CSE Stureps Session One
Head of School Summary Report
18th April, 2007

2007 Stureps

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1 Overview

This report has been prepared by Adam Brimo on behalf of the CSE Stureps and covers the period beginning the 14th of March 2007 and ending the 18th of April, 2007. It's contents draws upon formal and informal feedback from students undertaking CSE courses and/or programs.

2 Courses

2.1 COMP1911 Computing 1

Overview

Early in the session the Stureps received complaints from students regarding the following issues:

- Difficulty of the material and the pace of lectures

- Student engagement in lectures

- Explanations of examples

Upon sitting in on a couple of the lectures it became apparent that the different programming abilities and backgrounds were not always being catered for by the lecturer. Students who were new to programming expressed frustration that the material and labs were too difficult. While others with experience in programming found the exercises trivial.

Some students also found it difficult to follow the examples in lecturers and multiple students pointed out the 'programming style' of the code presented. Initially the idea of proper style was only enforced in tutorials and labs while the lecturer did not follow the 'style guide' for the course.

Students also found the content boring and attendance was not near the enrolled capacity for the lecture. During visits to the lecture it was said by students that it was just not interesting and there was little participation by students.

Recommendations / Resolutions

The lecturer in charge of the course was made aware of the concerns of students and Richard Buckland has been working at improving the teaching methods used. Another extension lecture is also being conducted which covers extra material and acts as revision for others. Student concerns in this course have dropped off and the course has improved thus far.

2.2 COMP2911 Engineering Design in Computing 2

Overview

Stureps have received the following formal and informal feedback regarding the course:

- Long hours required to complete labs

- Usefulness of lectures

Students have been raising concern about the amount of time required to complete the weekly labs for the course. The lab time allocated is two hours and students were spending upwards of eight hours working on the lab problems. Some tutors advised to have the lab completed before the start of the lab as it would require two hours to mark. Each lab requires multiple parts and no marks are awarded unless all tasks are completed.

The attendance to lectures has dropped off significantly in past weeks as John Potter has taken over in Richards absence- attended at the last lecture was 30% and students weren't motivated to stay. The current lab does not conform to the courses style guide and is drastically different to to previous ones leaving students confused.

Recommendations / Resolutions

The issues about the length of the labs were raised on the courses forum where many students pleaded for shorter labs at a time when the first task was also due. However Richard said the lab took him two hours and therefore students should have no trouble doing it in a bit less detail. The following weeks lab wasn't much shorter and many students were unable to complete it with the first task due in a few days.

There has been no action on the lecture yet as Richard has not been in contact the past couple weeks. A number of students are also concerned that the material is not being covered adequately by Richard and questions can lead off topic.

2.3 SENG2010 Software Engineering Workshop 2A

Overview

Stureps have received the following formal and informal feedback regarding the course:

- Inconsistent marking and instructions

- Differing understanding of the system

Students in this course were instructed to refine a document written in last years SE1031 course for the first deliverable. Students who did this were then marked down for inadequate reports despite being based on the previous report that was selected by Albert (Lecturer in Charge).

The system for Software Engineering this year is the Research Admissions Tracking System (RATS) in CSE, this system is part of Albert's job and thus his understanding is entirely different than that of the students in the course. Students based their understanding on a document provided last year which Albert has deemed incorrect and has marked the deliverable based on what he wants the system to do.

Recommendations / Resolutions

The marking of the first deliverable has been brought to the attention of the tutors who were aware of the situation when the deliverable was marked against differing guidelines. The deliverables should be marked by the tutors in addition to Albert as was done in the previous course (SE1031) or at-least marked according to the guidelines presented.

2.4 COMP2041 Software Construction: Techniques and Tools

Overview

A student expressed concern that the assessment guidelines and specification had changed in the middle of the semester (week 5). It was noted that the changes should not have occurred if the course was well planned out.

Recommendations / Resolutions

It was concluded that Morri (Lecturer in Charge) had spent a great deal of time adding notes regarding the changes and asking students for input on the matter. The changes to the guidelines where for the better and the issue has been resolved.

2.5 COMP3141 Software System Design and Implementation

Overview

The first assignment in this course was released in draft form (which was no doable) according to students undertaking the course. The second version was released just over a week before the scheduled due date of the assignment, giving students little time to work on the task. Students in this course has a number of other assignments to do and the system for late submissions did not award marks for late submissions.

Recommendations / Resolutions

John Plaice was informed of the concerns of the students and it was suggested that a marking system which allows for late submissions which reasonable penalties as per the standard university system. It would be ideal for situations like this to not arise and that doable specifications be released with ample time for students to accomplish the task. Stureps have not had any feedback on this as of yet.

3 Labs

3.1 Capacity

There have not been any complaints about the capacity of labs this semester. At peak times it may still be difficult to find an open terminal however there have not been any comments from students regarding this matter.

3.2 Temperature

Overview

There was a variance in the temperatures of CSE labs of approximately five degrees. It has been noted that the temperatures in the Mech Eng labs runs between 25-27 degrees

while Elec Eng labs were about 23-25 degrees.

Recommendations / Resolutions

This matter was brought to the attention of CSE staff however the temperatures remain at 23-27 degrees. The initial concern was that some labs were too cold however CSE staff confirmed that those temperatures were within the university's recommended range.

3.3 24 Hour Access

Overview

It has been requested by some students that a lab be kept open 24 hours a day to accommodate students who require the use of CSE computers over night. This is a recurring issue however some students do request it on a regular basis.

Recommendations / Resolutions

Loc was asked what was required for some labs to be opened around the clock however we have yet to hear back on whether this will go ahead. If possible a single lab could be opened for 24 hours a day and its usage could be monitored to see what the demand is.

Conclusions: The school has decided not to run labs for 24 hours at this time due to concerns over student's safety as they are leaving the campus. While the lab itself and the campus area may be safe, many transport services stop running after midnight and there is an increased risk to students in the areas surrounding the campus in the late hours of the night.

CSE will however open some labs to midnight on weekends and public holidays as assignments fall due over these periods.

4 CSE

4.1 Quotas

Overview

The university has recently lowered the cost of UNIWIDE access to students from 10c per megabyte to 2c per megabyte. CSE charges students $1 for 40mbs of IPQuota which is 2.5c per megabyte, CSE has previously charged a quarter of what the uni has charged

students and with the increasing bandwidth requirements of websites, students are using more IPQuota.

It is currently not possible for students to acquire more disk quota from CSE, even if a student would like to purchase it. Undergraduate students only receive a base allocation of 50mbs which can easily be exceeded by students requiring to run large tests on code or the increasing sizes of email. This allocation has not been changed recently while the sizes of files students must work with has increased.

Recommendations / Resolutions

Students would greatly benefit from increased disk quota and IPquota. Many students regularly exceed or come close to exceeding their disk quota while many more go over their IPquota just with normal usage.

Conclusions: Disk Quota doubled for the majority of students- a glitch caused some students not to receive this increase however this has been corrected. The CSG website will be updated shortly regarding base allocations.

CSE provides a subsidy to the UNSW UNIWIDE facilities for wireless access, each student in CSE receives credit to their account however the majority of students will never use UNIWIDE and that credit expires and gets refreshed each semester. It should be investigated if a student can elect to have that credit that would go to UNIWIDE credited to their CSE account for IPQuota.

4.2   Stureps

This year the number of Stureps has decreased to seven from the previous size of eleven. Due to commitments and coursework many Stureps have found it difficult contribute this semester. The lack of commitment and reduced size of the committee has led to a small minority undertaking most of the issues.

Please direct feedback to: stureps@cse.unw.edu.au