

1st Year Staff Student Liaison Committee Meeting

Wednesday 5th November 2008

Appleton Tower, Room 4.03

Attendees: Alex Simpson (Course Organiser), Dave Robertson (Lecturer), Phil Wadler (Lecturer), Roger Burroughes (Systems Intro Lecturer), Thomas French (TA), Willem Heijltjes (TA), Andrew Burnie (Class Rep), Maxim Cramer (Class Rep), Denes Findrik (Class Rep), Hristiana Pashkuleva (Class Rep), Flavius Popescu (Class Rep), Christian Quale (Class Rep), Tamise Totterdell (Secretary)

The meeting opened with a brief introduction on the format and purpose of the meeting.

1. Introductory material:

Some students felt that there were too many introductory lectures at the beginning of the course. Alex Simpson explained that this was due to confusion over when lectures would start and would not happen next year.

The Systems Intro was seen as helpful, but some students wanted less space in the lecture given to browsing the web and more on the terminal and commands as this was something students were less familiar with in general. Roger Burroughes commented that as students came from widely differing backgrounds, it was not safe to assume any level of knowledge. It was suggested that there might be a second optional lecture to cover the more basic material, or, alternatively, to cover the more advanced material.

The lab week exercise was generally felt to have been a success, but some students had expected to receive feedback on their work. It was explained that the exercise had been designed to have completion (via the submit command) as its goal, and had been kept simple so that that further feedback (beyond the success of the submit command) was unnecessary. The main aim had been to get students into the labs at the start of the course, and this had been achieved. It was confirmed that students who had failed to submit the lab week test had been informed of this and offered assistance.

ACTION: Phil Wadler to clarify in lectures that there would be no feedback on the lab week exercise.

2. Inf1-FP (Wadler, Heijltjes):

It was suggested that having fewer lectures and more tutorial time would be beneficial for students as the tutorials were seen as being more useful. Alex Simpson explained that this was not possible.

Some students wanted more work to do in tutorials as they were able to complete the allocated tasks and still have time left in tutorials. As not all students were in this situation, it was suggested there be more optional questions in the tutorial work. It was also suggested that an advanced study group be set up.

ACTION: Andrew Burnie to arrange an advanced study group.
UPDATE: Two study groups have been set up starting on 17/11/08 and using INFBase.

Following the class test, it became clear that some students were struggling with FP. Phil Wadler mentioned that those students who had very little programming experience seemed to be having great difficulty with the material. It was decided to set up a remedial study group to help those students who were having difficulties.

ACTION: Willem Heijltjes and ITO to set up a remedial study group.

UPDATE: Remedial study group to commence 17/11/08.

On the whole, most students felt the level of material was about right, though it was mentioned that it seemed to be getting more difficult as students were being asked to think more about how to solve problems. Students were also very happy with the quality of the lectures.

Alternatives to the current class test set-up were discussed as it was felt this came too late in the term to provide useful feedback to students who were struggling. Phil Wadler suggested that there be two exercises, one early on and one later and that both be worth 5%. There was some concern, not shared by all, that 5% would not necessarily be enough to make students attempt an assignment. Another suggestion was that one of the early tutorial exercises be marked by tutors and returned to students to provide early feedback. With Ewan Klein's approval, some form of early feedback might be trialled in OOP next semester.

3. Inf1-CL (Robertson, French):

In general, students were very happy with the quality of lectures and the delivery. However, some students felt that there should be more practical examples in the lectures. Dave Robertson said that he had some lectures in hand and could use those for that purpose.

Most students felt that the notes were very good and provided a complete reference. It was confirmed that there are spare copies in a bookcase outside room 5.01 in Appleton Tower and that copies could be obtained from the ITO. There was no recommended book for CL as students had a lot of reading to do for FP, but some references could be put up on the website.

Most students were not currently using the WebCT resource for CL. Based on patterns from previous years, it was suggested that usage levels would probably increase closer to the exam.

At the moment, tutorials were seen as being fairly easy and students were able to complete them quickly – because of this it was advantageous to get all the tutorial exercises at the beginning of the semester. Dave Robertson agreed that the exercises were easy and it was suggested that some optional questions be added to challenge the more able students.

It was suggested that students would appreciate written feedback on their work. Dave Robertson said that students would receive such feedback on the Week 9 coursework assignment.

4. Tutorials

The timetabling of tutorials had gone well and the ITO Request Tracker had proved useful in altering tutorial times.

5. Labs

Lab sessions were being well used and were always very busy. It was sometimes difficult to identify lab demonstrators and it was felt that some demonstrators were better than others.

6. Communications

It was felt that the newsgroups were not particularly well publicised and that the instructions on how to set-up newsgroups on the Inf1 webpage were not helpful. It was also be useful if students could post to the newsgroups from ResNet as currently there is only read access outwith the university. However, it was pointed out that this restriction is necessary to avoid spam.

ACTION: Alex Simpson to publicise newsgroups and clarify instructions on how to set up a newsreader on DiCE.

7. Any other business

There was none.