

UG4/5 Staff-Student Liaison Committee

4pm, 28th November 2018

Appleton Tower room 7.14

Present: M.Cryan - UG4 Year Organiser
P.Guagliardo - UG5 Year Organiser
M.Grigoris - UG4 Student Representative
N.Pavlov – UG5 Student Representative
P.Jander - UG5 Student Representative
G.Hall – administrator

Apologies: Finn Zhan Chen (provided the committee with feedback notes)

1. Introduction

The Year Organisers welcomed the attendees and outlined the purpose of the SSLC.

2. Comments on UG4 Courses

Advances in Programming Languages, I.Stark

No complaints were received and a rep expressed his satisfaction with the course.

Algorithmic Foundations of Data Science, H.Sun

A representative had attended the first lecture, but found that it didn't do a good job of getting students interested. This may have affected enrolment.

Bioinformatics 1 – D.Armstrong / I.Simpson

No comments.

Blockchains and Distributed Ledgers – A.Kiayias

This course, in its second year, appears to be running well.

Computational Complexity – H.Guo

No comments.

Extreme Computing – P.Bhatotia / V.Seeker

This course has been changed since last year, with a new lecturer, and has more of a systems focus, looking into actual implementations. Students praised the interesting guest lecturers. The coursework was deemed to be pretty straightforward, especially considering that it is worth 40% of the overall course mark. However, the class has been warned that the exam would be harder, and that it would require students to show understanding of “big picture” concepts. Students have issues with the feedback available, as (a) there are no tutorials, and (b) the syllabus has changed, so past papers are out of date, and no sample questions have as yet been provided. This was raised with the Director of Teaching and the Head of Informatics Student Services.

Honours Project / MInf Project – D.Sannella

Comments from students included:

- "Honours Project: I really don't like how all the supervisors have drastically different approaches to supervising students. I think there should be more strict guidelines for them on what level of support they should provide and how. E.g. they should be required to periodically meet with every student and maybe provide certain minimum number of contact hours that the student can use as they see fit. The current system does not seem to be fair."
- In the future, I would allow students to work in groups of 2-3 on projects (or even more if justified by the nature of the project). Most of the research these days is done in groups so it seems to me like a bit of a pointless exercise to try to write a paper all by myself. It's also quite a bit harder to meet the novelty/publishability requirements when working alone."

The first point was discussed, and the Year 5 Organiser was of the opinion that the quality of supervision was more important than the amount of time spent. One rep commented on the lack of accountability amongst supervisors. The Year 4 Organiser mentioned that due to the demands placed on supervisors, help from a supervisor's postdoc/PhD student might be sought. They also stated that it is the responsibility of students to seek help if they feel they are not being provided with adequate supervision, and that the course organiser can be contacted if necessary. However, the idea of a meeting log was raised and all present thought it was a good idea.

The second point was discussed. It was pointed out that the entire point of a final year project was to assess the individual students.

ACTION: contact D.Sannella / Computing Support to establish a supervision log.

Human-Computer Interaction, D.Glowacka

Comments from students:

- "Not very engaging lecturer styles, would be better if the lecturer does not just read out from the slides and 100% of Kami's slides"
- "Feedback for coursework 1 still not given out while coursework 2's already passed"
- "HCI: This course wasn't very engaging. The new lecturer took Kami's slides and just read off them; Kami has a very particular style of teaching and her slides work for her only. The TA seemed overly rude at times, maybe he is just to Scottish - I have taken no offence but I see how other students might! Furthermore, there is *STILL* no written feedback for the first coursework (which was due over a month and a half ago!!). Maybe by the time we graduate. I have absolutely no idea how this course will be examined, other than looking at past paper, most things in the lectures are not tangible enough to be assessed in a written exam."

The delay in feedback was noted, although it was stated that this feedback was not required to proceed with the second coursework. The difficulty of assessing the course was brought up, as it does appear to be an unavoidable issue with HCI, where the answers are more qualitative than quantitative.

Introduction to Quantum Computing – P.Wallden

The reps received several positive comments about this course. It was also regarded as quite challenging, and perhaps worth more than 10 credits.

Machine Learning Practical – S.Renals / P.Andreadis / H.Bilen

This course was considered to have a good introduction, was well thought through, with interesting lectures. Feedback was generally well detailed.

Machine Learning and Pattern Recognition – I.Murray

This course was praised for its engaging lectures, and the materials were highly regarded. The low mark average of this course was mentioned, although the class was clearly warned that it was challenging.

Natural Computing – M.Herrmann

- “positive feedback for Michael Herrmann in improving the quality of the course compared to INF2D he did couple of years ago. Students have enjoy the breadth and depth of the material presented.”

Neural Computation – M.Hennig / P.Series

The only comment was that the labs were not adequately prepared for coursework.

Performance Modelling (Level 11) – J.Hillston

The inverted (“flipped classroom”) style of this course was admired – it worked well, prompting the comment that other courses could learn a lot from this one.

Social and Technological Networks – R.Sarkar

The lectures for this course were fine and the project was nicely open-ended.

Text Technologies for Data Science – W.Magdy

- “Very interesting course, highly recommended”
- “Introducing some validation tests for coursework 2 would be great to make sure students are in the right direction”

Types and Semantics for Programming Languages – P.Wadler

The reps hear positive things about this course, which has a new text book written by the lecturer.

3. Comments on other courses

Introductory Applied Machine Learning

For the first coursework, students received marks only, whereas the second one was comprised of marks and written comments.

4. General issues about the year and specific courses

- “The general notion is that if the course starts to be bad it does not improve during the semester as it feels that there are no mechanism to do that.”

The committee discussed the practicalities of addressing a course mid-semester. Certain issues can be addressed through the weekly rep meetings, but some cannot. There is a general lack of tutorials on Level 11 courses.

5. Comments on Computer Facilities, labs, study spaces and social spaces

- "The approach on the Appleton Tower Level 9 heating problem is quite ridiculous."
- "It'd be great to have tables with just monitors (without DICE machines) that we can connect our laptops to, especially on 9th floor. (I only use the screens anyways and ssh if I need DICE.) The student.compute server has been insufficient during some parts of semester and the ug4/msc cluster hardware seems to be too old to run my thing. If technically possible, I would like to see the CPU time on student.compute allocated on a sort of per-user basis. Currently, if there are 1 or 2 students with jobs that can fully utilise 40+ threads and I come in with a job that can only fully utilise 1-2 threads, I will not get the full performance. It would seem fair that I get my 2 threads the other two students' jobs fight for the remaining 38 threads (unless of course there is so many students wanting to run things that my fair share is less than 2 threads)."
- "AT9 is good, even with heating issues. Great space and great view; Fosters a sort of community among our year."

ACTION: send to Neil Heatley / Computing Support.

6. Comments on Computing Support

- "Very helpful; maybe would like for it be available more than 2 hours per day as there may be more urgent issues."

ACTION: send to Neil Heatley / Computing Support.

7. Comments on ITO Support

- "I would like for lectures to treat ITO better. A lot of problems we associate with ITO is just because of problematic lecturers."
- "Shout-out to Neil <3"

8. AOCB

The committee discussed the lack of participation in student surveys. Possible incentives to improve this were suggested, including entry into a prize draw, course marks for entering a course survey, and a pop-up question box appearing upon login to DICE.

ACTION: raise at Teaching Committee.