University of St Andrews

Learning & Teaching Case Study

School of International Relations: Student Staff Lunches

The student-staff lunches project was organised and launched by the Honours-level SSCC Class Representatives to build better connections between students and faculty in the School of IR and to provide informal, practical support for career and individual development for Honours-level IR students beyond University.

Around forty students, all fourth year or finalist students studying International Relations at the Honours level participated in the project. The project provided eight lunches scattered throughout the Semester 2 calendar with a member of the IR faculty, a Class Rep, and up to six other students. The project was primarily organised by the Class Reps, who organised the student balloting for seats, allocated spaces for the lunch, scheduled each meal, and handled the financial logistics. Each staff member was invited to informally discuss with students their career plans or ambitions and to provide their own perspective from their personal history.

Benefits/impact on students/staff: Students and staff immediately benefitted from the additional opportunity to build personal connections bridging the gap between teacher and learner. Many students were given individual connections onto other organisations or career paths, supported by professor's individual contact networks. For many, the lunches also gave a practical and evident connection between an International Relations degree and a career path beyond University.

Student feedback:

‘The lunch was the first time I had met Dr Brett and found the lunch really inspiring, particularly as he told us about his unique career path. I also found the lunches a great opportunity to discuss IR and what we have taken from the school with my fellow students. I learned about different internship opportunities, connected a fellow classmate with a friend who already worked in the company to which he was applying and bounced dissertation ideas off of classmates. I would strongly encourage the programme to go forward and recommend that it become open to all honours students in International Relations.’

‘[Student-staff lunches were a] great opportunity to chat to and learn from teachers in a different environment. [It] definitely adds value to the student
experience. . . I was given several email addresses to contact, which was extremely generous and useful.’

‘I was very impressed with the student lunches. They were an excellent way for students and staff to casually get to know each other and chat about common interests. I also learned a lot about possible career directions.’

‘The IR school is so large and it can often feel very anonymous for students, so I think the lunches are a great way to get to know the lecturers better and to gain an insight into their diverse career paths and to gain some ideas about what we can potentially do after graduation. ... It was interesting to see the practical uses of an IR degree by speaking to the IR staff over lunch. I have felt that the careers centre’s advice is not particularly geared towards IR students, as it focuses on the more traditional Graduate Schemes at large multinationals rather than IR specific careers such as diplomacy, security, NGOs etc. ... I really hope that the IR school continues running these lunches, as I’ve found them both informative and enjoyable.’

‘The [student-staff lunches] gave students the opportunity to see what can be done with a degree in IR. Moreover, because the lunches give students and staff the chance to get to know each other better, it enables students to ask for advice that staff are then able to give, and likewise write more personal reference letters.’

**Contact:** Jaremey McMullin, School of International Relations [email: jrm21@st-andrews.ac.uk]

**Date submitted:** June 2013