

# Course Content (Degrees)

## WINNER

### Sustainable Tradition at the University of Bristol

Only one course in Bristol's 2005 undergraduate calendar lacked a departmental prefix. This was UNIV10001, Sustainable Development, a new inter-disciplinary module open to all students without any prerequisites.

Following an introductory scene-setting session, the course had six blocks of sessions from different disciplinary perspectives (history, economics, engineering, law, environmental science and education). Inter-disciplinary tutorials (on energy generation) and seminars (on congestion charging) ran in parallel. The University's Energy and Environmental Management Unit (EEMU) also provided practical inputs.

The course recruited over 100 students from 14 departments, well above the University's Open Units average. Confidential student feedback at the end of the session was very favourable and resulted in some minor amendments for 2006-7, including a second interdisciplinary seminar on Estuary Management and the recording of lectures for podcasting.

The course convenor, Dr. Tony Hoare, summarises the course's benefits as "widening the personal contacts and intellectual horizons of students, enabling them to visit new physical and virtual spaces within the University, and providing access to some exceptionally lively and committed teachers. Lecturers also gain a better understanding of - and personal connections with - other disciplines, enjoy the excitement of innovating with sympathetic colleagues, and are inspired by the realisation that others share their commitment. All this is good for the University as a whole, which also enhances its reputation by showing that it preaches what it practices. "



Other unexpected benefits include an interest in developing additional modules as a result of the high numbers, and general learning about the issues of developing inter-disciplinary courses which can be applied to other topic areas.

Tony Hoare believes that "UNIV10001 demonstrates that even the most traditional HE institution has leverage points for innovation and change. Open-minded academics and university administrators can still be excited by the potential to experiment and take risks, rather than regarding existing practices as effectively 'no entry' signs to anything smacking of non-conformism."

The teaching team for an interdisciplinary Estuary Management seminar - (from left) Chris Willmore (School of Law), John Loveless (Civil Engineering), Tony Hoare (Geographical Sciences), Sarah Cornell (Earth Sciences), Suzi Wells (Science Faculty E-learning Coordinator) and Chris Macleod (Historical Studies).

#### Judges' Comments on Course Content - Degree

*The best means of incorporating sustainable development into degrees varies by discipline, type of institution, and level. One difficult challenge is creating interdisciplinary courses within traditional universities that have strong disciplinary boundaries. The University of Bristol's new Sustainable Development module is therefore an exciting innovation - especially in a first year course - which combines many subject backgrounds and genuinely opens up new academic, and personal development opportunities to students. Its demonstration that a well-balanced and well-managed inter-disciplinary team can deliver intellectual cross-cutting and sparkiness without losing coherence should encourage more such courses in other universities.*