

## Minutes of Sociology Staff-Student Liaison Committee, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2012

*Present:* Staff: Ross Bond (chair and minutes). Students: Nicola Allison, Yuen [Joelle] Lam (Year 2); Katie Gonser, Martin Lam, Christina Muller (Year 3); Sinead McKendry, Elisabeth Ottosen (Year 4).

1. Committee members introduced themselves and Ross Bond explained the general purpose of the SSLC and some basic ground rules.

2. Ross introduced some issues arising from Sociology's Teaching Programme Review (TPR), the report of the External Examiners, and the minutes of the previous SSLC meeting. Student feedback was sought on some of these issues:

- TPR recommended that Sociology reflect on the allocation of supervisors for students' honours projects. In response, the current system would be retained but clearer guidance had been offered in the Honours handbook and in the introductory project meeting to explain how supervision was arranged.
- TPR recommended further use of the assessment of tutorial participation in years 1 and 2. Student reps in the meeting were generally sympathetic to this and felt that potential problems with assessing students new to university in year 1 might be addressed by e.g. having a settling in period; allocating a lower percentage of overall course grade to tutorials in year 1; and/or not beginning tutorial assessment until 1b in the second semester. But it was generally felt such assessment motivated students to prepare and contributed to livelier tutorials.
- TPR recommended that students be more explicitly informed when action was taken and any changes made to Sociology's teaching or general practices on the basis of student feedback. **Action:** SSLC convener to initiate as a routine practice
- TPR recommended improvements to information given to students about SSLC meetings and their timing. Students might also be encouraged to chair such meetings. **Action:** All reps were consulted on the time of the meeting and encouraged to bring any issues raised by students to the meeting. It was agreed that weeks 9/10 of each semester were the best times to hold SSLC and that will be adhered to. Students interested in chairing future meetings were invited to contact Ross who would meet with them individually to give some basic guidance on chairing. They should also inquire about further training via EUSA [Martin Lam has now expressed an interest in chairing the next meeting]
- External examiners emphasised the importance of diverse forms of assessment and student reps were asked for their views on this. Students generally welcomed different forms of assessment, especially those which assessed specific skills. However, they did think it was important to make sure that adequate and consistent guidance was provided. E.g. in DDSR it was felt that there were some inconsistencies with tutor guidance as to the word length of assignments; that assessment criteria could be clearer; and that the distinction between the Wiki-based assignment and the other assignments could be clearer. More generally, students also thought that being able to view exemplary coursework from previous years would often be helpful, and perhaps students who achieved high marks could be asked for their permission to use their work in this way in future years. **Action:** the School more generally is already working on plans to provide more explicit assessment criteria for all courses. The SSLC convener will liaise with the DDSR convener concerning the more specific issues on that course, and will explore the possibility of making previous exemplary work available.

- Students were asked to reflect on their experience of the rollout of electronic marking via PebblePad in years 2-4. Feedback was generally positive, although some technical issues had been encountered with uploading essays, especially in Sociology 2. Although students were aware of existing guidance, any enhancements to written or video guidance would be appreciated. **Action:** SSLC convener to discuss with Sociology secretaries.
- External examiners had recommended that Sociology consider introducing more required theory in honours years. Student reps reported that the current Social Theory course was very well-received and helped students in thinking about their projects, although on balance they would prefer if further theory courses were optional.
- Students' experience of the new Personal Tutor system was sought. There was not a perception of any radical change, but also no reports of students not getting support they required. Of the seven student reps, only two had been invited to a group meeting with their PT and Ross stressed that a group meeting should be offered each semester.

### 3. The following matters were raised by student reps:

#### Year 2

- Lectures were generally high quality in Sociology 2 and students particularly liked the use of Prezi rather than PowerPoint slides in the first unit
- There was a perception that tutors' marking of essays was variable and subjective and that feedback was mainly critical rather than focused on things that students did well
- Tutorial participation assessment was generally welcomed, especially when tutors gave students early feedback on their performance in this respect

#### Year 3

- Semester 1 coursework deadlines within and between subjects and schools tended to converge on one date – December 10<sup>th</sup>  
**Action:** explore with secretary/exams convener possibility of varying deadlines
- Students found the very low staff turn-out at the introduction to the project session to be very disappointing.

#### Year 4

- Students reflected on the fact that taking the DDSR course last year had been good preparation for their individual honours projects
- Supervision of honours projects was variable: some staff seemed too busy to provide adequate supervision. Ross encouraged students to ensure they were given at least the minimum supervision spelled out in the Honours handbook and to contact the Honours convener if they felt they were receiving inadequate supervision.
- The provision of lockers in CMB for undergraduate use would be welcomed. **Action:** although this is an issue for the School in general rather than specific to Sociology, Ross will explore whether lockers are being considered as part of the proposed refurbishment of the CMB basement.

4. Any other business: students noted the value of online media for discussion of academic work, with some course-specific Facebook groups already formed. Ross encouraged students to ask Sociology to help publicise any such forums, and to consult with SocSoc about their use (it was noted that Christina is currently SocSoc Treasurer)

5. The next meeting will take place in week 9 or 10 of semester 2, specific time and place to be discussed and confirmed.