

December exams and ug4 project deadline

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Summary:

- Three courses taken by ug4 students (MLPR, HCI, DS) will have December exams as of next year, for reasons described below.
- Projections suggest that the plurality of ug4/5 students will then have one exam in December, and four (down from five) in April.
- We propose to move the ug4/5 project deadline one week later, to Thursday of week 12, to compensate for this change.

Details:

Why the decision to have some December exams?

For a while we've been getting pressure from the University to limit the number of exams any student has in one diet. Many of our MSc students have 5-8 exams in April (see Fig 1, next page), and 5 or 6 April exams is not uncommon for ug4 students either.

More importantly we're now also dealing with urgent issues in the MSc programme. MSc project selection is becoming increasingly problematic due to the large number of MSc students, with many supervisors unable to meet individually with students to assess their suitability, and students having very little hard evidence on which to base judgments of their own suitability.

In discussions with DoT and others, it was felt that increasing the number of marks available for MSc students by the time of project selection is desirable to provide students and supervisors with concrete information. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that at least some MSc students are already choosing certain courses with December exams simply in order to avoid all exams in April.

Nearly all MSc-only courses already have exams in December, but not all MSc students take one of these courses. We have until now avoided December exams for courses with ug4 students in order to protect dedicated project time in December. However, both the University and School arguments now seem to strongly favour having (at least some) December exams. Moreover, the ug4 project coordinator has stated that there is no reason in principle why the ug4 project deadline could not be shifted later if need be.

Why MLPR, HCI, and DS? What are the consequences?

We analyzed this year's enrollment across all courses and determined that by moving exams for just three large courses in disparate areas (HCI, MLPR, and DS), we could ensure that

- (a) most MSc students would have at least two marks on record by January (including IJP),
- (b) almost no MSc students would have more than two exams in December, and
- (c) very few ug4/5 students would have more than one exam in December.

Illustrations of current and projected exam distribution are shown in Fig 1 (next page).

Note that a few ug4/5 students already have exams in December (those taking IAML, SDM, or one of the MSc-only courses in ug5), and a considerable number of them have a major coursework deadline on 17 March (for MLP, 20 points cw-only; see Fig 2). The modal number of April exams is now 5.

Since the lecturers for the three courses were all happy to have December exams, these have now been moved to December for next year. The projection is that the modal number of December exams for a ug4/5 student would be 1, and the modal number of exams in April reduces to 4.

So delaying the project deadline by a week would be feasible while still permitting time to revise for April exams. It would also allow students taking MLP to have more time after the MLP deadline to finish project work.

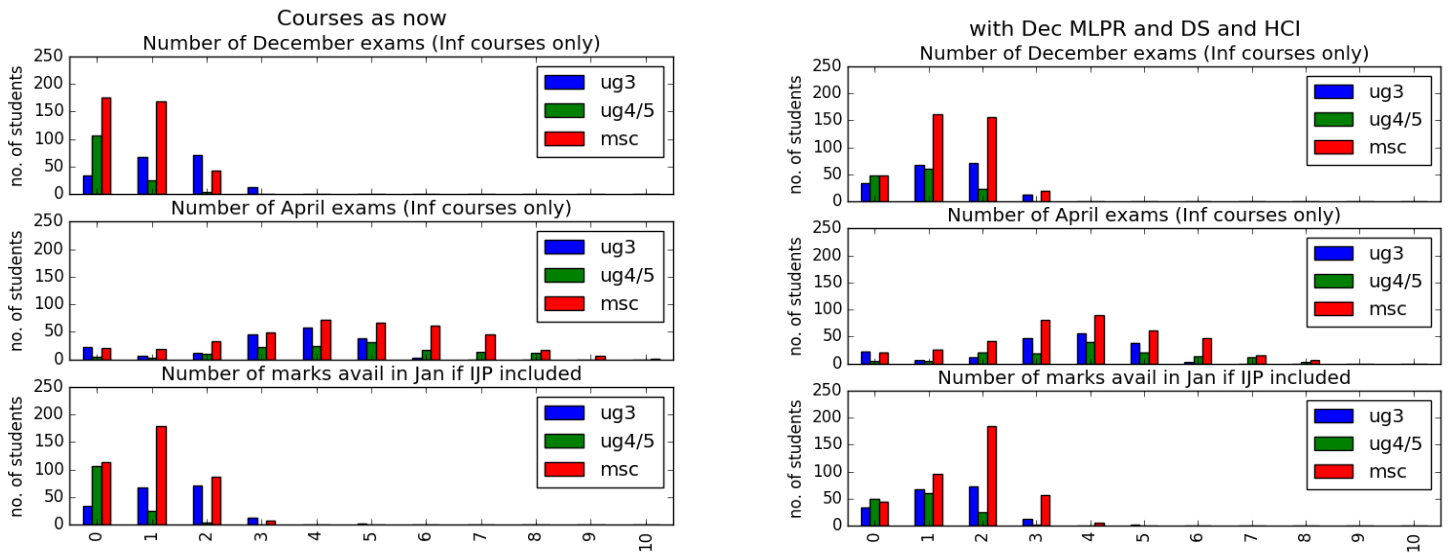


Fig 1: Histograms of exam dates for this year's students (left) and what would have happened this year if we had held the exams for MLPR, DS, and HCI in December (right). All counts of MSc students include part-time and CDT students.

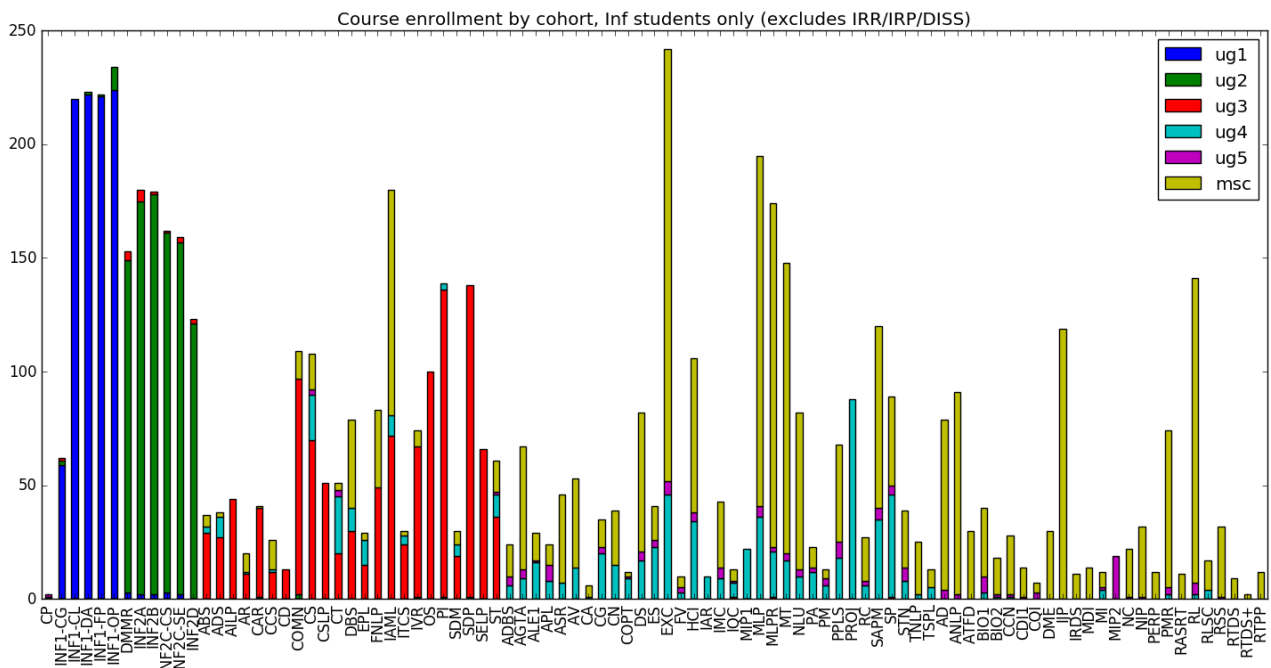


Fig 2: course enrolment by cohort, Informatics students only.