you would like to take part in the meetings please contact Dr Rachel Howell. However, students will also be emailed in the new year to ask for volunteers.

2. Tutorial experience

- Students felt that often the 'do the reading, turn up and discuss' tutorial was not working.
- There are some tutorials where no one speaks and this can be very demotivating as without discussion it can be difficult to gauge your own understanding.
- Participation is measured by attendance but students can attend but not contribute. There should be another way to measure participation.

- Some students do not do the reading and are not prepared for tutorials. Suggestion to separate into groups of 2 and take one part of the reading each. This may encourage students who would otherwise not do the reading.
- Many 1st and 2nd year courses don't require students to apply theory and maybe this is why many do not complete readings.
- Suggestion to have an online forum that students have to contribute something to before the tutorial. If a contribution was required this could be for credit, perhaps 5%.
- Staff noted that compelling students to participate did not always give best results – it's not organic, but students countered that many 1st and 2nd years need this structure and it improves confidence because they know when they are doing something right.
- Students felt tutors should acknowledge when there is low participation in groups and address this. Go back to topic and explain to get discussion going. Staff advised that students could speak confidentially to tutors, make them aware tutorials are not working for them. Students said that the students who need to tell the tutor it's not working are the ones who are not attending.
- Students felt tutors should give guidelines/expectations at start of tutorial – make clear that tutorial is an open space for discussion and students should not be nervous about saying the wrong thing.
- Tutorials are well attended at the beginning of the semester and attendance drops as the semester goes on.
- Students suggested that it could be that students are choosing their essay topic early and only attending relevant tutorials.
- Students suggested longer tutorials but staff advised that the would not be possible due to lack of teaching space
- Students suggested engagement could be enhanced by students giving group presentations after 4 or 5 weeks to demonstrate learning
- Students asked if 2 types of tutorial could be considered, one discussion based as they are now, and one which has an assessment element. Staff advised that the aim of tutorials is to be a student-led discussion to encourage students to share their thinking. Introducing an assessment element may make students who are not engaged less likely to attend.

3. Honours Project

- As the project preparation starts in third year, students felt that JYA students were disadvantaged. JYA students receive the slides from the project preparation meetings but are not able to attend meetings. Social Anthropology record their Dissertation prep sessions – could Sociology do the same? Staff responded that at the moment it's expected that JYA students would have a good relationship with their supervisor and would not miss any information.
- Students would like to have a social event to mark handing in Projects. In previous years, a lunch has been organised by the department but it was poorly attended. The Sociology Society might want to take this forward.

4. Sociology community

- Students would like to have a weekend writing retreat. Staff suggested that the Sociology Society may want to take this forward.
- Students would like to see more staff involvement with the Sociology Society but realise that as most SocSoc events/information is via Facebook, this disadvantages many staff.
- The new Sociology newsletter is a welcome addition and it will hopefully improve our sense of community. Students are encouraged to contribute to the newsletter.
- Students felt that improving communications between staff and students would help our sense community.

5. Career development

- Students would like to see careers information/opportunities be included in future newsletters
- The Sociology careers session from the Careers Service in November was good but poorly attended.
- Could a careers session be incorporated in a Fundamentals session ie. earlier

6. Degree

- Joint students often feel isolated, with few students on their particular joint degree. It would be good to be able to get to know others on joint degrees owned by Sociology.
- Sociology with QM students get to know each other because of the QM courses.
- Joint students can feel that they have little contact with the second named subject. Staff advised that joint degrees are not run jointly and students will have bulk of contact with owning subject. The number of joint students is increasing.
- Students would like to have a contact person in their second named subject that they could approach. There was a liaison person for the joint Economics and Sociology degree in the past.
- Staff felt that often joint students thought of themselves as part of a separate programme rather than a part of each subject.
- A separate meeting for joint students at the start of semester would be helpful. It could outline degree and introduce students to each other.