

Minutes of the Cybernetics Staff/Student Liaison Committee

<http://www.cybsslc.rdg.ac.uk/>

Thursday 29th January 2004

Members

Staff: Dr. John Bowen, Dr. Richard Mitchell, Dr. Philip Cotterell

Postgraduate: Nicoletta Nicolaou

Part IV Undergraduate: Mark Foyle, David Barrett

Part III Undergraduate: Ben Jones (absent), Daniel Scott (absent), Andrew Butchers (absent)

Part II Undergraduate: Pat Parslow (absent), Aristotelis Papadimitriou (absent), Dani Fortunov (absent), Ekaterini Savvas, Tye Hadlington

Part I Undergraduate: Helen Batson, Bob Boulos (absent), Alex Muirhead

Chairperson: Jon Farrimond (Part I)

Secretary: Laurence Withers (Part IV)

Issues from the Previous Meeting

The Cybernetics SSLC now has a website (URL <http://www.cybsslc.rdg.ac.uk/>). Thanks to Mark and David for setting this up.

1. Dr. Xia Hong's lecturing style

Last meeting, the committee had been asked to examine the issue of Dr. Hong's lecturing. This meeting, students have acknowledged that her style has definitely improved, but that lectures with complex content are not well presented.

Dr. Richard Mitchell will speak to Professor Paul Sharkey on this issue.

2. Part II practicals

Dr. Mitchell spoke to Mr. Les Comley about the consistency of supervision for these labs. It is hoped the situation will now improve; if not, students are welcome to let their SSLC representatives know.

3. Lecture feedback forms

Both Dr. Mitchell and Dr. Bowen have given ample time for their feedback forms, and an email has been sent to the lecturers asking them to ensure students do get a chance to fill in the

forms. However, it seems that some lecturers are not handing out the forms at all. This will hopefully be mitigated by a new, school-wide system which is in the works.

4. Vending machine restocking

The vending machines are now being restocked regularly, although it has come to our attention that we seem to have the most expensive vending machines on campus.... Unfortunately, the prices are set by an outside contractor and so there is not much that can be done.

5. Maths tutorial clashes

The clashes of Maths tutorials with some of Dr. Will Browne's tutorials has been resolved with three additional tutorials which will be in the summer term.

6. Joint faculty meeting

The school needs to choose a staff and a student representative for this meeting on March 12th. The chairperson should remind us of this at our next meeting.

7. Part IV exams and business lecture clashes

The examiners will need to be made aware that students were unable to attend the lectures. This affects all Part IV CS/Cyb students.

8. Room 187 capacity

New postgraduates do not start at this time of year, so the situation should not get worse. The department is thinking about limiting the length of time for which postgraduates have a desk available, but there is nothing solid yet. On a more positive note, room 187 does now have a printer.

9. Efficiency of the SSLC

An idea for running the meetings more smoothly was proposed: a forum on the SSLC website. This (or something similar) should be possible.

Laurence, David and Mark will look into this and report on it for the next meeting.

Newly Arising Issues

1. Part I programming

A list of issues with Part I programming was given. These issues will need to be raised with the

computer science SSLC. The issues are as follows:

- There are not enough assistants to demonstrate to during practicals.
- Students should only be allowed to demonstrate during their own practical sessions, to avoid certain periods being overwhelmed with students. Of course, we will also need to resolve any timetable clashes this enforcement may bring about.
- The marking is inconsistent across the different assistants.
- The practicals do not match up to the lectures: often they cover material which is either not yet covered or not covered at all.
- Questions are not answered in lectures (in particular with James Ferryman). Although it is good to experiment, the course is formally assessed and therefore should be formally taught.
- Feedback is required to make the practicals worthwhile.

Although the CS department requested more assistants, this request was denied. It is felt that putting in another request, possibly with comments from the SSLC, is appropriate.

Laurence Withers will address this list during the CS SSLC meeting in week 6.

2. Part I labs - feedback

Part 1 students are concerned that they are not given back their lab reports when they are marked, even though lab supervisors have been asked to ensure they provide ample feedback. It was noted that they can request to see the reports. In addition, it is felt that a mark scheme for each lab may be appropriate (although some of the supervisors disagree).

Dr. Mitchell and Dr. Bowen will talk to Mr. Les Comley to ensure lab reports are returned.
Lecturers will discuss whether a formal mark scheme would be beneficial.

3. Neural networks

It appears that there was some confusion as to whether a GUI was required for the assignment for this module (CY2D2). EE students are not taught to create GUIs. However, Dr. Mitchell (who will be marking the assignment) told us that a GUI is not required for any part of the project.

4. Part II going into part III - projects

Some concern was expressed by current Part II students about their third year projects, since their third year will not start until after the summer holiday. This has already been addressed by the department, since the projects will be chosen in the summer term after the exams. Thus students will be able to start the project before and muse on their project during the summer vacation. In addition, the projects will not have to be demonstrated until after the third year exams (currently, this is the spring period).

5. Equipment failure in Part II labs

The issue of equipment failure in the Part II labs was raised. If this occurs, then students must tell the supervisor and write it down on their report. The marker will then take this into account.

6. Part II mobile robot project

The SE2R2 (mobile robot) project has approximately 70 students. It is possible that this will lead to overcrowding in the labs (especially towards the end of the project). This potential problem was acknowledged.

7. Systems Engineering degree

Following an enquiry about whether it was possible to construct your own degree, Dr. Mitchell and Dr. Bowen informed us of a proposed Systems Engineering undergraduate degree. This course would be very flexible (subject to certain constraints, of course). A point was made that the degree could be even more flexible if a student did not desire accreditation.

8. Timetable problems

Unfortunately, various factors contributed to making this term's timetabling very difficult for all involved across the school. This is hoped to improve in future; if not, the point will be raised by the committee once more.

Detailed Member List

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