DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT

STUDENT STAFF LIAISON COMMITTEE

MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, 21st JANUARY 2015

PRESENT:
Andrea Aalstad, Andreea Antuca, Jacopo Casadei, Jodie Clark, Spencer Dennis, Julianna Doughty, Natasha Ezrow, Becky Fray, Muhammad Haji Awang Zaini, Lexi Keegan, Lucia Pantigoso Vargas, Evelina Semaskevic, Sallyann West, Merel Ypinga,

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Katharina Fleiner, Aleksandra Kamenova, Raluca Pahontu, Miruna-Elena Popa, Rosalind Redstone, Abi Reid and Roxana Tompea.

2. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING ACTION POINTS

The First-Year Administrator communicated updates on the action points from the last meeting as follows:

- **Previous Action Point** – *The First Year Administrator will discuss the assessment of GV252 with the Module Supervisor and feed back to students.* – Completed and communicated to students.

- **Previous Action point** – *The Peer Mentor Co-ordinator will develop a structured Peer Mentor job description for next year’s recruitment.* – In progress.

- **Previous Action point** – *Course Reps to get together and think of ways in which to advertise the student survey in a more positive way and assist students to understand them more easily.* – This point was not completed at the time of the meeting and is ongoing however the Undergraduate Education Officer said that this point would be further developed with the Capstone Project.

- **Previous Action Point** – *The First Year Administrator will investigate the timings of the tap in system.* – Completed and communicated to students.

- **Previous Action Point** – *The UG Education Officer will distribute notes on Plagiarism and Referencing to all students.* – Completed and communicated to students.

- **Previous Action Point** – *The Senior Advisor and Administrators will discuss the possibility of a note taking skills class.* – The Undergraduate Education Officer said that this point would be further developed with the Capstone Project.
• **Previous Action Point** – *The UG Education Officer will find out what other staff think about putting all materials on Moodle.* – This point will be discussed at the upcoming Departmental Meeting.

3. **PROVIDE SUBMITTED ARC**

The submitted ARC was previously circulated.

The Undergraduate Education Officer said that the report was updated with points from the previous meeting. She added that she is experimenting with different combinations of assessment to see which work best.

4. **ISSUES TO TAKE FORWARD TO THE DEPARTMENTAL MEETING**

Four Student Representatives put themselves forward to go to the Departmental Meeting on Wednesday, 11\(^{th}\) February 2015.

The following issues were raised to take forward to the meeting:

- **GV711**: Students are said to be reluctant to go to the employability module as it carries no credits, and it was expressed that the material has been learned by students at GCSE and A-Level.

- **GV252**: Students expressed that they would prefer to have reading assignments to count towards their coursework. The Undergraduate Education Officer pointed out that this would create too much marking for GTAs. Students also said that the readings were not discussed in the seminar and they were extremely difficult to find.

- **Election Debate Proposal** – The Politics Society are organising an Election Debate Proposal to cover the five main parties including the Green Party. It was decided that this did not need to be brought up at the Departmental Meeting as it was resolved.

- **Disparity of workload between terms**: The Second Year Student Representative expressed that there is no value for money; students are paying for three terms but there is no teaching in the summer, only exams. She also said that deadlines tend to all be on one day at the end of term; the Undergraduate Education Officer said that students have to learn to manage deadlines effectively. She also said that the Capstone Project will hopefully iron out these issues. The Second Year Student Representative said there should be more of a balance between coursework and exams as there is nothing in the summer.

- **Support classes for Stata**: The Final Year Student Representative explained that the Essex Business School have second and third year students volunteering their time to teach first-year students Stata. The Undergraduate Education Officer said
that the top performers in related modules could be approached to run a lab, but they would need to be compensated. It was suggested that Personal Tutors may be able to help with this and more time was needed to run support labs. Students expressed that Economics students find Stata very easy as they are exposed to it in their first year, whereas Government students find it difficult as their first encounter with Stata is in the second year. It was suggested by the Undergraduate Education Officer that a lab could be run once a week and students could gain support, using it as a “drop in” service.

- **Action Point** – Support classes for Stata to be investigated and discussed further by the UG Education Officer to see whether this would be viable.

Students then asked whether it would be possible to have a breakdown of where their fees are spent; the Undergraduate Education Officer said it may be difficult to provide this.

- **Action Point** – The First-Year UG Administrator will investigate as to whether these are obtainable.

They also asked whether a meeting with the Course Director of PPE would be possible as there was a disparity of experience between modules. Students were advised that they could set this up themselves if they wished.

The issue of clashing modules was discussed; especially with core modules. It was explained that the Central Timetable Office deal with the timetable, so the department is not in control of this. A student asked why the Seminar for Law & Politics is being cancelled, and the Undergraduate Education Officer explained that this is due to low numbers, but ideas are currently being discussed for something to replace this module.

The issue of Listen Again was discussed, with students feeling aggravated that with such a coursework-focused first term this facility is not available to them. The Undergraduate Education Officer explained that in her experience lots of students do not take notes and aren’t engaging, therefore Listen Again is not favoured by academic colleagues. There was a question regarding whether Student Support Notifications are now sent to the Head of Department, and it was confirmed that they are not.

5. **UPDATES ON ANY PLANNED CURRICULUM CHANGES**

The Undergraduate Education Officer explained that proposals are being put forward for new spring term modules to alleviate the inconsistencies between terms that have been reported by students. The proposal for the Capstone Project has been sent to the Education Director to introduce a third year project that begins with teaching research related skills in the first and second years. It was mentioned that Introduction to OLS is the only data module available in the second year.
6. STUDENT MATTERS

Newsletter/Newsletter Proposal
The First Year Student Representative proposed creating a Government newsletter to update students with regards to current events. He investigated the university newspaper – The Rabbit – and found that they do not have a political section. The Undergraduate Education Officer confirmed that this project could begin now, as long as it was sent to her for checking before it was sent out to students.

• Action Point – First Year Student Representative to draft a first edition of the newsletter and send it for checking to the UG Education Officer.

Listen Again
This item was discussed under point 4.

The disparity in workload between terms 1&2 and term 3
This item was discussed under point 4.

Communications between departments, especially between Government and Philosophy and Government and Law.
The Undergraduate Education Officer said that she communicates regularly with Law but not with Philosophy.

Election Debate Proposal
This item was discussed under point 4.

Increasing “Feedback from Student Scores”
The Third Year Student Representative embarked on independent research by visiting other departments to ask them how they process feedback from student scores. She found that they used social media, notice boards and pre arrival contact with administrative staff to display and communicate feedback from student scores, particularly as a “we said – you did” project.

• Action Point – UG Education Officer and Administrators to investigate how the Government Department can effectively give feedback to students in an effective manner.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Students expressed that the Common Room, whilst nice, has a cold and impersonal feel. They requested more personal touches, such as student work being put on the walls and a pin-board. The First Year and Second and Third Year Administrators expressed that pin boards were removed because they were so messy.
• **Action Point** – UG Administrators to investigate the possibility of a pin board for the common room.

It was mentioned that GV212 has a 7000 word research paper and it was explained that this was due to there no longer being an exam.

The Second Year Student Representative said that students taking joint degrees often don’t know which department they belong to.

• **Action Point** – The First-Year Undergraduate Administrator will generate a list of Government courses to put on Moodle.

Students asked whether the Student Conference will be taking place this year. The Administrators explained that they had no information about this as it has been taken out of their hands. The Undergraduate Education Officer said that this was still being discussed as there were some budget concerns. Students asked if they could arrange this themselves and it was confirmed that they could.

**Action Point Summary:**

• **Previous Action point** – *The Peer Mentor Co-ordinator will develop a structured Peer Mentor job description for next year’s recruitment.* – In progress – to be updated at the next SSLC.

• **Previous Action point** – *Course Reps to get together and think of ways in which to advertise the student survey in a more positive way and assist students to understand them more easily.* – This point was not completed at the time of the meeting and is ongoing however the Undergraduate Education Officer said that this point would be further developed with the Capstone Project – to be updated at the next SSLC

• **Previous Action Point** – *The Senior Advisor and Administrators will discuss the possibility of a note taking skills class.* – The Undergraduate Education Officer said that this point would be further developed with the Capstone Project – to be updated at the next SSLC.

• **Previous Action Point** – *The UG Education Officer will find out what other staff think about putting all materials on Moodle.* – This point will be discussed at the upcoming Departmental Meeting – to be updated at the next SSLC.

• **Action Point** – Support classes for Stata to be investigated and discussed further by the UG Education Officer to see whether this would be viable.

• **Action Point** – The First-Year UG Administrator will investigate as to whether financial breakdowns of student fees are obtainable.
• **Action Point** – First Year Student Representative to draft a first edition of the newsletter and send it for checking to the UG Education Officer.

• **Action Point** – UG Education Officer and Administrators to investigate how the Government Department can provide feedback for students in an effective manner.

• **Action Point** – UG Administrators to investigate the possibility of a pin board for the common room.

• **Action Point** – The First-Year Undergraduate Administrator will generate a list of Government courses to put on Moodle.