

School of Geography

Minutes of the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught
Student Staff Liaison Committee held on Wednesday 30th Sept 2020
at 14.00- 15.00 via MS Teams

Staff Members present

Dr Philippa Williams (PW) (Co-Chair)	Senior Tutor
Catherine Mills (CM) (Secretary)	Student Experience and Admissions Administrator
Prof Alastair Owens (AO)	Head of School
Dr Regan Koch (RK)	Senior Tutor from Jan 2021
Dr Tim Brown (TB)	Director of Education
Dr Sam Halvorsen (SH)	Deputy Director of Education (BA)
Prof Kate Heppell (KH)	Deputy Director of Education (Bsc)
<i>Kate Amis</i>	<i>Minuting meeting</i>

Student members present

Will Robertshaw (WR) (Co-Chair)	3 rd Yr Geography BA
Aminah Ossoman (AYO)	2 nd Yr Geography with Business Management
Catarina Da Silva Neves (CSN)	3 rd Yr Geography BA
Rachel Trumper	2 nd Yr Geography BA
Oliver Hurst (OH)	3 rd Yr Geography with business Management
Alice Mills	1 st Yr BSc Geography
Albert Newton	2 nd Yr BA Human Geography
Mohammed Rahman	1 st Yr Geography with Business Management
Buse Baspinar (BB)	Masters
Maria Caterina Ponticelli	Masters

1. **Welcome** from PW and WR who jointly chaired the meeting.
2. **Apologies** received from Rianno McFarlane Thomas (RT) and Shazia Sadiq (SS)
3. **Minutes of the previous meeting were approved** with edit to adjust Rianno's initials to RT
4. **Matters arising from the previous meeting and action**

Minute	Who?	Details	Action to date as reported Green= complete Orange= in progress and to be reported next meeting Red =Awaiting action/ roll over

2020: 35	TB and ES	Check on whether Weds afternoons will continue to be protected time for sports and societies	Actioned Confirmed that this is protected time
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5. What is a Course Rep and standing for election

PW thanked those who are standing /again. Reps are an important role as liaison within the school Nominations have now closed with voting until 8/10 and announcements on 9/10

6. Teaching and Learning

- How has online Teaching and Learning gone for students so far?
- What do students think about the quality and accessibility of online resources?
- Other Teaching matters students would like to raise?
- Reminder: Module Registration change requests due Friday 2nd October 2020

RT (question sent in) Would we be re introducing grace periods? TB replied that No, as this was a specific response to the specific needs of last academic year. PW added that in the School of Geograpy EC process we will continue to recognise computer and technical difficulties on a case-by-case basis.

RT (question sent in) Some students have been allocated a new IGS advisor and now been told the must choose a new topic completely. TB replied that it was difficult to respond without knowing the specifics but generally if staff leave it is necessary to change supervisors. TB confident that any academic could supervise in a broad area. TB happy to follow this up with Rianno.

AYO asked if on BB collaborate it would be possible for breakout groups to be the same each week rather than randomly generated each week? TB replied that this was a great question but that due to technological constraints the random allocation option is the only practical way at present but that he would look into this and report back on any adjustments that we might be able to introduce going forwards. KH added that she had trialled letting students move to a group of their choice, but it takes much longer and may not be viable for big groups.

BB asked if slides can be made available before classes to masters groups. PW would check with SS and TB and report back

Action PW to check on making slides available before lectures for masters students. TB to message module convenors to sort this.

CSN asked if lecturers could make it possible to download individual chapters as PDF rather than whole books as virtual resources as then annotate of PDF is straightforward. TB would ask academic colleagues to, wherever possible, make PDF available.

WR reported that peers had sent in comments saying that things were going well. TB welcomed the positive feedback and added that staff had worked hard all summer on training and planning etc. He hoped to get feedback from cohorts on their experiences of online learning

PW asked if students felt they had more work than normal. WR replied that it was nice to have the mix and esp the flexibility to watch asynchronous lectures when it suited your individual circumstances. AM added that she agreed with this.

AYO commented that with the longer readings people may be finding it hard to grasp the key concepts. PW suggested going back to module convenors to clarify. TB added that module forms are good place to raise these issues. OH stated that pre recorded lectures are extremely useful as they help to guide what you should read so this could contribute to a solution. In addition to this, lecturers could guide students, however OH understands that this may take out some of the experience for students.

MP stated that Liam (SBM lecturer) uses MS Teams for lectures and provides students with something to do each week, for example activities or readings in set groups for 5 weeks. These groups have each been given a channel on Teams where they can discuss the content, readings and also allows them to meet people to socialise. BB highlighted MS Teams was very useful for students to share notes on readings etc.

BB said that in the Masters group they all shared numbers within the first week to create a WhatsApp group which was useful and also they have coffee mornings.

RK reported the chat function could really change things for the better and has been extremely useful to address student queries and concerns for example the issue about putting slides up before the lecture. RK emphasised he has used this for GEG5126 and AN agreed it works well as a student who has taken this module.

RK also highlighted that tutorials have been important this year and he has set up a coffee with his tutorial group which helps students get to know each other better.

7. Decolonising the curricula: working towards an anti-racist School of Geography

SH gave short report on the work overseeing the programmes for human geography especially in relation to the decolonising agenda.

SH had shared the following paper (pasted below) in advance of the meeting. He introduced the paper by explaining that most staff had been involved in this initiative and the SOG have taken this very seriously as a way of reviewing the way we teach, what we teach, our attitudes etc. We have drawn up guidelines for modules and taken concrete steps to make changes which include more explicit discussions and opening up module space and time to value the experiences and values of all those participating. The first year module GEG4003 Geography in the World centres much of the new content. SH asked course reps to be proactive in feeding back comments from peers about this. WR asked if it would be worth setting up an open discussion in MS Teams for this. SH welcomed this idea and would encourage this and any space created for these discussions

Action: SH to set up open discussion forum on Teams

Towards Decolonising Geography: Questions for Module Convenors

This document provides a starting point for redressing forms of disadvantage associated with racism and colonialism, making concrete steps towards decolonisation across the pedagogy and content of our modules. Before we can take action, we need to **identify and recognise the intellectual limits**

and racialised structural disadvantages or exclusions that may be embedded in our curricula (i.e., content of modules and programmes) **and pedagogies** (i.e., teaching, assessment and feedback methods).

Content

1. To what extent does the **content** presume a particular profile/mindset of students and their orientation to the world, and could consideration be given ways of thinking about it from different perspectives? Are some students and their knowledges and experiences structurally marginalised by the content in ways that could be addressed?
2. Do the assumptions that frame the content reproduce global histories of Western domination, thereby limiting what counts as authoritative knowledge and whose knowledge is recognised? Can the way in which **knowledge is made (epistemology) be examined more critically to open up** other practices and experiences?
3. Should the module allow students to understand the origins and purposes of the field of study in its **historical context**? If so, to what extent does it already facilitate this, and/or how can the development of such an understanding be introduced? Can 'origin stories' be considered in how they shape the discipline and its recognised participants in shaping knowledge practices?
4. Does the module allow for, encourage or support a **critical approach** to relevant literature and other sources as a central feature of study, in particular in relation to intersectional colonial power relations (such as patriarchy, gender, disability, sexuality and othering)?
5. Could particular topics, readings, or field sites be potentially **traumatic or painful** to students either in general or in particular? If so, should they be examined (are they necessary?), signaled, or managed in some way that acknowledges those painful racialised histories?
6. Are there opportunities for students to feed into the content design of the module? Are there recent **developments in the field or relevant current events** that address systemic racism, which can be a foci for discussion?
7. Are there opportunities for students to reflect on the political economy of higher education in the UK and its effects on their position as learners and the formation of knowledge across/within disciplines? (E.g. the university embedded in a neoliberal system, the politics of knowledge, black in STEM)
8. To what extent does my module acknowledge/cultivate an appreciation for **diverse entry points** around a particular subject?
9. Does the demographics of the authors that are represented reproduce white and western privilege? What is the effect of this on the diversity of views with which the students learn? And, is there an effect on student engagement because of a lack of diversity? How can issues of equity in research be addressed and discussed?

Action: **Making a space for collective reflection and action.** We suggest that in the first and final lecture a space is made to reflect on the relation of their discipline to coloniality, and students are given a chance to use their experiences to examine why this issue matters in the present.

Pedagogy

1. To what extent could pedagogical changes, designed to **level the playing field for students** from different backgrounds and with different needs, be (a) identifiable and (b) achievable? And, how are these effected by teaching in a digital medium?
2. To what extent could **students be engaged in decolonising** the module (co-creation)?
3. Is my/our pedagogy *transparent* in terms of a) what students are expected to learn, b) how they are expected to learn it and demonstrate their learning, and c) how it is assessed?
4. Do the dynamics of the lecture / seminar / tutorial / office hour help to engage students who have been discouraged from **actively participating or taking risks in academic work** as a result of structural and/or interpersonal racism?
10. Are module convenors aware of **racialised patterns of attainment** in the module? Are there areas of overturn forms of racialised disadvantage that need to be addressed?
11. Are there adequate means of **giving feedback** on how teaching is delivered that are open to students and staff, in line with the questions raised above?
12. Are teachers and students encouraged and enabled to reflect on our own positionality and lived experience in relation to the module's subject matter (*this may be a discussion of white privilege, a sense of belonging and being represented in the discipline*)?
13. Are students given opportunities in their learning to **widen their circles of contact** or experience?
14. To what extent are teachers and students aware of what might constitute racist or racialising behaviour in a learning context? Do staff and students **know how to challenge** and report this if it occurs? Are we teaching students how to identify, recognise and responsibly take action for an anti-racist classroom?

Action: Developing inclusive pedagogies means seeking to level the playing field for students with diverse backgrounds and needs, by challenging and countering the inequalities produced by structures influenced by relations of racialised colonial difference. **Decolonising Geography can mean encouraging, supporting and empowering students** to understand and navigate their environments, and to cultivate their own critical thinking and practice.

The above is adapted from the ***Decolonising SOAS Learning and Teaching Toolkit for Programme and Module Convenors May 2018***, downloadable from:

<https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/decolonisingsoas/learning-teaching/toolkit-for-programme-and-module-convenors/>

Resources, Reading Lists and Glossary are available on **Decolonising 2** on *Teams*.

AO reported on an incident over the past weekend in which racist and homophobic comments had been posted in a *WhatsApp* group chat group which included 1st year geography students This matter is now under investigation by the registry. AO commented that it was reassuring that it had been reported quickly and that the report and support process in place was fit for purpose.

8. Advising and Student support

WR stated that students are understandably worried about what is happening in other universities at the moment (students halls being locked down and not being able to access facilities) and asked AO what support will be in place if there is another spike?

AO responded saying that this is something the University is looking into. At the moment they are holding the line on blended learning and are looking into support for self- isolation, testing and how to ensure food gets to students who may be self- isolating in halls. AO agreed that a reassuring message needs to go out to students about support and well being and would raise this at the HoS Faculty meeting which took place after the SSLC.

ACTION: AO to raise question of support if another spike to the HoS Faculty meeting

AYO reported that peers are finding it hard to meet people though against this there was positive feedback about the role of tutorials. The buddy scheme is also useful. There is considerable isolation and meeting people is difficult. CM and SH are working on strategies for this. SH asked students to feedback suggestions for events/ activities they would like to see this semester and throughout the year to aid support. SH to follow up about a forum for students to feedback via individual programme meetings.

Date of next meeting. Wednesday October 14th 2- 3pm

Actions from this meeting

2020: 36	PW and TB	Check on making slides available before lectures for masters students. TB to message module convenors to sort this.
2020:37	SH	Set up open discussion forum for all on decolonising agenda on Teams
2020:38	AO	Raise question of student support & wellbeing - if we see another spike in Covid cases - to the HoS Faculty meeting