

2012 UNIVERSITY ANNUAL LEARNING & TEACHING CONFERENCE

2012 & Beyond

Theme: Innovations

13:05 – 13:25

Same Questions, Different Answers?: the convergence of art and science in the ISL pilot module ‘Acoustic Ecology’

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Abstract:

During the previous academic year (2010/2011), a pilot module titled ‘Acoustic Ecology’ was offered to students from both arts (Creative Music Technology [CMT]) and science (Centre for Environmental and Marine Studies [CEMS]) trajectories based at the Scarborough Campus. There had been some precedent to the creation of this module, in the form of a Leverhulme Residency involving composer Craig Vear being based in CEMS, which sparked cross-disciplinary ideas between the departments. Voluntary in nature, the module was designed as a free-elective with the aim of teaching practical, transferable sound recording and analysis skills with contextual, cross-disciplinary principles that surround the subject and the convergence of the arts and the sciences within. The group met bi-weekly and alongside lectures, were tasked with practical assignments, usually undertaken within groups comprising of both music and science students that simultaneously reinforced the principles and skills associated with the discipline alongside working in a cross-disciplinary group. The students who attended the module ranged from level 5 to PhD. The module culminated in a practical field-recording trip to Forge Valley in order to create an innovative ‘sound-map’ of the area.

The outcomes from the pilot were varied and enlightening. The attendance was consistently strong – students maintained enthusiasm for the module and the additional workload associated, despite it functioning voluntarily. The convergence of the arts and science disciplines resulted in a fresh and vibrant exchange of ideas and practices, not only between staff (who have formed a research group ‘Sounds of Our Surroundings’ as a direct result of the project) but also students, who welcomed the alternative perspectives on offer. The module had also fed directly into some of the students’ Honours degree projects.

The pilot was an exciting ISL project that the involved parties aim to develop into a credited part of existing degree programmes in both CMT and CEMS.