

School of Informatics

UG3 Staff Student Liaison Committee Meeting Minutes 11 am, 27 March 2018, 5.02 Appleton Tower

Present: Christophe Dubach – Chair (UG3 Year Organiser)
Finn Zhan Chen (UG3 Rep)

In Attendance: Rob Armitage (UG1 Secretary, in place of UG3 Secretary)

Apologies: David Grilec (UG3 Rep)
Stefani Genkova (UG3 Rep)
Viktorija Lukosiute (UG3 Rep)

1. Introduction and Overview of SSLC

CD did not feel a detailed overview of the SSLC process was necessary since the semester 1 meeting covered this. CD asked for course feedback from the UG3 Rep present, FZC, from their individual experiences as well as from communications with the student body and with other Reps.

2. Comments on Courses

2.1 Algorithms and Data Structures – R Mayr [78 students]

The general feedback from students was that the course has been interesting, however some lectures and tutorials were considered not worth attending. A negative point raised was the lack of lecture recordings.

An individual student noted their dissatisfaction with the lecturer's presentation skills, to the point where they stopped attending lectures and utilised other resources to learn the course material.

2.2 Computer Architecture – B Grot / V Nagarajan [51 students]

The feedback was generally positive, specifically the lectures were "great" and the coursework was "interesting and appropriately challenging". A negative point was the minimal time between setting the coursework and the deadline. CD agreed that the deadline for next year should be just before Flexible Learning Week or at least a week after, rather than during or a short time after since this undermines the purpose of Flexible Learning Week.

2.3 Foundations of Natural Language Processing – A Lascarides [138 students]

The general feedback on this course was very positive, with specific mention being made of the quality of the lectures, the engaging personality of the lecturer, and the helpfulness of the labs. Two negative points made were that some lecture recordings had no sound, and that the absence of tutorials meant some students struggled with the change from UG1 and UG2 where all courses have tutorials. Some students wanted more opportunities to address issues they were having with the course material.

2.4 Introduction to Theoretical Computer Science – J Bradfield [55 students]

The general feedback was positive, that the lecturer is good and the course well organised. The low rate of feedback for this course prompted CD to ask for further details, however FZC did not personally know anyone on the course. For future SSLC meetings it was agreed that the number of students on each course should be included in the agenda.

Action 2.4.1: RA to note the number of students enrolled on the course and to make a note for Lisa Branney (incoming UG3 Secretary) before the next SSLC meeting to have this information for all courses available in advance.

2.5 Operating Systems – M O’Boyle [154 students]

The overall feedback was positive, specifically the lecturer gave very good explanations and the coursework was challenging and interesting. Several issues were raised:

- Lectures were not recorded for the entirety of the course.
- There was a lack of student support and material with this being a 20 credit course.
- There was a lack of build up to the assignment apart from a short introductory lecture.
- The TA was not good at explaining the coursework.
- One student suggested a weekly tutorial or a lab session focusing on c++ would be beneficial. Another suggestion was a crash course in c++ in week 1.

CD noted that the course has been altered for this year and will hopefully stabilise by next year.

2.6 Software Testing – A Rajan [180 students]

The feedback was generally positive, with the good organisation of the course being highlighted. The lecturer’s transparency regarding the UCU industrial action was appreciated, as was the deadline extension. One minor negative point raised was that the coursework, while good for teaching the required skills, could have been more interesting. An issue raised was that lack of feedback on coursework from the TA which seems to be a consequence of miscommunication. It is unclear whether this was an individual student with this issue, or if it affected multiple students.

2.7 System Design Project – J Hillston / B Webb [142 students]

There was some positive feedback for this course, specifically that the organisation was good. Garry Ellard received a specific mention as a positive aspect of the course. One student specifically noted that they enjoyed this course but felt this could largely be down to the team they were assigned, which they felt had worked well together. Some students enjoyed the new format of the course due to the creativity it allowed, but noted the organisational issues with introducing a new format.

There were a number of issues raised with the course:

- Communication was inconsistent and sometimes not timely.
- The marking was considered to be inconsistent, with the students feeling the performance of the markers was lacking.
- Many students feel the course requires many more hours of work than the 20-credit designation would suggest, especially with this being mandatory. A number of students experienced high rates of stress due to the number of group meetings and the amount of work required.

- The robotics component of the course was disliked by some students who do not count robotics in their sphere of interest. Some teams had no members with experience in robotics or electronics. There was a call for the robotics component to be removed.
- Some students were not in favour of being randomly assigned teammates and would prefer to choose their own team. CD noted that this is unlikely to be implemented. Some students felt that teams with no members who have leadership experience or skills were at a disadvantage and requested a strategy to account for this, specifically a self-survey on these skills. CD acknowledged that criteria could be added for assembling teams, including engineering/electronics experience.
- There was contradictory information given out by the course team. One example is that the Course Organisers stated that there should not be a table of contents in a course of this size, however the User Guide contradicts this.
- Having deadlines throughout the semester added to the pressure.
- Some students called for the course to be optional. CD noted that, as part of the ongoing curriculum review, Informatics is considering restructuring UG3 courses to give more options.

2.8 Other comments

- AI Large Practical received negative comments relating to the carryover of work from semester 1 and the lack of organisation. It was felt that Automated Reasoning should not be mandatory for an Artificial Intelligence and Mathematics course.
- AILP, CSLP and SELP do not have enough variability.
- It was felt that feedback has not been provided with enough detail and therefore does not serve the purpose of promoting improvement in students' work. FCZ believes the National Student Survey ranking is low partially due to this. CD noted that feedback can come from numerous sources including mentors, tutors and TAs. Lecturer's office hours exist for this reason. CD noted that this should be highlighted in the student handbook for future years. CD noted the difficulty of providing specific feedback to all students, and that perhaps more general feedback could be offered, consisting of model answers and common issues.

3. Comments on Facilities and Support

3.1 Appleton Tower Level 2 Facilities

FZC asked if Informatics students are allowed to use level 2, considering it is not an Informatics-controlled floor. The ITO's understanding is that as long as they have access to the floor and there is study space that isn't currently booked then Informatics students can use the space at any time.

3.2 Appleton Tower Microwave Removal

FZC queried the removal of the microwaves from the breakout areas in Appleton Tower.

Action 3.2.1: RA to discuss with Gillian Bell.

Outcome: RA discussed the matter with Gillian Bell and Neil Heatley. Neil had recently sent an email out to all students detailing the reasoning for the removal, reproduced below:

“Good morning,

Following last weekend [sic] evacuation of Appleton Tower, the cause was identified as the microwave on level 4. This is the second time that this has happened and as a result we can no longer provide it as a resource.

We have to assess all the risks in the building and given that this has occurred more than once, we have to mitigate that risk. In addition, the failure of all building occupants to leave, means that we have to be extra vigilant in preventing any potential sources of danger.

I know that many will feel that the actions of a few should not impact the entire student community, however, as noted in my email last week included below, we have no choice but to take preventative measures when issues are identified when it comes to safety.

Best,

Neil”

4. Comments on Admin Support

4.1 Changes Made to Timesheets

The Teaching Support Team have requested feedback on the changes made to timesheets. FZC stated that since there are no tutorials there has been nothing communicated to him or the other Reps.

5. AOB

5.1 Changes Made to Timesheets

FZC requested that the Computer Security lecture recordings be uploaded.

Action 5.1.1: RA to contact Ross Armstrong as soon as possible to make them available for revision.