Department of Computing – Macquarie University  
Minutes of the 300-level Liaison Committee Meeting  
12 May 2015, 1pm in E6A357

### Student Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Units</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darce Le (DL)</td>
<td>COMP330, COMP355</td>
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<td>Nathaniel Vale (NV)</td>
<td>COMP343, COMP355</td>
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<td>Sarah Heimlich (SH)</td>
<td>ELEC436</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natalie Batshon (NB)</td>
<td>ISYS302</td>
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<td>Hijab Alavi (HA)</td>
<td>ISYS302</td>
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### Staff Representatives

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<tr>
<td>Carl Svensson (CS)</td>
<td>ELEC436</td>
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<td>Les Bell (LB)</td>
<td>COMP343</td>
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<td>Steve Cassidy (SC)</td>
<td>Director of Teaching</td>
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<td>Len Hamey (LH)</td>
<td>COMP330</td>
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<td>Mike Johnson (MH)</td>
<td>COMP436</td>
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<td>Ian Krycer (IK)</td>
<td>ISYS360, ISYS302</td>
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<td>Peter Busch (PB)</td>
<td>ISYS360</td>
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<td>Steve Smith (SS)</td>
<td>COMP355, ISYS355</td>
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<td>Natalia Salzberg (NS)</td>
<td>Faculty IT</td>
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<td>Matt Cabanag (MAC)</td>
<td>COMP330, Minutes</td>
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<td>Diego Molla (DM)</td>
<td>COMP348</td>
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<td>Deborah Richards (DR)</td>
<td>PACE</td>
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<td>Melina Chan (MC)</td>
<td>Exec Officer</td>
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<td>Annabelle McIver (AM)</td>
<td>Chair</td>
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<td>Scott McCallum (SM)</td>
<td>COMP330</td>
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- Start 1:03
COMP 343
- NV said it was an interesting subject, but found that at the beginning of the year, it was very heavy on practical aspects, building things from scratch, dealing with Java.
- NV had trouble with the subject as he was not much of a programmer
- NV said feedback from tasks was quite good, talking about which aspects he needed more worked with and could improve.
- LB agreed that the course was a bit heavy towards the programming side rather than actual cryptography skills and would review the content.
- AM asked if there were programming prerequisites for COMP 343. The response was COMP 125, which was Java. NV pointed out that since Java was quite prominent in the 1st and 2nd years that he took it for granted that it was assumed knowledge for COMP 343.
- LB, NV remarked that the bitwise operators for Java was a bit challenging. LB pointed out that assignments were originally done in C++ and doing it in Java was more difficult.
- NV felt resources were not sufficient with regards to:
  - Doing Hex in Java (although covered in tutorials)
  - Some aspects such as hash maps, hashing were not covered in practicals.
- NV remarked that it was an engaging and interesting course. He felt the 2nd half was much more relevant, with industry practices and personal applications such as email; using what’s already available rather than building student’s own cyphers.

COMP 330
- DL said overall teaching of unit was excellent so far. She liked 2 hour + 1 hour block.
- DL appreciated the massive extension for assignment 1.
  - LH mentioned issues of four students understanding OO and GUI concepts. The extension was given for those who were struggling to even just get started.
  - LH and AM suggested that there might be some issue with the prerequisites. LH pointed out that basic concepts of objects was a problem for some students.
  - DL suggested a mix of programming languages in earlier years, such as C++ and other languages.
- DL requested an extension for Assignment 3 extension:
  - SM said he would think about it, but would like to leave enough time for marking.
- DL remarked that the demo programs provided were awesome.

COMP 348
- No student rep present.

COMP 352
- No student rep present.

ELEC 436
- SH remarked everything was good. The students liked the lectures and the tutorials.
SH pointed out that they had been making partial submissions for a major project, but had not yet received feedback on those submissions.

MJ pointed out that ELEC 436 was an approach to a “capstone” unit that was different to how other capstone units were done. It had raised a lot of interests in other universities as something worth doing. MJ pointed out that it was not merely getting students to do a single project and then saying “they’ll be good”.

MJ was concerned about scalability and said that they were able to do ELEC 436 well because they only had 14 students. However, the 14 was a step in an exponential growth pattern, which meant it would be difficult to replicate what had been done this time in the future. Getting enough staff to teach at the same high level and maintaining similar student to staff ratios would be difficult to fit into the university’s workload models.

MJ asked SH for suggestions on how to keep the good things for a bigger class. Was this a good way of doing a capstone unit?

- SH responded that all of the students liked this class better than all the other units they were doing this semester.
- SH commented on units in Dept Engineering where there was a “bad tutor” who was bad at encouraging discussion and did not engage the class.
- SH commented that only half the class was really engaging. ¼ was very heavily engaged and involved. ¼, still engaged but less so. ¼ was paying attention but not participating.

**ISYS 302**

- HA was happy that the tutorials weren’t running anymore, as she felt they didn’t really help.
- IK responded that the tutorials were designed to help students with assignments and the students that were struggling. There was some help with MS Project and some help in evaluating other tools.
- HA felt that the lectures and tutorial videos were much more helpful.
- NB said she liked the less content heavy format of the new slides.
- IK explained that the project management part of the unit was quite rigid, particularly parts to do with PMBOK and the textbook by Kathy Schwalbe. This caused the awkward pace of the earlier part of the unit. The part of the unit which involved IT management could be much more flexible and was reflected in the unit content.
- IK remarked that there was a complaint about the pace and the textbook, identified by David Lewis. IK said that David was a lot happier now that the pace had changed.
- There was a complaint about the lecture venue. Venue had now been moved E7B T3 to E7B T2.
  - The extra LCD screens made it easier to see the slides in T3, avoiding the strain of looking at the high rear projection screens in T2.
  - Chair spacing was much more appropriate.
  - Thanks given to MC for admin efforts.
- IK pointed out that the pace of the unit changed and the feedback was positive.
ISYS 360
● No student rep present.

COMP 355
● DL had been working with clients.
● DL complained about how teams were structured:
  ○ Some teams had more programmers and some teams less.
    ■ SS explained that there simply were not enough students to have a good balance between COMP/ISYS/BUS students.
    ■ NB asked if students got to choose which part of the project they wanted to be in: programming, business, documentation. Answer was the groups were assigned.
    ■ DR and SS pointed out that groups that did not have COMP students often rose to the occasion by picking up programming tasks, making workable prototypes or other innovative solutions.
    ■ NV said he was one such ISYS student that had stepped up to help with the prototyping.
● NV commented that the quality of clients was quite variable:
  ○ NV's group was Ernst and Young. The people dealing with their group had themselves done COMP 355. So their interactions were quite good.
  ○ NV contrasted this with someone else doing the unit. The client was overseas for 3 months, and skyped the group skyped only once, very limited contact and it didn't seem like that the client knew what he wanted.
    ■ NV said the client didn’t provide proper documentation or set a proper scope. SS and DR pointed out that clients didn’t necessarily need to do that. DR remarked that this was remedied by a proper feasibility study and scoping was a really big part of the problem.
    ■ SS pointed out that the group being discussed had not submitted weekly reports as requested. He believed that lecturers would not be able to fix something they did not know about. Anything to a line to a paragraph would have been sufficient.
    ■ SS contrasted this with DL’s group, which was always the first one to submit weekly reports every week.
    ■ SS pointed out that all the problems they had been made aware of had been resolved. For example the small issue with the Ernst and Young group.
    ■ DR suggested that the student who reported the problem to NV might not be the project leader and didn’t know the full story. DR requested NV to get back to him and see what was going on.
  ○ NV wondered if there was a way to source better quality clients. But SS pointed out that a range of different quality clients were needed to represent the real world.
  ○ DR pointed out that there was a new survey mechanism this semester for sponsors to give feedback on students’ performance. Often groups would say
that the client had not given any feedback, however the client would say that they had been giving many suggestions the group, which had not actioned any of them.


○ SS reported that two clients in the past had remarked to him that they only realised what they really needed after the completion of the project.

○ NS commented that students really needed good communication with the client. They might have an idea in their head but it was not fully formed. Extensive consultation with the developer and the “experts” was required. The role of the expert was to point out different possibilities and other scenarios that the client might not have thought of.

○ SS commented that in the real world, this would be the students’ role to be the expert and tell the client what they needed.

○ DR added sponsors/clients were asked to provide projects that were not in the critical path but still of value. Students must keep their ear to the ground on what would be of value to the client, not simply looking at step by step deliverables; which might not necessarily be of value.

● DL remarked on assessments:
  ○ Criteria didn’t align completely with the project definitions document.
    ■ Deliverable 2: project definition didn’t have usability requirements, but got 0 as it was a requirement in the assessment.
    ■ DR pointed out usability requirements was a standard thing to have for non-functional requirements, for example in the IEEE specifications.
    ■ SS pointed out that this could have been resolved if DL had come to see him once they realised the inconsistency.
    ■ DR explained that the rubric was designed to give students a finer grained idea of what’s required but should not be seen as a replacement for critically thinking about actual project requirements.
    ■ DR also admitted that sometimes, some sections were missed by the marker and students should take a look at the feedback and contact the lecturers if they found any discrepancies.

● Other student rep comments:
  ○ DL made positive comments towards getting industry experience with clients.
  ○ DL commented that a client told her not to be so formal and intense in her emails. Suggested use of emoticons.
  ○ NS said that the culture varied.
  ○ AM pointed out that it was always safe to be formal to start with.

LABS

- General comments were that the labs are great.
- SH: No need to use them, all the software had been installed on her laptop.
- NS encouraged students to have their own setup and laptop as it would give students the chance to develop their own environment and tinker. Students were not able to reconfigure the provided lab machines.
- SC mentioned grant application and would like to do something to make it better for group work. Cubicles? Calling for ideas.
  - SH: Whiteboards. All around the room.
  - DR: Dividers where students could write on them.
  - SH: Ethernet
  - SC: Shared screens.
  - MJ: Lounges and coffee machines.
  - SH: Security access. Early access, late access.

- Meeting ended at - 1:51pm