

SOCIOLOGY: STAFF-STUDENT LIAISON COMMITTEE
May 2011

Note: this is a record of a “virtual board” held via email in the absence of a meeting due to lack of attendance by reps at the SSLC in May. A communication was sent to all reps to impress upon them the importance of attending meetings and the essential role they play. In future years, the timing of the SSLC will also be monitored to ensure a healthy turnout.

The convenor of the board (Nick Prior) solicited feedback from all reps via email. Two reps responded and this is a record of their feedback.

First Year Rep (Chris Thacker)

-Special praise for Martin Booker as a tutor: “there was no hiding place so if I didn't do the readings there was no tutorial. I would highly recommend this Oxbridge model of two or three students per tutorial, I got a lot from it. So much so it has been the highlight of my university career thus far.”

-Also praise for curriculum organisation, design and content, but the rep reported that he would have preferred more assignments than reading alone: “it would make it more interactive and enjoyable”. Also a suggestion that it would have been useful to have seen how the fundamentals of sociology work in a wider context beyond the academy, such as in the work place.

-Basic elements of teaching and learning on the first year courses (Soc 1a and Soc 1b) were reported to be sound, though there was some suggestion that it was most effective when lecturers/tutors had made an attempt to weave in the fundamental approaches to sociology –Durkheimian, Weberian, Marxist, etc.

-General good feedback on individual lecturers, with some reservations for a couple of units that “lacked passion”.

-Assessment and examination: generally fine and effective; the rep reported that there was some support for continuous assessment and moving away from “antiquated methods of finding out how much we can remember”. The rep also suggested that the more information about what will be required for the exam (revision tips, common topics, writing strategies) the better.

-WebCT was said to be a bit “clunky, old and difficulty to navigate”.

Third Year Rep (Ross Mackenzie)

-In response to the suggested changes to “Designing and Doing Survey Research” (paper circulated), there was general approval. It was hoped that the new course would address a “disconnect between what students were taught and what they were being assessed on” in the course in 2010-11. However, there was some concern voiced that putting students into groups organised by research design would “limit the tools available to the students in completing their project, as well as students having a difficulty in knowing which form of research design best suits their skills due to it likely being something new to them”. The rep recognised, however, that the re-designed course could allow students greater scope for innovation in carrying out a more relevant and interesting research project.

The rep also noted the following points about the proposals:

- 1) The posting and updating of wikis was a good idea: “having them...available to all the groups might create a competitive atmosphere (who can update their wiki fastest), which could be a good thing”. This placed extra importance on the provision of basic and readily available information on how to edit and maintain a wiki.
- 2) The idea for the first part of assessment was praised: “especially as it sounds similar to the diary one would have to keep for their honours project.” Whilst assessing students based on the group wiki sounded interesting, “there would have to be a clear explanation of how that would work, and how students in the group would show their contributions.”
- 3) The rep also raised the issue of potential plagiarism due to the ease with which a wiki can be edited but assumed that a close knowledge of the wikis by members of staff would ameliorate this issue.
- 4) The reflective essay was praised as “an interesting form of assessment and I think could work well in the course, though it relies on other groups, as well as your own, doing a good job.”
- 5) Finally, “Research in the Real World” sounded like a much better (and easier to remember) name for the course.

-The rep praised “Armed Force and Society” and mentioned that it felt rather different to other Sociology courses “due to its focus on the use of technology”. In general, the course materials were useful, delivery and content were good. Some students tended to dominate class discussions, but the rep praised the lecturer on this course for addressing the issue at the end of the class and taking on board suggestions for avoiding this issue in the future organisation of the course.

-The assessment regime in sociology was highlighted as praiseworthy: “one of the best aspects of Sociology as a degree compared to others [was that] essays seem a much more useful endeavour and have a more practical application in the world beyond education.”

-Feedback for the essays has been “clear and also helpful”, staff were “very personable”, supportive and accessible.

-The rep highlighted how important the 24 hour access to CMB's computer labs has been, with students particularly appreciating this “always on” aspect of the School's IT provision. The rep finished by saying that “on the whole the department seems to provide well for its students.”

All these comments will be made available to staff and will feed into ongoing discussions about teaching and learning quality and provision within the subject area (i.e., at staff meetings and teaching committees) and in liaison with students (via published minutes and subsequent SSLCs) and individual convenors of those courses mentioned.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING
December 2011, to be arranged**