Department of Computing, Macquarie University

Minutes of the 100-level Liaison Committee Meeting

September 12, 2013 – 1pm

Present:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Representatives</th>
<th>Units</th>
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<tr>
<td>Veronica Bechara</td>
<td>ISYS100</td>
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<td>Thalia Reed</td>
<td>ISYS100</td>
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<td>Emily O’Brien</td>
<td>ISYS100</td>
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<td>Michael Thompson</td>
<td>ISYS114</td>
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<td>Patrick Warnes</td>
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<td>Michael McOllianowski</td>
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<td>Moshin Joffri</td>
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<td>Hannan Smith</td>
<td>ISYS100</td>
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<td>Brendan Jayaram</td>
<td>ISYS100</td>
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<td>Natalie Bosthon</td>
<td>ISYS114</td>
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<td>Kate Whittaker</td>
<td>ISYS100, ISYS114</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deanna Coco</td>
<td>COMP111, MAS111</td>
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<td>Morgan McIntosh</td>
<td>COMP125</td>
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<th>Staff Representatives</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bernard Mans (BM)</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
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<td>Melina Chan (MC)</td>
<td>Executive Officer</td>
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<td>Tahiry Rabehaja (TR)</td>
<td>Minutes</td>
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<td>Michael Johnson (MJ)</td>
<td>Chair</td>
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<td>Manolya Kavakli (MK)</td>
<td>ISYS114</td>
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<td>Matthew Mansour (MM)</td>
<td>ISYS100</td>
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<td>Scott McCallum (SM)</td>
<td>COMP125</td>
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<td>Stephen Smith (SS)</td>
<td>ISYS114</td>
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<td>Michael Hitchens (MH)</td>
<td>COMP111</td>
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<td>Christophe Doche</td>
<td>COMP125, DoT</td>
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<td>Matt Cabanag (MC)</td>
<td>COMP111, COMP125, Science IT</td>
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Apologies:

The meeting started at 1:05pm

MJ welcomed everyone and reminded about the importance of the liaison meeting. He also pointed out that the liaison meeting should mainly be used to improve unit qualities based on the feedbacks from students rather than debating over the problems we encountered.
COMP111: Michael Hitchens/Rowan Tulloch (Dept of Media)

Lecture:

• MJ asked the SR (Student Representative) how the unit was going. He particularly asked about the organisation of topics and assignments.

• The SR said that students loved it and that they were very satisfied with the content of the lecture notes as well as their practical teacher, Matt is very engaging.

• MJ asked how the other students (not present) were finding it. SR said that he had talked to other students and it seemed all good.

Tutorial:

• The SR and the lecturers have reported that the issues raised in the previous meeting had been solved.

Individual feedbacks from the SR:

• Almost 100% positive feedback from all students whom I have talked to. Lectures are good, tutorials are well paced and workshops are well utilized. The only comment I seem to hear coming from tutors and some students is that one hour for the theory side is not really long enough to get through all the content efficiently. However, other than everything seems to be going well. I know a lot of people have had fun doing the first and second assignments.

COMP125: Christophe Doche/Scott McCallum

Lecture:

• The SR said the content of the unit was interesting and very good. Students, however, felt that they worked towards meeting the deadline instead of the learning outcomes. They also commented that the 100 level units should be about getting foundation and this point was emphasised by MJ below.

• CD said that they were working on making the deadlines more flexible. He also reported that the lecturers were aware of the difficulties and have been working on resolving the issues.

• MJ emphasised that the learning aspect should be valued more than the deadlines themselves. He also said that the units were designed by the lecturers and Computing Department so as to prepare students for a professional future.
Tutorial:

- The SR said that the tutorial and practical classes were going well and the feedback was helpful.

- The SR reported that students were not very comfortable with the auto-marking process. CD said the auto-marking has been improved and that should be part of the learning process for each student. Students should get some understanding on how it works. CD and Scott would look at the submissions manually for those unhappy with the automarking.

- Diagnostic quiz is a good idea, it was suggested to develop this an exercise.

Individual feedback from SR:

- Generally in the same boat as COMP111, however some people have been upset about the unit testing style (aka auto marker). This doesn't seem to be a large percentile of the people I have talked to however I thought I would still bring it up for discussion between Scott and Chris. Otherwise the unit seems to be going quite well for the people I have talked to. I have noticed attendance is lacking somewhat in both lectures however the tutorial attendance seems to be quite good from what I've heard. I do think that the way in which you have approached the changes to rectify the very low submission rate has been successful thus far. Congratulations.

Summary on posted on iLearn:

1. Long delay to obtain mark/feedback when an assessment task has been submitted;
2. Too rigid deadlines for submissions which can get in the way of learning;
3. Automarking perceived as unfair.

We have addressed those items.

1. We promise a quicker turnaround for weekly tasks and assignments. The mid-term test has been marked and the marks are available in iLearn.
2. There will be more time to complete programming weekly tasks. There will be a first deadline (test run after one week) to submit your work and obtain some feedback based on a partial set of automarked tests. The final deadline will be a week later, giving you more time to finalise and polish your submission that will be later on fully automarked based on a full set of tests. Note that you will still have only one week to complete the quizzes.
3. We believe that the automarking is an important component of the assessment of a program as it tests your ability to produce a software complying with precise
specifications. It shouldn't be the only assessment method of assignments. That is why your programs are also marked by hand. Regarding, weekly programming tasks, we do not have the resources to hand mark the submission outside the class. We could have decided to mark the submissions during workshops (as in COMP115) but we have chosen not to because it can be too time consuming, leaving not enough time for the actual workshop material. Note that if you take advantage of the test run, as explained in 2. you will probably be able to identify small mistakes (e.g. package name, methods with different parameters, etc) early and eliminate all the issues related to the automarking.

**ISYS100: Matthew Mansour**

**Lecture:**

- The SR reported that this unit was very enjoyable and interesting. They find it very rewarding even though the unit is quite distant from their main course and learning objectives. They found this unit as one of the best offered at Macquarie and emphasised the role of MM in convening it. They also find it very engaging because it is not strictly a scientific subject but includes also some portion of social disciplines.

- SR said that this unit is his most enjoyed unit. He had also learned the presentation style from Matt which is helpful in his other units.

- BM said that it is possible for the students to nominate lecturers for an award who they felt had done an excellent job.

**Tutorial:**

- Some of the SRs said that the tutorials were not helping much and that some students did not take the exercises seriously. Some of the SRs however said that their tutor was doing a very good job on explaining and making the tutorial classes very enjoyable.

- The SR also said that the HTML assignment was too long and that the practical tutor did not have time to review some students and that needed to be revisited. They also said that the purpose of each exercise should be made clear and emphasised.

- MM emphasised that the tutorial questions and exercises were not pointless at all. They are primarily treated as revisions of the content of the lecture notes. He also said that the exercises on “creative writings” could be viewed as a writing practice which would be an important tool for the student to write the research paper later on. An example he gave was the writing involved for job applications.
Another SR has a personal inconvenience with his tutorial class time. He said that his tutorial session was the only class time which he got to attend on campus on a particular day and that it lasted for only one hour (or sometimes less) so he did not really find it rewarding.

MM and MJ advised the student that it would be possible for him to move into a different class.

MM also explained that each tutor was asked to follow the structure given by him at the beginning of the semester (i.e. each tutorial session is composed of a revision of the lecture and the creative writing exercise). He also said that with such given structure, a tutorial session should never be less than the allocated one hour. MM said he would be talking to tutors and looking for improvement based on the above reported feedbacks.

SRs also commented that the tutors in this unit are very responsive to emails.

**ISYS114: Manolya Kavakli/Stephen Smith/Matthew Mansour**

**Lecture:**

- The SR reported that the lecture was going well and that all the problems raised in the previous Liaison Meeting were addressed by the lecturers.
- MJ asked particularly about the materials covered by the unit.
- The SR said that they were fine. They are now making more sense as they progress through the unit.

**Workshop:**

- The SR said that their tutors were really helpful and responsive. They said that their practical classes depended a lot on group work which they found quite rewarding.
- One SR reported that probably due to the technique of the tutor he felt their tutorial and practical class was too mechanised instead of being more interactive. As a result, he had moved to a different tutorial class. MJ asked the particular details of the mentioned tutorial session so that Manolya could address the issue post the meeting.
- Some SRs said they preferred the previous marking scheme i.e. with 2 assignments instead of a single one.
- MM said students should consider the assignment as an opportunity to learn about the difficult part of the unit rather than just made up of multiple tutorial exercises.
MK also reported that most of the students were doing all the workshop questions so lecturers were using some of the practical exercises to revise the essential part of the lecture notes.

MK also said that the implementation of the extra workshops had been very helpful for the students and this solved the related problem raised in our previous meeting.

**Individual feedback from the SR:**

- I have heard nothing but happy comments about this course as well since the last meeting. With the change in slides per hour (which I would like to comment I made a mistype in the last email about 100 slides per hour, it was actually over two hours - my apologies). The extra workshop also seems to be well received from the people attending. Over all I do think that everyone is now feeling a lot better in the course. However my only observation is the low attendance of the lecture.

**IT/Labs:**

- The SR reported that many of the computer in E6A112 were down (as of today 12/09/2013). Everything seemed to be plugged in but the monitor would not show anything but a black screen.

- MJ asked for the IT representative to check it and MC said they would look into the matter.

**Individual feedback from SR:**

- There were some problems with iLearn during the week and some of the lab computers weren't logging in properly.

- I believe that it would be good for a new page to be created so that liaisons can talk between themselves about how they are gathering data – e.g. if they should attend different lectures, say night stream rather than the day stream, to see if any students there have different opinions.

The meeting closed at 1:55 pm and a few post-meetings were held to look further into the matters raised above.