

University of Brighton Students' Union

Academic Forum – School of Environment and Technology

Held - 18th November 2010 at the Huxley Building, Moulsecoomb

Present - 14 students

Chair –Emily-Ann Nash (EAN)

Secretary – Katrina Mayo

1. The session commenced discussing NSS data for the School of Environment and Technology. Students then raised the following points:

- Lecturers should have more training in how to deliver material. Too many depend on just reading out slides. More creative, engaging methods would aid learning
- Follow up seminars after lectures would be helpful
- Not enough support is given to first year students to bridge the gap from school. It can be very daunting. More clarity is needed at this early stage on what is expected (in terms of reading, studying) and how to put together work (such as a report) for students who have not done this before. Students would like lecturers to show more clearly what is expected and how to go about achieving the expected outcomes.
- Handbooks have often not been updated, so the learning outcomes may not directly relate to what is being taught
- Many students have still not had any feedback (Week 8), it would be helpful to be set a piece of work early in the term so students can see if/ where they are going wrong at an early stage
- Some courses have no seminars and are completely lecture based in the first year. One course consists of 17 hours of lectures / week. Seminars would really help students develop their understanding of the lectures
- An initiative to develop peer learning (as is occurring in other schools) with final year students mentoring first years, would be very beneficial for first year students
- Some lectures are very large (120 students), this makes it very difficult for students to ask questions
- There is a very high first year failure rate (@30% on one course), this is daunting for current students

- There is a lack of regular support / guidance for students, they are expected to just get on with the lectures. No one questions how they are getting on. There are no additional resources – just the lecture slides being available on student central.
- Lectures are in some cases curtailed. One 4 hour period regularly lasts only 2 hours and a 2 hour lecture lasts only 1 hour
- The reading list sent out to students before they started was inaccurate – at the first lecture students were told they did not need some of the books on it. Students had already bought the books. They would prefer not to have a list sent out if it is not up to date and accurate. They cannot afford to waste money on books they don't need.
- The assessment criteria that are given out are usually far too general and not specific to the piece of work in question
- Students from Architectural Technology do not feel well equipped for looking for work when they leave. Their role can fall between construction and architecture. There should be more links established with industry and placements while a student.
- At the universities jobs fair students were told there was nothing relevant for environmental sciences
- Generally more links with industry should be introduced.
- Lecturers are often hard to get hold of and do not reply to emails
- Lectures have been too frequently cancelled
- In the induction week students were told that their teaching would not be passed on to PhD students but then it was. PhD students often run seminars but don't necessarily have knowledge on the topic the seminar is on – this leads to a lack of informative discussion after students have presented. The teaching skills of PhD students may not be that good. (they sometimes lack flexibility in their approach)

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

- Ability to look at things from a student perspective
- An example of good practice is the setting up of a field trip in the first term which really helps bonding within the group
- Being able to make material relevant to what industry is going to need in the future.
- Enthusiasm
- Good support
- Lecturers who recognise that students also need to be involved in extracurricular activities such as visits and seminars – not just lectures

3. EAN raised the issue of increased fees. If fees were increased the following were raised as improvements/developments students would like to see

- Accommodation for all first years

- More support to help students find accommodation
- Students Union should be looking at 'Private Halls' – other universities have these
- Clearer guidance from staff on what and how they want students to provide written work
- Some time dedicated to how to use the library and various programmes
- Smaller groups.
- Groups often have very different levels of previous experience. There could be an initial exploratory questionnaire / test that students complete which allows staff to see their areas of expertise and therefore tailor groups so as to allow all students to progress. For example some students already have A level maths but are having to attend classes that basically repeat their A level – this is not a learning experience.

4. ICT/ E-learning and the developments that would be useful in these areas were then discussed. The following was discussed

- Forums. There was some debate as to how much students would use online forums. The benefits of use would need to be clear. If all lecturers were active in their use of studentcentral then students would be likely to also use it more.

Action points for reps:

Inductions / pre-course organisation. For students to succeed it is very important that they are able to properly prepare. This includes receiving accurate information. Students joining the university have different needs to students progressing between years. Discuss with your course what they need from the induction period and whether the information you received was actually 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.

Also, what are student views on how inductions might relate to drop out rates? If students on some courses are feeling daunted by seeing others fail, what might be done to address this?

The 2008 NUS student experience report suggested over 60% of student are doing their course so that they can improve their future job prospects. What more can be done to build better links with industry or further develop the “employability” aspect of courses?

Group sizes are an issue for some students, reducing opportunities to participate or contribute. Online forums are a way of providing space for students to discuss issues or work together. However there seemed to be little appetite for them unless staff were

committed to their use. Are there any areas / modules effectively using online forums? Why are they successful? How can we all learn from this? If your course uses technology in this way, suggest that staff are recognised for their work and can share with other colleagues.