

UG3 Staff Student Liaison Committee Meeting
2.00pm-3.00pm, Friday 29th March 2019
Appleton Tower, 6.16

Present: C Dubach (chair and UG3 year organiser), L Masselos (UG3 student rep), Q Patankar (UG3 student rep), G Gilligan (UG3 student rep), L Branney (UG3 administrator)

1. Introduction and overview of SSLC:

The meeting opened with a brief introduction from the UG3 Year Organiser on the purpose of the meeting, which is mainly to gain feedback to help enhance student's experience for the next academic year.

2. Comments on UG3 courses:

Algorithms and Data Structures

It was noted that the lecturer is quite hard to understand due to their accent, it would be better if they could speak more clearly and improve enunciation. Some students feel that the lectures are too long and that the coursework is quite intense. Otherwise, the content is very good.

Computer Communications and Networks

The course organiser received praise for listening to student feedback and implementing lecture recordings. Students would further benefit from more coding examples particularly for coursework questions. The course has really good content, but the 1.5 hour lectures feel very long and intense, perhaps a break in the middle would help with this.

Computer Security

Students love this course, the content is excellent and the coursework was well received. It is a very interesting and engaging course which is very well run. The guest lecturers were really good. The feedback for coursework 2 is overdue, however students are happy with the course in general.

Foundations of Natural Language Processing

There is an excellent series of lectures on this course. In general, students feel that there is a good overlap from INF2A, however it is questioned why the course is level 9, as there is no difference in difficulty between another comparable level 10 course. The course overall is well refined, the labs are good and really engaging; the feedback received so far has been comprehensive and was delivered on time.

Response from Alex, Course Organiser: The feedback is encouraging. Re: the course level. This will be moot very soon, in that next year we need to propose to expand FNLP to a 20 point course (as per the new curriculum designed by Sharon and others), and when we do that we may make it a level 10 course (Sharon is encouraging this; I'm not yet convinced either way but I will take this student feedback into account in the decision).

Introduction to Theoretical Computer Science

No feedback provided.

Operating Systems

The lecturers on this course are incredible, the content and coursework are good. Very positive feedback was received for Michael. The feedback on coursework so far has been comprehensive, the only issue has been that there are no labs or tutorials which makes it difficult when preparing coursework. Students feel they would benefit from a one off lab session or tutorial prior to coursework submission deadline.

Software Testing

The coursework description could be improved and made simpler, as it was very hard to read with very long prose. Some negative feedback was received for some of the tutors on this course, due to lack of engagement/unhelpfulness.

System Design Project

The general consensus was that this course is very large and time consuming and could be improved by making it a year-long or optional course. It is very draining for students, taking up a huge amount of hours and very stressful. It was noted that the Demo's are too short (10 minutes) and the feedback given for the Demo's was inconsistent and does not reflect what work was carried out for the Demo. Clearer marking criteria and expectations would help resolve this. The Demo's are currently marked out of 5 with no half marks given, students feel if they were marked out of 20, this would provide a wider scope of marks.

It has been noted that students who are aware of the peer marking scheme have been strategising and not all contributing to the project equally. Perhaps if students were marked up/down on each component, as opposed to the current overall group mark, this may help with this issue.

Garry has received a lot of praise for his continued hard work; he is knowledgeable, resourceful and always around to help.

Regarding the resources provided in AT 3.11, it was noted that some of the equipment may need updated/replaced or fixed. For example, students experienced issues with a faulty soldering tool and the EV3 kit is very slow so updated hardware would be beneficial.

Response from Barbara, Course Organiser: Regarding the equipment - this has been significantly upgraded from last year, including Raspberry Pi as standard kit, so that there is no requirement to use the EV3. Nevertheless there are still some designs and circumstances in which the EV3 is convenient to use - are students suggesting we actually remove this as an option from the supplied kit?

We make a set of tools available and assume anything faulty will be reported immediately via the technician (training on safety was provided, and the facilities inspected by the School's safety officer). Given the type of tools on offer, and range of use, we cannot entirely prevent faults from developing. Again, it seems better to make these facilities available with the caveat that faults may develop, than to limit it such that no student will ever encounter a fault.

Regarding the marking scheme and unequal contribution, this is an inevitable problem in a group project, but we have tried to keep to a simple scheme for mark adjustment rather than something

more elaborate. In the past, trying to explicitly adjust for each element caused significantly divisiveness as students felt they were competing with their fellow group members.

Regarding the 'huge amount of hours' - we do not believe this is an explicit imposition of the current course requirements on the students.

Groups are asked to devise their own project topic and workplan, including time planning for the expected hours. They are also explicitly told that if their planning proves to have underestimated the time required, they should adjust their goals, NOT try to spend more time. However, we will look at whether any additional actions can be taken to try to communicate this message more clearly. We are also considering potential options to revise the timing/delivery of the course.

We altered the demo arrangements this year to adjust for perceived problems last year of inconsistent marking. We take on board that this may have raised different problems with respect to duration and feedback.

However, we do not feel it is accurate to say (particularly as a general statement) that "feedback was inconsistent and did not reflect what work was presented". In every case where clarification on feedback was requested, we offered the group a 30 minute meeting with the course organiser to discuss it.

We hope students appreciate that running a course like SDP is very complex with many trade-offs. We very much welcome their future comments and suggestions for potential improvements.

3. Comments on other courses:

No comments.

4. General issues about the year and specific courses:

The marking across all of Informatics courses has been received late and feedback has been non-existent or very poor for some courses. Particularly with formative feedback, students feel they should be given more comprehensive feedback due to the purpose of the task, but they feel they have not been receiving this.

There is praise for the Honours Project, it has been very well administered.

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

As noted at the last SSLC in semester 1, there is not enough social space and too many students for the space provided.

6. Comments on Computing Support:

No comments.

7. Comments on ITO Support:

Students feel that the ITO does an excellent job with the resources that they have.

8. AOB

With regard to course surveys, it was noted that if there was an incentive to fill them out this would yield a higher response rate. If following the model that the Mathematics department use, such as a small incremental credit (1% for filling out the survey) this might attract more students to fill it out. Other suggestions were to have the survey added as an automated pop up at the time of submission (for example, Submit submissions).