

# **MSc Staff Student Liaison Committee Meeting**

**10am-11:30am, Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January**

## **Microsoft Teams**

Present: P. Stevens (MSc Year Organiser), L. Seal (MSc Administrator), R. Finlayson (MSc Teaching Secretary), S. Mills (Student Support Officer), A. Kocsis (MSc Rep), B. Zhu (MSc Rep), R. Verweu (MSc Rep), V. Kaulinskas (MSc Rep)

### **1. Introduction and overview of SSLC**

The meeting opened with a brief introduction on the purpose of the meeting, mainly to gain feedback to help enhance student's experience and to offer student representatives a chance to talk to the Year Organiser directly.

### **2. Comments on MSc Courses**

[Note: All feedback from this meeting was sent to Course Organisers with the offer to comment on/respond to. Any feedback from the Course Organisers that was returned is included in the minutes]

#### **ANLP**

Rep: Probably one of the better organised courses this semester. I think in general this course might serve as a good blueprint for other courses and how to deal with very large groups of people online, as all the courses had to do last semester. I think my main issue with the course was with tutorials and help hours that were set up. Most courses you would get a session with six or seven people for one hour or so to work through materials every week. With ANLP one Teaching Assistant (TA) was assigned to 4 or 5 groups of students and during the one hour tutorial the TA only had 10 minutes with each group, and they would run out of time with each group. They would then say, "come to the help hours." Most of the TAs had at least one hour a week where any student could come to them on Teams to get questions answered. From what I understood, I think many of those help hours weren't made use of (but I have no data on this though, you might want to check with instructors); I felt like the TA time was wasted on help hours, when it could be better used at tutorials. It meant students had to organise another point in their week to get a question answered instead of there and then in the tutorial. I think in general it was a well organised course though. Lectures were very clear, materials posted each week, and a breakdown of what each part of the course is on Learn. The tutorial feedback is perhaps just a bit of more advanced feedback to consider for the future.

Perdita: I don't know specifically what the background to that decision was but my guess would be that it would have been an overall shortage of available TA effort that forced them into that. Having only ten minutes with groups likely bred the question of what to do when there is additional queries, hence the help hours. But it's very helpful feedback.

#### CDI1

No feedback for this course.

#### CDI2

No feedback for this course.

#### DBBA

No feedback for this course.

#### IRR

Rep: Students complain about IRR very often. The tutors always changed during the last semester, and some of the tutorials were cancelled without any reason. Also it's hard for students to engage for this course, especially due to the coursework feedback coming back very late – indeed we are still waiting for it to come back for the draft.

Perdita: I think this has been an ongoing issue, but Ray may know more.

Ray: IRR always brings some issues, as it's a large cohort with every MSc student taking it. And this year R. Sarkar and S. Anderson took on the course, restructuring it. From my experience with large course with new Course Organisers, there are often some teething pains. I've not heard any specific feedback, but it may well have been brought up in the weekly Student Rep Meeting. Nonetheless, I will feedback these concerns to the Course Organisers to offer comment on in the minutes.

Rep: I think first of all, on a positive note, I have heard in previous years I heard you write your report and get your grade, so I think the general restructure with the multiple assignments (with the first being marking another student's assignment) is pretty good. I think the problem with IRR this semester (and I know it is hard with so many students online) is that the general execution has been pretty poor.

A couple of things: Grading has been very slow across all courses, but particularly IRR feedback has been very slow. We've only had one assignment graded so far, that in addition to the point in the rubric, most students didn't get more than one or two sentences of feedback, if they got any feedback at all (which was quite ironic as the assignment was about grading another IRR assignment and the importance of giving extensive feedback). With that assignment, the rubric that had been given beforehand consisted of three parts, but then once it was created it turned out the fourth part of the rubric was added after people were graded, where you would get additional marks if you did something exceptional. I understand why it exists, but it was very weird to see it after we had been graded, so we had no knowledge that we could do more if we wanted.

It felt like every week there would be another complaint. At the start of the semester, allocating tutorials was incredibly messy. There was this week where every day we get a new piece of information or an email correcting a piece of information in an email before. Just those sorts of mistakes that were seeping in all the time. I guess the problem right now is that at the end of next week the final review is due, but no one has gotten any feedback on the draft which was due before the Christmas break yet. You can see the deadline for when feedback will be published, but that deadline has been pushed several times already. So over the Christmas break we will have been waiting for feedback to get working on this, but now the break is over and the semester has already started, and people feel like they haven't had any chance to work on this over the break because they haven't gotten any feedback.

Perdita: Yes, this is really bad, and I am very sorry. This is very frustrating when this kind of thing happens, especially when there are patterns that one sees from year to year. There's not a lot we can do at this point, but we should certainly minimize it.

### IPPO

No feedback for this course.

### IAML

Rep: I received three emails about IAML. The Gradescope was used to mark the coursework as well as the final exam, and students found they were really struggling to submit in the time, and that using Gradescope was a bit of a nightmare

Perdita: So just to check this is about the usability of Gradescope?

Rep: Yes

Perdita: Were the other courses that used mechanisms that worked better than Gradescope? Is there something we should be telling staff to use instead?

Rep: So for ANLP they used Gradescope, but they specifically told us to ignore the general instructions that were sent out, because they used a slightly different system or setup. I thought it worked very well especially the midterm where we could start at any point of the day. And then once we started we had 90 minutes to complete the exam, which was very nice for people in different time zones. With the final exam they had it for two hours, but we had three hours to take it and submit it in case there was any technical issues. I think those kinds of measures are very helpful.

Lindsay: I would add that ANLP was trialling this method of exam submission, which was worked really well, which was submitting directly during the time. They were the only exam trialling that, so that's why it was different from the rest. ADS used Learn for the exam, but the Learning Technology have been dealing with it, so they may be able to offer better insight into this.

### ICDM

No feedback for this course.

### SPT

Rep: In general compared to IRR, SPT was really well organised and our feedback was on time. And the feedback was very useful for us, so we had no problems.

### RSS

No feedback for this course

## **3. Comments on Other Courses**

### HCI

Rep: The general issue was feedback not given in time. The first assignment feedback was returned to students just in time for the third assignment, so the second assignment was completed with no feedback. We raised this with the Course Organisers and they said there was no markers available, hence the delay which we can understand. Apart from this it was very organised and we can see the Course Organisers put a lot of work into the course.

## **4. General Issues about the Year and Specific Courses**

Perdita: So maybe this is good opportunity for me to ask for comments on anything anyone has done or might have done that has seemed to be helpful to make students feel like they are part of a cohort. This is a concern the university is aware of at large, about students feeling isolated, which is unsurprising given the year. But we would like to be able to do better, so if there are things we should encourage other programmes or other courses to do, I would love to hear about it.

Rep: I think for me the main thing that provides a sense of community was the Discord server that students set up at the start of semester, and if not everyone, then a lot of students are part of. I think N. Heatley is in there as well, so he may be able to talk to this. There are normal channels for socialising and there are channels for every course in Informatics. There's also channels specifically for giving student feedback, so that has been one of the ways for me to identify feedback and talk to people about issues.

Perdita: Do you have the feeling most students know about that, or should we be making more effort to publicise it more?

Rep: I think most do, but I don't think it would hurt to publicise it. I'm not sure how available it is in China though, which is my main concern.

## **5. Comments on Computer Facilities**

No comments on Computing Support.

## **6. Comments on ITO Support**

No comments in ITO support.

## **7. Any Other Business**

Rep: Maybe this is a small point, but maybe something of a reminder about the meeting ahead of time, as it might be a way of getting more people to the meeting.

Ray: Absolutely, I will make sure to send out one ahead of the next SSLC meeting.

Perdita: Thanks to all for the feedback.

Meeting adjourned.