

How to be excellent

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Learning & Teaching Symposium 2017

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HISTORY, SOCIOLOGY
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Today's aims

- Defining teaching 'excellence' in the current climate
- Excellence in Sociology
 - The context of our course
 - Areas of strength recognised in the WTEA
- Challenges to being excellent...and how we propose to meet them
- Discussion

Defining 'excellence'

- Westminster Teaching Excellence Awards
 - Innovation
 - Enhancement of student learning /the learning experience
 - Sharing best practice
- Teaching Excellence Framework
 - Employment/graduate destinations (DLHE)
 - Retention/academic support (HESA + NSS)
 - Student satisfaction (NSS)
- Turns attention back to teaching but...in the context of increased fees, marketisation and bureacratiation
 - What does it mean to be excellent under these conditions?

Sociology at Westminster

- Non-traditional student population
- Commitment to critical pedagogy
- Sociology as a transformative discipline connecting personal troubles to public issues



Areas of strength in sociology I

(i.e. why we are 'excellent')

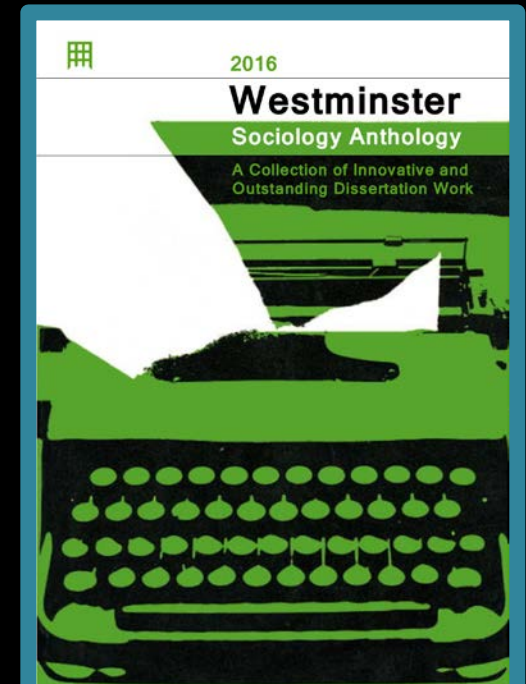
A rigorous and innovative degree:

- London as our campus
- Diversity of teaching and assessment strategies
- Emphasis on employability
- Pioneering use of media technologies
- Research-led AND student-focused teaching

Areas of strength in sociology II

Holistic approach to enhancing the student experience:

- Social media use (Facebook/Twitter/blog)
- Sociology student forum
- Social events
- Public recognition of student achievement
- External speakers



Areas of strength in sociology III

High level of student support:

- Integration of study skills in the curriculum
- Assessment support and feedback
- The level of support we provide our students – high staff commitment



Challenges

- The apparent increase in the number of students experiencing mental health issues
- Maintaining classroom attendance and engagement
- Lack of confidence among some students in their skills and abilities.
- Staff (emotional) labour/unrecognized hours

Proposals

- Conduct research with students to identify the challenges they face and the support they need
- Develop stronger links with central support services
 - e.g. counselling service, disability support, academic learning support, library
- Highlight existing resources around employability and graduate attributes
 - e.g. encourage take-up of study abroad opportunities, develop closer links with career development centre
- Improve practice in relation to assessment feedback
 - e.g. providing workshops dedicated to clarification of feedback across all modules

Discussion

- What currently makes it difficult to achieve excellence?
- How do we create the conditions that would make being more excellent possible?
- How can we resist TEF-type definitions of excellence and be more responsive to our students' needs?
- What do you do to achieve 'excellence'?
- What challenges do you face and how might these be overcome?