Department of Computing, Macquarie University

Minutes of the 100-level Liaison Committee Meeting

August 15, 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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<tr>
<td>Michael Thompson</td>
<td>ISYS114</td>
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<td>Michael Serretta</td>
<td>ISYS100, ISYS114, COMP125</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ali Alzturh</td>
<td>ISYS100</td>
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<td>Moshin Jaffri</td>
<td>ISYS100</td>
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<td>Pat Warnes</td>
<td>ISYS100</td>
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<td>Michael McOllianowski</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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<td>Deanna Coco</td>
<td>COMP111</td>
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<th>Staff Representatives</th>
<th>Units</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>Rolf Schwitter (RS)</td>
<td>For Christophe Doche (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 advised the staff to encourage students to attend the meetings.

ISYS100: Matthew Mansour

Lectures:
- The students found the content of the lecture very satisfying.

Tutorials/Practicals:
- A student said that for his class, the week 1 to 3 tutorials covered the same material.
- A student said his practical class could be more engaging, maybe more goals and more interactive. Other students however said that their tutors are very good so it depended on the teacher.
- MM said he will check and see if there is something to be addressed. He also pointed out that it is important for the students to know their tutor’s name as that demonstrates the existence of a good relationship between the teachers and the students.
- He promised the students that the content and challenges in the course are never going to be appropriate for all students.
- Lastly, He encouraged the students to attend the next meeting and report on how the above issues have been addressed.

Computers/IT:
- MJ asked if everything is fine with the IT services in the unit.
- The students said everything is OK.

ISYS114: Manolya Kavakli/Stephen Smith/Matthew Mansour

Lectures:
- The students said that the lecture notes on the web contain too much material, over 100 slides.
- MJ asked if the notes are formed of many small things that can be handled easily or are formed of complex material.
- Some students said the contents are new to them while others thought that they had seen parts of material before so the size of the notes wasn’t bothering them.
- MM remarked that students shouldn’t make assumptions such as that they already know the material because they might only recognise the terminology.
MK pointed out that the notes have been designed to be self-contained which is important for students who have limited background about the course or who are not attending the lectures.

**Workshops:**

- The students said that they did not get through all the questions but found answers to the missed ones on the forum. They felt that there are too many questions and there is not enough time to go through each of them. Some tutors did two questions and then read out the answers. This didn’t help with student learning much.
- Students had asked the tutor about which version of PowerDesigner to use, but didn’t get an answer.
- MJ asked if there is any intention of going back to the missed questions or if it was better that the students do the exercises before class. He also emphasised that expectations should be set for the weekly exercises.
- MK suggested that increasing the time allocated to practical would help. She pointed out that not all students are attending the workshop so they may not be doing the exercises before class at all.

**Individual feedback from students:**

The following feedback was submitted by email after the meeting.

- This subject has received a lot of criticism from students undertaking it for the following reasons:
  1. There is too much information packed too quickly (as a reference I believe that one lecture had something in the order of about 100 slides for an hour lecture). Whilst it is understood by students that is not necessary to take notes on every slide and is in fact sought after to summaries the slides, they feel it is still too much information - this was also echoed in tutorials as the number one fear and issue with the course.
  2. Some students have complained about their tutorial teacher to myself regarding their student interaction and/or ability to be heard coherently. Personally, my tutorial teacher (unfortunately I forgot his name and don’t have my book on me but the tutorial is from 12 - 1 on Wednesday) does not seem to have this issue at all. I'll try to obtain the classes that said students are unhappy with and send an email with more details if possible.
  3. Power Designer is far too expensive to obtain as a student and many people who are not aware of the ilab feature are discouraged to continue the course due to the needed extra time to work on assignment 1 at university.

- Response from MK: As a response, can we also add the following note:
1. isys114 lectures are currently 2 hours a week and Week1 lectures include 85 slides, Week2 107, and Week3 57. So, currently in week2 we have 50 slides/hour which seems to be too much for the students. A proportion of the Week2 slides are about the use case narratives and there is a lot of textual information in those, as I use them as a sample to point to and help them with assignment1. I think the student’s email is referring to particularly week2. We never had 100 slides/hour, but we had 100 slides/2 hour-lecture. Currently, we have roughly 42 slides/hour on average. My interpretation is, as stated by 2 student reps yesterday in the meeting, the students like the lectures but it is just too information packed. I believe it would be beneficial to distribute the content to 3 hours, rather than 2, in the future offerings of the unit, and we may or may not use the extra hour, depending on the content each week. This way, the lectures will be covered in two separate days and will not be overwhelming (keeping it at a rate of 28 slides/hour on average). It is also important to note that, as we have already started seeing it in week3 with data modelling (with only 57 slides/2 hour-lecture), in the rest of the unit, as we progress, the theoretical information will be replaced by more practical information, and it would be easier for the students to digest.

2. As discussed in the meetings, students are happy with the workshop content and the structure, but it would be beneficial to increase the workshops to 2 hours, so that we have reasonable time for everyone to speak and thus, students can be heard. For this offering, we can arrange a few extra workshops as catch-up tutorials.

3. I stated in the lectures and the forum that students can submit their assignments using other CASE tools, such as Visio, Rational Rose, etc. Power Designer is what we teach at the university but if they are already familiar with using a different CASE tool, it is fine with us.

COMP111: Michael Hitchens/Rowan Tulloch (Dept of Media)

Lectures:
- The students found the content of the lectures very satisfying.

Practicals:
- Some students found that the practicals lack structure. They found it impossible to get full marks for the practical exercises. They also said that the given marks are subjective and may vary from tutor to tutor.
- MH explained that game designs are indeed subjective so the marks may depend on the prac teacher. He said that the student should trust the decision of their practical teachers. He also reminded that high distinctions should only be awarded to excellent students and rigorous marking is necessary else it would be impossible to
distinguish them from the good or average students. However, he assumed that some tutor may have misunderstood the mark allocation in the first week.

- MJ emphasised that the issues should be addressed.

Individual feedbacks from students (again, by email):

- Thus far everything has been going well from what I've heard and experienced. Lectures are good and engaged, the recordings thus far have been well received, some confusion has been raised about the week system for the tutorials (the tutorial readings are listed as a week later than the current week), I think the simplest way to solve this for next semester is to keep everything in forms of lecture weeks rather than splitting the two (it also seems to be the only course that does this). Otherwise workshops and tutorials have been fun and engaging with no issues related to content or kudo.

COMP125: Christophe Doche/Scott McCallum

Lectures:

- The students found the content of the lecture notes great so far and they were happy with it.
- The staff said that the unit is going fine and reported that some students are doing well while others are struggling a bit.

Assignments:

- The students found the assignment interesting.

Individual feedbacks from students:

Feedback 1:

- **Lectures**: I enjoy the lectures and don’t find them boring. I guess this is because of Scott’s enthusiasm in teaching the course. I’ve spoken to other people in the course and they feel the same way; it truly makes a difference when the lecturer is enthusiastic in their delivery as it makes the students enthusiastic to learn. I’ve found that in working through coding on the projector with a pen has helped reduce confusion when learning key concepts of java as it allows Scott to explain how and why he has written certain code. It is more helpful than viewing the complete code off the lecture slides.

- **Tutorials/Workshops**: I enjoy the workshops as I have several friends in the same class and writing code in pairs helps greatly. I like how Amara will work through each question after giving the class a couple of minutes to attempt their own solution of
the question. With a big class, I think some students may be a little shy in answering questions that Amara poses; so I think a nice idea would be to work through some of the questions in pairs or threes which kind of opens up the class a little and makes it a more friendly environment. I know that group work doesn't make up a huge part of the course but I've found it helps when debugging and discussing alternate ways of writing code.

Feedback 2:
- Lectures are good, however some comments about the echo recordings have prompted me to suggest that Scott stick with the movable microphone as he tends to end up being rather soft at some points during the lecture. It was also raised that he should use the visualizer instead of the projector as they (people watching the recording) do not see what is happening on the projector. Otherwise everything for comp125 is flowing well, content is well paced and everything is explained nicely, workshops seem to also be thoroughly engaged (unlike last semester). I should note this is my first time undertaking this course, however as I am aware of the problems of last semester (namely the failure to attend classes and assessment rates) I think the current configuration of attendance and tests will solve this issue, I give my kudos to whomever thought of that idea.

General issues

A student reported that iLearn is difficult to use. He particularly pointed out that there are too many links that lead to one page and from that to another and so on.

Individual feedbacks from students:
- The wireless was down in the first week.
- Issues regarding software (namely PowerDesigner) have been seen on the lab computers - namely the license has expired on some accounts/computers.
- Issues regarding the number of pages an IT student can print have also been raised (people are unsure of the amount they are able to print).
- No wireless connection in the Price Theatre.

MJ reminded the staff to encourage students to attend the next liaison meeting because there were disappointingly few representatives for some units.

The meeting closed at 2:00pm and few post-meetings were held to look further into the matters raised above.