Department of Computing - Macquarie University
Minutes for the PG Liaison Meeting
5:00pm - 20 March 2015 - EMC Tea Room

Present:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Representatives</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Otoya</td>
<td>ITEC800/844/841/654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernesto Suarez</td>
<td>ITEC800/832/831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonam Sherpa</td>
<td>BPhil/MRes, ITEC831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ehsan Keshavarzian</td>
<td>BPhil/MRes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuel Escudero</td>
<td>ITEC810/850/855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehman Akram</td>
<td>ITEC841/844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damian Jurd</td>
<td>MRes Year 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Kuan</td>
<td>MRes Year 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Representatives</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christophe Doche</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manolya Kavakli</td>
<td>Director of PG Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvian Chow</td>
<td>Department Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Kuan</td>
<td>Minutes Taker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl Svenssson</td>
<td>ITEC800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton Baar</td>
<td>ITEC803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Busch</td>
<td>ITEC810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine Lee</td>
<td>ITEC831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Krycer</td>
<td>ITEC832, ITEC841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan Wang</td>
<td>ITEC833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason Lee</td>
<td>ITEC844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damian Jurd</td>
<td>ITEC850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udaya Tupakula</td>
<td>ITEC855</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Apologies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Representatives</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark Dras</td>
<td>MRes Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah Richards</td>
<td>ITEC654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Smith</td>
<td>ITEC844, ITEC654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Joyner</td>
<td>ITEC850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabelle McIver</td>
<td>COMP781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Sloane</td>
<td>COMP782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diego Mollá Aliod</td>
<td>COMP783</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proceedings:

Minutes opened at 5:00pm by Manolya Kavakli.

Student and staff introduced themselves.

The meeting then progressed to unit-specific discussions. Subsections below outline matters discussed:

ITEC800
Carl Svensson

Carl S advised that this year, the same unit runs lectures on a weekly basis, compared to fortnightly in previous years. However, the unit will be losing two weeks because of public holidays, resulting in the lecturer losing contact with the students over the month of April.

Carl S also mentioned that students provided feedback that the workload of the unit is significant. That said, Carl S indicated that the workload remained commensurate with a Masters-level course.

Students provided positive feedback overall on the unit and agreed with the lecturer that the material is dense.
One student suggested that ITEC units, in general, should incorporate stronger industry emphasis e.g. case studies, workshops, guest speakers from various technology vendors. Ian K indicated that ITEC832 and ITEC841 already have industry guest speakers from technology vendors scheduled for future lectures.

Manolya K sought clarification on whether the desire for industrial relevance is limited to only visiting guest speakers or does it also include internships, to which, the student replied both aspects are welcome. Manolya K advised that the Department is already considering internships for a different unit.

Carl S also advised that ITEC800 will also discuss examples and case studies in some of the weeks ahead.

**ITEC803**

**Milton Baar**

Milton B advised that the unit this year will be slightly different to previous years. The first six weeks will involve mainly traditional lectures. Slides are provided after the lectures so that students are required to give their full attention to the lecturer. The next six weeks in the second half of the session will be more inclusive and discussion-based. The unit also conducted its first assessment, a multiple choice quiz, recently.

Students suggested non-native English speakers had language difficulties to overcome. This language barrier for certain students resulted in more time spent reading and understanding the same material. Milton B explained that this may have been the result of his earlier encouragement to students to pay attention to their grammar.

Students reiterated the desire for more real-world examples and industrial emphasis. Milton B agreed with the feedback, stating that inviting guest speakers from the industry to give talks on specialist networking subfields is a good idea.

Students also provided positive feedback on the lecturer’s delivery style.

**ITEC810**

**Peter Busch**

Peter B conveyed the challenges of language from the lecturers and markers perspective, in having to spend more time correcting students English.

Apart from the use of freely available grammar and spelling checkers, the following ideas on overcoming the language issue were suggested:

- Christophe D suggested using Google services e.g. Search and Translate.
• Damian J suggested a language course similar to the MRES700 Research Communications unit, but this would have to take into consideration the impact on the total workload of PG students.
• Macquarie University Library and Learning Skills Support (HDR) currently facilitate workshops that students can be made aware of.
• Milton B suggested the use of paid proofreading and editing services (but not ghostwriting) and also a buddy system with native English speakers.

ITEC831
Jasmine Lee

Jasmine Lee advised that the unit is teaching PHP (CakePHP) and MVC, in contrast to the Python language previously taught in the unit.

Students are finding that this unit offers a refreshing technical perspective compared to other more theoretical units. Assignments require time but not impossible to complete. According to students, the MVC is also widely adopted in industry. Hence, its inclusion in the unit is advantageous. The overall feedback is positive.

ITEC832 and ITEC841
Ian Krycer

Ian K mentioned that this unit is all about industry application. Industrial application of computing technology can vary broadly, for example, message-oriented middleware, web services, EDI, etc. Examples that will be covered in the unit include Coles EDI, healthcare examples (hospitals, orthopaedics), the Ipad application for retail, Oracle Weblogic. The application of computing technologies is constantly evolving.

Students enjoyed the industry focus of this unit and provided positive feedback overall.

Ian K also mentioned that class attendance has fallen off, to almost half the number of enrolled students.

ITEC833
Yan Wang

Yan W indicated that this is his first time teaching an ITEC unit. The scheduling of this unit changed slightly from 4 contact hours fortnightly to 2 contact hours weekly. That said, the content of the unit remained unchanged compared to previous years. In the major assignment, students have to provide a proposal, write a report and present the nominated topic. There is no
limitation on the nature of the subject matter (e.g. technical, research, case study) as long as the chosen topic is relevant to web services and ideally, provides interesting insights. Based on the proposals submitted to date, Yan W indicated that students seem to be performing well.

Students complained that the text for the unit is costly to purchase ($95) and not easily accessible from the library because of limited copies. Yan W advised that two additional copies of the book have now been requisitioned.

Students also suggested:
- weekly practicals instead of bi-weekly
- one lecturer throughout the course instead of two lecturers, citing familiarity with a specific teaching style

ITEC841
Ian Krycer

One student is credited with prior learning and industry experience, enabling the student to enrol in ITEC841 instead of ITEC602. The student also resolved Visa issues concerning his enrolment changes in prior discussions with Manolya K.

Both lecturer and students agreed that there are varying levels of engagement, perhaps because of language issues affecting the ability of certain students to understand the lecturer.

ITEC602/ISYS302 and ITEC660/ISYS360
Ian Krycer, Peter Busch

Ian K and Peter B discussed advantages and challenges with sharing the same lectures and iLearn site, for both ITEC602/ISYS302, respectively catering for both postgraduate and undergraduate students. Postgraduate students have one additional assignment. Ian K proposed the idea of combining the iLearn sites for ITEC660/ISYS360. Peter B appears supportive of Ian K's ideas. Ian K and Peter B will work towards some resolution offline.

Manolya suggested that in order to prevent confusion amongst students, there should be two (2) unit guides and two (2) unit websites.

ITEC654
Stephen Smith/Deborah Richards

Students reported varying levels of engagement from the mix of both PG and UG students enrolled in this unit. Lectures are 3 hours long. Peter B indicated that the PG and UG students
should not be grouped together in group assignments because this may result in PG students doing most of the work.

On behalf of Deborah R, Peter B relayed that some students are losing focus and attendance is falling off. The lack of engagement may be generational because of increased accessibility to content via iLearn and recordings on ECHO360.

ITEC844
Jason Lee

Students indicated that there were some initial teaching problems (e.g. confusion on dates) but these issues are now resolved.

Jason L agreed that there were issues. 21 out of the 24 enrolled students have submitted their assignments.

Students also provided feedback that the lack of clarity in the lectures is affecting the comprehension of the material. Jason L explained that this may be because of the re-use of past lectures. In this regard, the suggested remedial action is to revise the lectures and remove obsolete or irrelevant information.

ITEC850
Damian Jurd

Damian J advised that the unit includes new material this year. At present, the unit content is entirely theoretical with no practical component. However, Damian J said that this is the nature of the first four week’s content however he is planning to switch from 4 hours of lectures to 2 hours of lectures and 2 hours of practicals. Carl enquired the logistical issue of ECHO360 recording being, booked out for the full 4 hours instead of only 2 hours. In other words, if the lecture format is changed, the timetabling will also have to change because ECHO360 is automated by the timetabling.

The idea of getting guest lecturers in to talk about software-defined networking was discussed, because software-defined networking is a current hot topic in the industry.

The students this year also seem less participative. Damian J will explore ways at making the lectures more inclusive.

Damian J and Milton B considered overlapping content between ITEC850 and ITEC803 and discussed the possibility of combining lectures on introductory software-defined networking material. There are a few challenges including scheduling because ITEC850 and ITEC803 are
currently on different nights. Manolya K agreed that this possibility should be explored. Damian J and Milton B will continue their discussion offline.

Students agree with Damian J’s comments that the course is theoretical, without practicals. Overall student feedback is positive.

Damian J also enquired on how to add a 10th Ph.D. student to iLearn, who is currently sitting in on unit lectures. The response was that the Ph.D. student can be added using the student’s OneID on iTeach.

ITEC855
Udaya Tupakula

Udaya T shared that lecture attendance is good. In every session, students are learning different types of attacks in the first half, followed by security tools and technologies to counter the attacks in the second half. The first quiz in the unit will be held on 30 March. There will also be a group project that attempts to relate the unit to real-world real-time attacks.

Students enquired whether it would be possible to include practicals in the unit to complement the theoretical aspects. Udaya T responded that this possibility is currently being explored.

COMP700
Steve Cassidy, Mark Dras, Vijay Varadharajan

This unit currently runs in S2, but students suggested it to be offered in S1 to get proper information on research masters.

COMP782
Tony Sloane

Tony sent his apologies but was also of the impression that none of his students will be attending the PG Liaison meeting. According to Tony, COMP782 is going well. There are four students in the unit after one dropped out because of family issues. The students are doing very well in the weekly homework and seem comfortable with how things are going.

Master of Research

Students mentioned that it took a couple of weeks to gain access to iLearn. Students have access to iLearn now. One student also enquired why certain Master of Research students are enrolled in ITEC units or have a mix of COMP and ITEC units. Manolya K responded stating that Master of Research students get the advantage of choosing from the full range of PG
computing units, i.e. 600-level and higher ITEC and COMP subjects. ITEC8xx Unit list is too large and most of these units are not available. Manolya K suggested that the website should be updated. Many PG students are unaware of where to find the appropriate links for relevant information. Perhaps, MRes and MIT students can be sent an email providing links to specific research information available on the Department of Computing’s website.

One student enquired whether it was possible to undertake mandatory Master of Research subjects in the first session instead of the second, the case for which, is earlier access to research skills and information.

Christophe D advised that there are many seminars and research reading groups that students can participate in. It turned out that the student’s enquiry can be facilitated by information found on the Department of Computing’s website. The student was encouraged to check out the Department’s website and contact research group leaders and administrators.

Yan W also advised that the Department runs induction programs, aimed at informing first-year research students on resources and facilities offered by the Department. In these induction programs, past, current Ph.D. students and (for the first time), MRes second-year students are invited to share their experience.

One student enquired whether there is an association/society for PG computing students. Peter B indicated that a UG computing students society exist. Perhaps, it is a good idea that someone establishes a PG computing society.

Another student also commented that many units are rested or not offered in 2015. The unavailability of certain units is unfortunately a long-standing reality of economics.

Science IT

Students advised that the air conditioning appears to be malfunctioning or non-functioning in the PG Computing labs (EMC210). The faulty air-conditioning is a known issue that is currently being addressed.

Meeting closed at 6.23pm.