

# 1<sup>st</sup> Year Staff Student Liaison Committee Meeting

Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> November 200

Appleton Tower, Room 4.03

**Attendees:** Alex Simpson (Course Organiser), Phil Wadler (Lecturer), Alison Downie (Computing Support), Tom French (TA), Willem Heijltjes (TA), Ali Eslami (Tutor), Jakob Gastellu (Class Rep), Diana Crisan (Class Rep), Anton Caius Gurgu (Class Rep), Brynach Jones (Class Rep), Kat Merican (Class Rep), Paul-Jules Micolet (Class Rep), Veronika Nesheva (Class Rep), Evgeniya Sotirova (Class Rep), Grenville Wilson (Class Rep), Tamise Totterdell (Secretary)

**Apologies:** Dave Robertson (Lecturer)

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

## 1. Introductory material (Simpson, Downie):

There were no problems with the introductory lectures.

The systems intro labs were well attended, but it was felt that they were not necessary for all students and that encouraging drop-in lab use might be better. It was also suggested that there be compulsory labs to ensure students were familiar with the DICE system and got more programming experience. It was mentioned that there would be compulsory lab sessions as part of the Object-Oriented Programming courses in the second semester.

There was some concern that students felt they were being forced to use Emacs. It was confirmed that students were free to use any text editor they wished, but that Emacs was the editor they would be taught to use. It was also stated that only editors that were installed on the DICE system would be available during the final exam.

**ACTION: Publish a list of editors that will be available during the final exam.**

## 2. Inf1-FP (Wadler, Heijltjes):

Students felt that the lectures were going well and also that they were very enjoyable. There was some concern that the tutorials didn't mesh well with the lectures.

Opinion was mixed on the recommended text book, with some students finding that it wasn't necessary to have a text book as it was often easier to look up things on the internet. Some students also felt that it might be better to use a 'friendlier' textbook. Phil Wadler explained that he had previously recommended two different books and that this had not gone particularly well and that he would only recommend one book.

**ACTION: Phil Wadler to consider recommending a different textbook for next year.**

Students felt that there was a very steep learning curve to the tutorials. Some students had difficulty in knowing how to approach the tutorial problems and felt that a lecture on general problem-solving techniques could be useful. Ali Eslami mentioned

that from a tutor point of view, it seemed that students were struggling more with the problem-solving parts of the tutorial than with the actual content.

The current support methods – remedial tutorials, drop-in labs, INFBASE, cascaders – were mentioned, and reps were asked what else they thought would help. It was suggested that some easy ‘warm-up’ questions be included at the start of tutorial exercises so that students would be able to start the exercises and might then feel more confident about attempting the more difficult material. It was also mentioned that Physics tutorial exercises – which were delivered online – included optional hints to get students started on problems.

**ACTION: Phil Wadler to consider adding hints or optional ‘warm-up’ questions to tutorial exercises for next year.**

Students were concerned that due to the high level of work required for Maths for Informatics, they were unable to give enough time to Informatics – this was a particular problem because the Maths coursework was credit-bearing and the Informatics coursework was not.

It was mentioned that the class test was harder than it had been in previous years. This was the first time students had had to work under a time constraint and also on paper. Some students liked this as it meant they could concentrate on basic methods without being stopped by syntax errors, although some students felt that not having a debugger was a disadvantage. Other methods of assessment were discussed, including a computer based class test – which was very difficult logistically – having two mock exams or having assessed coursework. In general, however, the students felt the existing class test format worked well.

### 3. Inf1-CL (Robertson, French):

Some students felt that the lectures were more difficult than the tutorials, but other students felt that the lectures were very straightforward and logical.

The handouts – lecture notes, slides and tutorial exercises – were felt to be very good. The lecture videos that were available were also very useful. As there was a delay between the lectures happening and the videos going online, it was not felt that students were using the videos at the expense of attending the lectures.

It was mentioned that non-Informatics students seemed to be struggling more with the course than Informatics students, many of whom had studied logic in some form at school.

Students were finding WebCT useful.

### 4. Tutorials

There was some concern that tutorials rooms were too small and that there were too many people in them. It was explained that the 09/10 intake was larger than expected and that there were resource issues relating to tutors and also to rooms.

The organisation of the tutorials had gone well and it was easy to change groups.

It was suggested that the remedial tutors should start earlier and should be offered before students asked for them, or that the infrastructure should be in place. It was also suggested that tutorials be streamed by ability. It was felt that whilst this might be a good idea, it would be very difficult to implement – especially in advance.

## 5. Labs

Students complained that some of the machines in the labs were broken. Alison Downie asked that any broken machines be reported using the Computing Support Form as the automatic checks run by Computing Support did not pick up on all broken machines.

Students felt that the lab demonstrators were very good.

## 6. Communications

The INF1 newsgroups were no longer being used. Students, in conjunction with one of the tutors, had set up an IRC channel and that this was proving to be very useful – particularly for FP.

Reps were reminded that students were required to check their SMS mail on a regular basis and that all course related communication would be sent via email.

## 7. Any Other Business

There was none.