

UG1 Semester 2 SSLC – Tuesday 20th April 2021 via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Laura Ambrose (ITO)
Paul Anderson (UG1 Year Organiser)
Fiona McNeill (INF1B Lecturer)
Matthias Hennig (INF1-CG Lecturer)
Chris Sangwin (ILA Lecturer)
Nikola Popovic (CAP Lecturer)
Michel Steuwer (Future UG1 Year Organiser)
Ammir Barakat (UG School Rep)
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.

Actions from previous meeting:

- Invite Mathematics Course Organisers – completed
- Report ILA feedback to the School of Mathematics – this was to be done by Björn Franke, who attended the previous meeting.

Informatics 1 - Object Oriented Programming (INFR08029):

The students are very happy with Fiona McNeill and David Symons. They have both been extremely welcoming and have shown they are happy to help students.

The pre-recorded lectures by Perdita Stevens were good quality and enjoyed by students.

Students felt that tutorial engagement was hard for some and labs could have been better; labs were described by some as “boring” and INF1A tutorials were said to be more engaging. Fiona asked for clarification on how INF1A tutorials were more engaging. The reps responded that, in INF1A, students did the work before the tutorial and then used the tutorial to discuss solutions and have interactive feedback on their work instead of completing work in class. Fiona also asked for clarification on the labs being boring. The reps responded that this was mostly due to the labs being online as they felt that watching their partner work was dull.

CW1 feedback was disliked, but CW2 feedback was helpful and clear. However, CW2 feedback was delayed for some students. Fiona acknowledged the issues with coursework release and feedback but commented that there were follow up tutorials offered to students who received their CW2 feedback late. However, Purvi Harwani commented that she did not receive this email and is aware of other students that also were not informed of this opportunity.

Continuous feedback through quizzes and surveys each week was very helpful; students felt like their feedback was heard.

Despite the issues with the CW, in general students feel like the issues were handled well.

Students would enjoy if sample solutions could be released. Fiona commented that, as they test on similar materials each year, releasing sample solutions could lead to academic misconduct and

plagiarism issues, however, she also commented that first year was more focused on learning than on marks so whether or not to release sample solutions could be revisited and considered against the academic benefits.

CW3 had a structure to work around and therefore were not very flexible and some students struggled to understand. Fiona commented that she would discuss this with David as he designed the structure, but that the structure is helpful for marking and to enable students to practice certain ways of working and that the act of interpreting code is useful. Paul Anderson commented that when coding it is rare to start from scratch and so working round a structure provides a degree of realism.

CW1 was much more flexible; reps therefore suggested that perhaps the order of assignments could be changed so that the more flexible piece of coursework is last, and students can show more of what they have learnt throughout the course. Alternatively, reps suggested making CW1 more restrictive. Fiona confirmed that she will look into the order of coursework for next year, however commented that the flexibility of CW1 is what caused marking delays as the coursework was perhaps too ambitious.

Finally, one rep asked for a one-to-one meeting with Fiona to discuss a complaint regarding poor tutor behaviour. The rep will email Fiona to arrange this privately.

Calculus and its Applications (MATH08058):

The reps commented that Stack study guides were good in weeks 1-3 and it would be helpful if these study guides could continue for the rest of term.

Weekly homework was useful as it provided continuous learning opportunities.

The lectures had different styles and did not feel coherent. Nikola Popovic commented that the feedback from the CEQs is mixed on this. Different styles are a feature of the course; however, the coming academic year will be more consistent as all material will be in the style of the first weeks in Stack.

The week 0 start to the course caused confusion and it had not been expected. Nikola commented that the inclusion of week 0 was due to the course being very front loaded and having lots of reading in the earlier weeks.

Some students believed there was an over reliance on the textbook, however the material was taught very clearly and students enjoyed live sessions.

Reps questioned whether the week cycles could be changed. Nikola commented that the timetable was organised by the School of Mathematics and that the course organisers do not choose the layout. Chris Sangwin commented that he did not believe the Wednesday-to-Wednesday week cycle was any different from the Monday to Friday cycle as long as they are consistent. Chris also commented that the cycle allowed him to avoid having a week 0 while still having 10 full weeks for the course and the cycle is about establishing a regular study timetable. Furthermore, there are religious observances that take place on Fridays that mean that Friday deadlines are not popular among students. The reps expressed their understanding but asked for the cycle and reasons behind it to be communicated more clearly to students at the start of term.

Proofs and Problem Solving (MATH08059):

Students are very happy with tutors and communication with tutors. Communication with other students is lacking and there is low engagement from many students in tutorials. Chris Sangwin commented that they cannot get all the students to participate, and it is hard to encourage engagement.

The course is easier for those with a proofs background. Those who do not have this background do worse on the course. Chris acknowledged that inconsistency in math backgrounds is a challenge.

Students would like more lenience to be given with spelling, especially for students with English as a second language. Chris commented that where mistakes obscure the meaning spelling is important. Moreover, there is a difference between and/or and tutors have been instructed to mark down for mistakes such as these. The goal is to help students improve the presentation of their work. Chris acknowledged that there will be inconsistency in marking as there are 35 tutors working on marking.

Students would like more basic questions and solutions to be shared.

Course organisers and tutors are passionate about their teaching and classes are enjoyable for students.

There were some errors in the quizzes. Chris confirmed there had been some errors and that they have been responding to and changing these errors; he also gave thanks to the students that pointed any errors out.

Introduction to Linear Algebra (MATH08057):

The reps commented that having three attempts for the weekly quiz in Calculus and its Applications was helpful and they would like to see the same for ILA next year. Chris will consider this.

Proofs in ILA were appreciated as they helped prepare students for Proofs and Problem Solving.

Students thought the ILA was organised and structured well.

Nikola then thanked the reps for inviting him and Chris and confirmed that he would be happy to attend future meetings. The reps expressed their thanks for Nikola and Chris' attendance as previously it was felt that feedback relating to maths courses did not reach the School of Mathematics. Chris commented that the School of Mathematics teaches a lot of different schools and that they take that very seriously; students from other schools are welcome at the Maths SSLC and are welcome to approach their maths lecturers directly.

Informatics 1 - Cognitive Science (INFR08020):

CW1 was coding based whilst CW2 was theory based; students were happy with this as it allowed different groups to do well. CW1 did not have many errors, but CW2 has multiple errors which concerned students and created worry that perhaps the coursework was rushed and not as credible as CW1. Matthias apologises for these mistakes.

CW1 feedback was received late, but was long, detailed and very helpful. Help for CW2 was not as useful as CW1 help due to being more theory based. Reps reported that demonstrators had been googling queries. Students also wanted more support for CW1 and suggested labs covering and demonstrating practical content. Matthias commented that he will consider a way to look at demonstrations without tutorials becoming too complicated.

Students believe the reading list is extensive and overwhelming. It would be appreciated if summaries could be provided, especially for textbook chapters. There are multiple research papers in the reading list, however not all are mentioned in the lectures and it would be good if all readings could be included. In general, students thought there was too much reading and would prefer if important sections or page numbers could be specified. Matthias commented that he would attempt to make the reading materials clearer, but for this level of course there is not a good textbook available, so he has picked out relevant readings from higher level textbooks. He further commented that the Psychology students taking the course are more used to this level of reading, but that the list could still be shorter and more focused.

Some students found part 1 of INF1-CG difficult as they were unable to see the broader applications of language and the learning objectives. Matthias commented that INF1-CG was a tricky course; cognitive science is a big field and so it is difficult to give an overarching view of the topic. More will be done to connect different aspects together.

Lectures were very encouraging, welcoming, and friendly. Despite this, some thought that mathematical aspects were not well explained in lectures yet were tested in CW1. Some students got help with these elements from external sources.

Some students would like weekly quizzes, similar to INF1B, as outside of the coursework some students felt disconnected from the course unless there was coursework due. Matthias commented that there were no weekly quizzes as he did not want to overwhelm the students or take up all their time but can see that there was perhaps less engagement due to the lack of weekly tasks. Fiona McNeill commented that the INF1B weekly quizzes were multiple choice and only covered key points from the lecture.

Matthias asked the reps what they thought about introducing quizzes to INF1-CG and whether they would want marks for these quizzes. One rep commented that they were happy with the current structure of three unassessed quizzes and suggested the question was put to all the students. Paul Anderson commented on the similar use of small weekly quizzes in INF1A-FP, suggesting that some students will care about 2 marks and some won't. Matthias discussed the continuous assessment being something students could still pass the course without doing, but weekly quizzes could cause stress for students. He will consider a compromise. Matthias discussed the previous course structure of three pieces of coursework and one exam; the coursework focused on coding and the exam focused on theory.

The guest lecture was very well received by students.

The reps praised the week 1 notes that were offered but asked why these did not continue for the future weeks as students found them very helpful. Matthias commented that unfortunately they could not keep up with the notes due to the time they took to produce.

Students have asked for solutions to be released for the assignments. Matthias commented that Notable was put together with solutions so that precise feedback can be given when marking. Moreover, the solutions will be published.

Informatics Connect:

Reps reported that Informatics Connect was much more engaging in semester 2. Students enjoyed external speakers coming in. The information shared regarding internships was particularly useful and helped put students at ease.

Fiona confirmed that Informatics Connect will continue next year.

Fiona and the reps discussed the possibility of having Informatics Connect sessions in person in the next academic year. One rep thought the classes would be better online as they are not compulsory. Another rep would prefer the classes to be in person as the course would be more informal and social in person. Fiona agreed that informal breakout groups would be easier in person. If the class were timetabled before or after compulsory classes such as INF1A and INF1B then students would be on campus already to attend.

The option of credit for Informatics Connect was discussed. Reps agreed it would be nice to have the option of getting credit for the course and believe it would boost attendance.

Reps requested Informatics Connect covered hackathons more as, as first years, they will be attending their first hackathon and would like to have more information on how to get the most out of hackathons and how to prepare.

Physics 1B: The Stuff of the Universe (PHYS08017):

Reps commented that it would be useful to have more practice exam questions.

General Issues:

No general issues.

ITO Support and Computing Support:

Reps commented that there has not been a lot of opportunity for contact with ITO or computing support, so there is nothing to report.

Final comments:

Matthias commented that the SSLC has been helpful; it has been difficult to know how the course has been going for the students due to lack of interaction in lectures and tutorials. Paul agreed that the reps have been particularly useful this year. Fiona also gave her thanks to the reps and commented that the weekly quizzes in INF1B contained a survey that asked students how they were and how they were doing with the work which allowed for continuous feedback regarding how well the course was going.

Ammir Barakat asked whether the CEQ could be part of engagement marks to encourage students to complete the feedback forms. Paul commented that this could cause an issue in regard to regulations as there are rules regarding what you can give marks for and marks need to be given for learning objectives. An alternative of mastery badges was suggested – INF1B uses these badges on Learn, and, while these do not give marks, wanting to achieve badges could be used to encourage students to complete feedback forms such as the CEQs. Moreover, the badges can be accessed outside of Learn so students could incorporate them into their CVs.