Dissertation conference day

Annual Academic Monitoring Dissemination Event Follow-Up

Group members:
Ruth Robinson (Earth & Environmental Sciences)
Ulrike Weiss (Art History)
Martyn Quick (Mathematics and Statistics)
Elise Hugueny-Leger (Modern Languages)
Emilia Ferraro (Sustainable Development)
Ryan Beasley (International Relations)
Rory Cox (History)
Paul Cruickshank (Physics & Astronomy)

Stimulus
The topic for discussion for this group was the Dissertation Conference Day, following a presentation by Ruth Robinson on the event run for 4th year students in Earth & Environmental Sciences (EES). Sustainable Development (SD) also have a long-standing dissertation conference (DC), and as with the EES event, the conference contributes 10% of the dissertation grade. Both departments report that these events are highly valued by students.

Positive outcomes for students
Events such as DCs give students an opportunity to present work in a conference environment, and receive feedback on work from fellow students as well as from staff. The assessment may be formative (pre-deadline events), summative (pre- or post-deadline) or a mixture of the two. In one department at least, the external examiner (EE) attends, and a DC is an efficient way for EEs to assess the suitability of dissertation/project programmes. Students are increasingly calling for more opportunities to present work, and student demand has recently led to one school introducing presentations for BSc students, when they had previously only applied to integrated masters students.

The evidence from Sustainable Development and Earth & Environmental Sciences is that students value their DC events far beyond their assessment value. The attendance of (final year minus one) students can provide a larger audience for the dissertation cohort, and stimulates interest in project selection early on.

Discipline suitability
In some academic disciplines, it is common for dissertation/project students to perform truly original work, but there are disciplines in which this is not really possible. A DC would perhaps be better suited to disciplines where the answers to original research questions are within the reach of final-year students.

Organizational Considerations
Such events involve a substantial amount of organizational effort by the coordinating staff involved, which is a large commitment, and not all schools or departments have a workload allocation model in which the effort would be reflected. Available space can be a significant factor, and feasibility is a strong function of student numbers. Schools with very large final-year cohorts may find it difficult just to locate a suitable venue, let alone assess and provide
feedback to a large number of students. Cost can also be a significant factor, depending on the chosen format: poster printing, for example, is expensive.

**Action resulting from AAM dissemination event:**
As a result of the efforts presented by Earth & Environmental Sciences (and SD in the subsequent discussion), Physics & Astronomy will be introducing a pre-deadline poster session for integrated masters students as part of their project work in this academic year. The posters will be assessed by staff for formative purposes only, with the aim of helping students prepare for their subsequent viva.

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