

University of Brighton Students' Union

Academic Forum – School of Arts and Media

Held – 25th November 2010 in the Boardroom, Grand Parade

Present - 19 students

Chair – Anthony Lewis (AL)

Secretary – Katrina Mayo

AL introduced Susie Cox the Arts and Media School Rep.

Students then had an opportunity to look at the NSS data for Arts and Media. The discussion following on from this focussed on the following areas.

- **Access to facilities within Grand Parade.** Students often find it difficult and are discouraged from accessing work areas that are not seen as being part of their course. This feels like an old fashioned art college – it's disjointed – you are on a course but cannot use all the facilities. Examples given were that printmakers finding it difficult to access letterpress / bookbinding and MA students not always feeling welcome when using other departments and not being able to rely on facilities being available to them. Students recognised that there are resource implications and the need to prioritise students on certain courses however interdisciplinary working should be seen as important and actively encouraged. **It would be good to generate more of a community feeling at GP with more opportunities for students on different courses to work together and within other departments.**

The University should be upfront when you apply for a course as to what facilities will be available.

- **The Importance of Technicians.** There are some great technicians who make a huge difference to the student experience. It can however be difficult for students if technicians are hard to approach, they can then become discouraged from using certain facilities. It might help in some areas if there was more integration between tutors and technicians.

The discussion raised will carry on with the Head of School.

- Students should be made aware of the **fees payable** for MA's at an earlier date. Presently they are not informed of the cost until payment is due

Looking at specific areas

Photography. The 2nd and 3rd year students had differing experiences. The 3rd year students had had to raise a lot of issues last year. The 2nd years felt that these points had been listened and responded to and as a result the course had been actively changing. Students would like to see **more industry links and placements established**. At present a few students do work experience but they set it up themselves. The Professional Practice module is in the 3rd year, it has been informative but not practical enough. Some of the ideas from this module need to be introduced in the second year. The photography course is very good for developing creativity but students need to know more about applying this in industry. Other courses e.g. printmaking has been developing these types of links and Media has a 4 week compulsory placement.

Painting Students felt that the NSS responses fairly accurately represented their experiences. The difficulty establishing links with other departments remains. The new Head of Department has been active in pushing and improving professional development

The discussion then moved on to what **attributes in teachers should be recognised / rewarded** by the student body. The following features were identified:

- Inspiring – Someone who motivates students to find their own interests and not to produce generic projects. Someone who allows you to believe in your own ideas and take your work forward
- Tutors with a variety of experience who bring this into their teaching
- At a postgraduate level, tutors who are welcoming, are interested in you as an individual and make the time to support you.
- Someone who goes beyond their role to help you (example of the excellent photography technicians was given) – ‘someone who helps get me out of a crisis’
- Approachable and easy to talk to
- Caring – not just ticking the boxes

The conversation then focussed on **teaching and feedback**

- Not all lecturers are good communicators, they should all have or obtain a teaching qualification
- Students would like **clearer indications of the level they are working at during projects** rather than just a grade at the end of a project. If the criteria for assessment are clear and students are made aware of how they are working in relation to these it would provide them with the opportunity to develop a project accordingly.
- A grade is received with the feedback forms but often **there is no accompanying feed forward tutorial** which would allow discussion of the feedback and the possibility of relating this to future work

- AL brought up the university policy of a **15 working day turnaround for feedback**. This was responded to by laughter from those present, with a recognition that this was not happening in practice.
Feedback needs to come promptly. Moving Image students brought up the point that feedback needs to be received in time for students to reflect upon it and incorporate the advice in time for their next project (currently there is too great a delay for this to occur)

AL raised the issue of increased fees and asked if they were attending with the increased fees what improvements/developments students would like to see:

- More staff
- Better facilities – state of the art media centres
- More cameras (Moving Image currently only has one working camera for 10 students)
- More equipment for making stretchers (Painting)
- Help in buying materials in bulk to reduce costs (Painting and Printmaking)
- More free materials

Photography is a very expensive course, with equipment students need to buy being very expensive and additional costs often working out at £400-£500 per project. Students had no idea when they started how much the extra costs would amount to.

Students on the photography and other courses felt that **when people are applying for courses the likely level of additional costs should be clearly indicated** so that they are able to make an informed choice as to whether they can financially manage to complete the course.

Students would also like to have a **clear breakdown of where their fees are going** and how much goes towards their course.

Action points for reps:

For students to succeed it is very important that they are able to properly prepare. This includes receiving accurate information about timetables, module content and expected course costs. Students joining the university have different needs to students progressing between years. Discuss with your course what students need from the induction period and whether the information you received was accurate and useful. Ask what works and whether they can identify any improvements for future years? Take these views to your course leader. Feedback any commitments made to your course.

There are currently moves for all courses to provide key information to prospective students. Brighton SU will be working with all course reps to ascertain what information is needed, when and in what format. Students or reps interested in being involved in this

project should contact Anthony Lewis, Student Advocacy & Education Research Coordinator
– a.r.lewis@bton.ac.uk

Feedback.