

University of Brighton Students' Union

Academic Forum – School of Computing, Engineering and Mathematics

Held - 8th November 2010 at the Watts Building, Moulsecoomb

Present - 9 students

Chair – Anthony Lewis (AL) and Emily-Ann Nash (EAN)

Secretary – Katrina Mayo

1. The session commenced discussing NSS data for the School of Computing, Engineering and Mathematics. This led to students raising the following points:

1. The issue of deadlines for assessments being too close together was noticed on the NSS data. This was recognised as a problem. It was suggested that better communication between staff, possibly by utilising an online calendar– which the Course Leader has an overview of would help.
2. When asked by AL as to the preferred type of assessment, reps would opt for a reasonable spread, not just one assessment in May. Some modules already have 2-3 deadlines spread throughout the year; this is preferred to one final deadline. It was appreciated though that assessment needs to be course specific
3. Greater clarity in what lecturers actually want to receive when they set assignments would be very helpful. Giving examples of good practice (and models in technical issues) would help clarify the learning objectives in advance.
4. The purpose of some of the first year modules, such as Professional Practice, was questioned. It is not made clear to students why they are taking the module. Is there room for improvement with this module?

EAN asked whether there were any specific issues within the school

1. Overall students reported being quite happy and gave examples of good teaching practice and interaction between staff and students. Particularly mentioned was the time based media 3D graphics, the tutor is very good but it is a complicated programme with a steep learning curve. It was suggested that peer supported sessions with 3rd year students would aid learning here and across other courses as well. Peer to peer projects would also be useful on other courses and would provide the reassurance that 'things do get better'

2. It's good to have 1:1 tutorials but the use of PhD students in this role was raised – they don't always know what has gone on in the lectures and can be poor at interacting with students
3. Students really like the way different modules feed into each other
4. Attendance is poor for 9:00 lectures when nothing else is timetabled for the day

2. E-learning and the developments that would be useful in this area was then discussed.

The following were raised:

1. Generally this is well used within the school but there is a lot of variation between tutors as to how well they use studentcentral. It would be good for a standard to be set that all modules adhere to.
2. Automated texts are currently not being used to notify students of changes and cancellations, it would be very useful for this to be introduced.
3. Communication in induction week was very poor. Information did not reach students as to where they should be and when. Information should be posted to all new students as they are not familiar with using studentcentral. The information on students central needs to be improved
4. There is a lack of software in Aldritch library, so all work needs to be done at Watts, which has shorter opening hours. The book resources are OK but more specialist software should be available at Aldritch. The current library hours were felt to be OK

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

1. Helpful
2. Good interpersonal skills
3. Friendly
4. Use of different media – not just power point
5. Teaching skills
6. Lecturers who inspire and let you know the great things you can do at the end of mastering the boring stuff.

4. EAN raised the issue of increased fees. 40% of students present would have been put of from attending university by the proposed new fees. If fees were increased the following were raised as improvements students would like to see

1. Free laptops provided
2. More options to specialise
3. Bring down the price of essential textbooks
4. Increased contact time was raised – there followed a discussion as to whether all students would want this or not
5. Twenty four hour support available

6. More money invested in sport and the provision of mini buses
7. State of the art lecture theatres and lecturers who have been properly inducted into how to use the equipment
8. More help finding part-time jobs
9. Everything available in an organised way on studentcentral
10. Lecturers who are 'the best they can be'
11. Lectures downloadable onto MP3 and podcasts

Action / discussion points for course reps:

- Discuss the way assessments are scheduled. What would students prefer the assessment timetable to look like? Raise these views with course leaders and at course boards.
- Would a shared calendar, where staff can see each others deadlines, help avoid multiple deadlines?
- Professional practise module. It seemed unclear what this module was for and how it fits with the rest of the course. Does its purpose need re-evaluating? How might it achieve its aims in a different way?
- Specialist software is only available in Watts. This doesn't currently meet student needs. What could be done to extend access in Watts, or make software available in Aldrich. Discuss student needs and feed back to course teams. Brighton SU will also raise this issue with Information Services.