

SCHOOL PRESIDENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SEMESTER ONE REPORT

24th January 2018

Introduction for staff and students:

This brief report is intended to explain what the Class Representatives and I have been working on for the duration of semester one. This is produced to help inform you about my work, whilst also providing a basis of work that can be built on further by my successor.

I have thoroughly enjoyed working as School President over the last semester, and am excited to continue this work until my successor takes over the role in July.

Thank you for reading this and taking an interest in academic representation within the School,

Best wishes,

Abi Whitefield

School President of Geography and Sustainable Development, 2016-2017, 2017-2018.

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1. Elections

The class representative elections within the school were very successful this year! We had over 45 nominees, for 24 positions, meaning that almost all of our election races were contested. In some instances, there were at least 9 candidates for 3 available positions! I think this made it one of the most successful class rep elections ever. These class reps have been very enthusiastic and hard working this semester, and I am looking forward to continue working with them as this next semester progresses.

Postgraduate class rep elections were also contested, which is a first! The class reps for these courses particularly have been full of ideas, including running many events for their students, which is fantastic. I'm hoping that the enthusiasm from the masters class reps will soon be followed within the PhD community.

With the class reps for third year Sustainable Development both going on semester's abroad during this second semester, new class reps have been selected. These will soon be trained with help from the Director of Education!

2. Staff-Student Consultative Committee's

The SSCC is a place for class representatives and myself to provide feedback on individual modules and courses to staff within the School. These meetings have been divided into honours and sub-honours meetings, which are further divided into geography or sustainable development, meaning we have four separate undergraduate SSCC meetings twice a semester. This year, the class reps have been meeting with myself for a meeting a week before each SSCC, to discuss any feedback which can then be presented to staff before the SSCC. This has allowed the SSCC meetings to be more productive, as staff are aware of the issues and compliments that have come up in the feedback before the meetings, and therefore these act as a forum to help fix existing issues.

For the first time, postgraduate SSCC sessions have been introduced. These run in a similar format to the undergraduate SSCC's, but allow the masters postgraduate class reps to discuss issues more in depth with the relevant staff. These have been particularly successful and have allowed staff to act on issues that may previously not have been seen.

We have held two SSCC sessions this semester, held in October and November. Both were very productive and a variety of changes have been made since them. These SSCC forums really are very valuable within the School, and are helping us continually improve. We have had high levels of feedback for these meetings (aided by the handing out of post-it notes within classes) which have been very useful for the School.

3. Welcome Events

We held two very successful welcome events to help introduce new Geography and Sustainable Development students into the School in September. Students were also given a welcome booklet with any information they may need about the school, academic representation and the societies.

The first event was a picnic and beach walk, which was not deterred by the weather! The picnic was held within the Forbes Room, and was followed by a beach walk led by Prof Bill Austin and Dr Tim Stjanovic to West Sands. This was both informative and entertaining, and was attended by at least 40 students!

The second welcome event held was a Cheese and Wine event, specifically for first year students. This was highly successful and allowed staff to introduce themselves to the new students. This was run jointly with GeogSoc and SDSoc, who provided the cheese!

4. Employability and Careers

At the beginning of the semester, an internship event was held. This enabled students to learn from older students within the school. Four kind volunteers who had undertaken internships during the previous summer presented their experiences to around 20 students, providing insight into what it is like to work in a variety of industries and sectors. Feedback for this event was very positive. Hopefully this event will have been helpful in inspiring students to take up internship work in the summer.

5. Social Events

Staff-Student Putting was the first social event hosted by the school this semester! This was run and organised by Iga Jozefiak. 10 students competed against staff to try and win the Himalayan Ryder Cup! Although the staff came out on top, a great time was had by all. I would love to see this become an annual event. Next semester, staff-student football will once again return!

Staff-student lunches have also been held throughout this semester. Those who have attended these have found them thoroughly enjoyable. Although initial weeks were well attended, as the semester got busier, fewer students have been signing up for these events. As staff are increasingly busy within the school, these will no longer be run in semester two.

The next event held was the SGSD Christmas Party! This was very well attended, with around 100 staff (and their families) and students turning up. Mulled wine, mince pies and festive snacks were enjoyed. The crowds were entertained by The Other Guys, and even paid a visit by Father Christmas and his little helper. Thanks go to Bill and the team of secretaries for working so hard to make this a success.

The final events of the semester were held in revision week, to help de-stress everybody before exam season. The first included a collaboration with Guide Dog Society, which involved three Guide Dogs (including puppies) coming into the School for cuddles and fun. This event helped to relax students, and also helped to raise money for the charity – a win-win situation! Over 50 students and staff attended. The last event of the semester was a relaxing yoga session, run by one of our own students. This was the perfect way to end revision week, and was attended by both staff and students.

6. Mentoring Scheme

A formal mentoring scheme has been introduced to the school. First year students were matched to volunteers from more experienced years, who were able to answer any questions they may have. This matching of students was based on the subjects they have taken and any hobbies or interests they may have. This scheme seems to have been successful, with over 40 first year students now having a mentor. I hope this will continue and progress further into the future.

7. Communication

The weekly emails sent out by myself have tried to help and keep students up to date with what is happening in and around the school! I have successfully managed to remember (just) to send out this email every week, and hope to continue to do so throughout the coming semester. Students seem to have engaged well with these emails, and I hope they have been useful!

I believe Facebook communication has also improved this semester, with regular updates being posted to the School of Geography and Sustainable Development Facebook group. This group has more members than ever! Individual course Facebook groups have also been used well.

8. Education Committee and School President's Forum

The Education Committee is comprised of the School Presidents, the Faculty Presidents, the Director of Education, and the Postgraduate Convenor. We discuss issues that crop up across schools on a university-wide level, before taking these issues to be discussed with the Proctor, the Rector, and the Deans at the School Presidents Forum.

This Committee has enabled School Presidents over the last semester to learn a lot from each other, about how others run things within their schools. We have also been able to deal with and vote on a variety of issues that have come up, including the administration of Lecture Capture technologies.

9. Teaching Committee

As School President, I am allowed to sit on the School's Teaching Committee, which consists of senior staff within the School. Through the last semester a lot of interesting changes have been discussed in this committee. Currently, the discussion of which modules will be available next year are being decided. There has also been a lot of discussion over the restructuring of the second semester for third years, and of fourth year. Changes have already been made to the structure of next semester for third years, in response to feedback given by last years class reps. Hopefully these changes will have resulted in some improvements. Feedback will be gathered by students this semester to see whether these changes have been fruitful.

10. Revision Rooms

Once again, the school was able to provide rooms for revision during the revision and exam weeks within the first semester. These rooms are very useful and have enabled students quiet space to study when other areas of the university are under too much demand. I believe rooms should regularly be made available to study during revision weeks, as this provides much needed study space when demand is high for university centric places.

11. Mental Health

At the beginning of the semester, I raised my own concern with the School that there is no uniform policy or pathway for students to speak to staff members within the school about their mental health if they are in need of help. Although student services is their for students, I believed there should be individuals within the school that can help students if they are in need. Since I had this discussion with the Head of School, the school has been very proactive in making staff aware of these issues. In December, many staff were trained in mental health first aid by student services. After this, an email was sent out to all students making them aware of the trained staff, and showing that the school is willing to speak to people when they are in need. I believe this is a massive step forward within the school, and wish to further this progress throughout the next semester.

12. Collaboration with GeogSoc and SDSoc

I have worked hard this year to encourage collaboration of the school with both GeogSoc and SDSoc. These societies have worked hard individually and together this semester, and I am excited as to what this collaboration could result in in the future. I have loved being more involved with these societies,

and I believe the academic representation system, school and societies will benefit from this increased collaboration. I would love to see this continue over the next semester.

13. Looking Forward

I believe the last semester has been very successful for the school, and academic representation within it. The SSCC's dates for this semester have been organised, and I hope we can continue to make the changes needed, highlighted in your feedback, to improve the school. I am excited for the coming election of my successor, and am looking forward to working with them to make a smooth transition for next year. As always, I am keen to run more events! Please let me know if there is anything you would like to see run over the next semester. We also have academic audit this semester which will be a very busy time!

Wishing you all the best for semester two!