

Biology School President's Report – Semester 1

Introduction for Staff and Students

This brief report has been prepared to cover what the academic representatives in the School of Biology have been working on this semester, and to give us something to build on in the future. Thanks to the hard work of our class reps and the enthusiasm of the student body we have had a successful semester and hope to continue this during the remainder of the year. I have greatly enjoyed working with the staff and my fellow students, and thanks to everyone for their continued support and for reading this report!

Amelia Hunter

Biology School President, 2015-2016

Class Rep Elections

This years class rep elections were moved up to take place during weeks 1 and 2. Despite the earlier elections, Biology still had a great turnout with 23 candidates nominated for 11 positions. All undergraduate and PGT reps were elected centrally via the online elections portal while our PGR rep volunteered for the position after there were no candidates during the online elections.

SSCC Reform

The composition of the Student-Staff Consultative Committee was reformed slightly both before and during the semester. The Honours class representative positions were changed so that there was one student each representing the cell/molecular/biochemical and ecology/evolution/organismal biology factions. The president of BioSoc, Hannah, was also invited to sit on the SSCC to encourage collaboration between the school and society. At the SSCC meeting, it was suggested that a class rep be added to represent the 5th year students who are part of the MBiochem program and the integrated Masters programs which have been added this year.

Careers Events

The first careers event of the year took place during week 2 with the help of Pamela Andrew (Careers Centre) and Verena Dietrich-Bischoff (Biology careers link). The event promoted summer internship opportunities for undergraduates by having 2nd and 3rd year students speaking about their work experiences over the summer in a wide range of different biology-related disciplines. The event was well attended with approximately 80 students in attendance.

During this semester we have been planning a range of events for second semester including a Women in Biology event, Careers Centre events including CV and LinkedIn workshops, and speaker events from recruiters and alumni.

Social Events

During November, our Wellbeing rep Januka organized a social for the third year students to de-stress before exams and speak with potential dissertation supervisors. The event had a good attendance (30 students, 7 staff) and students enjoyed the opportunity to speak to staff in a non-academic context as well as learn more about the dissertation process. The event was funded by the EDF and School of Biology. We hope that future class reps will hold a similar event next year.

BioSoc has had a very active and successful semester and I have been working with Hannah to promote events to students. We have also been planning the Biology and Psychology ball to take place during semester 2 and are hoping to have a high turnout from both students and staff.

Internal Communications, Social Media and Student Website

Social media has served as a very effective platform for communicating with students and promoting events as well as sharing information. There are Facebook groups for each year of students which are very well-used and have really helped to improve attendance to events as well as helping us find nominees for all the positions in the class rep elections. I am hoping to add a student contributor to the school's Twitter account in the future to share student events and information.

A "Current Students" website was created by last year's president Louise and we have done a lot of work on it this semester. With the help of Steve Smart, we have revamped the website and I have been updating it regularly with information about events and career/internship opportunities for students.

I have been sending out a formal weekly email to students regarding news and events of interest to students, as well as including information/publicity that I have been asked to circulate to students.

School Presidents Forum

This forum is held to discuss university-wide student issues with the Proctor, Rector (or Rector's assistant) and Deans of Arts and Science present. This semester, we discussed issues such as the NSS surveys, module evaluation questionnaires, funding for academic reps and student-staff ratios.

Education Committee and Working Groups

This committee of Schools and Faculty presidents meets with the DoRep, PG Rep and ERC to discuss student issues. I have been involved in the working group on supervision because while serving as a class rep I heard some issues with students being unable to reach dissertation supervisors. Since most Biology thesis projects are very research-heavy, it is important to me to promote and hopefully help to create a university-wide policy to ensure students are given proper supervision.

Looking Forward

2nd semester is going to be very busy! The School of Biology is undergoing a review of learning and teaching in April, and as School President I will be preparing a report on student opinions as part of the review which means we will likely be holding a series of focus groups throughout the semester. I will also be recruiting students of all years and disciplines to take part in meetings with the review team.

We will be holding several careers events this semester in collaboration with Pamela Andrew and the Careers Centre. In addition, I am hoping to have the class reps organize year group socials similar to the 3rd year wellbeing social. We will also be holding the Biology and Psychology Ball this February and hope to have a number of staff in attendance to promote student-staff relations.

On a personal note, I would like to thank the class representatives for their continuing hard work and support this year, and for being very understanding through all the ups and downs of the semester. I will be continuing to do my best to represent my fellow students next semester and effectively work with both students and staff in Biology. I am always open to suggestions of events and new ideas for the school as well as any constructive criticism. I hope everyone has had a great first semester and best of luck to for the remainder of the year!