

Sustainable Development

Staff-Student Liaison Committee

13th November 2013 – Meeting Room 6

Minutes

Present: Claire Haggett, Isabelle Darmon, Rebecca Bamlett (3rd year Rep)

Minutes: Sue Renton

Apologies: Sophia Cheney (1st year), Liz Teixeira de Mattos (2nd Year), Briana Pegado (4th year)

Claire welcomed Rebecca to the meeting and Sophia Cheney and Liz Teixeira de Mattos were thanked for providing detailed feedback from 1st and 2nd year students. Esther Dermott, University of Bristol is the Sustainable Development External Examiner. Claire gave a brief overview of the external examiner role which ensures a robust process in looking at borderline cases and ensuring that the academic standard for each award and award element is set and maintained at the appropriate level and that student performance is properly judged against this. The External Examiner produce a report in the summer of 2014, which will be available to students.

1. Student feedback (1st year):

Students were enjoying the course, thought it was well organised, felt very supported in their learning, and felt the teaching was of a high standard. The majority of students felt that the curriculum taught matched their expectations; however, a couple of students mentioned that it had been more socially and politically focused than they had expected. All efforts are being made at Open Days to inform students that the Sustainable Development Programme is based in Social & Political Science but that options are available to choose Physical Geography and other Science courses if desired.

It was suggested that sessions for SD students only would be helpful: A revision session (on December 2nd) will be used to talk about exam preparation and other issues more generally. There was agreement from first year students that a session to help alleviate the transition pressure from School to University would be helpful,

for example, advice on essay writing. Claire plans to run a Study Skills session for new first years to address this.

Some more clarity about the Geography pathway would be helpful: The Geography pathway will be discussed next week at a meeting with Claire, Isabelle and Anthony Newton and concerns from students raised.

At the Sustainable Development 1a tutorial meeting, some students highlighted that readings should be prioritised as they felt unable to read all of them every week. The reading lists will continue to highlight the two key readings for each lecture; and then subsequent readings will be listed in order of priority, not alphabetically, from 2014-15 onwards.

- 2. Student feedback (2nd year):** Students are happy with diversity of topics and perspectives that have been covered so far and comments on Sustainable Development 2a showed that the most successful lectures were by Gill, Isabelle, Jamie and Shisusri. It was felt that the units on transport and the family perspective were less successful. Tutorials were well received. Numerous complaints were received about the Lecture Theatre in Minto House not being large enough for the class and difficult for students to hear the lecture and see power points. Sue will feed these comments back to Room Bookings and all lecturers on the course will be reminded to use a microphone, although even when a microphone is used the acoustics in the room are not particularly good.

There was concern about the essay topics for Sustainability 2a being too broad to be covered in 1600 words but it was felt that this was good practice for pre-honours students. Some students are unhappy with Science and Society as a mandatory course as they had found it uninteresting and not relevant. The Committee believed the course is relevant and helpful regarding other units studied on the programme. Claire has met with the Course Organiser, Emma Frow, to ensure that this course does remain relevant for all students.

Students are concerned about progression to Honours, how this takes shape and place with the different pathways, particularly Geography. The Programme Handbook covering years 1-4 is available at the following web link which students are encouraged to read:

http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/undergrad/subject_and_programme_specific_information/sustainable_development/year_1_and_2

Concerns will also be raised at the meeting with Anthony Newton, and students will also have an opportunity to discuss issues with their Personal Tutor in semester 2.

Students are uncertain about their degree title on graduating and concerned that the pathway will not be recognised. The degree title is MA Sustainable Development. Staff are very sympathetic to the student view on this issue but

University policy is such that the title cannot be changed. The pathway will be obvious from the courses recorded on the degree transcript and can be emphasised on curriculum vitae when applying for jobs. Claire and Isabelle would also endorse and strongly support the different pathways when receiving a request for a student employment reference. It is important for students to check their emails as staff are working closely with Kay Barbour to support Sustainable Development students with career help and there will be announcements by email.

3. Rebecca Bamlett (3rd Year):

Students would like to see a 1st Semester dedicated Sustainable Development course as an option and the possibility of swapping Cases in Sustainable Development from 2nd semester will be looked at. However, this can only happen if students on all pathways are able to attend and there are no timetable clashes.

Pathway specific degree programmes were also an issue 3rd year students felt would have been more preferable. Claire and Isabelle will write references which reflect this if asked to do so.

The cost of producing large reports in colour for Geography pathway students is £15 and Claire will discuss with Anthony Newton whether printing credits could be arranged as they are at present given to Geosciences students.

The dissertation workshops were found to be extremely useful and helpful in encouraging students to think and plan ahead, and the handbook is well informed.

Isabelle announced that the session on postgraduate study held by Hugo Gorringer had a low turnout from Sustainable Development students but it was recognised that there are only 3 seniors and 11 juniors on the programme. It is planned that any future sessions in 2014-2015 for students interested in applying to PG study will be advertised in 1st semester before any required deadlines.

Claire announced that Amanda MidHamre, a 2nd year SD student, had designed a very short questionnaire to find out what careers information students would like to know more about. Students are encouraged to complete the survey and can be found at the following web link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/F5KM28H>

A date will be announced for a New Year get together in the first week of teaching as it was felt that students would prefer this due to ongoing exams in the last two weeks before the University closes.

Sue will provisionally book a room for the next SSLC in March 2014.