MSc Staff Student Liaison Committee Meeting

10:00-11:30pm, Tuesday 19th April 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), A. Deligny (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]

CSAI

Rep: I worked with Course Organiser N. Kokciyan, and this is the first time she's had a class, and the effort she putting and made was tremendous. Rarely have I met such a nice person who has put in so much effort. She asked for weekly feedback from students, considering how they will enjoy the course. In many instances the efforts a Course Organiser makes isn't always visible, so it's great to see it here.

CQI

No feedback for this course.

CCN

Rep: There was some feedback mostly about the first part of the course (the course was split into two parts). There was some difficulty, that the in it being too abstract and minimalistic; students had to search for papers based on screenshots of slides, and some notions the course covered were complicated to those without a neuroscience background

IM: The Course Organisers are aware of the difficulties and indeed this course is changing next year to help those without the background knowledge.

AV

Rep: At the beginning of the course there were some issues with the assignments but these were fixed and the Course Organiser added extensions to help with this. Due to strike action

there was only six of the ten classes delivered, so there is some worry about the eligible exam questions that will be forthcoming. There's no book or main resource, so there's only slides, PowerPoints, and past exam papers – the last of which will be mostly irrelevant to this year. They did invite guest lecturers which were very good, and for which the students had lots of questions. This is definitely worth keeping for the future, as it broadens the theoretical field and is a good addition to the technical terms.

IM: This course is still resettling after some modernisation in recent years, so good that the high points are being appreciated.

Response from Course Organiser, L. Sevilla-Lara:
-- The material that will be covered in the exam is explicitly stated in Learn, under the tab "Preparing for the Exam".
-- There is no book because the material we covered was too recent, and therefore is not covered in any published book.

IPP

Rep: The course was really back and forth, and it wasn't so much IPP but rather the legacy of IRR. IPP coursework is versed by IRR feedback, however, we are still awaiting this IRR coursework feedback. This has been chased multiple times and has apparently the marks are ready but there is some delay while things are finalised.

With IPP there was also an invitation to submit a draft early by March so as to get feedback, however, it's hard for many to submit at this time due to other workloads.

IM: The IRR delay is unacceptable and I can only apologise that it has been so long.

IAML-DL

No feedback for this course.

MCI

Rep: All feedback has been positive for this course has been good. The Course Organiser is smart, well prepared, and available and approachable. Even though the course the course is abstract, it's still very good.

PMR

Rep: This has been one of the best classes I have ever taken. The Course Organiser, M. Gutmann, puts in a lot of effort; the course material is well prepared. He doesn't just show students slides, but goes into details with each one, drawing graphs and tables and explaining everything thoroughly. Complex ideas are simplified well.

Tutorials are also well made, with tutors taking time to reply to questions – if not at the present tutorial, then at the next one if they don't have the answer on them. After quizzes the Course Organiser took time to explain marking, and generally is very approachable and replies quickly to questions and queries.

IM: This course regularly gets good feedback, so it's good to hear students are liking it again this year.

RL

Rep: This course is really good but it is not a 10 credit course; it should be 20 credits. The main reason is the assignment is an insane amount of work, equating to some 50 hours. It's definitely interesting to test coding RL models, but there's a lot of work to reach a certain performance. The coursework was opened in mid-March and available for about one month, but not all students have the opportunity to start early, with many having to leave it until the last minute to complete. There were a lot of extensions and Special Circumstances applications because of this coursework; indeed I know some students who are submitting late and still working on it. Perhaps putting the benchmark lower might be an option. A student would work three days to get two marks in the coursework, which seems all too much for too little.

The labs were great and helpful, but they were too short and ended too early in the semester. It would be great if they were around during the time the coursework is due. The Course Organisers were good at responding though, and the course is very interesting. There was a split between students too, those liking the fact it was delivered online, and those who didn't like it.

IM: This course has been improved over the years, but discussion perhaps need to be had about the workload. The real struggle for courseworks that are substantial is that it's somewhat natural to try get all the marks when you are completing them online. Equally room has to be left for top students to excel.

Response from Course Organiser, S. Albrecht: We thank the students for their feedback. Feedback is important to us and each year we make improvements based on the feedback. Regarding the coursework, note that it was in fact released in mid-February and available until end of March, so students had 6 weeks to work on the coursework. The labs were spread approximately evenly throughout this time, to encourage students to start early. Regarding the amount of work, the coursework included open-ended "performance tuning" elements to allow students to explore some RL concepts in more depth, and this was used as a differentiator between good and excellent marks in this coursework. We also emphasise again that a certain background in programming is expected for this course, and we hope that the provided "Coding Proficiency Self-Check" was helpful to students in determining whether they had the right level of programming skills for the course.

THF

Rep: The only feedback is that this is a good course.

3. Comments on Other Courses

ASR

Rep: We were introduced to many architectures in quick succession, which meant that many students were lost. It would be better if there were a focus on fewer aspects instead of presenting a wide range.

4. General Issues about the Year and Specific Courses

Rep: A peak of discussion between students was on project allocation. Some things don't see to be as transparent as they could be, with students having to contact supervisors to make sure and get marked as suitable before the deadline. Some students were not marked in time, so students would delete the project, only for the supervisor to come back at a later point to try add a student to a project. It seems there was an unspoken deadline for supervisors that students were not privy to, leading to a wave of frustration with students who took themselves off projects they may well have been able to get marked as suitable for. It would be good if any extended deadlines could be advertised on the DPMT.

Some students got their first choice though, but some their last. Mostly though students seems relatively content with what they got, and there haven't been any complaints to us after the allocation. Some students were aware of allocation before it was published though, which wasn't ideal.

One thing that is frustration is the tags that all the supervisors create, making searching nearly impossible. It's more helpful to Ctrl+F on the page itself instead.

IM: DPMT isn't perfect, but it is a lot farer than what used to be in place, with more students getting top choices. It's not great that supervisors were discussing allocation before it was officially published though; they are published to supervisors first so as to highlight any errors, and shouldn't have been shared at that points.

There's a new project organiser next year, so hopefully wrinkles can be ironed out. I agree that deadlines need to communicate better, and both students and supervisors need a fair chance to fill out DPMT. We also had a lot of late proposals too, which didn't help, particularly for Cyber Security students who said they didn't have a great amount of choice.

The most important things seem to be the feedback on IRR not being with you and the issue of workload. B. Franke is on the issue of workload and keeps an eye on it through the year. There is an encouragement to set courseworks that don't encourage working until the final point of a deadline. Concurrent deadlines is hard and tricky to manage. Maybe some courses could have less graded assignments and put more focus on the exam

5. Comments on Computer Facilities

Rep: there were some issues with the remote DICE desktop not working, and with memory issues to. The RAM would come up as full and students could only save in a few GPU clusters. The PCs are also oddly slow at the start of sessions.

IM: It's important to let Computing Support know of these issues through the ticket systems, as otherwise they won't be aware of the problem. The issue of disk space is complicated, as there's a soft quota for those who use DICE regularly whereas those who suddenly do heavy tasks after a year of not using the system will come across a harder

quota (which usually can be overturned when getting in touch with Computing Support and explaining the issue).

6. Comments on ITO Support

Rep: There was the issue of contracts and payment processing last semester, but this thankfully seems to be working now and we're able to start logging payments in he system. Hopefully with time issues will disappear.

IM: It's worth noting that the Advice Place is a great resource for any issues regarding financial worries. They know the rights of students and know when to lean on the University in unreasonable instances.

7. Any Other Business

Meeting adjourned.