

# Teaching Matters

**Issue 28**  
January 2013

A very happy new year from LSE's Teaching and Learning Centre. We're delighted that this edition of Teaching Matters opens with a piece from Professor Paul Kelly, outlining how the School's strategy for teaching and learning is taking shape. It is followed by several illustrations of good practice from the departments and programmes reviewed by the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee in 2011/12. Scattered throughout are notices about events, publications and other resources, including the recently launched LSE teaching blog and May's Teaching Symposium event at which Professor Craig Calhoun will deliver the plenary address.

## The School's new Pro-Director for Teaching and Learning shares his thoughts on future teaching and learning strategy at LSE

One of the tasks facing a new Pro-Director for Teaching and Learning on taking up the role is to develop a teaching and learning strategy. I follow a Pro-Director who made a major impact through the 2008 Teaching Task Force

and I assume my position alongside a new Director who has launched a School-wide strategic review, of which teaching will be one important dimension. This creates a personal challenge but also a great opportunity.



As a first step, I have launched a further task force, this time a Task Force on Teaching and Career Development. I have deliberately chosen to use the same terminology as Professor Hartley as a way of both showing continuity and indicating that the need for a thorough periodic review of the School's teaching mission has not ended. When the Teaching Task Force was reviewed by Academic Board in 2012, the Board acknowledged the need to continue its work. To that end my task has been easy as I am merely following up on that recommendation. But that is not the end of the matter.

Having set up the Task Force on Teaching and Career Development to give substance to the longer term teaching and learning strategy I am mindful of the need not to pre-empt its outcomes by pre-judging the direction of that strategy. That said, the task force and the Director's wider strategic review do not exhaust the opportunity to identify what needs to be done. So, without prejudice, what do I think need to be the main strategic issues?

I would like to approach the strategy from the perspective of learning and not teaching. Teaching remains important, as without it learning generally does

not happen, but focusing on teaching can direct attention to managing poor performance, faculty workload and reward. All of these things are important – although poor performance is less common than claimed – but learning needs to be central to consideration of our teaching mission. Learning is the bit that directly involves the students and therefore they need to be involved in the discussions. But the focus on learning also changes the perspective from which we view opportunities and innovations.

LSE has always had a very traditional pedagogic model of lectures and classes. We are unlikely to change that, but

we do need to adapt it to the use of technology, not just in the classroom but also in the new social media around the lecture and class event. Some colleagues are already showing a great aptitude for these innovations as ways of rejuvenating our teaching model.

We also need to review the teaching estate and consider the places where learning happens in the School. Students are already leading the way in creating spaces for group work. In turn as teaching space changes so does the opportunity to do different things in classes and lectures as well as around them.

The 2008 Teaching Task Force demonstrated that the School does take teaching seriously. It is my hope that the Task Force on Teaching and Career Development will show that we take innovation seriously and that through this we can enhance not only the student's learning experience but also the opportunities for faculty to enjoy teaching. I hope to put enjoyment and innovation at the heart of a teaching and learning strategy.

**Paul Kelly**

## Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee 2011/12 findings

There was high praise across the board from the external members of the review teams that visited the four departments (Methodology Institute, as it was then, Sociology, International Relations and European Institute) and one double degree programme (LSE/Sciences Po Urban Policy) last academic year. International Relations' programmes were seen to be at the cutting edge of their fields; the Methodology Institute was praised for its "teaching philosophy"; Sociology was commended for the overall quality of its teaching and innovative methods of engagement with students; and the European Institute was congratulated on having successfully embedded examples of good practice identified in its previous review especially in relation to assessment and feedback.

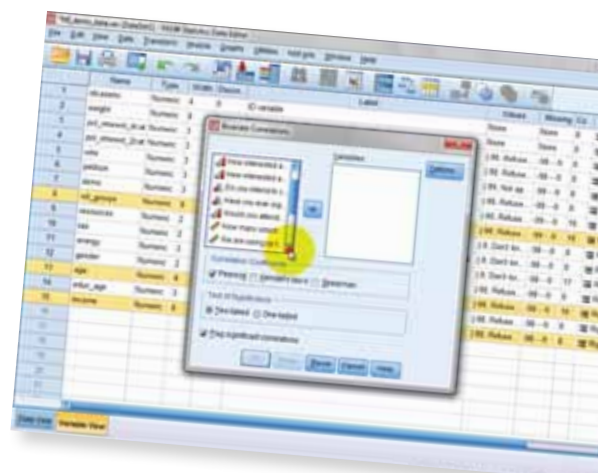
The Department of Methodology, as it is now, was praised for the layered, or staged, approach it has adopted to methods training at the School, much of it delivered through half-unit "hybrid" courses in collaboration with other departments or via student-friendly channels such as a methods surgery helpdesk. Here we focus on an innovative approach to developing students' use of SPSS and Stata software, through online video tutorials.

It is not uncommon for some students to struggle when first using SPSS and Stata software packages to analyse quantitative data, particularly when procedural and technical problems arise. The online videos – production of which were funded in part by LSE's Annual Fund and the School's Teaching and Learning Development Fund – were designed to smooth students' usage of

the software as tools for the application of the statistical analysis and techniques.

The video tutorials were inspired by other web-based initiatives, such as those hosted by UCLA and through the OU. These are indicative of a broader shift towards the provision of additional online support for student learning in statistical software training and the teaching of quantitative analysis. Importantly, the possibility of running the tutorials through screen-captured video content, as opposed to online written guidance or still visual imagery, offered the perfect medium to demonstrate practically the procedures and applications of the software.

The videos were recorded and edited by a team of GTAs in the department, with support from the Centre for Learning Technology, using Camtasia screen recording and capture software. A specially designed SPSS data file was provided for download in order



that students could work through the analyses as demonstrated by the videos.

The online tutorials loosely map sections of content on introductory courses in the Department of Methodology, which has a sizable student intake from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds, and the content of the tutorials supports learning by repeating and reinforcing the procedures and applications demonstrated in classes.

At the same time, the online tutorials have been designed to balance guiding the use of the software – as a specific form of training itself – with the need to ensure that the students understand the substantive interpretation of the statistical procedures. As Dr Sally Stares noted, “The aim was to show how the software works as a tool for the application of statistical theory. We’ve been really careful in the department about the fact that the courses involve both theory and substantive application ... Nevertheless, we do want to provide training in the software. Part of the hope of the tutorials was that we could get back some of the time in the classes that would otherwise be spent clarifying procedural problems.”

Students using the tutorials have responded very positively to the videos. As Dr Stares added, the project will be taken further in the next year with the development of video tutorials to support training on the range of qualitative data analysis packages used in the department, such as NVivo and Atlas.

**Support for PhD students in the European Institute – shown in the clarity of information about progression requirements in its handbook and the effectiveness of a Post Upgrade Progress Panel – was well received. But the department was particularly commended for its feedback practices and improved dissertation support, some features of which we detail here.**

Postgraduate students, in particular, tend to be more demanding in the volume and frequency of feedback that they expect on their work. The European Institute (EI) has built upon the already recognised high quality of feedback delivered on students’ essays to develop a range of feedback mechanisms and channels that provide students with a more rounded sense of appraisal of their work.

One of the more practical strategies adopted by the EI is to make the opportunities for feedback more visible. Changing the term “office hours” to “Feedback sessions and office hours” has been a simple strategy for “signposting” the opportunities for feedback on coursework. Moreover, students must receive feedback on at least one coursework submission in person. Other means of delivering a more comprehensive feedback “package” include increasing

the visibility of marking criteria, shifting coursework deadlines earlier into the Michaelmas Term to ensure feedback as early into the MSc programme as possible, and centralising LSE for You as a repository of all formative student assessment. One final novel strategy for improving feedback is the introduction of a student self-assessment, backed up by practical examples of students’ senses of their own progress, that can be discussed with academic advisers.

Dissertation support for taught postgraduate students has always posed a dilemma across departments at LSE, balancing the need for staff to pursue research agendas out of term time against the needs of students as dissertation submission approaches towards the end of the summer break. This means that adequate dissertation preparation and supervision prior to the summer “cut off” remains a pressing concern. In the European Institute, new practical initiatives have been deployed to respond to this concern, specifically reframing and clarifying the dissertation process. MSc students are now provided with both the conventional academic adviser as well as the appointment of a specialist dissertation supervisor, and a provisional dissertation plan is proposed in March. The students are now also required to submit a 2,000-3,000 word extended research essay – directed toward the theoretical, empirical or literary components of the dissertation – at the start of the Summer Term. Feedback is then provided to help the students prepare for the more demanding research and writing phases of the dissertation,

helping focus and guide students, and ensuring that projects are feasible and realistic in scope. Following the exam period, the final two weeks of the Summer Term are then devoted to further dissertation supervision and guidance. As Dr Vassilis Monastiriotis acknowledged, although this approach adds additional pressures for students around assessment periods, “all the students find this really useful because they realise it actually saves time in the long run”.

**Student engagement and support in the Department of Sociology was highly commended, and is illustrated in a broad range of activity and processes: clear and robust admissions and upgrade procedures for PhD students, an active Sociology Society, MSc dissertation support throughout the summer break, and effective collaboration with LSE Careers, to name only a few. Some particularly notable examples of engaging the interest of undergraduates on the department’s Crime, Deviance and Control course are featured here.**

“Meet the Crims is a project for students by students,” says Dr Janet Foster, who runs the Department of Sociology’s Crime, Deviance and Control course. With the help of PhD students from the department’s Mannheim Centre for Criminology, undergraduate students conduct and review video recorded interviews with seven selected expert criminologists each year. Students

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## Career development events for academic staff, Lent

**Wednesday 23 January**

### Using iThenticate

To support the School's piloting of the use of iThenticate text-matching software to compulsorily test all theses submitted for examination between January and September 2013, this session, led by Research Degrees Unit manager Louisa Green, will show the kind of outputs and reports that the software produces, enabling you to read and understand the reports accurately and give appropriate guidance to PhD students.

**Thursday 24 January**

### Blogging, press, web presence and social media

Build your impact with some expert guidance to making the most of traditional and new modes of communication.

**Friday 1 February**

### Using iThenticate

A repeat of the 23 January session.

**Monday 4 February**

### Alcohol and drugs

An opportunity to learn how to recognise the signs of excessive alcohol or drug use, when help might be needed and how to discuss with students.

**Monday 25 February**

### Equality and diversity in exams

LSE Registry Manager Damian Roberts will outline how to ensure that the processes and procedures for School examinations are compliant with equality legislation and LSE policies.

**Friday 1 March**

### Facing the media

A one-day workshop delivered by Media Players International and designed specifically for academic staff and early career researchers who need to communicate their work to a general audience.

**Monday 11 March**

### Dealing with difficult personal issues

A session that offers a range of strategies and techniques for helping you maintain a professional stance and manage emotional responses to difficult situations when dealing with students.

**Wednesday 13 March**

### Voice coaching

Leading voice coach Stewart Theobald will run one-to-one sessions focusing on some aspect of the use of your voice – pitch and tone, intonation, voice strain, for example – and can also help with more general presentation skills such as handling nerves, connecting with your audience or speaking to large groups.

**Monday 18 March**

### PhD supervision

Kate Exley, a consultant in educational development and co-author of the just-published LSE Handbook for PhD supervisors, leads a session looking at key aspects of the doctoral supervision process.

**Thursday 21 March**

### Perfecting your one page pitch

Tips on how to distil your research into the perfect pitch for print and radio producers.

**Monday 25 March**

### Widening Participation and the equality and diversity agenda

Deputy Academic Registrar Cath Baldwin will look at the School's Widening Participation work in the context of statutory legislation and LSE policies relating to equality and diversity.

**Monday 15 April**

### Voice and presentation skills for lecturers

A day-long course aimed at lecturers in qualitative/discursive subjects, to develop voice use and presenting style to increase impact. Delivered by voice coach Susan Henry, with an optional one-to-one follow-up coaching session the next week.

**Thursday 25 April**

### Voice and presentation skills for lecturers

As above, but aimed at lecturers in quantitative subjects.

**Monday 29 April**

### Belonging: the role of E&D networks at LSE

Equality and Diversity Adviser Asiya Islam, along with representatives from networks such as Spectrum and Embrace, will talk about the importance of such networks in building a diverse and positive LSE community.

**Monday 13 May**

### Managing boundaries

All professionals can get pulled into taking too active a role in trying to help others. This session will help you to recognise signs and develop strategies for managing boundaries.

**Monday 20 May**

### Equality and diversity in residential life

Rachael Elliott, Head of Residential Life, will outline how LSE's Residences are addressing matters relating to equality and diversity to ensure positive, community-building experiences for all School students and staff.

**Friday 31 May**

### Great ideas for bringing lectures to life

Led by Mike Grenby, an assistant professor at Bond University and veteran presenter, this workshop will provide ideas on how to deliver dynamic large and small group lectures and other presentations.

**Monday 10 June**

### Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and neurodiversity

A session that will aid recognition of the signs of ADHD and conditions such as dyslexia, and offer suggestions for providing assistance.



# and Summer 2013

**Thursday 20 June**

## **Developing as an academic writer**

Guidance on developing a style of academic writing that will enhance opportunities for publication.

**Monday 24 June**

## **(Un)reasonable adjustments in marking**

The School's Neurodiversity Manager, Linda Kelland, will outline "best practice" approaches to marking to ensure compliance with statutory legislation and LSE policies.

**Wednesday 3 July**

## **Writing journal articles**

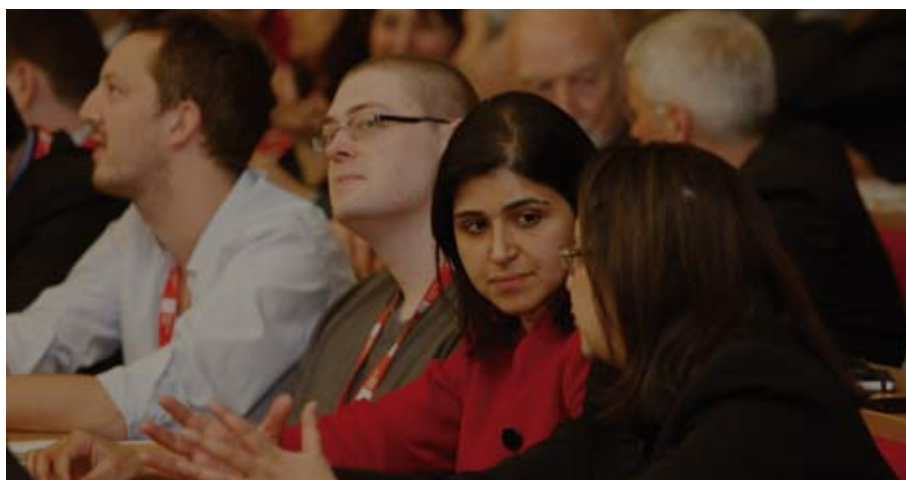
Journal editors will offer tips and advice on writing the sorts of articles they want to publish.

**Monday 22 July**

## **Listening to students who have the label of Asperger syndrome**

Dr Nicola Martin, Head of the Disability and Well-being Service and Visiting Fellow at Cambridge, will use her work with the Cambridge-based Asperger Syndrome Project to advise on dealing with and supporting students.

More information and online bookings at <https://apps.lse.ac.uk/training-system/> (enter keywords from the event title in the Search box)



## **Annual Teaching Symposium** **Wednesday 29 May 2013**

This new event is designed to celebrate and discuss teaching at LSE in the context of the School's emerging teaching and learning strategy. All teaching staff are warmly invited to attend

- Professor Craig Calhoun's plenary address;
- panel discussions on key strategic themes;
- lunch and exhibition;
- late-afternoon reception and celebration for LSE's teaching prize winners.

More information and online booking at [lse.ac.uk/tlc/teachingsymposium](https://lse.ac.uk/tlc/teachingsymposium)

## **LSE TEACHING BLOG**



News, resources, features on teaching practice at LSE and much more ... [lse.ac.uk/teachingblog](https://lse.ac.uk/teachingblog)

*"A very, very helpful enhancement resource."*

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research and apply their knowledge in the development of interview questions but also have the opportunity to ask criminologists for further clarification about points not understood, or about critiques of their work, and how they respond to such issues.

With the repository of recordings and interview material growing with each year's student cohort, Dr Foster hopes that the collected material will eventually be turned into a manuscript, giving young scholars and students an opportunity to expand into the academic field of criminology.

Several other opportunities for learning outside the classroom arise on the course. Court Visits require second and third year students to self-arrange and do a day of observations in a London courtroom. On Nights with the Police, students can voluntarily sign up to ride along in a police car during a Friday or Saturday evening shift, usually with an emergency response team, and may also take part in an organised overnight visit to a prison to engage in a group discussion with inmates.

Student feedback about the activities has been largely positive, as the post-it notes here illustrate. One student commented, in the in-depth feedback sought during the evaluation process, "What I found interesting was that, even as I observed him [the defendant] for just a short while, he displayed many of the traits of juvenile delinquents that are discussed in the literature. He displayed traces of

Matza's Techniques of Neutralization as he gave evidence by appealing to higher loyalties and denying that any harm was caused as the car was returned."

These opportunities for active and experiential learning running across the course can be highly rewarding. According to Dr Foster, "Even what we might call 'passive learners' in the classroom can

respond to new environments. When given a broad prompt, students step outside of the institutional frame and their points of references are gone. They have to decide on a strategy ... and they emotionally encounter real life events, which come into sharp relief with the readings [from the course]."

Dr Foster believes that the extra layer of experience has also added a dimension of richness reflected in essays and exam papers. Not only did a good number of her Crime, Deviance and Control students receive a First Class mark on the course, but the response to an exam question that required students to draw from their experience of learning and apply that body of knowledge to a real world situation were particularly impressive in their depth and variety.



## NEW FOR 2012/13

All of these can be accessed online – at [lse.ac.uk/tlc/publications](http://lse.ac.uk/tlc/publications) – or requested in hard copy by emailing [tlc@lse.ac.uk](mailto:tlc@lse.ac.uk)



The Department of International Relations' internal examining was described as "second to none", it has trialled some innovative ways of engaging and supporting students (including podcasts to help with module selection and effective dissemination of SSLC reports), and it operates good diversity of assessment and feedback practices at MSc level. But it won particular praise for its support of graduate teaching assistants, one of whom – **Zeynep Kaya** – shared her experience of working in the department with us.



"I first arrived at LSE six years ago to do a PhD and began teaching almost straight away," says Zeynep, "partly because I needed the money, but mostly because I wanted to learn how to teach." Despite the huge juggling act that her life has been since then – she has worked in two departments, finished her PhD, almost completed the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education and had a daughter – she feels that she has gone a long way to fulfilling that wish, thanks in great part to the support her department, the course convenors and LSE in general have given her.

An early indication of the department's engaged approach to teaching were some of the questions on the GTA application form. "They asked why I wanted to teach certain courses, which made me think carefully about what I thought I could offer students at particular levels in their studies and in particular topics," Zeynep recalls. Her preferences – for two of the department's core undergraduate courses, IR100 (The Structure of International Society) and IR200 (International Political Theory) – have stuck, and she continues to teach on IR200, as

well as on a course in the Department of Government and with LSE100.

"It's a heavy load, but I've had lots of help from the department," Zeynep says. "The course convenors are very hands-on and always available to talk if necessary." As well as producing a comprehensive GTA handbook, the department runs a long meeting for GTAs at the start of the academic year where lots of information is provided and there is space to raise concerns and discuss possible solutions to teaching "problems". Zeynep has also appreciated the convenors' encouragement of GTAs to do exam marking: "I have learned a lot from doing that, especially about LSE's expectations of its students, which in turn helps my teaching." Last but not least, there is recognition from the department of the benefits of social interaction: the Head of Department hosts a GTA dinner at the beginning of each year, and there are funds provided for GTAs to take each class of students they teach out for an evening.

Much of Zeynep's learning about teaching has been embedded and extended through participation in the School's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education programme. "I have definitely become a better teacher because of that. The teaching observations are really useful and I like the opportunity to self-reflect – to think about what went well and not so well in a class. Mostly, I like the fact that I can see the students making progress in their learning as a result of the progress I've made in my teaching. That's a big reward!"

The LSE/Sciences Po double degree in Urban Policy, in which students spend their first year in Paris and their second at LSE's Department of Geography and Environment, was commended on several fronts.

An effective complementarity between the programme's two years was noted, with a highly structured, practical approach to the course material in Year One followed by a more critical, intellectually creative and policy focused approach in Year Two.

Moreover, some of the seminars in Year One are delivered by LSE academics at Sciences Po, which both adds coherence to the programme and helps introduce the students to LSE's approach to teaching and learning.

The optional visit to LSE during Year One was seen as a particularly helpful way of preparing students for their second year: students are able to meet with academic staff to discuss course options and also get to meet Year Two students on the programme. The fact that only around 50 per cent of students take up this opportunity (possibly because it is self-funded) has led to the consideration of a joint programme handbook, in which some of the information that students learn during the visit could be made widely available.

The high degree of dedication and commitment on the part of the programme directors, and frequent but informal contact between them since its inception, will be harnessed from 2012/13 by the introduction of a formal Joint Programme Committee. This body will not only facilitate the development of student-facing information such as the handbook mentioned above, but will also enable the implementation of formal progression rules, and procedures for analysing the performance of double degree students as a discrete cohort (as distinct from the results for students following the one-year programme at each institution).

## JUST PUBLISHED...

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