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| SEMESTER 1 REPORT 2020 |
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| School of Geography and Sustainable Development  Imaan Kotadia  *School President* |



1. INTRODUCTION

In this report, I will summarise the work I have undertaken as president alongside class representatives and school staff over the first semester. Each section will offer a brief insight into the efforts that have been taken to ensure that student voices are heard, and their experiences continually improved.

This past semester has been full of challenges for all of us as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been met with a whole host of new logistical puzzles to solve and burdens on our mental and physical wellbeing. My first semester as school president has certainly not been what I anticipated when applying for the role, however I can say without a doubt that I am thoroughly enjoying the experience and am persistently committed to supporting and representing students wherever possible. Thank you to staff and students for your encouragement – I am always grateful. If you have any questions about this report, please do not hesitate to email me at [geosdpresident@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:geosdpresident@st-andrews.ac.uk).

1. COMMUNICATION

Every Monday all students receive an email from me detailing school updates and news, events, careers opportunities, wellbeing resources, and student notices. Students frequently contact me on the president email to ask questions and seek guidance; I make conscious effort to check these emails daily and respond in a timely fashion. The president email address is also used to contact staff about school matters; I have a regular cadence with the Director of Teaching through email.

Each subject year group has their own Facebook group page that the class reps and I manage. Facebook events are often shared here as well as union resources. These pages are an opportunity for students to collaborate informally and share material useful to everyone. Additionally, I manage the School of Geography and SD Facebook page where students across all years can view and share material.

The Instagram page is in use to publicise events and messages. It has been a challenge to manage so many communication/media platforms this semester and unfortunately, I have not made as much use of the Instagram page as I have found there is better engagement via email and Facebook.

As a result of the pandemic and very little opportunity to meet in person, Microsoft Teams has been instrumental in offering a way for me to regularly meet with the Director of Teaching and the class reps.

1. FEEDBACK AND REPRESENTATION

*3.1) Class Representatives and SSCCs*

Class reps act as points of contact for students who wish to provide feedback to the school and they regularly have the opportunity to meet with me and discuss challenges their year group may be facing. Twice a semester we have the staff and student consultative committee where class reps report to their Head of Year, the Director of Teaching and the Deputy Director of Teaching. I provide class reps with the survey and they take the task of distributing it to their peers via the communication channels previously mentioned. A few days before each SSCC I meet with the class reps to discuss their reports and ensure that they are clear and ready for the staff. The SSCCs have been even more important this year due to the introduction of dual learning and new methods of teaching. There has been significant engagement from students, especially in first year. Through the SSCCs staff have been able to: ensure all course material is readily available online, ensure seminar/tutorial groups run smoothly with active participation, understand student attitudes to the movement to in-person teaching, streamline communication methods, and modify assessments to reflect the challenges of the pandemic.

*3.2) Weekly Feedback Forms*

In order to prevent feedback building up until the SSCCs, I created a form which is distributed every Monday in the weekly email to allow students to regularly submit ideas for improvement on each of their modules. This has allowed the school to deal with any issues as soon as they arise and ultimately lead to better outcomes for students. Each week I collate the anonymous feedback and create a document for the DoT to read and distribute to the relevant module coordinators.

*3.3) Education Committee*

EduCom meets every Thursday evening to discuss issues that have been raised to Presidents across a variety of schools. Prior to each meeting, Presidents send a report of their achievements and challenges of the week. Alongside the faculty presidents and the DoEd, the School Presidents endeavour to solve collective issues and offer each other ideas and support. We have spoken on a variety of topics this semester including: Extension policies, S-coding, wellbeing, remote student welfare, decolonisation of the curriculum, study buddy schemes, and online lecture attendance.

*3.4) School Presidents Forum*

This is a meeting with the School Presidents, Faculty Presidents, DoEd, University Deans, and Proctor. We bring agenda items often discussed at EduCom that require resolution and is a chance for us as student representatives to speak directly to staff.

*3.5) Teaching Committee*

Teaching committee is where the school heads of year, DoT and Deputy DoT meet to discuss teaching strategies for students. Here I act as the main student representative and offer input from a student perspective. It has been great to be part of these discussions and be included in the decision making within the school.

*3.6) EDI Committee*

The equality, diversity and inclusion committee speak on a variety of topics to improve the representation within the school. Whilst the school has a duty to meet university wide EDI targets, they have been proactive in pushing for change beyond this. There is ongoing movement towards creating a curriculum that diverges from a very white, Eurocentric framework and this will be developed further this semester. I have been working with members of the EDI committee to include students in more discussions surrounding race and privilege and offer events that allow for debate and learning.

1. EVENTS

The restrictions against in-person gatherings have posed a significant challenge when organising events for the school. Whilst students are keen to socialise, it has been difficult to gain significant interest in online school events. In my role as School President, I primarily organise events in association with academic development and career progression. This semester the following events have been organised:

* First Year coffee round robin
* Share Your Summer Internship Event
* Geography and SD Careers: LinkedIn Workshop
* Class Reps Team Building and Social
* 4th Year Geographers Diss-Cussion
* Paint Your Own Christmas Rock

As the pandemic continues, organising events in Semester 2 is likely to be equally challenging. However, there are exciting plans in the pipeline for events for DiverSTEM (a celebration of POC in Science), and guest panel speakers.

1. WELLBEING

Student wellbeing has never been more important. I have worked with the school Wellbeing Officer to ensure that students get regular words of encouragement and tips for stress management from staff members. Additionally, I worked with the Design Team to create a wellbeing poster and additionally formed a comprehensive document of University wide resources and where to find them for students. It has proven very difficult to boost the morale of students given the difficult circumstances we are all facing, and I have often felt very powerless in the matter. However, students should know that my email inbox is always open to those that need to chat or pointing in the right direction to seek help.

*Thank you to everyone who has supported me this Semester – it has been full of new challenges to navigate and I do not doubt that this next Semester will be the same. I promise to continue to represent the student voice to the best of my ability and work towards improving the learning experience for all.*

*Stay Tuned!* 