

MSc Staff Student Liaison Committee Meeting

10:30-12:00pm, Wednesday 12th January 2022

Microsoft Teams

Present: I. Murray (MSc Year Organiser), L. Seal (Teaching Organisation Officer MSc), R. Finlayson (Teaching Organisation Administrator MSc), S. Mills (Student Support Officer), E. Hoole (MSc Rep), A. Deligny (MSc Rep), K. Hussein (MSc Rep), S. Bansal (MSc Rep), F. Mi (MSc Rep), S. Kambhampaty (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 over the past semester so as 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: This relates to ANLP, but also to the exam period in general: some courses require a lot of prep before the exam, and when they are grouped together in the exam diet so early on after the end of the semester, it can be cumbersome. Perhaps there could be a wider range of time (even four or five days) between exams like ANLP and MLPR? A bigger split between the ANLP and MLPR (a week at least) would have been appreciated. Otherwise students generally seemed happy with the ANLP coursework and content.

I. Murray: We as a School do not control when exams are scheduled, as the University does it centrally. We can make light requests (asking for an exam to be put at the start or end of a diet, for example), but those requests may or may not be met. ANLP and MLPR are early on because they have to have the marks returned early, since we need to let failing students know their marks so they don't take other heavy machine learning courses in the next semester. If the exams were at the end of the diet, then chances are we wouldn't get these marks returned in time.

The other thing is we can't put the exam in a non-standard exam time; exams have to be within a standard diet. There is the option of moving semester 1 course exams to the April diet, but from experience this means students have to re-study the material. Engagement also falters over the subsequent months from the end of semester 1 and the April diet. I hear arguments from both sides on this, and the faculty are split on this issue too.

Rep: I don't think students wouldn't want the exam moved to the April diet either. Students would have to restudy the material again, or would just ignore the course in favour of other deadlines

CDI1

Rep: Everything went smoothly with this course, and everyone seemed to have a good time. There was only one individual assignment, and for the other we were put into subset. Everything was pretty clear and there's only been positive feedback about the course.

CDI2

No feedback for this course.

DBBA

No feedback for this course.

IVC

Rep: While the course was okay and really well organised, the exam was very, very frustrating. The Course Organiser said they wanted to assess our knowledge of Computer Vision, and not our speed of googling. At least two of the questions in the exam were unrelated to the course content, so we basically had to google them and synthesize them, which felt unfair. The preparation we had with the past papers we had was unhelpful too, as they were different content and format. I don't think any of the students were able to answer all the questions in time. This was frustrating, which is unfortunate because the course was very good.

IRR

Rep: Last year there was mention of a draft, but this year it wasn't in the deadlines, so students didn't realise they had to work towards it. This meant that later in the semester the tutors would be expecting a draft, but students were not working on it, because the official coursework deadline is further way. This also meant that tutorial participation decreased, which is a shame because the tutorial content was good. I understand not wanting to give students a hard deadline before Christmas, but perhaps a formative deadline for drafts before Christmas will give students something to work on and think about. Tutors set their own draft deadlines, so it was hard to keep track of this during the exam period and holiday season.

I. Murray: This is useful, as there is a strong tension with some of the course. Some students won't engage with something unless there's something attached to it or there is a hard deadline, but others will be dismayed about us setting another deadline, not giving students freedom to set their own.

Rep: I thought the first deadline this year with the Literature Review was pretty useful. It wasn't too much work but it had people engaged over the first couple of tutorials, looking over the content, and figuring out the points they are looking for; students would learn

what the Course Organiser is looking for. I think a formative deadline would be good, as it wouldn't put pressure on students to return a full realised piece of work if they are too busy, but might get them to think about it at least. Perhaps even a deadline at the start of January, just before the final deadline.

I. Murray: There's always tension when deadlines are set during a time when the university is on a break. Perhaps even just a deadline at the end of the exam diet might do the trick.

Rep: Perhaps split it and not leave it as a big chunk in January? There subchapters in IRR, maybe having intermediate drafts or thematic tutorials (one on what you want to research, and have a mini exercise in writing a chapter) might create a continuous engagement and keep the students thinking about what they want. If there was a small exercise after each tutorial, students might be more keen to engage and learn. Maybe also even engagement points: 10 points across each tutorials where you get a point if you say something in each of these weeks. The value the students get from discussions might outweigh the small amount of points the engagement is worth.

IPPO

No feedback for this course.

IAML

Rep: One student has said that the paper is not solvable in the two hours assigned to do it, and that the difficulty level was high. The student also believes that the format of uploading answer scripts is not ideal, and they would prefer an autosave option (which would protect them against the 0 mark policy), like with ANLP and MLPR (where answers are typed in, with the option to upload at points if the student wishes too).

S. Mills: There has been a lot of upset with regards to this exam. Information and guidance was sent out to student in advance of the exam stating that the exam was 2 hours long, with an additional hour to upload answers and compensate for any technical issues. What we've seen is that students are using this extra hour to work on their exam further and then upload in the final ten minutes. We need to draw a deadline somewhere, and there are Special Circumstances (SC) available for issues in this final hour that were out with the student's control. It's difficult on our side too but a line has to be drawn somewhere.

Rep: The problem with this expectation is that because students are using this extra time, you need to use this time yourself otherwise you are putting yourself at a disadvantage.

Rep: There have been cases where there have been lapses by the School (marks returned later than expected) and student are expected to act in good faith in these circumstances. I think in issues like this when the student has come across a problem out with their control, the School needs to act in good faith in return. If the exam were in the format of ANLP/MLPR, then the issues that happened with the IAML exam would not have arisen. The specific format of the exam introduces a certain element of risk for the student. Because the IAML exam was set up in this format, the Course Organisers should allow for some allowances for mistakes.

Rep: There is also the issue that the window cannot simply be closed due to those with extra time allowances needing extra upload time. But Gradescope is not especially clear in this regard. One actionable thing to do regarding the 2 hrs + 1 hr exam format is changing the message displayed on Gradescope for Extra Time Adjustment. Currently, after 1600, Gradescope reads 'Deadline has been extended by an hour'. This is quite confusing; at least in one case that I am aware of, the student did not write to ITO immediately upon being confused by this message. Changing this message to 'Deadline has been extended by an hour for ONLY students who have obtained prior ETA relief', or extending the session for only those with ETA relief while closing it for others will be very helpful.

L. Seal: Information – including the exam quickstart guide - about what to do if there was an issue (and to contact the ITO if the issue arose within the final upload hour) was sent out to the student both five days before the exam and on the morning of the exam. We also sent this out with practice exam information. This was clear in that it said that any submissions after 16:00 would be marked 0. I don't think we could have been clearer about the guidance. The decision on the late penalty after 16:00 is a College decision, not a School decision, so we cannot alter that, so this is why we advise students who believe they have a case to make to contact ESC.

I. Murray: In regards to the original point about the exam not being solvable in the time, I am sceptical of claims like that. Every year there are students who say this but those who write plenty and get over 90% and seem to finish early. It is doable, but it is hard, and some people would not finish it with any sort of arbitrary deadline. With my course I go through and read the questions and write the answers, to see that the writing is not the limiting factor of the exam. For every course - even if the exam is reasonable - there will always be some who say it not doable. In the absence of an in-person exam, would shifting to the live-typing system be preferable?

Rep: I'm hesitant to change from what we're used to now, as that would mean new teething problems when trying to learn a new system – but I am aware that that doesn't address any of the issues that were brought up.

BAI-ICDM

No feedback for this course.

SPT

No feedback for this course.

RSS

Rep: I think this could be a model class for other courses, because the Course Organisers were very appreciative of feedback. Every time a student had a question or an issue, the Course Organisers would publish a note of Piazza. The exam for course was one of a few that was very doable in the two hours; you felt like you could submit a full paper based on what we learned. They would make you think about what you write, but without being stressed about time constraints.

Rep: I agree with the course being very nice, but I think the course could be 10 credits. It feels like less of a workload compared to other 20 credits courses, and more content could have been squeezed in. The assessed coursework is a pretty big task, but perhaps more content could be put into the end of it. Most of the lectures covered the basics (which is what the course was intended to do), but we only had one advanced special topic lecture. I understand there was meant to be another that students didn't give enough responses for. But considering lectures finished at week 8, perhaps more content that explores the state of the art in the industry? It would be a nice addition, especially on the likes of the Kalman filters, which were included in previous years but not this year. Maybe mobile robotics too (as it was mostly armed robotics we learned about) or applications of robotics with AI (e.g.: expanded motion planning). But the course material could be expanded, because the field is huge.

3. Comments on Other Courses

MLPR

Rep: Many the students were saying that the exam this year was harder than a lot of the past papers (other than the fact that MLPR in general is difficult). The other issue was that the type-as-you-go format of the exam meant that there felt like there was no time for uploads.

I. Murray: Is there actually an actionable thing there? We worked hard to minimise the need to do that. There was probably only one question where it was needed, but we made it quite short and provided practice on how to do it. I appreciate it's annoying and would prefer it is in person, but is there actually anything we could do?

EXC

Rep: It felt that the course was a bit underwhelming with how in depth it was. Especially the second coursework, which was a carbon copy of the first coursework, just using Apache Spark instead. It felt like a lot more could have been done with that course. We felt like we spent less time on the coursework than was advertised. It was also mentioned that the second coursework would be run on the HPC cluster, which a lot of us were really excited to do. But halfway through the course that was made simpler and that component was removed, which is a shame because that would have been really interesting to learn.

BDL

Rep: Students were pretty happy with it. It's positive feedback all round. Students are happy with the fact that the last couple of assignments were over Christmas, which gave more time to think about them more in depth. The only thing that could be added was some discussion on Web 3 JavaScript Integration. The course turns very theoretical near the end, but from a practical point of view when someone gets involved in blockchain developing or interacts with that sphere, some Web 3 JavaScript discussion would be useful.

PDIoT

Rep: Positive reviews all around. Everyone really likes the course. There was part where we double up our individual apps and do a demo and expo, which was great so as to see what everyone else was doing.

Data Science For Design

Rep: We had three assignments and because not everyone was from a coding background some students were struggling. The feedback on assignments could have come earlier, as we only got feedback for the previous assignment after we submitted the subsequent one. If we could get the feedback sooner, it would help us not make the same mistakes again.

I. Murray: Could perhaps one of the assignments been formative? This might have meant that marks could return feedback more quickly, as they do not have to meticulously go through everything.

Rep: While all the assignments were linked, the first assignment could perhaps have been set up like this, as it was a little separate from the others.

4. General Issues about the Year and Specific Courses

Rep: For Computer Science students, the programme structure (where we get 60 core credits, and 40 to choose from other areas) is appreciated, as it gives freedom to explore other areas of study.

Rep: In Semester 2 will there be any issues for students doing teaching support roles not attending lectures? How will their attendance be marked?

I. Murray: Attendance isn't taken for lectures, and all lectures should be recorded, so any material can be caught up on afterwards.

Rep: Will old course content be available alongside live lectures?

I. Murray: We can't enforce Course Organisers to have old course materials available, and it's up to them as to what they make available to students. Ideally students would be able to browse course material for all courses freely (as used to be the case when courses had their own webpages before the University became more Learn-focussed), but they can be enrolled as Class Only on courses they wish to explore the material of.

5. Comments on Computer Facilities

Rep: I had brought up the possibility of having laptop docking stations in AT6, but I have already mentioned this to Neil Heatley.

6. Comments on ITO Support

Rep: It's worth anticipating Teaching Support contracts taking up a lot of queries in the coming weeks.

L. Seal: We will pass this onto our Teaching Support Team, who are likely already aware of it.

Rep: Regarding the Special Circumstances (SC) process, there's a lot of information that students don't know. Perhaps it's worth training Programme Reps on this so they can give out advice?

S. Mills: There's a lot of information, and now ESC take charge of SC applications, it's something of a two part process, as we advise students to come talk to the Student Support team first before submitting their application. We would advise Reps to send worried and querying students to us direct, so we can help. We also send out an email about SC two weeks before the exam diet, but we could send it out earlier in the semester too. The ESC team are doing a review of the process though, so any further feedback would be appreciated.

7. Any Other Business

Rep: Given the current situation with Covid and isolation period, what's the situation regarding missing tutorials? They aren't recorded, so you are missing information for one week and half. It's unfortunate there's not a general rule about it.

S. Mills: So there is a central university page about this which advises sending an email to Student Support and Course organisers. There are guidelines we are bound to, so it's hard to move around them.

I. Murray: Different courses have different approaches to how to deal with this. One pre-Honours course had the idea of having an online option for tutorials, others may just choose to answer any queries about worksheets or such. But if you think there's information you are missing out on, then it's a question for the Course Organiser on how you are supposed to catch up. It's hard to record tutorials, because students might be less inclined to talk if they are. If there are sessions you think you should be recorded, then it worth raising it with the relevant Course Organiser.

Meeting adjourned.