

RCSU Academic Affairs Officer Report for Autumn Term 2014-2015

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Overview

The autumn term is probably the busiest time of year for the academic affairs network especially with the election of the year reps, with the dep reps and I starting to work together and make plans for the coming academic year. Some of the highlights of this term include an update of Panopto, meeting the year reps, RCSU year rep handbook, SSCs, Town Hall Meetings and Plans for next term.

Panopto Update

The beginning of the new academic year saw lots of improvements in the general attitude of faculty towards Panopto recordings. Departmental updates are summarized below:

Maths: Almost all lectures in years 1 and 2 are recorded. Larger lectures in years 3 and 4 are recorded. (courses in these years are all electives and therefore difficulties arise in synchronizing the system)

Biology: Quality of lecture recording is good and students find recordings very useful for revision. Lectures are recorded for first and second years. Due to the number of electives in third years, lectures are not recorded.

Chemistry: All chemistry lectures are recorded and live streamed. Some lecturers are reluctant on releasing lectures however the vast majority do. Most are released according to timetable schedules for convenience. Ancillary/Horizon lectures are not recorded.

Biochemistry: Very little recordings. The DUG of life sciences has suggested and encouraged the usage of panopto however few lecturers actually respond. There is reluctance due to the policy that lectures have the choice to release the recordings and therefore many fear to get involved with copyright laws. First and second years only have introductory lectures recorded. Third years don't have lecture recordings at all.

Physics: All lectures are recorded. Recordings are released by the UG team twice a week. The department is looking into increasing this frequency. Students are generally happy with panopto this year however a higher quality camera is recommended. Students generally use panopto to re-watch parts that they missed out in the lecture rather than the whole lecture. This can be reassuring to lecturers as this solves the 'poor-attendance' problem.

Meeting the year reps

Shortly after the rep training, Pascal and I met with the year reps in each individual department. The aim was to firstly get to know the year reps, and for the year reps to get to know us. Furthermore we wanted to stimulate active discussion and participation in the year reps and encourage them to speak up for matters in their year group. We also wanted to get a better idea of where each department stands in terms of the recurring topics in RCSU e.g. panopto, NSS, coursework feedback and relationship with post grads.

RCSU Rep Handbook

The RCSU rep handbook is a pdf file the RCSU dep reps and I put together over the summer. This is a guide tailored to the RCSU year reps and dep reps with the important contacts and fundamental tips on how to make use of all the resources in RCSU to become a successful rep. In addition the guide also includes messages from the AAO, DPE and dep reps to reiterate their roles and illustrate how the network is run. The PDF is circulated amongst all the year reps and feedback has been gathered for improvements for the next academic year.

SSC

I attended two SSC meetings in the last term (Biochemistry and Chemistry). In Biochemistry, the meeting flowed well with the DUG chairing the meeting. This will be changed for future meetings with the dep rep directing the conversation. Hopefully this will give the students more of a power to speak up and convey their message. There were no major issues arising other than some coursework affairs and the fact that biochemistry is significantly lacking behind in terms of lecture recordings. Other dep reps in RCSU are actively helping out with this issue and are intending on presenting statistics to the Life science department so changes can be made in the future.

Chemistry is a relatively strong department in terms of communication. The department as a whole seems to respond well to student feedback. The year reps seem to have an active role and good relationship with the dep rep and staff. There were no major issues arising at the meeting.

SSC for Math, Physics and Biology will be attended this term and summaries of the departments will be included in the next AAO report.

Fons Town Hall Meetings

The faculty of natural sciences hosted town hall meetings for each department. The aim was for any student to drop in with questions and suggestions. Overall attendance was low. This may have been due to the lack of advertising prior to the events and a miscommunication with the academic representation network as we only heard about it a few days before the actual event. In the future it is suggested that the Fons collaborate with academic reps to help raise awareness and improve flow of information.

Plans for next term

A panopto focus group is being implemented college wide and each dep rep in RCSU will send someone to represent the department in the group. This will hopefully help with college wide collaboration to bring about more lecture recordings.

More relevant for the next academic year, however the academic network of RCSU is looking to build a stronger relationship with the post grad students in the natural sciences. This will help current undergrad students in planning their future studies and careers. Recently the RCSU has passed the notion to work towards merging with the post grad students in the long term. The RCSU and the academic affairs network included should see this as an evolution of student collaboration.