

Council
13th June 2011

Deputy President Education Report
A note by Alex Dahinten

College Day Working Group

Although this working group has not convened since last Council, I would like to give an update on the situation. At the most recent Humanities Committee, the proposals were discussed and it turns out that the department was not consulted on the latest proposals. This contradicts what was presented at the working party meeting. For the next working party meeting, on top of creating a union response consisting of the feedback from council, I will also propose that a representative from humanities sits on the committee permanently; they are turning into a major stakeholder. The committee next meets on **Tuesday 12 July**.

Journal Pricing

This issue is becoming more and more relevant to us as a Union since we are now approaching the time where big decisions need to be made. As you will see from the paper to be discussed later, our role should extend further than just publically supporting this initiative; we need to play a major role in letting our students know the potential consequences to any changes to this provision. More on this later...

Departmental Wiki Working Party Meeting (06/06/2011)

The key stakeholder in the Departmental Wiki project met (officially) for the first time on Monday. Requirements and potential problems were discussed in a very forward-thinking atmosphere. I am currently collecting the course codes for all modules at Imperial so that we can create a Wiki environment for every Department. The idea is to have the content managed and publicised by our year/Departmental reps; the wiki will be up and running by (latest) end of July.

Another project which ties into this is creating a similar resource for postgrads; however this will have different requirements and is currently being looked at by the GSA, Graduate Schools and myself.

Rectors Awards

I was invited to attend a number of meetings to discuss college-wide nominations for different Rector's Awards (Excellence in Teaching, Research Supervision, Pastoral Care and Student Experience). Going through the nominations took many hours of my time, however I was extremely pleased at the number of our lecturers and staff which truly care about students and put their education first.

Colours Committee (08/06/2011)

On Wednesday Becca, all Sabbs, FU Presidents and 6 reps (3 from RWB; 3 from CSB) got together to scrutinise the Union Award nominations. I was very pleased to see a number of academic reps put forward for awards this year. Also, this will be the first year we award a President's award for Representation to the department which had the strongest student representation over the entire year.

Transferable Skills Working Group (02/06/2011)

This working group has recently been set up to review the current professional skills provided by Imperial and to see whether this can be improved over the next few years. The reasons for this are plentiful; the main one is that our graduate recruiters tend to feel that our graduates are leading in their fields, but lack certain communication, presentation and group-working skills. Two sub-committees have been set up:

- 1) PG TS Working Group: this group is mainly looking at how to provide the same quality and breath of TS courses now that the Roberts funding is stopping. Student representation on this committee is through the GSA.
- 2) UG TS Working Group: this group is reviewing our current UG TS provisions, with the goal of improving them. In the spring term (**year 1 vs. year 2?**) of next year we will be introducing a new and exciting optional module to a few trial Departments – Imperial Horizons. This module will explore different topics of science which are being discussed in the news and will be mainly discussion-based. Groups of students (from different departments) will then have the chance to create videos, conduct interviews and write funding proposals to do with this topic. It is designed to run in collaboration with the Science Communication course and engage leading academics and PG students in UG teaching through interactive, engaging and thought provoking processes; it has the potential to fill a niche here at Imperial. Departments will inevitably need to review their own provisions and see whether there is an overlap with what this course offers and make sure that it is complemented with degree-specific TS learning.

The long term plan is to make this a core course in the future, for EVERY student.

Union Strategy

Some great feedback from students and staff is being incorporated into our strategy document. The one area I wanted to make Council aware of is that many students are looking for the Union to take a more active role within their academic life. This is something we have never really made a priority, however it seems like we need to in the future. To what extent this will be done still needs to be discussed with next year's Sabbs.

Manifesto

All things considered, I am quite happy with the number of things I've managed to work on this year. Some have been less obvious (increasing all survey turnouts considerably, creating Staff-Student Committee guidelines) and others more so (improved representation system (FRM) and rep training).

Going back to my manifesto and addressing all points individually:

- 1) **Spread out coursework deadlines**: although I did not manage to introduce a "policy" on the max. Number of deadlines one can have in a week, I did bring this up and lobby Departments all through the year to take this into account. Feedback seems to be that it has improved, however more work needs to be done on this front.
- 2) **Access to previous exam answers**: college has a very strict policy on this. The way around this has been the Wiki's, where students can post their worked out solutions for others to use. Once this is done over the summer, I am very optimistic that it will be very well received by students and help with next year's exam revision.
- 3) **Encourage student input**: as mentioned previously, survey participation has taken a massive leap forward this year. I have introduced Union vouchers to our shop which have proven to be great incentive vouchers. Furthermore, actively working with Departmental reps and running small-scale campaign has gone a long way this year.

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- 4) **More constructive feedback on exams and coursework:** to a certain extent this was my greatest challenge, while being the easiest at the same time. From day 1, College was keen to work with us on improving feedback. In order to address the timeliness issue, I proposed that Departments should be returning your average piece of CW within 2 weeks and (more importantly) that students should always be told by then they can expect their feedback by. College took this to mean a strict 2 week deadline; regardless I think the timeliness has broadly improved.

Regarding the quality, I was working with College to create guidelines for staff and students on what they expect regarding feedback. Recently, this project has been taken down a different route (reported at previous council). I will be working very closely with my successor to have something in place by the beginning of next year.

- 5) **Restore postgraduate representation:** not knowing much about how the PG-side of Imperial works before taking on the job, I had my work cut out. I managed to create a completely new rep training program for both UG and PG (first PG rep training ever) – both of these sessions were incredibly well attended and well -received. I definitely cannot take all of the credit for the advances made in PG representation; without Andrew Keenan (Union Rep Coordinator) or Deena Blumenkranz (GSA President) much of what was achieved this year could not have been done. The GSA and its rep system have a great future ahead; the Union has definitely opened its eyes this year with regards to PGs!
- 6) **Guarantee academic well-being:** beautifully vague. I would hope that I have managed to improve it, if only by a small margin. ☺

Alles Gute und viel Glück für die Zukunft! (“All the best for the future!”)

Alex Dahinten
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