



Teaching Matters

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A warm end-of-term greeting from LSE's Teaching and Learning Centre. We hope your academic year has started well. In this edition of Teaching Matters, we're highlighting good practice from the 2010/11 Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee review submissions from four departments (Geography and Environment, Mathematics, Media and Communications, Social Policy) and three double degree programmes (LSE-Peking University MSc in

International Affairs, LSE-Sciences Po MSc in European Affairs, LSE-University of Southern California or Fudan University MSc in Global Media and Communication). We also have news of several initiatives aimed at promoting the research culture among undergraduates – a major focus of teaching practice this year.

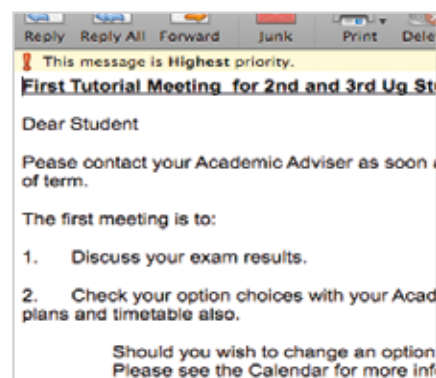
Academic advising

Plenty of good practice is on show to indicate that departments are taking seriously their responsibilities for providing effective and extensive student support through the academic advising system

The Department of Social Policy operates a system of regular email reminders, to both Academic Advisers and students, prompting students to arrange meetings with their advisers, suggesting to them what might usefully be discussed depending on the time of year, and reminding them of the purpose and value of the meetings. The department also makes

use of its Undergraduate Programme Tutors' Forum, established in 2009/10, to provide course and programme expertise to Departmental Tutors when, for instance, programme-transfer applications are being assessed.

Academic Advisers in the Department of Media and Communications hold group sessions for their advisees at the



Detail from the Department of Social Policy's first Michaelmas Term email to second and third year undergraduate students

- start of Michaelmas Term which act as useful ice breakers. New staff are paired with experienced staff and attend each other's sessions.

The Department of Mathematics has several ways of supporting students who are not performing well or are disengaged for other reasons. On all of its first year courses, it provides optional Extra Example or Help sessions, which create an additional possible contact hour each week for students. The department also hosts the Mathematics and Statistics Society's popular Homework Help sessions throughout the year and runs revision sessions for all its undergraduate students in the Summer Term. Students whose attendance is poor are systematically picked up by the Undergraduate Course Co-ordinator who notifies the Departmental Tutor who can then see the students and warn them of the likely consequences of continuing to miss classes.

Several measures have been introduced in recent years by the Department of Geography and Environment to raise the learning experience and study satisfaction of its undergraduate students. Undergraduate Programme Directors, whose role is to administer, monitor and review programmes, have been established, and they run informal focus groups with students to gather feedback on programmes and courses. Further, the department has set up an Undergraduate Teaching Task Force, headed by Dr Richard Perkins, which meets regularly to review departmental provision in general.

At the MSc level, the Department of Media and Communications has introduced some innovative approaches to dissertation guidance. These include group supervision sessions, in addition



to individual ones, in the Lent and Summer terms, some of which are preceded by plenary sessions to review expectations and provide feedback on progress, and all timed to fit around deadlines and exams. The department has also produced a short film, uploaded to Moodle, made up of interviews with supervisors giving hints and tips on producing a dissertation. To cover the summer break, a system of PhD students employed as "dissertation officers" (backed up by faculty on a rota) is used to respond to student queries on any aspect of dissertation writing.

PhD students in both the Social Policy and Geography and Environment departments are encouraged to make

use of the PhD log on LSE for You as a means of keeping a record of all supervision meetings, agreements about work and notes relating to future meetings and the general timetable of activity.

"We have found the PhD log to be particularly valuable in helping keep 'associate' supervisors informed of progress."

Department of Social Policy

This year's edition of our Handbook for Departmental Tutors and Academic Advisers is now available. Read it online at lse.ac.uk/tlc/publications (under Handbooks) or request a hard copy by emailing tlc@lse.ac.uk



Feedback and assessment

The focus placed on feedback and assessment in the School's Teaching Task Force recommendations has prompted much reflection and many good ideas among LSE's academic departments

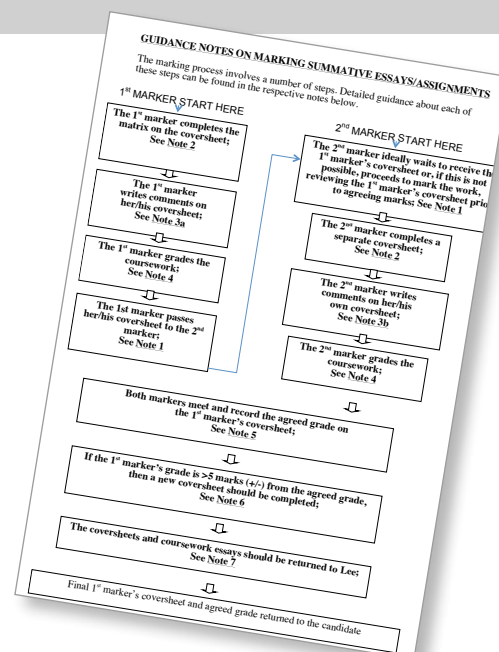
Diversity of assessment techniques, especially on its undergraduate courses, has long been practised in the Department of Geography and Environment: essays, dissertations, fieldwork exercises, projects and practical work are all involved. More recent developments include the use of cover sheets to provide feedback for assessed work; written feedback and a provisional, indicative mark on both formative and summative undergraduate course essays; a guidance document for staff on providing feedback; and, for the 2011/12 year, trial mock exams for selected first year courses to allow students to familiarise themselves with the system of university exam assessment, which often differs radically from the way they were assessed in school.

The Department of Social Policy, on top of the assessment and feedback arrangements common to all its programmes, has introduced tailored practices for several of its core courses and programmes. For instance,

- In SA451 (the core course for the MSc in Social Policy Research) individual, face-to-face feedback sessions, one in Lent Term and one in the Summer Term, have been developed, to provide feedback on the formative essays students have written over the Christmas and Easter vacations respectively.

- The MSc Social Policy and Development programme has produced a "feedback policy" that outlines the nature of feedback, highlights the formative assignments and explains that the aim in the programme is to encourage "feedback literacy" among students and staff.
- In response to indications that some students were having difficulties with written work, SA105 (a first year Crime and Society course) instigated a marking essay exercise in Week 11 and a mock exam (with one question only) in Week 21 last year. Exam answers were considerably improved compared to the previous year so the early signs are that this has proved worthwhile.
- On a number of health and health economics courses, there are "progress tests" which mirror half of a final exam. This is then marked as if it were a final exam and students are offered individual feedback in which their work is discussed.

Electronic feedback template forms for formative and summative course work were introduced in 2010/11 by the Department of Media and Communications and are used across the department. The forms provide feedback in the form of free text commentary and standardised scales which correspond to the published marking criteria. Staff can also indicate whether students should seek advice from their Academic Adviser or other services like the Language Centre. The department has invested much time, and used the support of CLT, to achieve technological implementation of the forms and has this year developed a tailor-made solution to the challenge of returning the forms anonymously to students.



An extract from the Department of Geography and Environment's *Guidance Notes on Marking Summative Essays/Assignments*

"I got good and useful feedback on essays that helped improve my writing."

SA451 student

The Department of Mathematics will this year be providing an extra resource for students in the form of a mocked-up sample attempt at an exam question in one of two of its courses, together with information on how such an answer would be graded, with explanations. Feedback is also routinely provided to students by supervisors on various preliminary versions of dissertations required for its MSc Dissertation in Applicable Mathematics.

Don't forget our of notes of guidance on feedback. They provide advice and tips, plus sample pro-forma, for giving feedback on essays, presentations, quantitative work and exams. Download them (and the pro-forma separately) at lse.ac.uk/tlc/publications (under Notes of guidance) or request hard copies by emailing tlc@lse.ac.uk



Supporting GTAs and guest teachers

In recognition of the important role that GTAs play in delivering teaching across the School, departments are developing solid support and monitoring systems

The Department of Mathematics runs a system of observation of GTAs and guest teachers. Their classes are observed in around Week 6 of their first term's teaching, then again in their second year of teaching and thereafter every two years. In addition, small-scale surveys of student opinions regarding the teaching of GTAs and guest teachers are conducted in around Week 7 of their first term, to get quick feedback and identify any potential problems. Once or twice a year, the department holds a lunchtime meeting where all GTAs and guest teachers are invited to discuss any issues that they or the department wish to raise and in the Summer Term the department hosts a thank you lunch.

The main form of GTA engagement with teaching in the Department of Media and Communications is through its MCLabs course, established in 2008/09 by Professor Robin Mansell and supported by the Teaching and Learning Development Fund. MCLabs provides a series of focused and intensive workshops designed to match the demands of the MSc academic year, so for instance there may be an initial session on how to approach academic reading, one on course-work preparation, another on the dissertation and another on exams. The workshops are conducted by three or four GTAs each year, backed up by weekly office hours and a summer dissertation support system. GTAs develop the MCLabs' curriculum in close

collaboration with the PhD Programme Director, Professor Lilie Chouliariaki, who holds termly meetings with the GTAs and invites informal reviews and recommendations throughout the year.

"Working on the MCLabs course is a great experience for a GTA because there is so much freedom for those of us in the team to design the course ourselves. Because it's a skills based course we can be creative in terms of exercises and how we deliver the material."

Sally Broughton Micova, Department of Media and Communications

The Social Policy Department relies heavily on GTAs not only for teaching undergraduate classes but also for marking of undergraduate summative essays and, on some first year courses in particular, second-marking of undergraduate examination papers. The support the department provides for these marking tasks – clear criteria in handbooks and on Moodle, advice from individual teaching staff, practice marking exercises, spot-checking of essays by teaching staff – suggests that it is well geared up to respond to recent TLAC recommendations that departments offer marking exercises or marking standardisation meetings for GTAs.

GTAs in the Department of Geography and Environment are benefiting from a whole range of new support mechanisms and requirements, including:

- the introduction of a Manager of GTAs as a new departmental responsibility (currently Dr Claire Mercer)
- a requirement that all new GTAs undertake the one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education
- a two-hour workshop at the start of Michaelmas Term to discuss good practice in class teaching and feedback provision
- a requirement that GTAs attend lectures if they teach classes on a course for the first time
- closer auditing of GTAs, especially new ones, by Course Managers
- invitations to departmental events normally open only to permanent staff and LSE Fellows
- commendations from the Head of Department to those GTAs who receive very good teaching evaluation marks (average of 1.4 or better)

In this way, it is hoped that GTAs will understand that they are an important and valued part of the department's teaching staff.

We've just published this year's edition of our Handbook for Graduate Teaching Assistants. Read it online at lse.ac.uk/tlc/publications (under Handbooks) or request a hard copy by emailing tlc@lse.ac.uk



Building esprit de corps on double degree programmes

Overcoming the challenges raised by linguistic, cultural and pedagogic differences on some double degree programmes promotes a strong sense of community among students

Some 160 students annually graduate from one of the nine double Master's degree programmes offered by LSE and a partner institution. These programmes see students spending one year at each institution – here we feature Peking University (PKU) in Beijing, Sciences Po in Paris, Fudan University in Shanghai and the University of Southern California's (USC) Annenberg School for Communication in LA.

Welcome/induction programmes are an important feature of all double degree programmes. Students on all three of the LSE-Sciences Po programmes, for instance, are, on acceptance of a place, sent information about registration, course selection and activating an email account at Sciences Po as well as an invitation to an optional (paying) two-week orientation programme. (Those who do not undertake the orientation programme receive two orientation days at the start of the academic year.) The same cohort, during their year in Paris, then spend a pre-induction day at LSE early in the Lent Term, during which they meet with the LSE Programme Director and academic and administrative staff from their home LSE department and with representatives from the Student Services Centre, the Accommodation Office and the Library. At an informal lunch hosted by their LSE department, they are given the opportunity to meet current students on the programme who can share their "insider's perspective".

Another important element of double degree programmes is regular communication between the institutions and the sharing of information. On the LSE-USC and LSE-Fudan MSc in Global Media and Communication programmes,



Students on the LSE-Fudan MSc in Global Media and Communication visiting Windsor Great Park during their induction at Cumberland Lodge

the institutions are in weekly and sometimes daily email contact with each other and visits between institutions are routine. Particularly important are the presences of Professor Chen Na (who runs the Fudan programme) and Professor Patti Riley (the USC programme) at the Cumberland Lodge induction for all students embarking on their first year of the programme at LSE, but an annual visit is also made by the LSE director for each programme, Professor Terhi Rantanen and Dr Bingchun Meng, to USC and Fudan respectively in the students' second years. The students themselves participate in this information-sharing by means of an annual video conference between first and second year students, which both groups find extremely valuable.

The LSE-PKU degree builds in linguistic skills to the induction for its MSc International Affairs programme. Non-Chinese students complete a Chinese language course before embarking on the programme; and this year Dr Svetozar Rajak, the programme's director in LSE's Department of International History and LSE Ideas, is piloting an Applied Study Skills in International Affairs course, with the assistance of funding

from the Teaching and Learning Development Fund and co-operation from staff in LSE's Teaching and Learning Centre and Language Centre, that aims to help Chinese students develop their English for Academic Purposes skills.

Information sharing is vital for this programme too, and the creation of

a single LSE-PKU website, hosted and maintained at LSE, and reviewed via monthly joint web information "check-ups", has gone a long way to ensuring that students have access to a reliable, one-stop source of information.

The relationships forged between students during double degree programmes can be strong and enduring, as illustrated by their determination to stay in touch. They feature strongly among the 7,400 followers of LSE's Alumni Association pages on Facebook and LinkedIn, and those on the LSE-Sciences Po programmes have established a dedicated double degrees website run by the alumni themselves.



Undergraduate research

The wish to foster a culture of research excellence at all levels across the School is prompting a range of opportunities and activities for undergraduate students

LSE GROUPS (Group Research Opportunity Undergraduate Projects) ran for the first time this summer as part of the School's Maximise Your Potential initiative. Designed by Dr Jane Pritchard and Dr Claire Gordon in LSE's Teaching and Learning Centre to provide a post-exam 'serious but fun' end to the year, it recruited 36 undergraduates to participate in a two-week original research project around the theme of sustainability, with a specific focus on either LSE or London.

The students, grouped in mixed years and mixed disciplines and with LSE GTAs acting as supervisors, came up with a fantastic array of projects:

- How effective has community participation been in enabling sustainable development around Dalston?
- The sustainability of communities: reconception and measurement
- Environmental sustainability in public transport: Is the choice of bus as a mode of transport in Westminster influenced by environmental concern?
- A wedding for the future: How sustainable was the Royal Wedding?
- To what extent is excess rail commuting socially unsustainable? The relationship between commuting, stress and the quality of life
- Determinants of successful implementation of environmental policies across London universities: The role of information, education and incentives



The winners of the LSE GROUPS best conference presentation, which examined the role of information, education and incentives in the implementation of environmental policies across London universities



The team behind the winning LSE GROUPS conference paper, which looked at the sustainability of the community in Greater Carpenters, a part of Stratford that falls within the 2012 Olympics development zone

The final afternoon of the fortnight was dedicated to a conference in the Hong Kong Theatre, at which Dr Vicky Hands, LSE's Head of Environmental Sustainability, gave the keynote address and each group delivered a ten-minute presentation of their research findings. Everyone received certificates and additional prizes were awarded for the best conference presentation and the best conference paper.

"The students' abilities and dedication exceeded my expectations. I was surprised by their quantitative and qualitative abilities, and pleased that I was able to offer guidance and advice."

LSE GROUPS supervisor

We'll be running LSE GROUPS again in 2012, so please tell your undergraduate students to look out for information about it from early Lent Term on the Teaching and Learning Centre website: lse.ac.uk/tlc

"LSE GROUPS allowed me to challenge myself by working in a team, which I had never done before, and certainly gave me an insight into the research process."

LSE GROUPS student

The winners of LSE GROUPS' best conference paper and best presentation have been put forward to the BCUR conference in Warwick this year. If their papers are accepted, two members of each group will attend and present their papers. Several of the groups are also exploring possibilities for publishing their papers.

The Department of Geography and Environment has been running its Independent Research Project (IRP) course for some years now. A requirement for some degrees, and optional for others, it offers third year undergraduates the opportunity to conduct their own independent research project on a geography topic of their choice and to submit a 10,000 word (maximum) document for assessment.

Carrying out the project requires the students to engage in the traditional research practices of

- reviewing the literature in their chosen topic area
- formulating a viable research question
- analysing primary and/or secondary evidence and other material appropriate to their investigation (often a case study, data set, archival source, fieldwork observation, survey results or interviews)

Students engaged in IRPs can draw on support from across the department. Structured workshops on dealing with common problems facing researchers using quantitative and qualitative methods are offered in both Michaelmas Term and Lent Term. In addition, students meet regularly with their Academic Advisers, who are effectively their project supervisors, throughout the process, and are also each assigned a PhD student in the department who is familiar with their research topic area and who can offer one-to-one guidance as the project develops.



A write-up of the conference on research led teaching held at LSE last year, and addressed by several LSE academics and students, is available at lse.ac.uk/tlc/publications



Do you have a success story about current or past students with dyslexia or other learning differences that you would be willing to share with others? LSE's Neurodiversity Service is working with Film Studies students from The Sixth Form College in Farnborough to make a short film promoting LSE to prospective students with learning differences, and is looking for good-news stories. If you would like to take part, please email s.blankfield@lse.ac.uk by 18 January. Filming takes place on 25 January.



Orientation 2011



The "International Marble Challenge", a team-building event for MSc Finance students



The Department of International Relations ran a pub quiz for its students



The Orientation Fair on Houghton Street



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