

School President Report – Semester 1 2017-18

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Introduction

The School of Earth and Environmental Sciences has had an exciting time recently with lots of changes to staff, modules and degrees, and there have been plenty of opportunities for student input via the academic representation system. In this report I'll outline what I and the class reps have been up to this semester, and some of the things we're planning for next year.

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School President of Earth and Environmental Sciences

The SEES Academic Rep Team

We're lucky enough to have a great team of class reps in our school this year, who have been very proactive about liaising with staff over the day-to-day issues that have arisen. I decided to start having informal class rep meetings each Friday, which turned out to be a really helpful way to share information and ideas. We also started a class rep facebook group, again as a way to share ideas in a less formal setting, and this has been really fruitful in terms of getting the team working better together to represent the student body.

Remember that if you have any comments or concerns your class rep is a great first point of contact, so don't hesitate to get in touch – we're here to help!

Feedback

I placed a strong emphasis this semester on gathering student feedback and working with staff to act upon it. The class reps came up with a number of creative ways to gather feedback, involving post-it notes, online surveys and lots of chocolate! Students made the most of this and we had excellent response rates. This feedback was formally conveyed to the school at the Student-Staff Consultative Committee (SSCC) meeting in December where we discussed a wide range of issues including coursework feedback times, clarity of staff communications, and timetabling of deadlines.

This semester also saw the University-led Review of Learning and Teaching, which happens to each school once every five years. The whole student body was surveyed, and focus groups also gave feedback to the panel in person. This was generally felt to be a productive process that should result in positive change within the school, but the formal report has yet to be released.

Turnout for the Module Evaluation Questionnaires was low at first, but picked up when the class reps encouraged students to participate. A number of staff commented to me that the feedback they received through the MEQs was very valuable and will be used to inform future changes.

I also sit on the school's Teaching Council which meets once a semester. This semester we raised several points from the SSCC meeting and were able to make progress with most of them, including changes to the way the MGeol programme is handled, clarification of coursework expectations, and staff responsiveness.

Events

I was involved in organising a number of events in Semester 1, including:

- Freshers' Welcome Lunch: A chance for the incoming first year students to meet with staff and honours students at the very start of term.
- Students' Prizegiving: When academic awards for last year are presented and students are welcomed into the new academic year with an abundance of pizza.
- Hydrogeology careers talk by St Andrews alumnus Alastair Black: This went down exceptionally well with those who attended.
- Q&A with the school's current PhD students: The PhD rep and I organised this to help honours and MSc students to decide if pursuing a PhD may be the right path for them. Many attendees found this event extremely helpful.
- GeoBus Mars Night: Students have the chance to volunteer with our school's amazing outreach programme to help deliver geoscience workshops to high school pupils around Scotland and gain valuable science communication experience. This event was organised to raise awareness of this opportunity, via the medium of a film screening, pizza, and some fun hands-on activities.
- MIST Student Seminars: This was a set of talks given by honours students who had benefitted from funding from the Mining Institute of Scotland Trust (MIST) and/or the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining (IOM³) help towards the costs of completing their research dissertations in the summer. This was a great way for students to learn about the opportunities available, and was followed by a wine and cheese networking evening.
- Second years' careers session: Pam Andrews from the Careers Centre gave a talk to the second year students about career options, and I went along to talk about internship options and the Laidlaw scholarship.
- ES1002 talk: A couple of second year students volunteered to speak to the first years about the wonders that next semester has to offer them, should they choose to take the Earth Sciences module. The first years appreciated being given this information and seeing the enthusiasm of our second year students.

- Laidlaw seminars: Our Laidlaw scholars were invited to contribute to the school's lunchtime seminar series, usually given by PhD students, postdocs and visiting scholars.
- GeoSoc events: Our school is lucky to have very close ties to the Geological Society, which this semester hosted a great Freshers' BBQ, a bake sale and a pub quiz.
- Knowledge share: We had a number of extremely successful afternoons where students at all stages of study gathered in the lab and helped each other with practical geoscience skills such as fossil identification and optical microscopy. Junior students reported that they learned a lot and enjoyed having a more informal setting in which to ask questions, and senior students enjoyed the chance to refresh their skills and pass on tips.

Ongoing projects and next semester

I had several meetings this semester working on student mental health within our school. We have successfully clarified the pathways that should be taken by students suffering difficulties, and next semester will be working to advertise these better to students. This semester there was excellent engagement of staff to mark the 45th anniversary of Nightline in St Andrews by raising awareness of this service.

I also participated in the University Learning & Teaching Space Review, which is working to consider how the university should best utilise the spaces available to it in the coming years and decades. I will be reporting the results of this back to students next semester once they are released.

Next semester is set to feature an exciting set of events. There is a university-wide careers week in Week 2, and we will be hosting school-specific events throughout the semester. The much-loved "This is Your Geological Life" event, where students interview lecturers about their lives and careers, is due to make a return along with appropriate quantities of pizza. We will be hosting the regional heat of the Young Persons' Lecture competition, in conjunction with the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining. The "Knowledge Share" events were so well-received that we will certainly be holding more next semester, and I'm keen to encourage a wider variety of events where students from different year groups and degree pathways get a chance to interact. There will also be a wide array of GeoSoc events including socials, the annual GeoBall, and hopefully an exciting trip away!

Conclusions

It's been a busy year so far and looks set to continue that way next semester! I'm finding being president very rewarding so far; it's a privilege to represent such an enthusiastic and engaged group of students. We are also fortunate to have some great staff members who are genuinely keen to listen to your suggestions, so keep them coming!