

UG1 Student Staff Liaison Committee – Semester 1

Monday 18th January 2021 via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Laura Ambrose (ITO)
Paul Anderson (UG1 Year Organiser)
Phillip Wadler (INF1A Lecturer)
Michael Fourman (INF1A Lecturer)
Claudia Chirita (INF1A Assistant Lecturer)
Bjoern Franke (Director of Teaching)
Christopher Lucas (INF1-CG Lecturer)
Fiona McNeill (INF1B Lecturer)
Julian Bradfield (Future INF1A Lecturer)
Pardis Farahi (UG1 Rep)
Pranav Gupta (UG1 Rep)
Yuto Takano (UG1 Rep)
Purvi Harwani (UG1 Rep)

Introduction:

Pardis Farahi took on the role of Chairperson for the meeting; they began the meeting and welcomed those present.

INF1A:

FP – Chairperson asked for comments on FP.

The Reps noted that overall feedback had been good. Tutorials were said to be engaging, motivating, and particularly useful as they provided real world examples. It was requested that more tutorials be in person if possible, however COVID-19 guidelines and the current situation must be considered.

Reading week was also brought up as a well-received aspect of the course; this week allowed for students to catch up and allowed more flexibility.

As well as this, lectures were always released at the same time and the consistency was appreciated.

Some points areas to improve were discussed: the subgroups in tutorials were seen negatively as they limited interaction with the tutor; some students were unhappy with the installation process and found that Demonstrators could not always help with the issues students were having with installing; CodeGrade was removed for later assignments; tutorial content and quality differed between groups; and some students were upset by changes in course structure (removal of FP Tutorial 10).

Paul Anderson commented that tutorials can be very variable and that while increased communication could benefit, that to enforce the same tutorial plan may not be helpful due to lack of flexibility.

Another improvement suggested was the introduction of unseen content into tutorial groups. Phillip Wadler asked for further clarification on this point. The Reps explained that the tutorials could be more engaging and interactive if there was a shared question that students could work on together in the tutorial as well as the tutorial prep work. This question would be unseen and would allow for students to communicate and use teamwork.

The Reps also raised questions about the plan for the course next year – Phillip Wadler has suggested that he will co-ordinate with the other lecturers and arrange a new meeting to share ideas with the Reps.

CL – The Chairperson then asked for comments on CL.

The Reps commented that the CL Tutorials were less engaging than the FP Tutorials. This was partly due to group size – in break out groups, some students did not join in or turn their microphones on. Reps suggested increased group size so that there is more engagement from a larger selection of students. Julian Bradfield suggested the possibility of merging groups when students do not turn up as a solution.

The Reps also noted that the feedback for CL was very brief – a few words at most, whilst FP had two to three sentences of feedback. The CL feedback was therefore not useful. Claudia Chirita commented that the small amount of feedback was due to the fact that CL Tutors were not paid for marking. The budget should therefore be considered. Bjoern Franke commented that the budget is small but can hopefully be used in more effective ways going forward.

The Reps then considered CL Quizzes – some students wanted this work to contribute towards their final marks. Michael Fourman explained that the CL Quizzes were formative not summative and that that they gave students an opportunity to test their knowledge and engage further with the course. Phillip Wadler commented that many students spend their time on the work that has been assigned marks and so he assigns marks to areas he wants students to focus on. The Reps said they understood, but that they believed the approach should be consistent for CL and FP rather than differing as it is the same course.

Other Courses – The Chairperson then moved onto other courses taken by UG1 students.

Informatics Connect was found useful. However, the attendance dropped after a few weeks which led to breakout groups with few students in, some of which were not very talkative or did not speak at all. It was suggested that students should be able to pick their own groups.

Fiona McNeill commented that Informatics Connect aimed to get feedback from the students. INF1B will also be focused on feedback and will have continuous feedback as part of the course. Regarding the Informatics Connect attendance, Fiona McNeill noted that they struggled to predict interaction. They originally wanted fixed groups but this failed due to lack of engagement. However, Fiona McNeill was unsure on allowing students to select their own groups as this may lead to marginalisation. This semester there will be larger groups for Informatics Connect due to the smaller number of students attending, so unengaged breakout groups should not be an issue.

Bjoern Franke then thanked Fiona McNeill for all her work on Informatics Connect.

ILA was then discussed.

ILA is a compulsory course from the School of Mathematics. ILA had many overlapping deadlines with INF1A which caused stress for students.

It was also reported than the deadlines within ILA were too tight; reading was released on a Wednesday and expected to be done for a discussion group the next day, on top of other deadlines.

There were issues with STACK – for example, the system went down for maintenance without notice causing some students to have to redo tests.

The textbook was also discussed – there has been a request to change the course textbook to either David Poole's 'Linear Algebra' or Gilbert Strang's 'Linear Algebra and its Applications'. This is due to two main reasons: vector spaces and subspaces are discussed before linear dependence and orthogonality, leading to a smoother transition between these topics as well as a better albeit different heuristic approach and the problem sets in these books are generally less tedious and less calculation-based but are consequently more involved conceptually. Moreover, both books cover more practical applications of Linear Algebra. This is a viable option as the current course organisation treats the topic quite abstractly.

Action: Paul Anderson to invite a representative from School of Mathematics to the next meeting. Laura Ambrose will remind him closer to the time.

Action: Bjoern Franke to pass above comments onto the School of Mathematics.

Cognitive Science was then mentioned.

There have been some technical issues with Blackboard Collaborate – for example, some students were unable to hear the live lecture and could not see subtitles. However, Media Hopper provides good quality recordings of the lectures with good audio and subtitles; students therefore find it easier to watch the lecture later rather than engage with the live lecture.

The Reps will ask the students for wider Cognitive Science feedback and feedback directly to Chris Lucas.

Finally, **INF1B** was discussed.

Fiona McNeill asked the Reps for their opinion on group sizes – INF1B is to have 15 students per group working together on a task rather than discussing feedback. The Reps suggested INF1B start of working as a group of 15 and move to smaller break away groups if needed. The Reps also expressed that the surveys had received positive feedback.

ITO – the Chairperson invited comments on ITO support.

No comments.

Computing Support – the Chairperson invited comments on Computing Support.

The Reps asked for areas of support (for example, INF Pals) to be promoted at the start of the year.

Michael Fourman noted that INF Pals had been advertised – Phillip Wadler added a post to Piazza detailing areas students could go to for help. Michael Fourman also commented that it would be useful to monitor who is engaging with these areas and be able to send reminders to students that are not engaging.

The Reps mentioned that there was very good feedback regarding the weekly to do lists provided by Claudia Chirita and that it would be useful to have similar lists that remind students of INF Pals and other areas of support. As well as this, Fiona McNeill's INF1B quizzes ask students what they have engaged with which reminds students and allows them to tick off what they have done.

Final Comments:

Timetabling had lots of issues at the beginning of semester 1 and students did not feel confident that their timetable was correct or that it included all the activities it was meant to include.

Despite the challenges of online learning and COVID-19, students have enjoyed semester 1 and INF1A as it was challenging and engaging.

The Reps would prefer Julian Bradfield to make his own CL content so that there is a more personal connection with the students, but also wish to still have access to Michael Fourman's lectures.

Phillip Wadler made plans to invite the Reps to a separate meeting to discuss the plan for the course in the next academic year and receive feedback.

Claudia Chirita's contributions to INF1A and the work she has done were praised.

Pardis Farahi was thanked for chairing the meeting and the meeting was brought to an end.