Geography Degree Programme
Staff Student Liaison Committee Meeting
Minutes of the meeting held on Wed 19th October 2016
12.30pm – 2.00pm, Geddes, Drummond St

Present: Eva Panagiotakopulu (Chair), Kirsty Allan (Secretary), Katy McPhail (Student Support Coordinator), Dr Anthony Newton, Dr Eric Laurier, Rebecca Rees, William Ming, Katie Oliver, Christopher Molyneux, Chris Ringland, Addie Pape, Imogen Drummond, James Elway, Katja Nacevski, Yearin Cha, Harriet Nicholls, Clorinda Luck, Aleksandra Zaforemska, Laura Sloan, Amy Flynn.

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<th>Year 1 Summary</th>
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<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>The Chair introduced staff and student representatives and summarised the remit of the SSLC. Student representatives were encouraged by the SSC to use a variety of methods of feedback as well as the survey they were provided with.</td>
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<td><strong>Human Geography</strong></td>
<td>A feedback survey yielded 10 responses. Lectures were enjoyed and students found staff to be friendly and approachable. Topics were well laid out in the first few lectures. Some students felt that tutorials could be weekly and the material more closely linked to lectures. TO confirmed that this is due to the set amounts of contact time for a 20 credit course. Some students were not familiar with the library system and there was some call for a basic study skills workshop and opportunity to meet other Geography students. The core textbook was expensive and not always linked to lectures. Some lectures seemed rushed.</td>
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<td>The GeoPALS members that were in attendance added that they advertised study skills sessions to first years which were designed to run on the weeks when no tutorials run. There was discussion on how a 1st Year Facebook page could be created and used more to encourage socialising, GeogSoc and GeoPals events. The other class reps also informed first years of a GeogSoc book exchange and Blackwells buy-it-back scheme.</td>
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<td>Dr Newton would relay feedback on library skills to the induction team for next year and consider a library session.</td>
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<td>Class reps will feedback to students that GeoPALS sessions are available and consider creating Facebook page. It was also mentioned that tutors could recommend GeoPALS in feedback on essays/tutorial work.</td>
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<td>Overall the reps felt that there may be more feedback later in the semester once students had spent more time on their courses.</td>
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AN
Reps
**Fundamental Methods**
Students felt that more exercises were needed to help with methods and statistics. The fieldtrip was really enjoyed by all that had been so far. More interaction with GIS was mentioned, Dr Newton confirmed this will come later in semester.

**Economic and Political**
There was high praise for Jan Penrose and other lecturers on the course. Dr Penrose provided a summary of lectures in class which was appreciated and students felt it motivated attendance and engagement and asked for other lecturers to provide this. Some students requested broader topics for the essay as the questions were very specific, however some preferred this as it was more directed study. Some felt there were too many questions in tutorials and fewer would allow for greater depth of discussion during tutorials and help develop ideas and thinking. Some of the recommended reading was hard to find or in high demand from the main library. Class representatives suggested a link to library catalogue in handbook, or PDFs/scans if available.

Feedback will be passed to CO who may be able to find PDFs or scan onto Learn. A required/recommended/beneficial breakdown would also be appreciated.

**ESC –** There was general high praise for the course with students enjoying the variety of topics and the lead on from Physical Geography in first year. Tutorials were very good and the case study tutorial was well received. Some students asked for more practical sessions: E Panagiotakopulu confirmed the course replaced practical sessions in response to student feedback and said that, as she has mentioned in lectures, she would provide lab sessions to any students interested. There was no reading list for the essay in handbook: this was confirmed as intentional, as second year students are required to source their essay references. Quaternary topic was difficult to grasp in two sessions: this would be noted but the topic is large and it cannot be further simplified. The main textbook is available as an e-book in the library and provides explanation for the basic themes and key papers have been provided.

**Year 3 Summary**

**NOGK –** Students found Prof Withers to be very well prepared and enjoyed how lectures were delivered without reading from slides. Two hour long tutorials every fortnight were enjoyed. Students would like tutorials to link more with lectures to increase understanding. Some of the terminology was difficult to understand but students were informed of this at the beginning of the course. Some Physical Geographers were not finding course relevant to their interests, but widely understood the benefit of taking the course. There was an error with assessment deadlines in the course handbook but this had now been resolved. There was some call for a tutorial every week but this would not be possible due to the allocated time of a 20 credit course.

**Qualitative Methods –** Students found the double lectures to be a good use of time. Lecturers were enthusiastic and tutorials were well linked to lectures. Students had found the course relevant for other projects outside of Geography. There was some call for a wider range of techniques to be covered, and some
students would like to have the course as a full semester. The committee discussed the timing of the course and the benefit of all Geography students spending a block on Qualitative and then Quantitative Methods. The CO confirmed that the long reading list is designed for reference when students are writing their dissertations. Example essays were really appreciated. There was mixed opinion on the group presentations.

Snowdonia – good feedback for the field course, everyone was happy with the trip. Some students had asked for a drop in session before trip to discuss ideas which the Course Organiser (Dr Newton) confirmed had run but was not well attended.

Athens – good feedback, overall student had really enjoyed the fieldwork days which were led by each of the teaching staff. Some students found the guest lecturers difficult to understand. The trip was good for integration within the year.

Cape Town – really well organised and students loved the lecture team, the trip went really smoothly.

Glacial Processes - Engaging course, lecturers were very passionate about their topics.

Development and Socionature – student found the course interesting and engaging; the core readings could be discussed as a larger group, or perhaps smaller seminar groups would be better to allow the CO to have more time for feedback.

Values and Environment – Some students would like a tutorial to discuss readings and develop understanding.

Encountering Cities – Students were enjoying the course, but did find the 2 hour lecture followed by a 2 hour seminar quite long, although the CO managed to break up the time well.

Year 4 Summary

Iceland – “best trip ever” - Andy and Nick were really well organised. The committee discussed adding a first year field trip – this would be difficult as part of the GDP as the only compulsory courses were open to outside students, but the GeoPALS members in attendance would take the idea on board as a potential induction week activity.

Berlin – Students enjoyed the trip which was project based with several topics being offered.

Western Isles was well received. The student representatives relayed that research elective deadlines should be in same week and that the Iceland week 6 deadline is good.

Some students wanted another type of assessment within research electives (fieldbooks or presentations) as the 100% report can be daunting. The Chair noted
that assessment of presentations posed difficulties as a result of a lack of hard copy. The representatives felt that more presentations throughout the degree would be appreciated by students and that it was a good life skill.

**Dissertation** – students had just attended the dissertation conference and appreciated the opportunity for feedback on their work so far; some students were able to do more work than others and as a result the presentations varied, with some being general and others including data.

4th year students were realising the benefit of having written their dissertation proposals earlier in the degree than other programmes (as part of Research Design). The feedback on Research Design from the previous year was that the class was not well received and the field trip was not useful. What would be useful would be a session each on: methodology, literature review, empirical analysis, what to expect from the proposal. A general introduction lecture on the process of writing a dissertation was needed, including covering what is feasible for dissertation topics.

Students wanted a warning before winter break in 3rd year that they will be expected to begin thinking about topics for research design in semester 2. TO confirmed this is the case and will be continued.

The database of supervisor topics had stopped and the committee discussed the benefits of this. The resource had been under-utilised in previous years but it was agreed to revisit the idea of providing supervisor research interests to students. TO will locate and update list and communicate before Christmas and feedback to Research Design COs.

Some physical geographers found that they lacked some quantitative skills, e.g. statistics.

Overall there was lots of praise for approachable teaching staff and TO.

**AOB**

The next meeting would be held on 2nd November 2016 in the Old Library.