Proposal to change PMR to exam-only

1 Proposal

Probabilistic modelling and reasoning (INFR11134) is currently assessed in terms of an assignment (20%) and the written exam (80%). The return of the resources invested in the assignment is rather small both for me and the students. Having computer labs, for example, would be more effective. I hence would like to put in a request to change the assessment to 100% written examination so that the freed resources can be used for continuous improvement of the course.

2 Context

I started teaching PMR in the academic year 2016/17. The course then had a total of 149 students, this year, it has 213 students (43% growth). The current assessment structure was inherited from previous years.

For the coursework (assignment), we currently invest 65 hours of TA support for the preparations, and 80 hours of support for marking. I spent at least roughly 40 hours on the preparations, 20 hours related to marking, and a considerable amount of time to deal with student queries (during and after the assignment) and on administrative tasks (e.g. finding markers).

3 Justification

The assignment has the clear benefit of giving the students an opportunity to apply the lecture material to practical problems. Overall, however, I believe that this benefit comes at too high a cost, and that similar if not better benefits can be achieved by investing the freed resources into developing related exercises in the tutorials or as part of computer labs. In more detail, main reasons for my proposal are as follows:

- Marking and giving valuable feedback on the assignment scales poorly with the increasing number of students.

- Insufficient feedback is an important source of student dissatisfaction. Despite best efforts on our behalf, some students were rightly dissatisfied with some of the feedback, and in other to amend this shortcoming considerable further marker hours would be needed.

- Finding qualified people for support is difficult and require a considerable amount of my time.

- Most of the invested time and resources (e.g. marking, administration) contribute very little, if at all, to the continuous improvement of the course in subsequent years. We rather spend the resources on developing good computer labs or exercises that also benefit future students.

- It is very difficult (time-consuming) to check whether the stipulated rules regarding collaboration etc. in the assignment are actually followed by the students.

- Having both pen&paper and related computer labs/exercises with detailed solutions will allow the students to better understand the course material and thus lead to a better student experience than the assignment.