CSE Stureps 2008
Head of School Summary Report
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2008 Stureps

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Contents

1 Overview

This report has been prepared by Adam Brimo on behalf of the CSE Stureps and covers the period beginning the March 2008 and ending the 11th of August, 2008. It's contents draws upon formal and informal feedback from students undertaking CSE courses and the survey run during the exam period for session one of 2008.

The Stureps ran a survey from the beginning of the exam period in session 1 2008 to the end of the first week of session 2 2008. During this period of time approximately 149 unique students responded by answering some or all of the questions. This report focuses on the extended responses to the open ended questions in the survey.

2 Courses

2.1 COMP1911 Computing 1

The feedback for this course was somewhat mixed although generally very positive. Although a few students commented that it was difficult at times, many agreed that it was a useful and interesting course. One student explained,

"The labs and assignments in this course are very helpful in giving me a better understanding on programming." While another person commented, "was good course, i liked the lecturer allot to. all the taskes semmed fair and examined all levels of code writing. "

Some students did find it difficult to pay attention during lectures, although an almost equal number said the lecturers were interesting and the assignment seemed fair. The end of session survey results confirmed that some students did think the workload was excessive however student almost unanimously agreed that the lectures were excellent and incredibly interesting.

2.2 COMP1917 Higher Computing 1

It was noted earlier in the year (last session) that the workload for this course was excessive and that some students where having trouble coping with other subjects and COMP1917. One student noted, "Excellent course; Richard was great, the tutors were very helpful and personable." While another one commented, "Great lecturer, very challenging. Lab assignments were difficult, so some simpler assignments to get the basics would be more helpful."

A student pointed out, "There is a fair amount of pressure on the individual to perform well on the day. An individual can do well throughout the course and and still do poorly due to the final exam. It doesnt feel quite right to me." This touches on an issue which some student had regarding the level of coursework. Students would be given a week to do a project based on the assumption that most students start assignments in the last week anyway and therefore wouldn't need anymore time. Time management is an issue for students to deal with and those which take longer to complete a task may be disadvantaged.

2.3 COMP2041 Software Construction: Techniques and Tools

Student commented that the assignments in this course were not spaced out evenly and therefore it was difficult for students to complete all assessments from this course and others. One student noted that the coursework clashed with assignments from COMP2911 and COMP2121.

One student noted that the course was, "Hard :) I think we should be given a little more time to complete the assign- ments. Labs and tutes were excellent. I learnt a lot from this course." This was a view shared by the majority of respondents as everyone agreed the content was highly useful.

2.4 COMP2911 Engineering Design in Computing 2

This course had many issues last semester. These include:

1. Slow marking of assignments, which provided students with little feedback on their progress
2. Assignments were not evenly spaced out and not released on time
3. Not very interesting lectures made it difficult for students to pay attention
4. General feeling of disorganization in the course

The majority of students were very unhappy with the course in general and one went as far as to say it was, "Absolutely terrible," adding, "All the assignments were released late, all crammed into the last few weeks of session. Not enough practical or even Java in general was taught, so most students ended up having no idea what to do in assignments- not to mention the incredibly poor assignment specs. Lectures were useless and covered topics that werent entirely essential."

Many of the students agreed that the level of work required by the course was far too high and that this workload made problems with assignments and lectures worse. The stureps have spoken with John Potter about all of these issues and other students have confronted him about the situation as well. The course is currently running this session however the course outline has been highly modified to address these issues. In developing the course outline, students and tutors were consulted and asked for suggestions.

In order to prevent these issues from happening again this course should be closely monitored by stureps and the course admin.

2.5 ENGG1811 Computing for Engineers

Some students found the content of the course difficult yet useful while some other students found the work to basic and not relevant. Although this course is for engineering students in general, depending on the student's competency in computer they may find the course uninteresting as it doesn't teach real programming languages. A student express this

concern, " Uninteresting course, which I thought was either important but boring (excel and access, or pointless and difficult (VBA). 3/10."

The course did appeal quite well to some students as reflected by this comment, "The course went great, I loved to learn about excel and access and all the other information about computer security, though there wasnt enough time to go over in detail." It was suggested though that the weighting of exams, labs and assessments be more evenly distributed in the future.

2.6 GENE8000 Spreadsheet & Database Applns

The feedback received for this course was positive overall with one student commenting, "Thought it was a fantastic practical course. The lecturer explained concepts very well. Assignments were very fair and very useful in order to better understand concepts taught." A couple students did comment that the assignments contributed too little to a students overall mark in the course.

3 Clashes

Due to the new universal timetabling system used by UNSW, a number of courses which may be popular with students clash with one another. This year, the survey asked whether or not the respondent was not able to take a course due to it clashing with another course. The following table shows the clashes which exist in session 2 2008 that have been noted by students.

Course	**Clashes with:**
COMP1917	PHYS1111, INFS1603,
COMP2041	SENG2020,
COMP3171	POLS2020
COMP3231	COMP3311
COMP3441	MATH2859, TELE3113,
COMP3821	ELEC3104
COMP4141	ELEC3115, PHIL1007,
COMP9311	COMP4416
ENGG1000	MATH1081
GSOE9820	COMP9322
PHYS2050	MATH3411
PHYS3070	PHYS2630

Courses Note Offered This Session
COMP9008
COMP9317
COMP9318
COMP9117

4 Labs

Overall the majority of students are satisfied with the quality of the CSE computing labs with many of the respondents of the survey stating that everything was 'good.' However some issues did exist with the labs this past session.

4.1 General Purpose Labs / Gaming

It has been suggested by numerous students that some labs are always kept free for students to use. This means that some labs would be kept off of the booking system as well as kept free when the timetables for labs are generated.

Gaming is also an issue which is related to this problem. Some students spend their time playing games in the lab while other students are walking around looking for a free computer. Many students would not feel comfortable asking another student to stop playing a game so they can use the computer and if the student refuses then a conflict may occur. Therefore it might be worth having gaming free labs during normal business hours which is usually when the labs are full.

4.2 Software Requested / Software Feedback

Through the survey, some students requested that some additional software be installed on the computers. The software requested by students includes:

1. Microsoft Office 2007
2. Remove Desktop
3. Compiz Fusion
4. Mac OS X
5. Firefox 3

A very small percent of students who responded to the survey thought that the labs were too difficult to use. One person said, "computer labs are too complecated for log in and hard to use for assignments." However the use of Linux is very important and the overwhelming majority of students are satisfied with the current setup of Linux. Another student noted, "Nice to see the labs running a modern Linux distro. Don't change that!" Therefore the one or two percent of students who are only able to use Windows should learn to use linux quickly otherwise they may have difficulty with university level work.

5 Quotas

Overview

UNIWIDE access for students with their own laptops is now free. Only a few years ago students were required to pay $1 connection fees and where charged by the megabyte. Hence the university has gradually reduced the cost of internet usage on campus for both schools and students alike. CSE is behind the rest of the university in this regard; many CSE students do not have laptops or do not bring them to university. This means that some students will quickly run out of IP quota whilst others are enjoying the free internet provided by UNSW.

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.

It would make sense for CSE to remove the bandwidth limits for CSE students. As far as the Stureps are aware, CSE is no longer charged for their bandwidth usage and therefore this savings should be passed onto the students. Additionally, for the sake of equality between those with laptops and those without, all students should have equal access to the internet.

6 CSE

6.1 Stureps

This year the number of Stureps has stayed consistent at seven with atleast one sturep for each year. Due to commitments and coursework many Stureps have found it difficult contribute this semester. Many of the issues regarding workload documented in this report have directly affected each of the stureps in their courses. It is also evident that the stureps are generally involved in a number of other activities around CSE and therefore have had limited time.

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