

# CSE Stureps 2011

## Head of School Summary Report

### August 9, 2011

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#### 2011 Stureps

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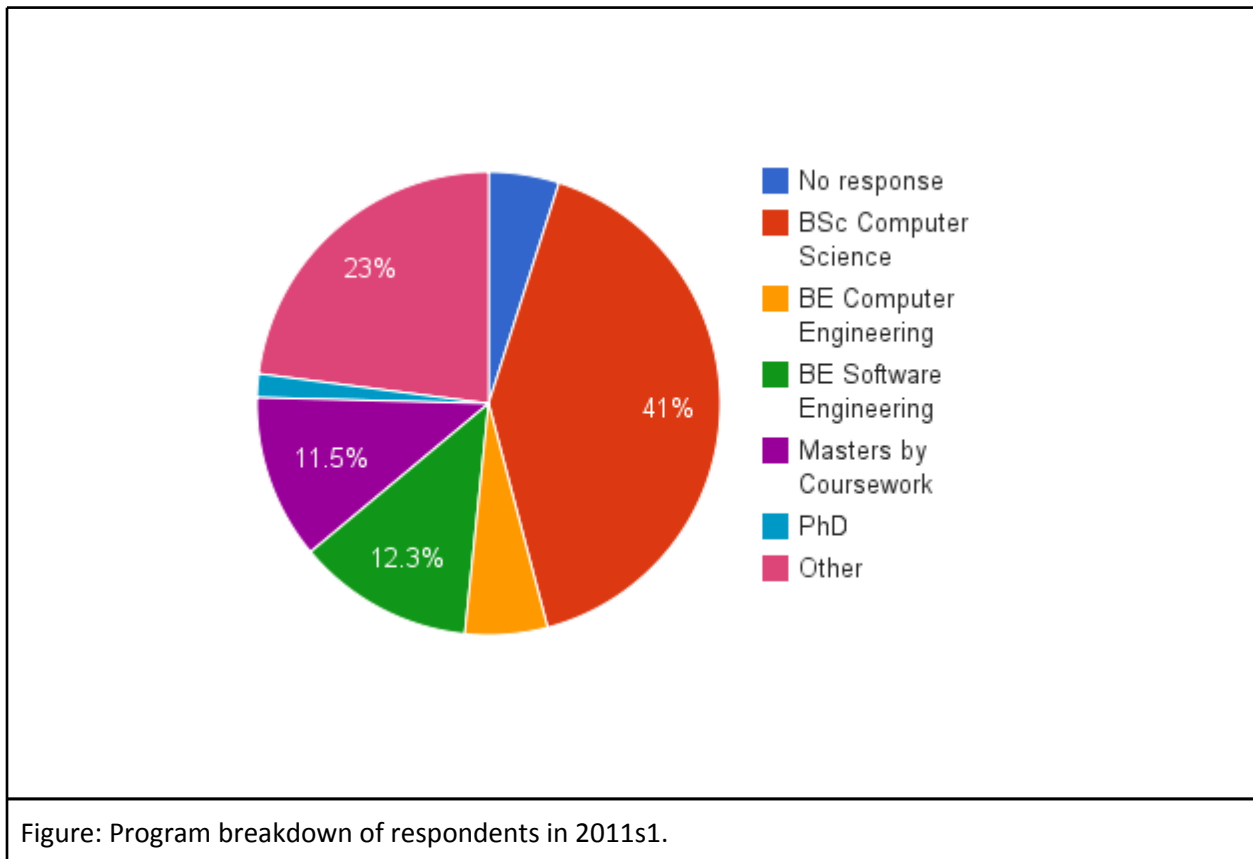
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# Overview

This report has been prepared by the School of Computer Science and Engineering (“CSE”) Student Representative (“Stureps”) and covers the period beginning July 2010 through to June 2011. Its content draws upon formal and informal feedback from students undertaking CSE courses. The Stureps survey ran during the second half of the first session of 2011. During this period, 122 students responded by answering some or all questions. This report focuses on their responses.



# Courses

## COMP1911 - Computing 1A

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
7%	14%	79%	14

Feedback for this course was mostly positive, with students agreeing that the lecturer was good and that they found the introduction to coding valuable. There was mixed opinion as to the workload, with one student saying “need more labs”, whilst another said that the difficulty of later tutorials and labs led to them losing enjoyment in the course.

## COMP1917 - Computing 1

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
3%	9%	88%	34

The feedback for this course was overwhelmingly positive, with most students rating the quality of lecturing, tutoring and course content very highly.

One student wrote that they “Love[d] the lectures, great and helpful tutors, was very interesting and challenging, and although it was difficult, now it feels like the best course in the world”, and another student wrote that they “Thought it was great, very relevant to my degree, and a fantastic introduction to university. The tutors were amazing. The workload and assignments were very manageable”.

However two students raised issues with the organisation of the course, citing the new structure as leading to poor communication, with one saying that they “Didn't like the portfolio stuff. Poorly organised, bad communication to the students about what was required of them. First time it was run though, so maybe it will be better in the future?”.

## COMP1927 - Computing 2

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
29%	57%	14%	7

The feedback for this course was very negative, especially for the second core first year computing

course. Many students had complaints about the lecturing quality. One student summarised it as “Lecturer was bad. So bad we started our own lectures to teach ourselves everything he was meant to be teaching us.”

One student did disagree with the majority about the lecturer, instead raising concerns with the workload: “Content was cool, and the lecturer was interesting and fun, but I think the lab materials were dodgy and the work was too easy.”

## COMP2041/COMP9041 - Software Construction: Techniques and Tools

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
0%	0%	100%	13

Feedback for this course was unanimously positive. One student said that they “Loved the material and the course. Andrew was a pretty good lecturer. Specs were always clear and on time. Well run and good content”, and another stated that this was an “extremely useful course. Very interesting too. Much credit goes to the lecture and his ability to make his lessons interesting”.

## COMP2121 - Microprocessors and Interfacing

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
31%	38%	31%	13

The feedback for this course was mixed and raised many issues and concerns regarding course content, organisation and teaching of the course. Students also highlighted the lack of purpose and lack of feedback in the course.

“Worst CSE Course completed to date; despite a very respected lecturer. It was very poorly constructed - while the absence of a textbook could be accommodated, had no clearly defined purpose nor did it provide the proper fundamentals of assembler programming.”

“Interesting subject matter, OK LIC, terrible tutor, boring coursework (and with no feedback except marks!), confusing course layout. The least applicable course to my degree.”

Four students found the course a positive experience, one described it as a “Great hands-on course”, and another as “Just like any other programming course, except with assembly. Always good to touch on the low level stuff of programming”.

## COMP2911 - Engineering Design in Computing

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
26%	37%	37%	19

The feedback for this course was entirely consistent; the course content was fine, but the lecturer was dull, confusing and a totally disorganised course administrator.

One student said that “Tutorials, labs and assignments are released very late, none of the assignments have been marked to date, lecturer could not be reached, I have no idea where I am heading in this course”.

Another student found the disorganisation so unmanageable that they emailed us separately on the 21st of June to notify us of their concerns:

“This course has been very poorly organised and student are still without important information regarding the prac test this Friday. The assignment specs have been vague and confusing and without marking criteria and submission details. One assignment contained information that was seemingly contradictory to the rest of the spec, when the lecturer was asked, he stated he had forgotten to remove that part although he did not make this information known to anyone who did not attend the lecture and he did not fix the spec. He also did not give the sample exam or tests for the assignments when he promised he would and often had to extend deadlines because submission/testing details were released hours before the submission deadline (Assn 2 was extended twice from start of week 13 to Sunday in stuvac). As of 21/6/11 no assignment marks or any feedback have been given to students although one assignment was submitted over 2 months ago (week 8) and 2 were submitted in week 13.

Most importantly though there is a prac exam this Friday and no details have been provided to students other than the time (by the cse internal timetable). The lecturer promised a sample prac exam which has not been given and no information regarding length, question style, requirements, locations and what resources students will be able to access has been given.”

## COMP3121/COMP3891/COMP9101/COMP9801 - Algorithms and Programming Techniques

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
0%	6%	94%	18

This course had very positive feedback, with all students enjoying the content and appreciating the usefulness. One student said that it was an “Excellent course! Really enjoyable, I learnt some extremely

useful techniques that will certainly come in handy in the future! The only downside to this course was that sometimes the explanations given were not very clear”.

## COMP3131/COMP9102 - Programming Languages and Compilers

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
0%	38%	62%	8

The feedback for this course was mostly good, with no negative comments. The overall opinion was that the work was dry but effective, and the work load was manageable.

One student described it as “The coursework was very tedious (as I admit might be necessary for an introductory course) but the course was administered well”, and another said they had “no complaints, the course was fairly straightforward but very dry”.

## COMP3141 - Software System Design and Implementation

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
20%	40%	40%	5

The response here was mixed, and the feedback mostly confused as to the point of the course.

One student thought there was “Not enough focus, too much breadth and not enough depth. Course title does not sufficiently describe the course contents” whilst another found it a “Good course on theorem proving and functional programming”.

## COMP3231/COMP3891/COMP9201/COMP9283 - Operating Systems

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
7%	0%	93%	14

Responses to this course was highly positive. Students found the course “challenging but rewarding”, “interesting”, “useful” and “manageable”.

“You learn quite a bit about concepts that every programmer should know about. The difficulty is perfect.”

“Assignments helped build practical skills associated with lecture material.”

## COMP3311 - Database Systems

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
0%	18%	82%	11

Feedback for this course was positive with most comments highlighting that the content of the course was interesting and John Shepherd was a good lecturer and was continuously engaged with the course. One student commented that the “aim of the course is very clear” and “everything [was] very useful”. Another student noted that the “assignments were practical which is good because it forces you to learn” but noted that tutorials/labs would be beneficial to students. One comment noted that assignments took too long to mark.

## COMP3331/COMP9331 - Computer Networks and Applications

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
8%	31%	62%	13

There was a mixed feeling in regards to this course. Most considered the content of the course interesting and covered the basics of networking that is necessary for CS graduates. In 2010, NICTA’s IREEL was trialed in the course, which faced mixed responses with one student commenting that it “should be removed from this course”, contradicting another student saying that the “attempt to use a new NICTA program in the labs was commendable” and another stating that “NICTA labs were great”.

## COMP3411 - Artificial Intelligence

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
0%	38%	62%	8

For a course which is such a large field of computer science the feedback from students regarding how the course is taught and run is concerning. Concerns range from how assignments were run, course content and course organisation.

Feedback, some of which was received by Stureps throughout the semester criticised the assignments for being irrelevant to what was being taught in the lectures and focused too much on robotics, which is only a small subset of what AI encompasses. The simulator, which was used for the assignments, was



criticised heavily, with one student remarking, “assignment really tested if you could use the simulator, not anything AI related”. Another student commented that “assignments required a lot of work and did not help learn the content covered in the course”. Yet another commented that in the “second assignment the provided code didn’t meet the spec, and it was impossible to even finish the second assignment properly.” Some students believed the spec was ambiguous and was “constantly changing” even up to when assignments were due. Students suggested that smaller programming tasks would be more helpful than the large assignments.

Another area of criticism was the fact that the course was taught by two lecturers who “disagreed on lots of things”. One student wrote that “too many lecturers that didn't appear to communicate well with one another and taught overlapping things”. It is concerning that there is so much negative feedback for this course, which is a prerequisite for many fourth year courses.

## COMP3711 - Software Project Management

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
30%	20%	50%	10

There were mixed feelings towards this subject with most focusing on the fact that this course isn’t run by the School of CSE but rather the Australian School of Business.

The positive feedback that was received from students highlighted that software project management is “definitely one of the more useful courses for anyone looking to enter the industry (which will be most students)”. Other students shared similar feelings, saying “Management is a useful skill to have” and yet another, “Surprisingly good! I was expecting a boring textbook-focused course, and was surprised by the positive force of Ken Stevens' sceptical approach and industry stories.”

On the other extreme, there were several comments echoing this student’s feelings: “COMP3711 [...], worst course EVER. Seeing as the course is compulsory I would recommend funneling your seething hatred of this course into something productive, like filling out surveys.”

One student commented that this course is the “Worst course ever. Course is run by the Australian School of Business and is aimed for its students. Mostly irrelevant to CSE students, a more practical approach should be taken in teaching project management skills, such as those in SENG workshops.”

The main point of criticism is the teaching style and how the course is run, while the course content is seen as valuable to students. Students will benefit if the course was run within CSE with a more practical focus.

## COMP4141 - Theory of Computation

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
0%	40%	60%	5

The little feedback that was provided for this course was generally positive, with one student commenting that it was the “Best course I've ever done at CSE”. One student suggested that the course was “Decently handled, perhaps more effort could be taken to keep the less able students from lagging behind”.

One student heavily criticised the lecturer in regards to the final exam saying “The exam was TERRIBLE. The lecturer was LAZY and didn't write original questions. Either you've seen the problem before or you haven't, and if you haven't then you lose 18% of available marks for the whole course”.

## COMP9321 - Web Applications Engineering

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
29%	0%	71%	7

Feedback for this course was mostly positive. Students found that the content was relevant to the industry and useful.

Some complained that individual feedback was slow to receive and that lectures were boring.

## COMP9417 - Machine Learning and Data Mining

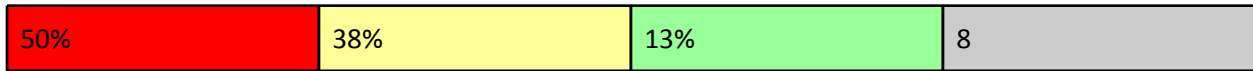
Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
17%	50%	33%	6

This course was received with mixed responses. Some found it interesting whilst others found it boring. Students were, however, strongly in favour of a tutorial and/or lab to complement and reinforce the concepts taught in lectures.

Students also complained that communication in regards to the course’s administrative issues should be improved and that assignment marking, and hence assignment feedback, was far to slow, with the first assignment not marked until the end of the session.

## SENG4921 - Professional Issues and Ethics

Bad	Neutral	Good	Sample size
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Feedback regarding this course was mostly negative and, being a core course for all B Computer Science and B Software Engineering students - the School's two largest programs, is especially concerning.

Students found the course disorganised and with no real structure. "Lectures were rarely enjoyable which resulted in attendance rates dropping to about 15 people/lecture toward the end."

"This course should not be compulsory for Comp Sci students; bring back COMP2920 or an alternative. SENG4921 is very focused on engineering and professionalism, neither of which apply to Comp Sci since it is neither a profession nor engineering."

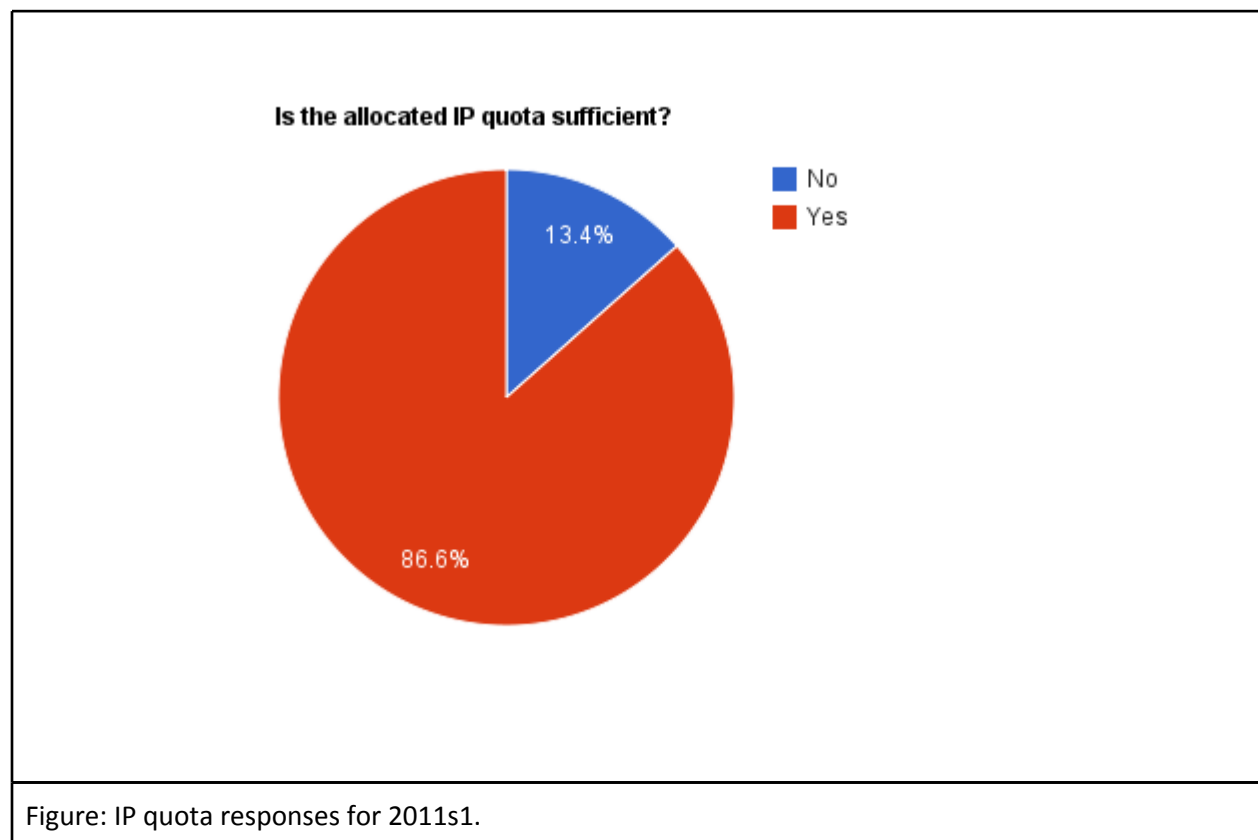
In its defence, one student claimed that the course "opened [his/her] eyes to many interesting things [he/she] never knew about".

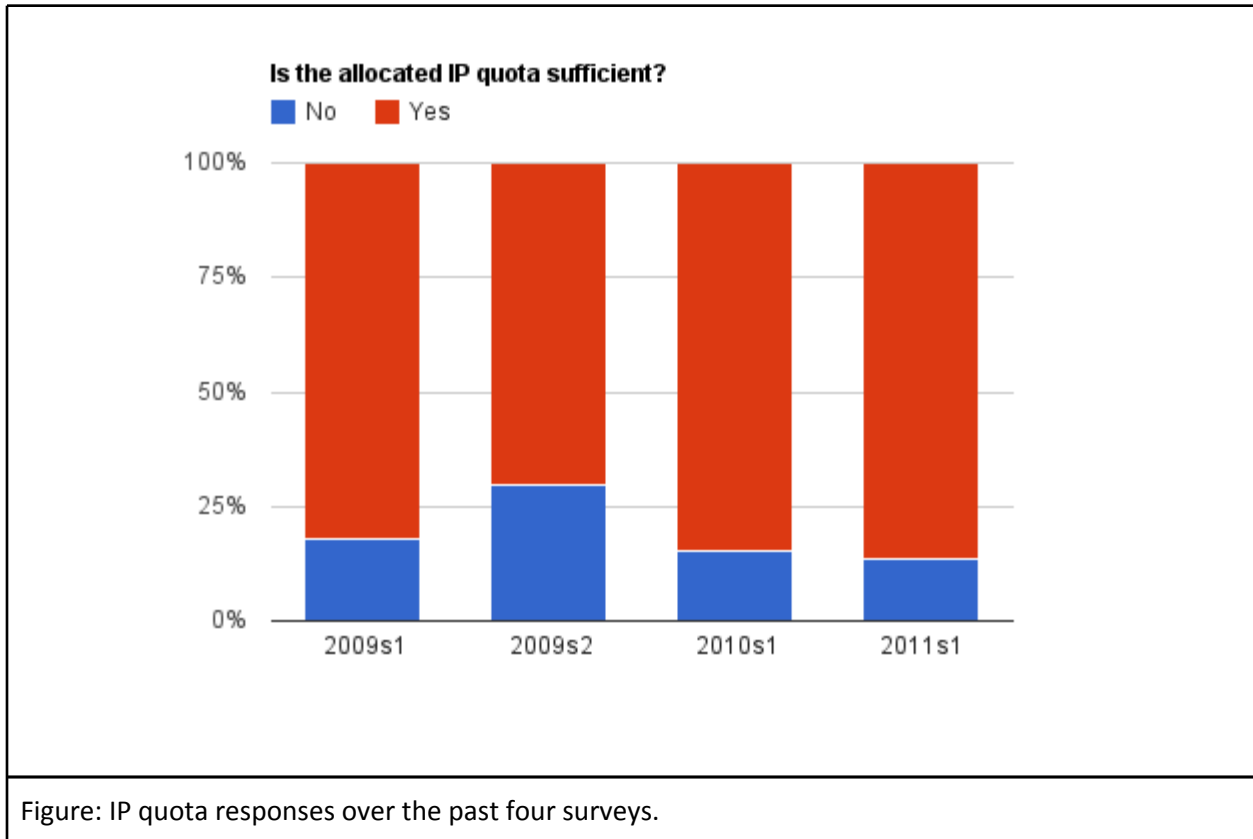
# Resources

## Internet Quota

Whilst the satisfaction rating of the allocated internet quota has improved since previous years, there remains over 13% of students who do not have enough internet quota. What's more absurd is that other schools do not impose limits on internet use on their students (including UniWide), and that it is the students of the school of computing who face the severest of limits.

Considering that the School is using the University's internet connection, and that no other School imposes such strict limitations (at all), we recommend that internet quotas be removed. This will allow students to take advantage of, amongst other reasons, internet media and content such as the university's own lecture recordings on YouTube.





## Disk Quota

Out of the three resource quotas allocated to students, disk quota had the lowest satisfaction rating, reaching levels worse than in any previous survey conducted by Stureps. In fact, dissatisfaction was so rampant that multiple students approached us even before the survey was held to share their concerns regarding disk quota, or lack thereof.

Many programs that are required for courses are either not installed on lab computers or not up to date, forcing students to install it themselves in their home directory.

Further, most browsers keep a cache, which, by default, is stored in users' home directories. These caches have the tendency to quickly use up one's disk quota if not frequently cleared.

**Is the allocated disk quota sufficient?**

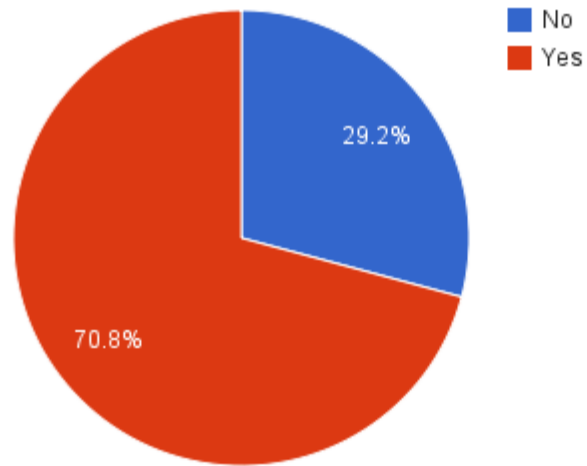


Figure: Disk quota responses for 2011s1.

**Is the allocated disk quota sufficient?**

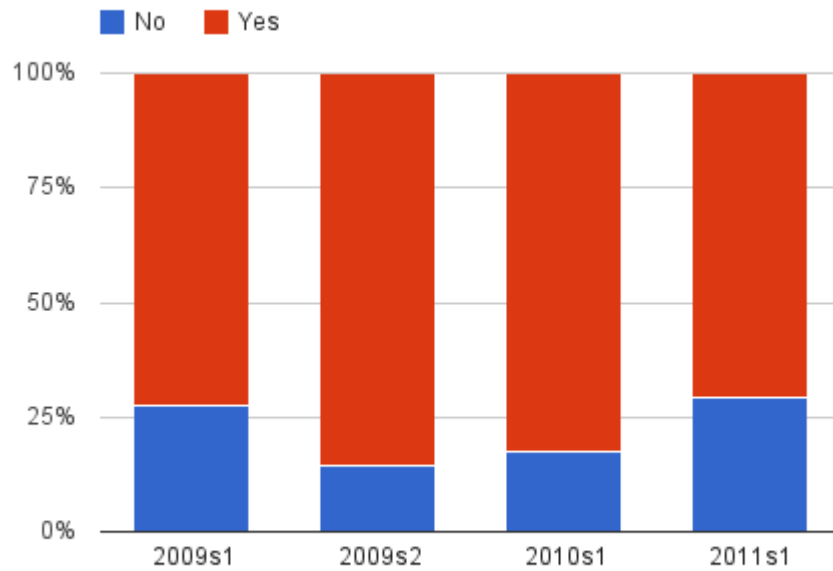
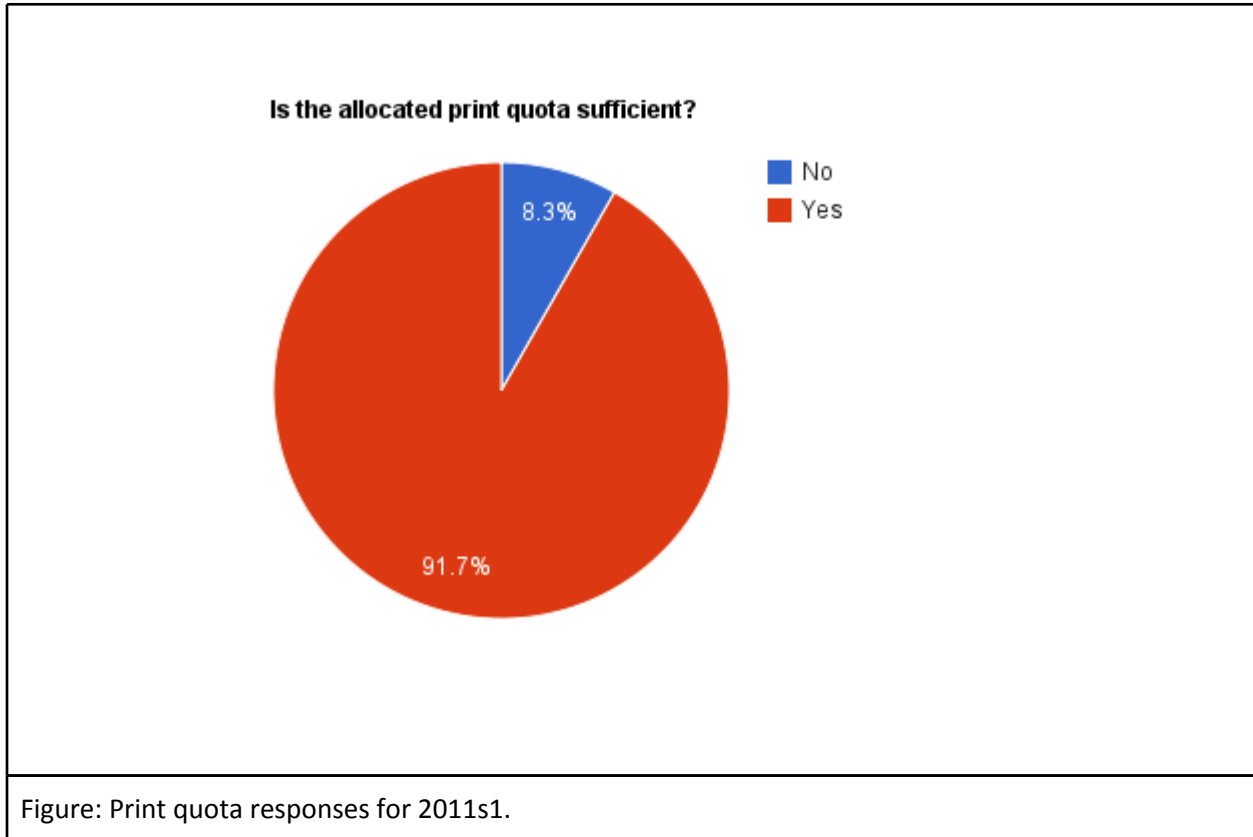


Figure: Disk quota responses over the past four surveys.

## Print Quota

Out of the three resource quotas allocated to students, printing quota had the highest satisfaction rating. Furthermore, the proportion of dissatisfied students halved since the last survey.



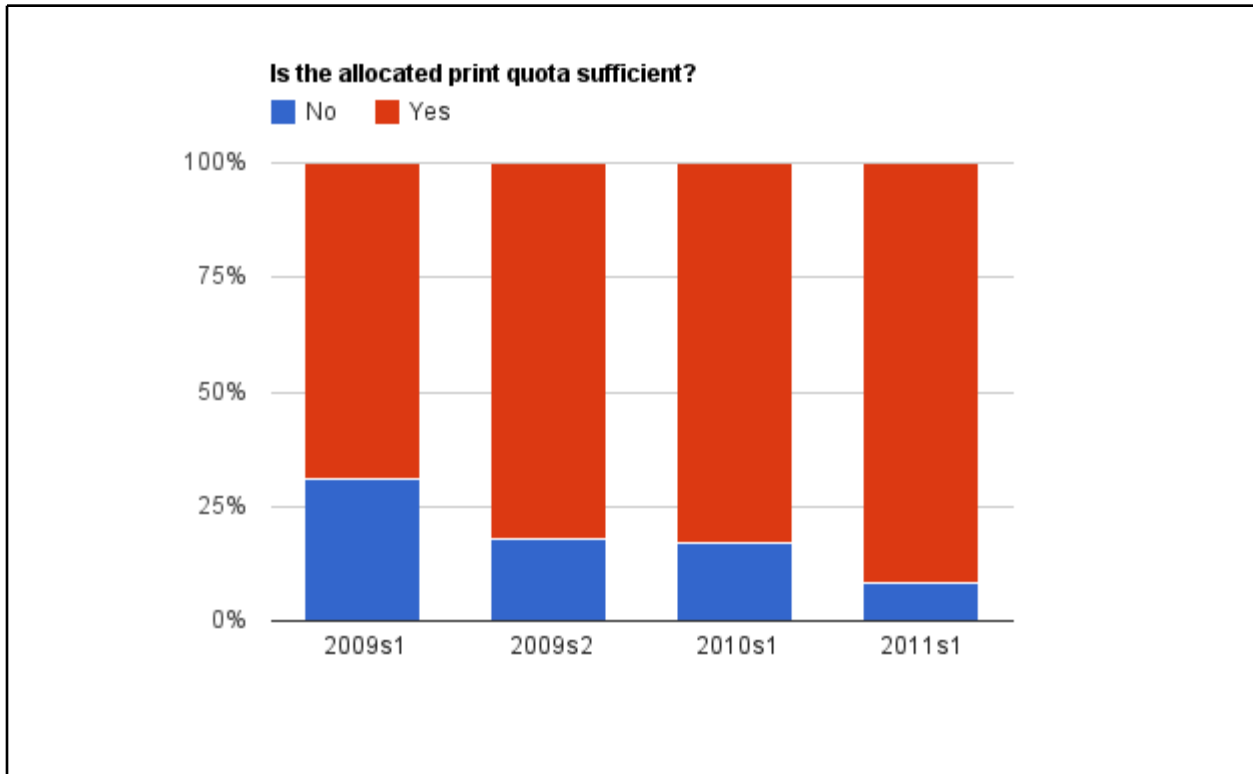


Figure: Print quota responses over the past four surveys.

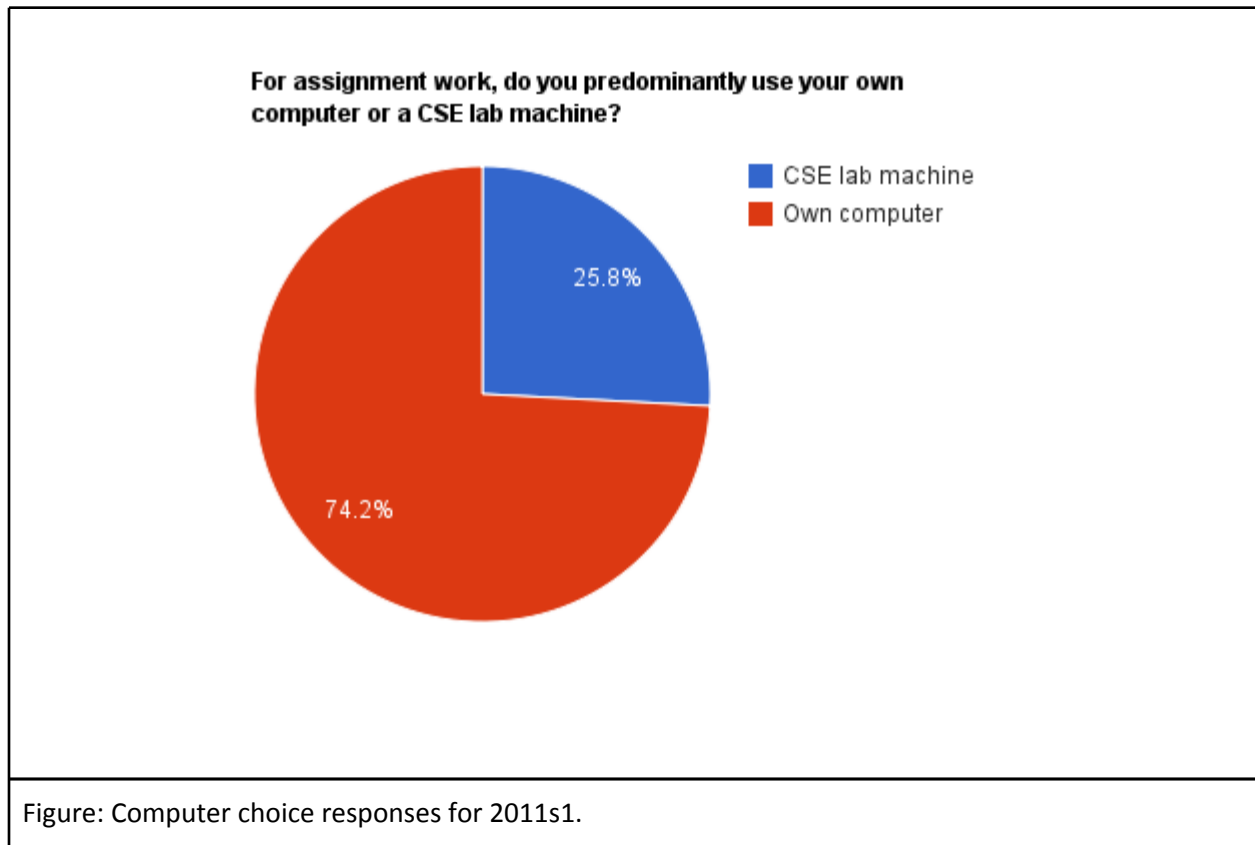
## Facilities

### Usage of CSE lab machines vs personal laptops

This is the first year we've asked this question and the results were interesting.

The main reasons for using a personal computer was cited as convenience or customised environment, and the main benefits of the CSE lab machines were the Linux environment and the ability to easily do group work there.





## CSE Lab Suggestions

We had 61 responses to this question, with the main concerns falling into 7 main categories.

### Mice and keyboard ergonomics

13% of respondents found the current mice a problem due to the inconsistent styles (some are Mighty Mouse, some regular mice), and the lack of a suitable ergonomic option. Similar ergonomic issues were raised with the keyboards.

### Hygiene

11% of respondents raised concerns about the decreasing level of hygiene in the CSE labs, with one summarising the situation with “Since Loch is gone, people eat in labs now. It's smelly and dirty”.

### Air conditioning

10% of respondents asked for better thermostat regulation, with students commenting that “ee-undercroft labs were too cold at around week 10. ~22 degrees while bell and co were at about 25-26 degrees”.

### 24 hour lab access

8% of respondents requested that at least 1 or 2 labs be open for 24 hour access for all students, especially during exam times.

### **Sound through headphone ports**

7% of respondents were surprised at the lack of audio drivers, and requested that they be installed and enabled for use with headphones.

“AUDIO! These computers don't even work with headphones plugged in. We're CSE how come we can't get audio working on Linux?”

### **Noise control**

5% of respondents complained about the noise problem that comes from people playing games, and chatting rather than working. One student suggested that CSE should “Ban food, ban game players, ban chatty people. They can be so noisy at times, if you want to chat, chat outside”.

### **Better wireless access**

5% of respondents raised concerns about the wireless access for students on laptops, saying that “Wireless needs to be fixed in the K17 labs”.

# CSE experience

Feedback regarding overall student life and experiences at CSE were highly positive. Many students praised the social and community aspect of CSE, attributing CSESoc's efforts in running social events and BBQs. Students commended the facilities, teaching aspects, social aspects and general experiences at CSE. The only complaints and suggestions related to facilities and are discussed above.

"CSE is a great experience and all people not involved in CSE are missing out at uni."

"CSE is an awesome faculty to be involved in. A good community and a great environment for learning the art of computing."

"CSE is awesome, great atmosphere with lots of helpful and friendly people. The basement is great since it promotes socialising."