

School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences

Linguistics & English Language

Staff Student Liaison Committee Minutes

Tuesday, 15th March 2016 at 1pm

Room 7.01, Dugald Stewart Building

Present:

Staff:

J. Fruehwald (SSLC Convener), P. Ackema, C. Cowie, V. Chondrogianni, P. Iosad, N. Gisborne

Students:

A. Zhigareva, N. Markl, E. Kouhi, R. Macy, K. Wilson,

In Attendance:

M. Davidson (Minute Taking)

Welcome from SSLC Convenor

J. Fruehwald welcomed all those present to the second SSLC of semester 2.

Apologies

B. Los, J. Strenger, I. Youmerski

Feedback on PPLS Writing Clinic

N. Gisborne reported that the PPLS Writing Clinic working group have now had their first meeting and have made contact with the Institute of Academic Development. The writing clinic initiative has been awarded a grant to help it go ahead and pay the tutors that will help to run it. The Staff student ratio is 15:1 which is currently too high. Tutors will be trained up to run the writing clinics, as the clinics seem to work better on a 1:1 encounter by responding to a piece of writing.

First and Second year students are in favour of the Writing Clinics as there is a general feeling that more help is needed for essay writing.

Third years are also in favour and still feel there is need for the clinics in year 4 as it will be used for essays in courses but not for the dissertation.

K. Wilson stated that the 4th years wished that there was something like the proposed writing clinics previously, especially in pre honours, some students do not do a lot of essay writing in school and the prospect of writing an essay can be very daunting.

Feedback of Upcoming Teaching Programme Review (TPR)

J. Fruehwald explained that he is the TPR Liaison and is currently in the process of looking at the externals for the TPR.

The students will be hearing more about the TPR soon so that they can meet with the review team and there will be an informal information gathering meeting, this meeting will be held in June and it will be about looking at a list of areas and determining whether these areas are working. As many students will be away for the summer, J. Fruehwald will be collecting information before the meeting.

Staff are allowed to propose a certain number of areas to review and the students are allowed to propose a certain number. So it would be good to have a strategy so that there is no duplication across the staff and students. At the moment the staff have not got any solid ideas but some general ideas are the LEL merger and an administrative review on PG and UG joint courses.

The first year reps reported that students would like the lectures to be recorded so that students can review the lecture if missed and it is a useful tool for revision.

The second year reps also asked that lecture recording is reviewed, better preparation tools for exams, a better introduction to honours courses. Students have also mentioned that they would like a better distinction between Linguistics and English Language within the courses in pre honours.

J. Fruehwald reported that the merger will be a big topic in the TPR because LEL had just merged in the last TPR, so there will be questions as to whether it is working.

The fourth year reps reported that a review of the structure of tutorials and teaching of the course was what the students want as there is inconsistency across the way tutorials are taught, some tutors just stick to what has been assigned and others branch out and provide extra materials. Consistency should be key in the student experience, and this should happen across all courses.

The third year reps reported that students do not like one piece of assessment for a course as there is too much pressure to perform in one piece of work.

P. Iosad said that this has been addressed and going forward 100% pieces of assessment will be phased out.

Year 1 Reports and Feedback

The year 1 representatives reiterated that lecture recording is high on the student's agenda as there were 56 votes for recording lectures.

Students have also stated they would like more support for essays, as the essay workshop in Innovative Learning Week was too general and therefore not helpful because for LEL students a linguistics essay is written differently from other subject areas. Most people were unhappy with the essay, 67 students were unsatisfied and 4 were okay. Therefore it is good that the writing clinic will be available to students soon.

Most students were not happy with the reading list for the essay as there did not seem to be a connection between the books and the essay topics, in some cases the students were told to only read the book in the reading list but that particular book did not appear to comment on the topic they were writing about. Students were very lost with the essay, clearer instructions are needed and students would like to view a sample essay.

C. Cowie believes there is scope for putting something on the UG Hub that differentiates between the different subject areas and the different essay writing styles.

Currently the information on the hub relating to essay writing is directed more at honours students discussing statistics and methods, which is unhelpful for pre honours students.

P. Ackema suggested it might be an idea to have a document of the type of questions students have about essays, so tutors can put something together that will help students with the things they are really struggling with, tutors are aware of the anxieties but are not clear on what the issues are.

It might be an idea to survey honours students about their experience/top tips and to ask the tutors about frequently asked questions, this would give the academics key information that needs to be conveyed in this document.

The year 1 representatives questions why the essay topics are not in the handbook?

C. Cowie explained that essay topics need to come from a wide range of people which can change every year, therefore it is difficult to gather the questions before the year starts.

Year 2 Reports and Feedback

Students felt confused by group presentations in LEL 2C as many people did not know what was going to happen.

C. Cowie explained there were a number of issues, as it was supposed to be practice work for the essay but the use of the word presentation has worried people.

Students has also expressed that the lectures feel unstructured and the use of Tophat has not been as useful as it was in LEL2B because the questions are too broad. Students also felt that the essay instructions for LEL2C are distressing and anxiety inducing.

C. Cowie suggested putting questions on Tophat to ask about possible anxieties around the essay topic at the beginning of lectures to try and address them before the submission date.

As a response to past anxiety many documents were uploaded onto LEARN but then Students complain that there is too much to read. So it is challenging to understand what the right remediation is.

In LEL2D there is varied feedback about the assessment, many students are happy with the fact that there were diverse types of assignment available (essay, phonological analysis, article review) but there were a lot of comments about the article review, in particular questioning its relevance to the course. As LEL 2D doesn't teach article reviewing and barely mentions the topic the article was written on, it didn't seem to be useful in consolidating anything learned in the course. Additionally, there was some mention of contradictory instruction from the assessment guidelines and from going to speak to the course organiser. However, overall the students really appreciated being able to speak to the course organised and generally found it helpful.

Students have complained that in LEL2C and 2D there is too much information in one lecture.

In LEL 2E the essay given has an open topic and there is a list of previous questions students have chosen in the past, but students are still concerned about what to do.

P. Ackema said that he will encourage students to come and speak to him if they are still confused about the open essay question.

Year 3 Reports and Feedback

Students feel comfortable going to their lecturers at any time, this might be because of smaller class size and honours level but students generally seem happy.

Unfortunately the larger classes still have tutorials and the tutors that hold the tutorials do not have enough knowledge on the subject they are tutoring in.

Some students do not feel like they can speak to their PT if they are having problems.

Most students like electronic marking and are more likely to look at feedback if it is electronic and it appears that better feedback is given electronically. It is useful as an electronic essay is much easier to refer back to for work in the future.

Year 4 Reports and Feedback

With regards to electronic marking students are generally positive about it, because last year students were not able to take their essays away from the Teaching Office so electronic marking combats this issue. Also students are aware that if there is electronic marking then the Teaching Office is not swamped with students on deadline day.

In Second Language Acquisition some of the tutorials are scheduled straight after a lecture so some students are going to a tutorial to discuss the learning points in the lecture an hour before this makes the tutorial challenging as there is no time to absorb the information.

There is a general feeling that it should be made clearer that students are allowed to speak to the Course Organiser about the work on the course such as essays. Some Course Organisers tell students to come and see them which makes it easier for the student to approach them, in this case the majority of students take advantage of this.

Students would also like feed forward events to help with essay writing, by presenting a draft of an essay as it also allows students to get the practice of talking about their own work. It sounds like this might be addressed in the PPLS Writing Clinics.