

CSE Stureps 2010
Head of School Summary Report
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2010 Stureps

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1 Overview

This report has been prepared by the CSE Stureps and covers the period beginning the November 2009 through June 2010. It's contents draws upon formal and informal feedback from students undertaking CSE courses and the survey ran during the during the second half of the first session of 2010. During this period of time approximately 76 unique students responded by answering some or all of the questions. This report focuses on their extended responses to the open ended questions in the survey as well as the multiple choice questions.

2 Courses

2.1 First Year Computing

2.1.1 COMP1911 - Computing 1

Students remarked that the course is interesting although the workload was slightly high. One respondent remarked that the “Workload [is] quite heavy with trying to understand a lot of new material. No reprieve time between assignments Tutors are helpful :).”

2.1.2 COMP1917 - Higher Computer 1

Overall the comment received in the survey were positive and some students stated that the workload was manageable and the course was exciting. Some students seemed concerned that the topics and questions in labs were not thoroughly covered in lectures. A few students also noted that they had were not shown how to use terminal commands.

One student remarked, “I find it very interesting, and it is explained very well. The workload is fine, Im keeping up even though I had very little prior knowledge of programming.” However not all students new to programming were as comfortable, “Big classes means tutors have little time to help you, assignments were very hard for someone like me who has never done programming before.” The comments from students that were finding the course difficult focused on the unix commands that appeared to be assumed knowledge but were not taught within the course. These command would have been covered in lab0 but maybe not in much depth.

A student that took the course as an elective felt somewhat inspired, “LOVE this course. Lectures are occasionally somewhat boring, but tutorials are always interesting and the assignments are kind of fun. It is just an elective, but its made me want to do more Computer electives.” There were not any negative remarks regarding tutoring with all the respondents describing the tutors as ‘helpful’ or ‘awesome’.

A lone comment on the Higher Computing offering in semester 2 2009 was along similar lines, mentioning that the lecturer and workload were reasonable.

2.1.3 COMP1927 - Higher Data Structures and Algorithms

The session 1 2010 offering of this course received only one comment however that student found the workload was fairly good and their tutor was helpful.

The session 2 2009 offering of this course was taught by Richard Buckland and students found him ‘engaging’ and ‘awesome’. However some of the students thought that he was quite disorganised and that the workload was far too high.

“Quite engaging lecturer (Richard Buckland) but no course notes if a lecture is missed. Quite a lot of work. Core subject.”

“Richard ran the course in an awfully disorganized way. Im not taking COMP2911 this session because Id rather avoid him...”

These comments have been fairly consistent over the past few years with students enjoying the teaching and lectures but struggling to keep up with the significant workload and apparent disorganisation. This situation has not really improved in recent years with the workload always being far higher than other courses, which in turn might put students off from future computing courses.

2.2 COMP2041 - Software Construction: Techniques and Tools

Students thought Andrew Taylor was an ‘awesome lecturer’ and found the material to be relevant and necessary for their degrees. A couple of students remarked that they found the content a bit boring while others found it interesting. Overall there didn’t appear to be any issues and students enjoyed the course.

2.3 COMP2111 - System Modelling and Design

Many students found that the lectures were not interesting or engaging enough throughout the semester. There were a few complaints that the assignment marking was much too slow for useful feedback and that there was limited feedback on individual assignments. It has been mentioned that the lack of a mark breakdown for assignments was frustrating, since students found it very hard to determine if a solution fulfils the marking criteria.

“The course seems particularly irrelevant to the program (software engineering). While it helps us with the SENG2010 course, it seems like a waste of time. The extension lectures provided by NICTA are interesting and appear more relevant than what we are doing with Event-B in COMP2111”

2.4 COMP2121 - Microprocessors and Interfacing

Students found the main lecturer, Sri Parameswaran, quite good however the substitute lecturer mainly read off the lecture slides. A few students noted that the content of the course seemed 'stale' and seemed to have not been updated in a long time.

A few students expressed interest in having tutorials to go over the material in more detail. A student remarked, "This course needs tutorials, even if they are optional, or more consultation times. Some concepts take a little time to grasp completely in the lectures."

2.5 COMP2911 - Engineering Design In Computing

The 2010 session 1 offering of this course received a number of responses from students, all of which bar one mentioned that the workload was too high and that the course was taking up all their time. Students were required to do the majority of the course work including labs and assignments in groups / pairs and had multiple deadlines per week. Some comments that were representative of the students' responses were:

"Again, Richards course, highly interesting, ridiculous workload, awesome tutor. Like everyone else, its taking up most of my waking and sleeping time."

"Too much pair stuff. I understand and value group work; its still too much pair work. One reason in particular; plenty of people in this course know java, plenty dont. If you dont know java (like me) and you get assigned lab and project partners who do, you better hope one of those partners aspires to be a teacher (they didnt). Another reason: this course is a lot of work. Which is okay. But it makes any difference in work ethic more significant."

"Too much work. Feels like each week is a crash course in one particular idea. Have heard several instances of tutors being overly strict as well as being overly lenient. Doesnt seem like tutors are all on the same page."

Not all of the students were disappointed in the workload of COMP2911 as some other students remarked that they found the course interesting.

"Great fun so far, work load has been decent and good tutors"

"Good course, again a lot of work but its rewarding"

The comments for this course are similar to those received over the previous years of other courses taught by Richard Buckland. Although highly engaging and rewarding once complete, the workload is significantly higher than most computing courses. At the end of the course, we received some feedback from students saying they were happy with the mark that they got, which was indicative of how much they realised they learnt at the end. The open question is whether the workload of the course needs to be this high for students to learn all the required material and be inspired to do more computing courses.

2.6 COMP3131 - Programming Languages and Compilers

Feedback regarding the course was in general positive. Some of the students noted that the course was very theoretical and that they found the theory component to be quite complicated. The students did however appreciate the assignments as they helped with understanding the of the theory.

2.7 COMP3141 - Software System Design and Implementation

The overall response for this course was positive. A few students mentioned that getting used to AGDA was a bit hard. Many were excited about the prospect of learning Haskell. There was a lot of positive feedback regarding the lecturer Manuel. Most of the students were happy with this course because it was new and refreshing. The content taught was something they had not previously had much experience or exposure too.

“A wonderful course This is the first course where the majority is new to me, and I have to say that it is a fun and rewarding experience. Manuel is a great lecturer. In a world where the use of functional languages and formal methods are still a bit of a rarity, I think this course will help set me apart from others. Hurray for formal methods.”

2.8 COMP3151 - Foundations of Concurrency

There wasnt much feedback for this course. One student commented that the course was Awesome.

2.9 COMP3161 - Concepts of Programming Languages

There wasnt much feedback for this course. One student felt that the content was very specific and not applicable outside the course.

2.10 COMP3231 - Operating Systems

Students made positive comments regarding this course. They said that the content and the lecturer were both great. “Really good course, and great lecturer. The course material fills a lot of gaps left by COMP1917, so I would definitely recommend it.”

2.11 COMP3311 - Database Systems

Students found the course to be fairly good however some thought that the tutorials and labs should not be optional and that the three hour lecture was a bit too long. A significant complaint was raised around the use of Oracle in the course (session 1 2010), in previous offerings PostgreSQL was used.

“Content is quite dry. I feel strongly against the use of proprietary software as the foundation of the course (Oracle) when there are better and free (speech) alternatives (eg MySQL, PostgreSQL). Tutorials and labs must be improved and made mandatory. 3 hour lecture should be split.”

Some of the students stated that there was too much work, that the work itself was quite dry and dull and that it was hard to find motivation to complete the tutorials and labs in the course.

2.12 COMP3331 - Networks and Applications

There wasn't much feedback for this course. One student mentioned that the three hour lecture should be split up into two or three separate lectures. Another student thought the course was good.

2.13 COMP3411 - Artificial Intelligence

The feedback for this course was positive. Many of the students enjoyed the course content and thought the lecturer, Alan Blair, was great.

2.14 COMP3441 - Security Engineering

There weren't many responses in regards to this course. A student did mention that they found the course material to be shallow and that they thought the course content should have more depth and rigour. The student was also dissatisfied with the lecturer, stating that the lectures were both boring and slow. Another student thought the course was interesting but did state that sometimes the content was quite dry. In relation to the tutorials, a student suggested that there should be more student discussion and that the seminar presenters should be given more direction.

The course had a good reputation, but so far the course material has been too shallow, it needs much more depth and rigour. Also the current lecturer could try to improve his lecturing. Lectures are boring and really slow. (No need to spend 1 hour explaining how Julie Bishop plagiarised) The seminars seem to be a waste of time; as the presenters are given no direction, and most of the student presenters don't know the material well enough for the audience to learn much. Also the labs have no student discussion (so it's not a tutorial), and the practical tasks could be a little bit more challenging.”

2.15 COMP3821 - Extended Algorithms and Programming Techniques

Students stated that the course was both good and challenging. Some students thought that the mid-session exam was too heavily weighted.

2.16 COMP3891 - Extended Operating Systems

There wasn't much feedback for this course. The feedback received however was very positive.

2.17 SENG1031/2010/3010 - Software Engineering Workshops

Respondents found the workshops to be quite good overall and enjoyed the lecturing, particularly from Peter Ho in SENG2010. One respondent enjoyed the third year software engineering workshop more than the previous years.

“Finally, a good SENG workshop. You are told what you have to do, then it's up to you how you want to do it As it should be. No more useless diagramming/eventb/etc. Workload is just like any other seng workshops. Assignments are easy (personally). A good course to sharpen your skills.”

2.18 SENG4912 - Professional Issues and Ethics

Overall respondents enjoyed the course however some students noted that the seminar materials and readings are not released in time to allow for proper preparation. In many cases the required readings were released on Sunday or Monday of the week in which they were required, which inhibited seminar discussions.

3 Resources

3.1 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 existed in session two 2009 or session one 2010 that have been noted by students.

Course	Clashes with:
COMP3441	COMP2911
COMP3891	COMP3821
CVEN9888	COMP9021
CVEN9892	COMP9414
ENG1000	-
GSOE9810	COMP9414
GSOE9840	COMP9021
MATH2111	COMP2041

The CSE student office has been in contact with the Stureps before the timetable for the coming session is finalised. The student office already has a comprehensive list of class free course combinations however this year the stureps recommended the some (additional) clash free combinations for the semester 2 2010 timetable.

- COMP3601 (Design Project A), COMP3331 (Computer Networks and Applications)
- SENG2020 (Software Engineering Workshop 2B), COMP2041 (Software Construction: Techniques and Tools)

These additions were based upon a survey the Stureps ran over the summer holiday that asked which courses students planned on taking in semester two. The vast majority of popular course combinations were already without clashes.

3.2 Internet Quota

Over the past few years, Sturep surveys have shown that some students still do not have enough internet quota. After the survey held in session 2 2009, the Stureps recommended an increase in IP quota which was implemented before session 1 this year. However the allocated quotas are still surprisingly low for a Computing school while the rest of the university does not have a limit on internet use.

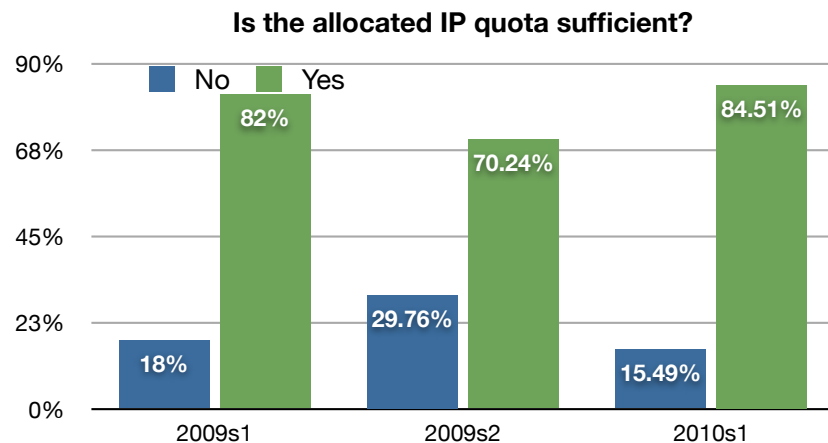


Figure 1: IP quota responses over the past three sessions.

We would recommend that a further increase in IP quota be considered as the previous increased amounted to only 50Mb extra base allocation per session. We do not see any reason why even 15% of students should have to run out of internet quota when additional quota comes at no cost of CSE.

3.3 Disk Quota

Figure 2 shows the percentage of students from the past three sessions that did and did not have enough disk space. The amount of disk space allocated was increased part way through last year which has reduced the number of people without sufficient quota to 15%. However some students are still finding the current allocation insufficient due to the size of files requires for assignments including large libraries, version control repositories and test data.

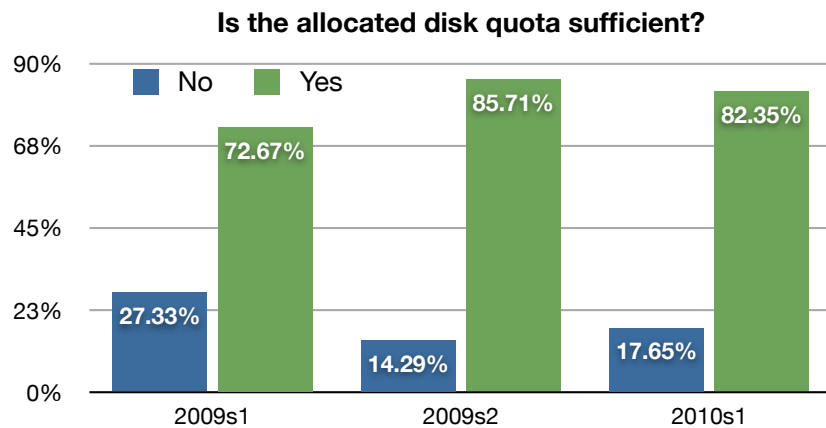


Figure 2: Disk quota responses over the past three sessions.

3.4 Print Quota

Some students remarked that they did not have enough print quota as they printed out lecture notes and assignments. If students were to print out all of their lecture notes then few people would have enough quota however this is not something that is generally encouraged. The base print quota should still be increased from its current level of 100 pages to a more reasonable level. However we have been informed that print quota might disappear all together under the new centralised IT plan, we expect this will not be welcome amongst students.

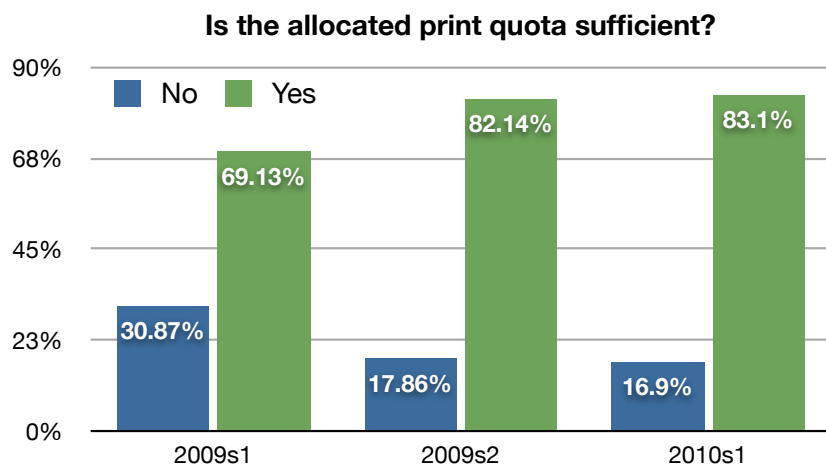


Figure 3: Print quota responses over the past three sessions.

3.5 Apple Keyboards and Mice

At the beginning of 2010 all of the lab machines were upgraded to new iMacs with the standard Apple keyboards and mice. In previous years we did not receive any comments on the ergonomics of the lab keyboard and mice however this year we received numerous complaints both in person and through the survey. The main focus of these complaints is that the Apple mice and to a lesser extent the Apple keyboards are not ergonomic and are uncomfortable for many students.

We have raised this issue early in 2010 however the mice have not yet been replaced with the standard PC ones that were previously in use. It was acknowledged that the keyboard take some getting used to but are actually quite ergonomic however the concern around the mice remains.

Adam Brimo, in his capacity as the Occupational Health & Safety representative has raised this issue with the OH&S committee and submitted a hazard report requesting the mice to be replaced. This has also not been acted upon by the committee or CSE. Many students are becoming increasingly frustrated and some of their comments are shown below.

“The apple mice that are now in most of the labs are really bad - it is hard to right click or middle click. It would be much better if the old mice were put back. Additionally I would prefer the non apple keyboard.”

“Use ergonomic keyboards and mice, not these horrible Apple ones. They hurt my wrists and fingers and are difficult to click.”

“Variety in the mice and keyboards we can use would be nice. I prefer the larger keyboards and dislike the mac mice.”

We recommend that the mice in the labs be changed back to the standard PC mice. The Apple Mighty Mouse currently in use is also subject to wear more easily as the scroll balls are known to stop working after a short period of time.

3.6 Facilities

Overall students seemed fairly satisfied with the lab facilities and facilities in CSE in general however a couple issues were identified. These include the wear and tear on the laptop lounge and the cleanliness of the bathrooms. Students have complained that the bathrooms in K17 are not always clean and often do not have proper ventilation.

3.7 Stureps

Elections were held in 2010 and a number of new Stureps were elected. The challenge for us is gathering feedback from students on a regular basis. We have updated our website, created a Facebook group and added an anonymous feedback form however this has generated few responses.

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