Sustainable Development: Staff-Student Liaison Meeting
8TH March 2023 – 1.00 pm; Conference Room 2.15, CMB
Minutes

Attendees

Year 1: Vilte Civilyte (Informal Rep); **Year 2:** Ola Majewska, Sophia Mainiero;
Year 4: Luisa Langmann - (PIR Pathway), Hedvig Pontén - (PIR Pathway)

Apologies: Gro Gisleberg, Nina Brown, Yara Share (Year 3, PIR Pathway), Daniel Suarez Bernal (Year 3, Geography Pathway)

Chair: Ola Majewska

Year 4 Feedback

Study Space (SPS in general): The student reps highlighted a lack of study space specifically around the exam period and the idea of allocated rooms within SPS was raised. It was noted that the fourth years do have a weekly study session; they wondered if it was possible to get more of these.

Structure of dissertation process (Politics specific): Students explained that they were told to submit proposals by April, with a final deadline of September, after which supervisors would be allocated in following 2-3 weeks but this was delayed. In 21-22, supervisors were allocated by 20th October and this year in November. The literature review is to be completed by end of 1st semester, poster session takes place in January and draft of 3000 words due the following week. Feedback received at poster session often made students feel they had to redo what they had been working on. Students highlighted that they feel a lot of pressure in 2nd semester, and clarity on why the poster session takes place at this point would be appreciated. They suggested that the poster session would be more helpful if it took place at the end of Semester 1. Semester 1 had two workshops which are lecture presentations with timeline and unfortunately the strike impacted the semester 2 event. Support from supervisors varies and it would be good to approach the PIR Pathway liaison, Michael Albert, to discuss this further.

SD degree: The students suggested that they would like more courses on the environmental and economic pillars of SD as a lot of courses are focused on the social pillar. From a 2nd year perspective, questions arise around course choices, such as what are my prospects, how to engage with University community. FW highlighted that the Sustainable Development degree runs out of the School of Social and Political Science and this is a key reason for the focus on the social pillar. In addition, students were reminded that this is an interdisciplinary degree and they are able to take courses from a range of different departments as their outside courses. The students noted that they were not always aware of the different options available in e.g. economics and geosciences, although the students did agree that the slides provided during the 'transition to X year' end of semester meetings were helpful. We discussed the possibility of talking about outside courses a bit more, for example, asking existing students to reflect on 'the best outside courses' during start of semester events. They also suggested that DRPS descriptions of elective courses are not always accurate. Picking pathways before arriving in Edinburgh was introduced last year and proved difficult for students who would have liked more detailed information on pathways/courses. STIS DPT will be published and included for 23-24.

Year 3 Feedback

No feedback received

Year 2 Feedback

Concerns surrounding industrial action/SD2a: Students support the strikes but a lot of tutorials have been missed with most landing on strike days for the second year in a row. Concerns about personal development, and particularly impact on core courses. Students reported missing introductions to important theoretical ideas, and being concerned that they will not have learnt the theoretical background needed for Honours courses, potentially meaning they miss elective courses. How can we strengthen and compensate some of the foundations and the loss: LEARN learning not the same; informal reading groups; SDPALS are good but not a replacement during strikes but a conversations about missed lecture topics could be organised. It was stressed that no exams can include topics that have not been taught during strikes. FW encouraged students not to be put off choosing courses or particular topic when transitioning to honours years. Honours courses will usually provide some basic information about a foundational theoretical idea to cater for students who may be coming from quite different backgrounds.

SD2a: Students said that the content is relevant and engaging with applicable assessments but expressed concern with providing information on coursework, unhelpful essay feedback and repetition in content. Ecofeminism lectures were particularly enjoyed, but students struggled to see connections between community theory and catchment flooding. Some weeks felt very theory focussed, and the issue brief was found not to be very intuitive at first.

Student Support: Unanimous positive feedback received about access to academic and mental health services, and in particular students appreciated their relationship with their PTs, and highlighted that Sue is a great Student Adviser. The students compared their experience to friends on other courses and noted that the SD degree stood out for the support available.

Pathway concerns: Students on PIR pathway don't feel like they're gaining enough from Political data Analysis and Stata tutorials – some students are finding that this is simple and not relevant to SD. The 4th year students did note that sometimes it is only later that the connections between different courses become clear. Social and Cultural Geography was seen as too broad by the Geography pathway students. STIS has 3 core courses, which those on the STIS pathway reported enjoying, but some of the courses could be quite repetitive in introducing core STS concepts ('too many black boxes!'). FW noted that the STIS pathway is new and some of the courses have not necessarily been designed with students taking 4 years of STIS in mind, and a recommendation to meet with Sarah/Eugenia was suggested. Students were generally enjoying the anthropology pathway, but noted some frustration at not being able to take some of the more practical courses. Students looking forward to elective options in 23-24.

Careers: Positive feedback received on events organised by 1st year cohort lead, Isabel Fletcher. More career talks to understand applications of the degree and gain connections in the industry would be welcomed. Topics that would be useful are economics, business, ESG, carbon credits, sustainable supply chairs, tools and knowledge which could contribute to a wider variety of jobs and increase employability. A discussion took place about course recommendations and strengthening communication within the SD community and Alumni and HP/Sue will look to setting up a LinkedIn Group.

Year 1 Feedback

Degree Structure: Students felt that the tutorials for SNE didn't feel like they contributed to understanding of course. It is a good course contributing to STIS pathway but less so for others. Th structure felt out of place but the students enjoyed the case studies of 'what is nature?', 'what is happening to the ocean?'. The reps had received complaints about the media project, choice of articles and how scientific knowledge travels through the media. Media hadn't been discussed in the class beforehand and the students felt that they didn't initially understand the assignment, despite it having a 30% weighting.

Cohort feels fragmented and not great response from WhatsApp group chat

Any Other Business

Points raised were how useful it would be to be made aware which non SPS courses would be relevant and conducive to SD. Action: Students to develop a form on what courses they took in 1st/ 2nd/ 3rd year – incorporating some student feedback alongside each of the courses. Students highlighted that 2nd year is a good opportunity to do things outside of your comfort zone. NSS Pizza event during Creative Learning Week and breakfast events in CMB were highly praised.