

School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences

Psychology Student-Staff Liaison Committee

Monday, 20 November 2017 at 12.30pm
Room S38, 7 George Square

MINUTES

Present: Dr Alexa Morcom (Chair), Dr Kasia Banas (Teaching Coordinator), Rue Chaladauskaite (Year 2 Rep), Dr Martin Corley (Head of Psychology), Kristina Gray (Year 4 Rep), Jenni Kahkonen (Co-Chair and Year 4 Rep), Dr Michelle Luciano (Year 3 Course Organiser), 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 Dave Carmel (Year 4 Course Organiser), Emilia Janiczek (Year 1 Rep)

In attendance: Sarah Larios (Student Support Officer)

1. Welcome from SSLC Convener, News

Dr Morcom welcomed everyone to the second SSLC meeting, and thanked the Class Reps and Year Organisers for the agenda items.

2. Actions and Matters Arising from last meeting on 16 October 2017

Routes to stats support for Y4 have been clarified: Information has been sent out to both students and supervisors about stats support.

Update on returning average marks to class groups: Dr Morcom reported that they're currently look at the best way of reporting and sharing course stats on Learn.

Dr Morcom handed over the Chair to Jenni Kahkonen, as fourth year co-chair.

3. Year 1 Reports and Feedback

Clarification of Essay Expectations and Feedback

Students felt that there was inconsistency in the quality and amount of feedback provided by tutors on the essay plans, and that they would have like to have received the feedback more than one week before the essay deadline.

Dr Moore advised that students who have questions about their feedback or want further information should go back to their tutor in the first instance and ask for clarification. If that doesn't help, they should approach Dr Moore. The course team tries to ensure that there's a level of consistency when it comes to feedback, but if there are any instances of inconsistent or confusing information coming from tutors, this should be raised with Dr Moore and Dr Banas as early as possible.

Dr Moore also explained that timing of the essay plan and feedback can be tricky – any earlier in the semester and the students would not have covered enough lecture material to make a reasonable start on their essays. Leaving one week for students to utilize the feedback before their essay deadline was decided on as a reasonable compromise.

Students didn't like the essay question. Dr Moore acknowledged that it's not an easy question, but it was chosen as the themes will be relevant throughout their years of study. Marking also takes difficulty of the question into account.

4. Year 4 Reports and Feedback

Lecture length

The third and fourth year Class Reps reported jointly on their survey of what students thought of the length of lectures. The majority of fourth year students preferred having two hour lectures with a break. On the other hand, 50% of third year students preferred having two 50 minute lectures a week, and 41% preferred 2 hours with a break. In the comments, though, some students said that they weren't getting breaks in their two hour lectures. Students with jobs or long commutes commented on the benefit of having 2 hour lectures, which simplifies their timetables.

ACTION: Dr Morcom will send staff a reminder about making sure they have a break in their two hour lectures.

Career Update – results of interest survey

About 40 students responded to the careers interest survey. The majority of respondents want to pursue postgraduate study in Psychology, but many want to gain work experience first. Students would like to have an event where students who have done work experience or internships can talk about their experiences.

Dr Corley explained that the department doesn't have the resources to vet advertisements for work experience/internships, but PsychSoc could organise a bulletin board or event like this.

Results from Mental Health Survey

17 fourth year Psychology students responded to the survey on mental health, 15 of whom have had recurrent or past mental health issues. Half of the students who reported having had mental health issues said that they did not tell anyone at the University. Of those that did tell someone, 5 used the University Counselling Service, 1 told their PT, and 1 told another member of academic staff. No one said that they spoke to the Student Support Office.

Half also said that their academic performance was adversely influenced, but they didn't apply for Special Circumstances.

Students seem to be unclear or unaware of the role of the Student Support Office. Information online and in the course handbook may make it sound like the Student Support Office is more about academic support than personal support.

Most students wanted PPLS to run more de-stress events, and one student commented that they liked the idea of the online drop-in session for questions about mental health support, trialled by the Student Support Office during Mental Health Awareness Week.

Students would like more training for PTs, and Class Reps suggested that at the beginning of the year, PTs should make it clear, both by email and face-to-face, that it is useful to let

the university know if the student is having mental health problems, and that the student support office should be the first point of contact, but it is also alright to speak to the personal tutor and they can direct the student to the right resources and give advice on special circumstances.

5. Year 3 Reports and Feedback

Mini-Dissertation

When surveyed, students were neutral to slightly negative with regards to the Mini-Dissertation. Some students commented that they really liked their supervisors, while others commented on a lack of support from their supervisors. Students also commented on a lack of guidance, although it was unclear if they were referring to guidance from their supervisor or general guidance on the course, as this is the first year the course has run. Class Reps were asked to get clarification on this, and pass this on to Dr Luciano, along with any specific suggestions.

Action: Dr. Luciano and Dr. Murzyn will ensure that next year's cohort will receive more guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the students and supervisors.

Lecture Recordings

Students strongly feel that lecture recordings in Honours would be beneficial. Students had lecture recordings in Pre-Honours, and are used to using them to help consolidate what they've learned. Students also feel not having lecture recordings is detrimental to students with health issues.

Dr Corley explained some of the issues that come up when it comes to recording lectures. Honours courses in particular are usually smaller and more interactive, and it is difficult to edit lecture recordings if a student speaks during class, but doesn't want this recorded. There are also concerns around intellectual property – both with the sharing of copyrighted diagrams or images, as well as staff's intellectual property when it comes to their lecture material. Students can, of course, record lectures for their own personal use.

ACTION: Dr Corley to form a working group with a subset of Class Reps, or their nominees, to look at the issues relating to lecture recording.

Office Hours

Students are aware that staff hold office hours and are utilizing them.

Deadlines/Time

Students feel that they have a high volume of work due over a short period of time. Dr Morcom explained that this issue is raised every year, but it's hoped that this will improve with the introduction of 20 credit Honours courses and the Mini-Dissertation. There is also a big jump from Pre-Honours to Honours, and the department is looking at ways to change Pre-Honours to better prepare students for Honours.

6. Year 2 Reports and Feedback

Summary of Psych 2A mid-course feedback and actions

Prof Watt and Dr Murzyn reported on the mid-course feedback for Psychology 2A and the actions taken, summarised below:

N feedback cards received = 82; N comments received = 185

Main positive points:

1. Lectures - interesting & informative; like abnormal psych course
2. Labs/tutorials - tutorials useful & well-structured; labs practical & fun
3. Organisation - clear course structure.

Main negative points:

1. Lectures - Indiv Diff's; Doing & Communicating Psych poorly received
2. Labs/tutorials - relatively few negative comments, but see next point
3. Assessment - more guidance on lit summary, on lab & tutorial reports, and on what to expect for exam
4. Readings - Too much reading

Action taken – Dr Murzyn presented and responded to main feedback received at her qualitative lecture (2nd Nov); also used this as example of 'small q' method; Prof Watt will give exam preparation lecture (4th Dec; this is already planned).

ACTION: Dr. Morcom will look at make recommendations to lectures regarding approximate amount of reading.

2A Tutorials, labs and lit summary

Concerns raised at the last SSLC meeting about inconsistency in tutorial marking have now been resolved.

Students would like more information on the criteria for lab reports, including more guidance in the lab assessment info in handouts.

Students were confused on how the lit summary related to the rest of the course, but have since had more information about this.

2A Required Reading

Students had found it hard to keep up with the amount of reading for Individual Differences course. Prof Watt noted that the handbook entry shows two priority readings per lecture for this course, which seems reasonable so long as the papers are read strategically.

It was suggested that tutorials could cover how to read papers strategically, and this will be looked at for Semester 2. It was noted that any guidelines would be helpful to other years as well. Potentially a PsychPals session could also cover this.

RMS1 Feedback

Positive feedback: Students like the weekly quizzes, which help them consolidate knowledge and understand how they're doing in the course.

Credit load: Although it's a 10 credit course, students felt that RMS has the heaviest workload of all their courses. Dr Corley explained that a 10 credit course normally requires 100 hours of learning and teaching time. RMS guides students through these hours, while other courses require more self-directed learning.

7. AOB

Timing of surveys: Dr Morcom reminded everyone to send out any surveys to students well in advance of the SSLC meetings, so that agenda items are not last minute.

Times Higher: The University of Edinburgh has been ranked 20th in the world for Psychology, 2nd in the UK.

Small Projects Funding: The University is offering funding of up to £500 for small projects carried out jointly by students and staff relating to the areas of either Student Voice, Academic Support, or Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. There's an application process, and projects must be carried out during Semester 2. Anyone interested in putting together a project proposal should get in touch with the Student Support Office.