Department of Computing – Macquarie University
Minutes for the 200-level Liaison Meeting
12th March 2015 at 1pm in E6A357

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<td>Christophe Doche</td>
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The meeting opened at 1:05pm by Len Hamey. Len welcomed everybody and explained the purpose of the meeting.

**COMP225 - Algorithms and Data Structures**  
*Annabelle McIver*

SR enjoyed the unit. A few points: Lecture recordings didn’t contain video of the whiteboard, and students found this unhelpful. AM had mixed feelings about using the document visualiser, and had previously heard these complaints. Visualiser was small and made lecture more boring for people there. Whiteboard was a better teaching tool perhaps. Only maybe 1/3 of students were turning up to lectures however. Also, there was no recording at all on the first week. AM would think about using the visualiser. Also there were comprehensive notes, so the students weren’t really missing out. AM reminded the SR that those who *could* attend the lectures should do so.

MJ commented that everybody around the table agreed that the whiteboard was a better option, even though it didn’t get recorded.

SR: some students were finding that the group structure of workshops was not working terribly well for them. AM: these people should contact her and have a personal discussion about why their particular group wasn’t working. Group work was very intentional and important. It was important that students got very detailed feedback, and this was not really attainable when every student’s work was marked (too much marking for tutors). AM would look into the groups that weren’t working and would urge the students with difficulty to come forward and tackle the issue with their group.

MJ asked how groups worked in COMP225. AM said that groups were 4 (sometimes 5). Four questions per week. Thinking or programming etc questions. Designed for group discussion. They submitted their answers on wiki. The effort should be spread among the group members. The tutors were able to give better feedback this way. AM repeated that she wanted students to be *trying* and *getting feedback*. DR asked if this was additional to workshops. AM explained that these groups took place as part of the workshop. AM said that collaboration was good. DR asked if there was class-level discussion. AM said that this only happened if enough of the class was struggling with the same issue.

*(1:14pm Christophe Doche joined the meeting)*

SR said that some of the questions were very hard. Also that there seemed to be a large variance in difficulty in the questions. AM heard this concern and would take it under consideration.
SR said that he found night lectures very difficult to attend, due to tiredness. Asked for advice on how to deal with night lectures. LH, CD and AM discussed night lectures, and shared that not all offerings of the unit had night lectures, so that students didn’t have to choose an offering that had night lectures. It was acknowledged that full-time students didn’t always have the flexibility of choice in this matter.

**COMP247 – Data Communications**

*Michael Johnson*

SR discussed practical classes: much of the work was in groups. Often a student’s partner was unprepared and one student was ‘carrying’ the other. SR would like more individual work, and said that individual work was more relevant to industry.

SR: There hadn’t been much work on looking at a network that was already constructed. Student didn’t know if this was planned for the unit later in the session.

SR: the textbook wasn’t “in the same order as how we’re getting taught in the unit”. The textbook moved from the application to the physical layer, whereas the unit taught in the other direction; from the physical to the application layer. The result was that the students were working backwards through the textbook, which could be confusing when the textbook referred to earlier chapters.

SR suggested that there might be a FAQ section on iLearn.

SR: assignment one was a “paper assignment”, which was strange for computing students.

MJ took the advice about group work on board. MJ shared that there would be more work looking at established networks later in the unit. MJ shared that it was important to teach from physical to application layer, and that perhaps the textbook would be changed in future to better match this teaching strategy. MJ liked the FAQ idea, and would consider implementing it. It was clarified that “paper assignments” refer to submissions written in extended prose, instead of in code or short answers to technical questions. MJ thanked the student for the feedback.

SR made a comment about students having trouble using the crimping tools in the lab. DJ: crimping tools seriously needed sharpening. MJ took note.

DJ: Group work existed because the prac demonstrators didn’t have time to check everyone’s work. There were logistical problems with the volume of students. MJ commented that there were a huge number of students and this was a recognised problem. There were many more students than were planned for. Some flexibility would be given in light of these issues. DJ commented that the semester would get more difficult over time and the existing issues would be exacerbated. CD commented that there might be students dropping out and perhaps they would also form another
workshop to fit all the students. MJ shared that COMP247 was running an “early alerts” system, and there had been some students who were being encouraged to drop out, since they were struggling early and it would only get harder. Some students had been dropping out, but more students were joining at the same time. Overall, COMP247 was experiencing many problems caused by there being too many students enrolled. MJ commented that there were 65% more students enrolled than expected.

A different SR shared that group work was helpful for him, because teaching was good for solidifying knowledge.

SR was concerned that he was being asked to submit work on a topic before he had been taught about the said topic. MJ said that this was at least partially intentional, but perhaps was happening a little more than was intended for. MJ would look into the content scheduling.

SR commented that there had been very little student input in the lectures, while apparently student input was promised. MJ appreciated the feedback and was thankful to the students.

**COMP260 – Game Design**

*Malcolm Ryan*

SR had an issue where there was a presentation on a lecture one day after the lecture was given, and that there wasn’t enough time for preparation. MR said that this might or might not be a problem, but perhaps more time could be given to students. MR didn’t know how many days in advance students were preparing their work anyway. MH examined the timetable to try to figure out what was going on. It was discovered that the student actually had 8 days, not 1, to present their work. A lecture in week 5 would have its content presented in week 6. So it turned out that there was not a big issue.

MR said that there was an issue with some tutorials before a lecture and some after, which made some students exist on a different kind of schedule to the rest.

SR was happy that they were not using Kodu anymore. SR heard that the practicals were changing and would like more details. MH said that they had ‘sped it up a bit’. There had been complaints that content presentation was too slow, and now three “prac sheets” would now be covered in two pracs to speed up the pace.

MR said that the document projector was not properly working. This was in Y3A T1. There were problems with Echo360; the video on the recording was just black. CD says that AVTS should be contacted.
ISYS254 – Applications Modeling and Development

Stephen Smith

SR: some students were concerned that the tutorials were too short with too much material. Other students said the same about the lecture. Student asked if they might have better access to question answers before tutorial. DR: This was an issue because there was more than one tut, and answers couldn’t be released before any tut. Answers would be put up at the end of the week now. SR asked if it was possible to get just the questions put on iLearn before the tutorials to help revise etc.

DR said that second half of semester would be different. Agreed that one hour wasn’t enough. Most of the second half of semester was practical content (PHP HTML etc). The first half had a little bit of practical work in week 5, too. DR said that if you read the chapters and listened to the lecture then that should be sufficient preparation. DR wished there was more time, but there just wasn’t. SR said that his tutor had been quite helpful in assisting the students to deal with the pressure. SR asked again for questions beforehand, and DR again said that book and lectures were enough.

(1:45pm Malcolm Ryan and Stephen Smith left the meeting)

COMP249 – Web Technology

Diego Molla-Aliod

SR: Some students were struggling with the fast turnaround on assessments. People were struggling with python. DMA said that it was 100 level programming so it should be fine. The tests were somewhat diagnostic tests. DMA asked if they were just uncomfortable with the language? SR said that the emails he had received said that they weren’t confident in python. Moving from static to dynamic typing was difficult. SR discussed some of the work they’d done, and that there was perhaps only an hour of programming exposure before an assessment, and students said that wasn’t enough. More practice was required. DMA suggested that there could be more exercises. CD asked SR what was the ‘right’ prerequisite for 249? SR said that perhaps this was the first time the students had ‘changed language’. It was Processing and Java (closely related languages) in 100 level, and in 249 students were learning python “all of a sudden”. CD asked if those who had only done 115 were uneasy? SR said probably yes. So, while COMP115 might not be enough, COMP125 might be too much of a prerequisite.

SR noted that they were also learning HTML and CSS for potentially the first time, which could add to the pressure. SR reiterated that perhaps there could be more time and more practice before there were assignments/assessments. MJ asked DMA why the assessments were early, and DMA explained that it was because there were four assessments and they couldn’t “squeeze” them all together at the end of semester. SR suggested that the first assessment could have been a homework task. DMA was thankful for the feedback.
SR: “I know these are kind of nit-picky comments, but”: the music at the start of the videos is “too loud and too country”. This was shared in good humour. The music was loud and the voice in the video was soft.

SR also asked if all videos links could be on one page; that might make it easier to move through them one at a time. DMA said that there were links and associated notes with the videos so this might not be possible. DMA suggested that perhaps the videos could be put on YouTube in a playlist.

SR asked for a shortcut to PyCharm on the menu of the lab computers. NS and DJ said that this was certainly possible.

**General Discussion**

LH thanked the students and asked if there were any comments about the labs.

SR shared that he came in on Sunday and they were all locked. Security said they weren’t scheduled to be opened. DJ said that there were some strange behaviours to do with which doors were locked and which were open on weekends and late at night. NS said that she had experienced similar issues.

CD asked if the SRs thought the computers were new/fast enough. SR said that the only real issue was that there were error messages popping up regularly about network storage quota. NS and DJ said that they were on it.

SR noted that laptops in the engineering labs were still running Windows XP. DJ and NS explained that this was for compatibility with old hardware.

Len Hamey thanked everybody for coming and closed the meeting at 2:00pm.