

1st Year Staff Student Liaison Committee Meeting

Friday 13th March 2009

Appleton Tower, Room 4.03

Attendees: Alex Simpson (Course Organiser/Lecturer), Ewan Klein (Lecturer), Joshua Ritterman (TA), Vincent Valton (Tutor), Andrew Burnie (Class Rep), Maxim Cramer (Class Rep), Denes Findrik (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. Inf1-DA (Simpson, Janarthanam)

The reps confirmed that they had received no negative feedback about Data & Analysis though some students had felt the course was a bit slow. Alex Simpson confirmed that the same amount of material had been delivered in four lectures fewer last year. There was some concern that attendance at the lectures was quite low. It was suggested that some students felt that the lecture notes were good enough that they did not need to attend the lectures themselves.

The availability of printed lecture notes, both in the lectures and from outside room 5.03 after the lectures. The availability of copies of the recommended reading was also useful as it meant students did not have to go to the library to obtain copies. It was mentioned that the reading was considerably heavier than the lecture material.

It was suggested that summative coursework be re-introduced for Data & Analysis. Alex Simpson explained that this had been removed to allow students to collaborate more freely without the worry of accidental plagiarism, and to follow College assessment guidelines. Nevertheless, the possibility of introducing a low percentage of assessed coursework (say 5%) is an option to consider for future years.

2. Inf1-OP (Klein, Ritterman)

In general it was felt that OOP had gone well, but that it was very hard to please everyone in a programming course. In particular, the class was split over the use of *Head First Java* as students either loved the book or hated it. Ewan Klein explained that he had anticipated this, but felt that weaker students would prefer *Head First Java* to some of the drier alternatives. In general, students who disliked *Head First Java* were those with previous programming knowledge and who would thus find it easier to use the other materials available. It was suggested that specific recommended reading be given both for *Head First Java* and *The Java Tutorial*. It was also suggested that the availability of both books through Safari be mentioned earlier.

Attendance at both labs and tutorials was low. The revision/remedial sessions that had been set up were particularly poorly attended. The reps felt that this was not due to bad advertising or organisation, but more to do with lack of student motivation.

Some students would like more coursework exercises that would be looked at by a real person and not WebCAT. It was suggested that extra work might be kept

optional, but that this was then difficult to go over in tutorials as the tutorial groups were very varied in terms of ability. It was confirmed that tutors were able to look at the work submitted to WebCAT, but that most did not.

ACTION: Ewan Klein to meet with tutors before OOP starts next session to ensure they receive improved training and feedback.

Many students did not like WebCAT's use of style-checking, but this is not a significant problem because it is optional. Some elements of the implementation of WebCAT had gone wrong this session, but as this was the first time it had been used, this was only to be expected and would be improved upon for next year.

Ewan Klein suggested that more detailed feedback from the reps could help improve the course for next session.

3. Labs

It was noted that attendance at labs was down and it was suggested that this was due in part to the fact that it was easier to do Java on a home computer than Haskell so students didn't need to use the DICE machines.

It was mentioned that lab demonstrators did not identify themselves well enough and it was suggested that introducing them in the one of the early lectures would be useful. It was also suggested that making attendance mandatory in some way would increase attendance as would assigning students to scheduled lab time.

4. Communications

The newsgroup was no longer being used and whilst some students were using IRC, this was not official and was not well publicised. It was suggested that a forum accessed either via MyEd or DICE could be a viable alternative.

Some students were not reading mail sent via mailing lists as a large number of emails were sent to the students@inf mailing list that were not at all relevant to 1st Year students.

ACTION: ITO to monitor students@inf list more carefully and re-direct mail to year groups lists as appropriate.

5. Any Other Business

It was suggested that drop-in sessions for both DA and OOP be offered after the Easter break.

It was also suggested that reps be given time in lectures to get feedback from the class as it seemed that many students were unaware of how to get in touch with reps and it was often difficult to obtain feedback on the course.