Department of Computer Science

Minutes of Staff/Student Meeting

Monday 18 August 2014, Room 303S.561

Present:

Staff: Paul Denny (Chair), Bakh Khoussainov, Robert Sheehan, Adriana Ferraro, Ann Cameron, Angela Chang, Sean Davidson and Sithra Sukumaar

Student: Adam Miller (101), Khei Wong (105), Elizaveta Rakhmanova (111), Scott March (111), Matthew Spierings (210),Sharon (Shuang) Zhang (220), Rodney Shell (230), Sahif Ali (230), Ryan Peter Tiedemann (280), Alyssa Ong (314), Adhisha De Silva (335), Kieran Jaunay (340), Chris Petty (340), Logan Elliott (367), Zoe Xu (705)

Apologies: Kenneth Anderson (335), Tianhao Du (320)

If you attended the meeting and your name does not appear above, you did not fill out the attendance sheet as requested.

1) Welcome

Paul welcomed all the class representatives, and thanked them for volunteering to represent their peers. The Terms of Reference for the SSCC as stated in the AUSA Class Representation Policy were briefly mentioned:

The department SSCC will:

- consider any business relating to the student learning experience, student views or feedback

- discuss and seek solutions for teaching and learning issues that are presented by students including:

  - teaching, learning and assessment

  - student support and guidance (academic & pastoral)

  - teaching and learning resources e.g. IT, teaching space

  - issues arising from student surveys and other feedback mechanisms

  - any matters referred for feedback from the Student Consultative Group (SCG)

- consider matters to refer to the Faculty SSCC meeting

Paul also encouraged the class reps to make themselves visible in class and to invite other students to direct any concerns to the lecturer via them. In many cases, these concerns can be resolved by the lecturer. Issues that cannot be resolved with the lecturer, or that are not the responsibility of the lecturer, can be discussed at the SSCC.

2) HoD report

There were numerous successes in the department recently, and the following were highlighted:

- A group of 4 UoA students (3 from Computer Science) has won $50,000 at Microsoft's Imagine Cup in Seattle over the weekend. Kiwi team Estimeet won the Innovation category at the event for their social interaction app, called 'Estimeet'. Team Estimeet members Hayden Do (19), Jason Wei (19), Chris Duan (30), and Derek Zhu (22) designed the app to track the real-time locations of people making their way to business or social meetings

- There is an Alumni and Student day for the CS Department on Saturday 6 September. Past students have been invited to come to the department on that day and see a showcase of research.

- Reinhard Klette's computer vision book made it to #1 on Amazon (out of 700+ books on computer vision).

3) Technical report

Sean Davidson delivered the technical report on behalf of SIT. He noted that the Faculty's alliance with Microsoft, called "DreamSpark", has been renewed for another year. All of the software on this platform is now available to all students in the Faculty of Science (previously it was limited to Computer Science students). As a result, SIT should be able to provide a better quality of support if students have problems (for example, with installation of software).

Wifi is an ongoing issue. In some cases, access points simply can't cope with the number of connected devices that students carry with them. The working group looking at this problem needs more data - in particular, they ask all students who have any kind of issue with the wifi to report this to Science IT. This must be done through the AskIT system, so that a ticket number can be created and referenced. Class reps were invited to spread the word about this to their classmates - if any student has any issue with the wifi, they should report this by sending an email to:

  askit@auckland.ac.nz

This can also be done by logging in to the machines in the lab and opening a browser - the default home page will include a button to submit this feedback to the AskIT system.

Finally, Sean noted that the SIT website (https://www.sit.auckland.ac.nz) was no longer showing some of the data it used to display, including opening hours and usage info for the labs. This was due to a power failure (manually caused!) in the data centre which corrupted the database being used to generate this data. Resolving this is a significant amount of work and is allocated to a part time employee so there is no clear timeframe on its resolution.

4) Elect representatives

The following students were selected as representatives on the Faculty of Science Undergraduate Staff/Student Consultative Committee:

UG reps: Alyssa Ong (CS314) and Khei Wong (CS105)

There were no volunteers for the PG SSCC rep.

5) Report back

Paul reported back briefly on several issues that were raised in the Staff/Student meetings last semester.

- Scheduling assignment/test deadlines within the department

At the AC meeting it was decided that we should, as a department, avoid test clashes between courses at the same year level (initially we would not be concerned with assignment deadlines). This was published in the AC minutes and mentioned in the staff meeting, however there was not consensus on how this should be done. It was noted that Clark had emailed his test dates around the department. However, once again there is a test clash (CS367 and CS340 on 25 August). This will be revisited again by the AC, hopefully with a more effective solution.

- Guidelines on granting class-wide extensions to assignments

It was agreed that assignment extensions should not be granted at very short notice for reasons of fairness. Class-wide extensions should not be granted if within 3 days of the originally published deadline. Class reps were asked to report courses if this took place in the future.

6) General business

Paul began by canvassing the class reps opinions on one issue that had been raised at an earlier meeting. Course evaluations and lecturer evaluations are both conducted on a 3-year schedule (in line with Faculty requirements), although it is possible for both to be conducted more frequently if necessary (for example if the course is "red-flagged" or if a lecturer is new or needing feedback for promotions). In at least one case in the past, a class rep had requested a teaching evaluation for a lecturer who was not otherwise being evaluated this semester. This issue was discussed at the AC meeting who felt that this decision should remain at the lecturer's discretion. If the class rep was still unhappy about this, the issue should be raised with the HoD.

To canvas opinion on the suitability of this decision, all class reps present were asked if they had ever been involved in a course where they felt it should have been formally evaluated but was not. Of those present, one rep felt this was the case, and two felt marginally in agreement. Therefore there do not appear to be widespread concerns about the evaluation process, and class reps can always discuss particular problems with the HoD if they feel it is necessary.

There were two reports emailed by students which Paul read out:

- In one Stage 2 course, the lecturer had been requested to show more code in class, to clarify vague assignment specifications, and to make the lecture slides available before class. The class rep who attended the meeting confirmed that this information had been passed on to the lecturer and all of the issues had been resolved. Bakh encouraged class reps to talk regularly

with their lecturers to pass on this kind of feedback. Paul will pass this positive feedback on to the lecturer.

  - In one Stage 3 course, the class rep commented on the high practical workload of the course, which had 6 assignments. Paul commented that the workload expectations for a single course should not exceed 10 hours per week for an "average" student, and will pass this feedback on to the lecturer to check that these expectations are valid.

The CS335 rep raised an issue about the way that the labs/tutorials are run in the course. Rather than being conducted in a closed lab (where space is not available), they are conducted in the open lab on the first floor. However, no machines have been allocated for students attending these tutorials, so they sit where ever they can find a vacant machine. This creates two problems:

- some students cannot find a suitable machine. In at least one case, up to a dozen CS335 students who attended the tutorial were unable to find students and simply left.

  - it can, at times, be difficult to get help from the tutor/lecturer in the tutorial. This wouldn't necessarily be solved by having students sit together, as often students are working on distinct problems. However, individual queries can take significant time to be answered which can put pressure on the tutor and make it hard for other students to get the attention of the tutor.

It was generally felt that there were two possible solutions to this problem:

- hold the lab earlier in the day, when it is less busy. Currently the labs are held at 2pm, and this is traditionally a busy time in the first floor lab.

  - allocate contiguous rows of machines for the lab. Clear signage should be in place to inform students which machines are reserved, and for when, and all other students should leave those machines for students in the course holding the tutorials.

Finally, it was also noted by the CS335 rep and other students in that course that the tutorials were very helpful, and the tutor would often stay after the conclusion of the tutorial to continue helping in the lab.

The CS105 class rep commented that there wasn't a course book that students could refer to. However, this was clarified by the teaching staff who noted that there is a good online course book available, but the first few weeks of the course, which are a transition period from CS101 to CS105, do not rely on it heavily due to the material covered. This would be different for the remainder of the course, and the class rep was invited to comment on this at the next staff/student meeting.

Lectures in CS335 are held in HSB1 where one projector is very light and the other is very dark (and regularly flickers). This should be reported to LTMU via the AskIT system (Sean confirmed that AskIT is used University wide for practically all issues now). Paul will ask the lecturer to raise this via AskIT.

It was also noted that many chairs in the lab were broken. Sean noted this was a problem, and he typically replaces about 100 chairs per annum.

Paul thanked the class reps for volunteering their services.

Meeting closed by 1.55 pm. See you all on 22nd September!