

School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences

Psychology Student-Staff Liaison Committee

Monday, 16 October 2017 at 12.30pm
Room S38, 7 George Square

MINUTES

Present: Dr Alexa Morcom (Chair), Dr Kasia Banas (Teaching Coordinator), Dr Dave Carmel (Year 4 Course Organiser), Rue Chaladauskaite (Year 2 Rep), Dr Martin Corley (Head of Psychology), Kristina Gray (Co-Chair and Year 4 Rep), Emilia Janiczek (Year 1 Rep), Jenni Kahkonen (Year 4 Rep), Dr Adam Moore (Year 1 Course Organiser), Dr Eva Murzyn (Teaching Coordinator), Kayleigh Smith (Year 1 Rep), Johanna Stoye (Year 2 Rep), Griffith Tai (Year 2 Rep), Rachel Totty (Year 3 Rep), Prof Caroline Watt (Year 2 Course Organiser)

Apologies: Dr Michelle Luciano (Year 3 Course Organiser)

In attendance: Sarah Larios (Student Support Officer)

1. Welcome from SSLC Convener

The Chair welcomed all the new Class Representatives, and reminded everyone of the structure of the meeting. The Chair will report on any general news and updates, and any actions outstanding from the last meeting, and then hand over to the fourth year co-chair, who will go through the reports and feedback from each year.

2. Actions from last meeting on 16 March 2017

Year 3 – Concerns about timing of Group Project Feedback: Dr Morcom explained that this issue is part of the reason why the Mini-Dissertation has been introduced this year, and we are keen for feedback from Year 3 students.

Year 2 – Examples of Exam essays: Last year the course organiser collected general feedback from markers and presented this at the exam preparation session. Prof Watt plans to do this again this year, and get feedback from markers on the December exams, such as examples of common mistakes, and feed this back to students via Learn in Semester 2.

Dr Morcom handed over the Chair to Kristina Gray, as fourth year co-chair.

3. Year 4 Reports and Feedback

Dissertation process

The Class Reps conducted a survey of fourth year students' satisfaction with the dissertation allocation process. The majority of students were happy with the process, but they also received detailed comments from a few students who were very displeased with the process.

Only two people this year did not receive any one of their top six supervisor choices, and students questioned why, if only a small number of students didn't receive any of their choices, supervisors couldn't be asked to take on extra students.

Dr Carmel explained that dissertation supervisor allocation is a difficult matching problem, designed to "maximize happiness" amongst the greatest number of students, while also taking staff workload into account. Although it's understandably disappointing to the students who didn't receive any of their choices, this year had the smallest number of students who didn't receive any of their choices than any year previously. If there are other specific suggestions for how the system can be improved, then the department would be open to implementing them.

The Class Reps noted that out of 35 respondents, 97% wanted extra help with stats for their dissertation. Dr Morcom explained that students should approach their supervisors for advice in the first instance. This is important as it is part of the supervisor's role to provide methodological support. Support for the student's statistical analysis has to be given within the context of each particular study as there is often more than one way of approaching analysis, so student and supervisor work as collaborators. The stats tutors have office hours, which students are able to go to for any additional stats advice if needed.

ACTION: Year 4 Reps to contact the stats lab coordinator, Luna De Ferrari, at ug.ppls.stats@ed.ac.uk and get a list of tutor office hours, and circulate this to fourth years, with the reminder that they must discuss questions with their supervisors first.

Option courses

Students were generally happy with their option course allocations, but suggestions for improvement included:

- Students want some courses run twice
- Students want more clinical psychology and social psychology courses
- Social psychology courses were all in the same block, so students were limited on the number they could choose
- Allocation information was sent to students late, so some students had clashes with work, etc.
- Students wanted the option to say no to courses they'd been allocated, although Class Reps noted that this was solved by sending an email listing what courses still had space so students could switch.

Dr Carmel and Dr Morcom explained that the department has expanded its provision of clinical and social psychology courses in recent years even though clinical psychology is not part of the core BPS undergraduate curriculum. Clinical psychology courses have been given higher caps than other courses, so more students can take them, to accommodate the interest, but it's important to maintain balance with the core areas. Staff will monitor and where possible avoid having courses from the same area all in the same block in the future, but this has to be balanced with requirements for BPS accreditation which mean few students will need/ want to take courses in the same area, and overall need to take courses from different areas. Allocations were unfortunately released late to students this year due to staff shortage issues in the admin team over the summer.

Providing the average grade of the course/assessment

Students requested that the average grade for each course/assessment be published after marks are released. It was agreed that this is a good idea and should be straightforward to implement.

Social events

Students requested more social events. Wine and cheese nights were particularly popular. It was noted that in the past the department has put on events that required a lot of planning and effort, but then weren't popular with students, so they are open to suggestions for new ideas.

Dr Banas reminded students that the Friday staff seminars are open to all, and are good chance to meet and interact with staff (and also usually include a wine and cheese reception afterwards).

Students were asked that if they have any events to go on the Psychology facebook page, they can get in touch with Dr Banas.

Careers/Help with future plans

Students have found that PG application deadlines are very early, and vary greatly by institution. It was suggested to flag this earlier to students, at the end of third year/very start of fourth year. The Careers Service gave a talk in Week 2 of the Semester, and will offer a series of Seminars in Semester 2. If there is enough interest these will include one specifically on preparing PG applications.

Students also wanted to hear from lecturers on how they got to where they are in their careers, what it was like to be a PhD student, etc. Kasia Banas will organise this if the Year Reps establish sufficient interest.

Lecture recordings

97% of the 35 students who responded to the survey wanted lecture recordings. 70% didn't agree with the worry that having lecture recordings would cause them to not attend or participate in lectures.

Dr Corley explained that the University policy on lecture recordings is currently under development, with news expected soon.

4. Year 3 Reports and Feedback

Positive Feedback

The Class Reps received positive feedback on the essay examples used in Learning and Memory, noting that it was useful to see how markers arrive at the mark. Students would like to see this in more courses. The Reps also reported good feedback on the mini-dissertation, with students liking it so far. In general, students feel well-looked after and find staff very supportive.

Statistics – integrating methods with option courses

Students felt that RMS2 could be better integrated with the option courses, as they would like to see how the methods tie in with their option courses. Dr Morcom noted that it's difficult to ask the option course organisers to incorporate this into their lectures, but encouraged students to be proactive in asking lecturers questions about it, and to make use of lecturer office hours as well.

Statistics labs

The Class Reps asked about the training that the stats lab helpers receive. One student has reported that they've found it difficult to get advice from helpers. Dr Morcom explained that helpers receive extensive training, and have expertise in that area. If there's an issue with a particular tutor, students should speak to the course organiser. If there is evidence of a more widespread problem it would be good for staff to hear about this.

Length of lectures

Some students asked if lectures could be 1 rather than 2 hours in length. Although it's not something that can be changed for this year, Class Reps were asked to get feedback from students on what they think of the length of lectures, so that this can feed into curriculum planning for the future.

ACTION: Year 3 and Year 4 reps to survey students on what they think about the length of Honours lectures (too long / right amount / too short, etc.) and feed back to next meeting.

5. Year 2 Reports and Feedback

Positive feedback

The Class Reps reported that they have received positive feedback from students on the use of lecture recordings, and the organisation of the course overall. Students are happy with lab and tutorial assignments, as it helps them consolidate their knowledge.

Concerns about inconsistent marking

Students raised concerns about inconsistency in tutorial marking, and tutors in different groups giving differing advice.

Dr Murzyn explained that tutors receive extensive training at the start of the year, but sometimes issues do come up, and tutors have been sent additional training material to address issues with consistency. It's expected that there will be some differences between groups, as different tutors may structure their tutorials differently, but tutors should clearly communicate to students about their expectations.

It was also emphasized that all marks that have been released have been moderated. Work from each tutor is sampled, and if marks are out of range, either too high or too low, tutors are asked to remark. In general, marks from the first tutorial tend to be low, and marks this year are consistent with previous years. Overall, the tutorial mark average is usually around 6 or 7 out of 10, with marks usually improving as the semester goes on. Students were also reminded that tutorial marks are only 8% of the overall course mark.

6. Year 1 Reports and Feedback

The Class Reps carried out a survey, receiving responses from 30 first year students. In general, the students who responded are enjoying the course, including labs and tutorials.

Students reported that they felt overwhelmed with trying to choose their timetable, with many outside courses filling up very quickly. Dr Corley explained that there are known issues with outside courses and this will be fed back to the Timetabling Unit.

Camera Obscura: 20 of the students who responded to the survey attended Camera Obscura. In general they enjoyed it, but they wanted more interaction and explanations from staff.

The survey asked students about what issues were important to them, and a large number of students who responded listed concerns about mental and emotional health and wellbeing. While the contact information for the Student Support Office is in the handbook and in the undergraduate notebook, and guidance is given by the Year Organiser at the start of the course, it was suggested that it would be a good idea to provide more reminders to the class as a whole on the availability of support services. It was also suggested to incorporate this into the first meeting with personal tutors. While 16 out of 30 respondents said they felt

supported by their Personal Tutor, 14 students responded with either “neutral” or “disagree” on feeling supported by their PT.

Some students were also unclear on the structure of the course, and Class Reps were asked to remind students that this is included in the Handbook. Students were asked to feed back on whether there was any particular information they felt was missing or that they would like to have included in the course handbook.

7. AOB

Handbook photos: Dr Banas asked the Class Reps to send her a photo of themselves that she can add to the Handbook, to help students recognize their Reps.

Date of next meeting: **Monday, 20 November, 2017** at 12.30pm in Room S38, 7 George Square. Dr Morcom asked Reps to get in touch with their Year Organisers around two weeks before the date of the meeting, to set Agenda Items well in advance of the meeting.