Excellence in teaching rewarded

Next week the restored Brighton Dome will play host for the first time to the University’s annual graduation ceremony. As well as the 2,000 students receiving awards, five members of staff will also receive honours for outstanding teaching. The annual Alumni Society teaching awards aim to recognise and reward excellent teaching, planning and assessment.

Julian Broughton, convenor of music in the CCE, wins a teaching award for an innovative music course designed to attract people back into education.

Orchestra 2000 enables adult musicians of varying abilities to become part of an ensemble. The course has achieved great results, with many students progressing into orchestras or onto degree programmes.

"I was so surprised to win the award," said Julian. "However, I do have a slight sense of alarm as now my work has to be even more up to scratch!"

Dr Helga Dittmar wins the award for, among other things, demystifying statistics. The psychology lecturer in SOC does this by grounding statistics in familiar situations, such as advertising effectiveness, and using the skills of teaching assistants who can troubleshoot students' problems.

Claire, one of Helga’s students, commented: "It makes a wonderful change to read work that is approachable and fun, rather than dry and unnecessary."

On hearing of her award, Helga said: "I'm really thrilled and extremely touched by students' comments."

Dr Andy Field was selected for an award for his excellent teaching materials and the warm rapport he shares with his students.

The COGS psychology lecturer engaged students in statistics by relating it to their everyday interests such as (as Andy puts it) "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll". On winning the award, Andy said: "It vindicates all the effort I've put in."

Teresa Sutton, a lecturer in the School of Legal Studies, is rewarded for her work on encouraging students to widen their skills base and focus on future careers.

She instigated a strategy that involved spending time with students arranging legal work experience, helping with CVs and providing personal support. This was especially important for mature students preparing to return to the workforce.

Teresa, who is currently on maternity leave, said: "I'm very pleased. What I find most encouraging is the statements I received from students supporting the award." Dr Carlton Wood, a research fellow in BIOLS, is rewarded for his managerial role in the Sussex Science Postgraduate Support group (SciPS).

Academic research bodies are increasingly concerned at the lack of transferable skills gained by science postgraduates. SciPS aims to combat this by providing a voluntary programme in which students learn a host of new skills for use both during and after their studies. Courses range from Using Database Technology to Writing for a Public Audience.

Carlton was also praised for the formation of a master's degree specifically targeting overseas students. He remarked: "It's nice to feel that the effort you put into teaching is recognised."

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Just the ticket: parking charges revised

University-wide consultation in recent weeks over the details of the proposed new Travel Plan has resulted in changes to the level of car park charges to be introduced.

The plan, published at the end of May, proposed a standard rate for parking cars on campus equivalent to £30 per year for full-time staff.

At its meeting on 5 July, the University Council agreed to change the charging system, with reduced rates for lower paid staff.

All staff earning less than £12,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) will get their permit free. Staff with earnings between £12,000 and £22,000 FTE will pay 50 per cent of the full rate, i.e. £150 per year. Staff whose gross salary is above £22,000 FTE will pay the full £300.

Neil Gershon, Registrar & Secretary, said: "We believe the revised plans strike the right balance between reducing car use and recognising the needs of staff on lower incomes."

Council endorsed the recommendation to ban students who live off campus from parking cars at the University. Students who live off campus will pay 50 per cent, i.e. £150, to park.

Occasional parking by permit holders will cost £2 per day, and occasional parking by non-permit holders will be £5 a day.

Finally, Council decided to delete all references in the Travel Plan that encourage members of the University to use motorbikes. However, it also agreed that there should be no extra impediment to the use of motorcycles, such as the immediate introduction of parking charges. For a detailed summary of consultation on the Travel Plan see www.sussex.ac.uk/transport.
Honorary graduands

It's not just students and academic staff who will be receiving awards at the Brighton Dome next week. Four renowned academics with strong links to Sussex will also be honoured.

Dr Brian Manley was Senior Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the University’s Council from 1996-2001.

An engineer by profession, he devised the lightweight electronics systems that were adopted in Telstar, the first transatlantic broadcasting satellite. In 1958 he brought the channel electron multiplier to realisation, a device that remains the detector of choice for low-energy particles in space.

Dr Manley holds the rare honour of being a past president of both the Institution of Electrical Engineers and the Institute of Physics. In 1995 he received the CBE for services to engineering.

Today, Dr Manley devotes much of his time to the Daphne Jackson Trust. Established in memory of the UK’s first female physics professor, the trust awards fellowships to women wishing to return to science after a career break.

Professor Norma Reid Birley’s long association with academia began at Sussex in the 1970s when she read Mathematics. After graduating, Professor Reid Birley went on to hold a string of academic posts at universities throughout Britain and today she is the first female Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand, one of the most respected in South Africa.

The University refused to practise segregation during the apartheid era and students actively protested outside government offices. Professor Reid Birley feels her Sussex connections helped during the selection process at Witwatersrand because the University of Sussex is so well known in South Africa.

Born in Barbados, Professor Kamau Brathwaite came to Sussex in 1965 to do a DPhil on Creole society. During his studies he also co-founded the Caribbean Artists Movement. Professor Brathwaite soon began publishing poetry, including Rights of Passage (1967), The Arrivants (1973) and the more recent Ancestors. His works draw heavily on the post colonial and racial issues of that period in the Caribbean and are often studied alongside the works of Coleridge and Shelly.

In 1991 Professor Brathwaite moved to his current position as Professor of Comparative Literature at New York University.

Professor Brathwaite will be reading his work at an evening of Caribbean poetry in the Meeting House on 18 July. The event, from 6.00–7.15pm, also features John Agard, James Berry and Grace Nichols.

Economist Professor Richard R. Nelson is currently George Blumenthal Professor of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University. Much of the professor’s research has been directed toward understanding technological change, how economic institutions and public policies influence the evolution of technology, and how technological change in turn induces institutional and economic change more broadly.

SEI celebrates 10 years

The Sussex European Institute (SEI) has been celebrating its 10th anniversary this week with a reunion dinner on campus for over 50 alumni and a series of conferences.

In the decade since SEI was founded, over 500 students from 50 countries have completed masters or doctoral programmes. Three-quarters of its students have come from outside the UK, and alumni have gone on to work in many different areas of European affairs.

Matt Browne, former aid to Jacques Delors and now head of research at the think tank Policy Network says, "SEI gives students the opportunity to network with policy-makers, European and international officials, and politicians. It gave me both the beginnings of a network of contacts and the confidence to express my opinions within similar circles."

Andrei Lobatch, from Belarus, who is currently working for the European Commission in Brussels, agrees: "Studying at SEI was crucial for me. It opened a huge field for professional self-realisation and professional growth."

This week’s anniversary conferences have featured distinguished guest speakers including Professor Leszek Balcerowicz, President of the National Bank of Poland; Professor Helen Wallace (founder of SEI and now director of the Robert Schuman Centre in Florence); Professor Wolfgang Wessels (University of Cologne and Chairman of the Trans-European Policy Studies Association); and Sir Stephen WALL (Head of the European Secretariat at 10 Downing Street).

SEI has developed into a leading centre of research on European issues and is one of only nine Jean Monnet Centres of Excellence in the UK. Research ranges from enlargement of the European Union, European defence policy and post-Communist economic transition to issues of migration and regional development in Europe.
Being Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sussex is a privilege as well as a challenge, and I am grateful to the Senate and Council of the University for entrusting the role to me for a further period. The world of higher education in the coming years will be no more stable than it has been in the recent past. My central objective will continue to be to enable the University to prosper in that challenging environment.

A radical reshaping of the University’s School structure will take effect in 2003, and I have no plans for further structural change. We must now ensure that the new structure works to the benefit of teaching, learning and research. Other major developments are at varying stages: the medical school, new initiatives in management studies, media studies, and film studies, initiatives on student recruitment and retention, the new Arts curriculum, and a revitalised teaching and learning policy. This is a demanding programme, which is stretching our collective capacity to manage change, and we need to be cautious about adding to the list.

Early signs about the impact of the new Arts curriculum are very positive, and I am optimistic that the new curriculum will strengthen our admissions profile. But student recruitment remains difficult across a wide range of Science subjects, and we need to address this. Bold initiatives in Engineering, in which new programmes have moved away from the traditional Engineering curriculum, have been successful, and the two new Science schools should be looking imaginatively at reshaping their curricula.

Money is a problem for all universities, but especially for those like Sussex that are heavily dependent on government funding. We have taken steps to reduce our dependence on the government, but there is scope for much more. Only by a substantial increase in our earnings from non-government sources can we fund research, teaching and infrastructure at the level that a top-class university requires.

The government will continue to give a high priority to widening participation in higher education. New form of partnership between universities and colleges will be required to deliver the government’s objectives and there will be exciting opportunities for the University of Sussex to develop our relationships with new and existing partners.

The 2001 Research Assessment Exercise was both a success and a disappointment, in ways that have already been extensively discussed. Strong research performance is not sufficient to define a top-class university but it is absolutely necessary, and we need through individual and collective efforts to rebuild the research standing of the University of Sussex. The objective should be for every unit to raise their RAE grade by at least one step in the next RAE. That is a stretching objective, but an attainable one.

Finally, in the coming years, we need to give more attention to raising the public profile of the University, ensuring that our strengths are widely appreciated, and I see that as one of my key personal objectives.

I thank the University of Sussex for the confidence they have shown in me. In turn, I have great confidence in the University and in its future.

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Dear Bulletin

Mick Henry says (Bulletin 28 June) that the "implacable and arrogant" University will take £30 a month out of his salary through car park charges. But this is not inevitable. He could reduce the costs by up to a quarter through car sharing, or reduce them to zero through cycling. Public transport is likely to prove equally expensive, which only goes to demonstrate that those suffering worst under present arrangements are the poorest groups at the University who do not have access to a car.

Any change to travel arrangements will create a degree of inconvenience. But this has to be set against the spectrum of costs that car use imposes upon others. Aside from the immediate costs to the University, these include noise; air pollution; congestion; death and injury from accidents; a vast and increasing area of land under concrete; and, ultimately, global climate change. Car drivers pay only a fraction of these costs, which is why our transport problems are spiralling out of control.

Accommodating individual car ownership by all capable adults in the UK would require additional road space equivalent to a 257-lane motorway stretching from London to Edinburgh. This is for the car park alone. We haven’t got the space, even if all the other unsustainable features of car travel are ignored. The implacable and arrogant assumption is that this wider context can be ignored.

Ultimately, sustainable transport requires individuals to either change their behaviour or pay for damage they are causing.

Steve Sorrell
Research Fellow, Environment & Energy Programme, SPRU

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Sam Younger
Chair of Council

I am pleased to report that at its meeting on 5 July the University Council decided to offer Professor Alasdair Smith re-appointment to the Vice-Chancellorship for a further period of five years.

The Council had before it a report from a Committee established under my Chairmanship to consider the re-appointment of the Vice-Chancellor. The Committee, full membership of which was detailed in the Bulletin of 3 May, sought views from within the University and had 48 responses. The Committee met on 20 June and in discussion took into account all the views that had been expressed. The Committee was unanimous in recommending that Professor Smith be re-appointed for a further five-year term from August 2003 and this recommendation was passed for information to the Senate meeting held on 28 June and to Council for its decision.

I am pleased to record that Council unanimously endorsed the Committee recommendation and that Professor Smith has accepted the offer of re-appointment.

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Students showcase their projects

The future of computer science and artificial intelligence was on display this week, when postgraduate students shared their project ideas with Sussex-based and national technology companies.

Guests at the poster presentation on Wednesday (10 July) included representatives from BT Laboratories, EPIC, The Future Office, IBM, InterMed, Hewlett-Packard Laboratories, MASA, Motorola UK Research Lab, Worth Media, Searchspace, VictoriaReal and Wired Sussex.

The students are on four Masters programmes in the School of Cognitive and Computing Sciences:

- Evolutionary and Adaptive Systems;
- Human-Centred Computer Systems;
- Intelligent Systems; and
- Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence.

Organiser Sejal Shah said the annual event aims to showcase emerging talent and to build relationships between industry and the University. "It is valuable as a way of informing industry about the work being done at Sussex and of receiving feedback so that the students can improve their work."
Groundsperson dies in accident on campus

Gary was an employee of Ecowert Management Ltd (EML), which is contracted by the University to maintain the campus grounds. Before EML took on the contract in November 2000, Gary had worked for the University of Sussex as a groundsperson for 13 years.

Gary was taking a ride-on mower across a car park to fill it up with fuel for the day’s work. An eyewitness saw him jump from the mower and then strike his head on the ground. It is not yet clear why he jumped from the vehicle. The mower came to a stop when it hit a tree.

Nobody else was involved in the accident and nobody else was hurt.

Trained first aiders from the University’s Rescue Team were at the scene within five minutes and paramedics arrived shortly afterwards. They took Gary to the accident and emergency department of the Royal Sussex County Hospital in Brighton.

He did not regain consciousness after the accident and was transferred to a life-support machine in intensive care. Gary was declared dead on 1 July.

The University has sent its condolences to Gary’s family. Paul Kelly, the University’s Maintenance Contracts Manager, said: “We are devastated by this tragic loss. Gary was a quiet, unassuming and likeable man who loved rock music. He will be sadly missed by all the grounds staff and by everyone who knew him at the University.”

Clive Parkinson, the University’s Director of Safety, met with EML management immediately after the incident and continues to liaise with them. The University will be assisting EML (Gary’s employer) with their accident investigation and the incident has been reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Sussex students discover new species of spider in the Seychelles

As film buffs queue to watch the new Spider-man movie, geography students from Sussex have gone one better by discovering a new species of spider in the wild.

The second year undergraduates were taking part in a field course to the Seychelles, one of the most biologically diverse places on the planet. As part of this trip the students were responsible for helping to set insect traps in the Vallée de Mai, a UNESCO World Heritage Site on Praslin, the second-largest island in the main Seychelles group.

An undisturbed tract of palm forest, the area is renowned for being home to the remarkable Coco de Mer double coconut, as well as vanilla orchids and a host of rare birds and lizards. Because of its fame, the site is frequently visited by biologists and, as a result, is one of the most-sampled places on the islands.

The flora and fauna of the valley is incredibly diverse, and currently forms part of a study being undertaken by the Nature Protection Trust of the Seychelles (with whom the students were working) as part of their conservation work on the islands.

To the delight of the students, the contents of the insect traps revealed a species of spider that is completely new to science. Named Opoea suspicia, it is tiny, with a smooth, brown body and pale yellowish legs.

Dr Michael Frogley, Lecturer in Physical Geography, said: “There are around 250 species of spider in the Seychelles, most of them ridiculously small. The new one is actually quite large, by comparison. But at 1.6mm long I don’t think it’s going to be tackling the Green Goblin or Spider-man’s other enemies in a hurry.”

Small ads

- TO LET: Beaconsfield Villas. Large double room available immediately till mid Sept, all 4 rooms. £35 p/w. Tel. 560814 or email c.lido@sussex.ac.uk.
- TO LET: 3-bed furnished maisonette, Glodstone Place, B’ton. £30 p/cm. Email kapp2@sussex.ac.uk, ext. 3180 or tel. 07810 758880.
- FOR SALE: Rover 820s. E reg, 100,000 miles, 6 months MOT, 1 month tax, full service history, good condition, £350 ono. Tel. 07967 316747.

WANTED: Mature student, non-smoker seeks house sitting or cheap room to rent. Mid July-Oct. Refs available. Tel. C. Veyriere on 700801 or email ldub4@sussex.ac.uk.

Staff vacancies

Apply by 16 July
- School Administrative Managers, Schools of Life Sciences and Science and Technology (ref 406)
- Research Fellow, Genome Damage and Stability Centre (ref 102b)
- Research Fellow, Children’s Social Behaviour Project (ref 389)
- Handyperson, Student Support Area (ref 411)

Apply by 24 July
- Research Fellow, Centre for German-Jewish Studies (ref 113b)
- 2 x Subject Support Librarians, Library (ref 402)

Apply by 25 July
- Research Fellow in German Nationalism, Brighton and Sussex Medical School (ref 410)

For further details, see www.sussex.ac.uk/units/staffing/personal/vacs or contact Staffing Services on (01273) 578706, fax (01273) 877401, email recruitment@sussex.ac.uk

Bulletin

The fortnightly Bulletin is written and produced by Alison Field, Peter Simmons and Bernard Brook. We welcome any news, story ideas, letters or small ads from staff and students of the University.

The next issue will be out on 26 July, with a copy deadline of 1pm on 19 July. Please contact the Press and Communications Office in Sussex House on ext. 8888 or email Bulletin@sussex.ac.uk.