

Minutes

3rd MURC Meeting of Hilary Term 2019

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1 Attendance

Name	Office(s)
A. Bassi	-
N. Cleland	St Anne's College Representative
G. Cooper	President
C. Fitzpatrick	Treasurer Diversity and Inclusion Representative St. Peter's College Representative
M. Goh	Mathematics and Statistics Representative Questionnaire Representative Queen's College Representative
E. Hart	Corpus Christi College Representative
T. Jiang	Magdalen College Representative
R. Laing	First Year Representative
P. Marimon	Mathematics and Philosophy Representative
C. M ^c Garry	Secretary IT Representative Merton College Representative
A. Patel	-
B. Thomas	Outreach Representative
J. Toudic	Hertford College Representative
M. Viotti	-
J. Wright	-

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Can we remove C. Fitzpatrick from people to send bios to? They are no longer president.

Question about vote for Secretary? Not an issue, as C. M^cGarry definitely elected.

Previous minutes confirmed.

3 Statistics Teaching Committee

3.1 Machine Learning and Stats for Finance course

New part C course - Machine Learning and Stats for Finance, proposed, assessed by miniproj, open to part C and OMMS, suitable as a small overlap with existing courses. But concern that there may be insufficient teaching capacity next year. Limiting numbers was discussed. - M. Goh

How many? - G. Cooper

At most 2 tutors and 1 lecturer are available, so maybe 45? Likely not sufficient, but won't start in next academic year. - M. Goh

Will it be available to Maths students too? - C. Fitzpatrick

Yes, if it wasn't there would likely be capacity. - M. Goh

How is this different to existing courses? - G. Cooper

Different techniques and focused on finance, not much overlap with existing courses. - M. Goh

Asked stats department to leave blank questionnaires, but not decided where to locate them physically. Maybe at pigeonholes where work is submitted? - M. Goh

Why not reception? - G. Cooper

Maybe too open. - M. Goh

Likely does not matter too much. - G. Cooper, C. Fitzpatrick

Department not giving feedback to SB1 assessed practicals - asked, refused, but will get mark descriptors. - M. Goh

Does it lead on to anything else? - C. Fitzpatrick

Somewhat, and report writing an important skill. - M. Goh

Knowing how it's marked may be more important, we saw this from part C dissertations this year. - C. Fitzpatrick

4 Teaching Committee

Lecture capture should be fully working now, but uploading is at the discretion of lecturers. Is everything working properly? Do we know if other departments mandate uploading? - C. Fitzpatrick

Some of our lecturers don't want to either for privacy or attendance. Warnings about this. In other subjects, especially for students with disabilities

this is useful and recommended by DAS, suggesting other departments record all lectures. - C. Fitzpatrick

Maybe for disabled students recording only for them. - G. Cooper

How many lecturers in Prelims and Part A are using it? Waves and Fluids and Integration not doing it at part A, not aware of any others. Could bring issues up with individual lecturers at next JCCU? Why is attendance important? - C. M^cGarry

Considered unfair to expect lecturers to lecture to empty room, and not sure on specific reasons. But don't want lecture capture to substitute lecturers. I've also seen in philosophy lecturers refusing to give notes for attendance reasons, this happened for one course, and lecturer is releasing notes in the term after the course. I was thinking that to some extent lecture capture a good revision tool, for a few missed lectures for example, if they are worried about attendance then the best solution seems to be to publish them at the end of term. - P. Marimon

Maybe a good suggestion? Depends on lecturers' preferences and concerns. - G. Cooper

IIRC mathematics lecturers are required to produce lectures, only Algebraic Topology. Some people concerned about visibility of writing on lecture capture. - R. Laing

Software we are using doesn't allow zooming in, MPLS software, won't fund use of any other software. Not sure if we can do anything about this, will try. Not ideal, but constrained by funding. - G. Cooper, C. Fitzpatrick

Is this an accessibility issue? - C. M^cGarry

No, department would allow them to record their lectures themselves. Quite a minor hypothetical.

Not all rooms have cameras installed, so for this year and next year, lecture capture only for Prelims and part A.

Why not for other lectures in equipped rooms? - C. Fitzpatrick

Doing it in blocks for equality reasons, and to not to motivate people to differentially choose courses with lecture capture.

4.1 Class Sizes

Class sizes a long standing issue. There is a questionnaire at the end of the previous term, but this questionnaire has given very inaccurate results.

Due to non-response? - C. M^cGarry

No, just unpredictable, despite their best analytics efforts. Was a suggestion by Teaching Committee of a course reminder email just before the start of term, to help finalise choices.

Deadline is just before exam results for Michaelmas courses, but may extend for a week after results.

Isn't that still a bit early? - C. Fitzpatrick

They will send a second email in Sept asking if students still want these courses, etc.

Is there still a cap on the number of courses you can select?

Yes, 5, and this is a problem if people want to do 6 courses in a term, or try courses if they aren't sure. But they won't be allowed to do this with classes for logistical reasons.

I think there are many courses doing 5 courses a term. Colleges seem happy to pay for this. That may be causing problems for the department; they don't want to encourage this. - C. Fitzpatrick

Department will try to publish more detailed course descriptions by the end of June to help people make their minds up earlier. - G. Cooper

Colleges may not have realised; some colleges actively encourage this. - C. Fitzpatrick

Now Maths students can take 10 courses to exams in part C, maybe this contributes?

Should we make drop-out deadline earlier, before second class, to reduce tutor and TA workload? - C. Fitzpatrick

May be a better idea to align the advice students receive, from their college tutors.

Is there a way to indicate on the preference form whether you are definitely or maybe taking the class, or otherwise giving more subtle preferences? Department wants definite numbers.

Maybe this would give them more data for analytics? - C. M^cGarry

Can raise at next JCCU. - G. Cooper

Are there plans or thoughts about having the second classes earlier? Since the first problem sheet has to be quite short in part C.

Will discuss this later, affected by changes to part C class structure next year. - G. Cooper

4.2 Part C Classes

Hopefully everyone has seen the papers I sent around yesterday, with feedback on classes this year. General preference is to go back to how things used to run. Class 4 assumed to be optional because they had solutions, but this is not the case. Class 4 will now be in week 8 or 1, solutions will no longer be online, students have to go to class as normal, attendance clearly compulsory. - G. Cooper

They still want to keep extension questions on sheet "4+", which will not be marked or gone through in class, solutions for these will be circulated online. Does any course content depend on these?

No.

This year, were sheet 4 (optional) supposed to be extension material, project like?

No, they have been longer sheets with more questions about the last part of the course, so not that different to part B last sheets.

Will stress that 4+ will be optional material. - G. Cooper

Would be good to have clear distinction between the two things. Solutions to 4+ will be published not immediately, maybe after class, up to tutors? - P. Marimon

There will be such a distinction. - G. Cooper

4.3 Proposed Course Changes

Introduction to Distribution Theory quite dense and prone to overrunning. Will split into two courses, one in MT and one in HT, as currently there is too much material. Members of Analysis Panel also concerned that currently there is no pure PDE theory in part B, not just in applied courses. May also help judge demand for part C analysis courses such as Hyperbolic Analysis; currently these are quite unpopular, likely due to lack of part B courses leading into them. They are considering abolishing some of these due to low attendance.

They probably should not do that until introducing better part B lead in and seeing if that helps.

I emailed asking about part B analysis, currently trying to recruit lecturers. - E. Hart

Modular Forms is not running next year. There are a couple of provisional

courses that may be introduced later on. Low-dimensional topology not staffed yet. We don't know how many courses they are trying to staff, quite provisional.

How much new content will be added to Distribution Theory courses when it is split? More PDE theory, currently not that much.

Split course will have HT course depend on MT course. Currently it's an MT course. Maybe 15-20 people in last lecture?

This year you should be aware that Computer Science will have calculators for their M3 papers. Teaching Committee says maths students should not have calculators, some tweaks to the paper to make calculators not an unfair advantage. CompSci does only probability on M3, and needs calculator for other parts of the paper that are exclusive to CompSci.

Can't we split it into two exams, to not affect Maths questions?

Would be hard to split in a single paper, or split into two papers due to examination schedules. This is happening this summer.

Are CS maths papers for probability are scaled together with Maths students' results? We don't know. We think not, but should check; if it is scaled together, it is possibly a problem as calculators may be slightly useful. Could we have graduate students providing drop in sessions during week 1 to help with problem sheets and prerequisite knowledge for the part C courses? Department not so sure about this, requires a lot of recruitment.

Is OMMS and part C integration still an issue? Seems to not be a problem at the moment, and we don't think workshops are necessarily that useful for it. Maybe classes were split so that OMMS could learn prereqs better?

Should Department be engineering the social interactions of students?

Yes, responsible for welfare, and a significant difference in their experiences, part C have much more experience of Oxford etc.

Meetings with project supervisors may be a better place for this.

What sort of introduction do they get? Some sessions in AWB as well as introductory lectures; department already doing many other things that seem useful and don't impact on teaching.

Do we have questionnaire data from OMMS students, their opinions on these matters, including class 1 structure?

Could we ask on end of term questionnaire that OMMS students be asked about social experience?

Bring to next MURC meeting to ask about social experience of OMMS students.

4.4 Gender of Teaching Staff

Concern about gender of part B and C lecturers and tutors, mostly male. Concerns shared by department. Regarding part A and Prelims, a requirement for at least 6 female lecturers, we are just meeting this. Is this an issue anyone else thinks is significant?

It maybe gives a bad impression of the maths department, but we don't want to hire based on gender. There are female staff in all departments, they could take classes.

Could a lack of role models contribute towards gender results gap?

Do we know how lecturers are hired? How many people are there qualified to lecture courses? Maybe not enough availability.

Department releases a list of proposed courses, subject panels propose lecturers and propose one person for each course, often from their own subject panel. May be easier to change for tutors and TAs.

Can tutors choose not to teach at department, in case we are recruiting more female grad students to tutor, to their disadvantage? Do they need departmental clearance to teach elsewhere?

No, grad students can choose to not teach in department.

4.5 End of Year Questionnaire

Department considering sharing summary of end of year questionnaire with student body, from second page onwards in George's papers. Opinions, changes in response to comments, requested services that are already available but not advertised well, and things that can't be done.

We have asked for more openness, good that they are publishing this. Feedback summary may be more useful for committees, whereas planned responses more interesting for general student body.

5 Informal Guide to Options

MURC are proposing to have an informal guide to parts A, B, C options, written by students, to be released in Trinity each year. Department is creating their own course description guide, rewording to be more informative and less terse. You may have seen guide to part A short options, as a trial,

and will do it for the rest of the options.

Seems to make sense that MURC no longer do our own guide, as it's redundant and will be hard to keep in date.

Student quotes in MURC guides still may be useful, we may propose to JCCU that a question be put in course feedback questionnaires to collect quotes.

Maybe we should have a regular meeting with some senior MURC exec and department to go through proposed quotes and discuss what to put on prospectus, each Hilary.

No objections to this, this will become MURC policy.

6 Elections of College Representatives

6.1 Keble College

Akaush Patel, Keble College

Elected nemine contradicente

6.2 St Catherine's College

Michelle Violti, St Catherine's College

Elected nemine contradicente

6.3 Somerville College

Amrek Bassi, Somerville

Co-president of maths society at Somerville

Elected nemine contradicente

7 Elections of Executive Representatives

7.1 Maths and Computer Science

Nathaniel Cleland

How can you represent the views of joint schools students?

I know the course, in second year.

Has it split much?

A few less options now

Nathaniel, clear majority. RON, none. Abstain, none.

7.2 Publicity and Careers Representative

No candidates.

8 Any Other Business

8.1 MATLAB teaching

I have been getting a lot of comments that there has not been much tangible help with the MATLAB projects; one demonstrator told people to Google things, rather than helping directly, in the sessions. - R. Laing

Is this related to the MT sheets or the HT projects? A bit of both, the MT sessions aren't helping much to prepare for the HT classes; demonstrators however can't help with projects.

Suggest that you write up comments for next MURC meeting, to bring to next JCCU.

8.2 Bank Account

Need to change name on minutes to C Fitzpatrick due to bank admin issues.

8.3 Elements of Deductive Logic problems

For Elements of Deductive Logic, no problem sheets or notes, so colleges making their own sheets. It is a philosophy course, so run differently. Will be released at the end of the course for attendance reasons.

Philosophy lecturers do not set the papers for the courses that they teach;

they are set by someone else in the department, and the lecturers do not necessarily cover the entirety of the examinable material. Lecturer is producing much more than most philosophy lecturers do, although it is less than for maths courses.

Tutors set the questions for students in philosophy courses; for departmental reasons, lecturers cannot produce problem sheets.

Notes should be published at the end of this term, for revision over the vacation. - P. Marimon

MURC does not have much influence over philosophy, as it's in another department.

There seems to be a fairly standard set of questions, so it should not be too hard to put together a regular one. But depends on college tutor, who are given a vague idea of what questions to set, so questions can vary quite a lot. They do not have access to lecture content. Would seem sensible to give tutors access to lecture notes.

It overlaps a lot with 3rd year Logic, another strange thing. It is only taught to philosophy and science joint schools, but these students need some logic before 3rd year.

Issue has been raised a lot by students, hopefully notes will be produced at the end of term, but lecturer and department both opposed to producing problem sets.

8.4 Past Paper Mark Schemes

There are already example mark schemes for e.g. Prelims 2016, and a couple for Parts B and C. Department does not want to regularly release them, some tutors want to use them for revision purposes.

They would need to rewrite the solutions as they are not comprehensible to students in their original form.

8.5 Pacing in Prelims

In 5th and 6th week, the material seems to get significantly harder, and this is especially an issue if people get unwell.

Some students wanting a reading week, likely not feasible, but could lecturers hold drop in sessions to catch up?

Isn't this what tutorials are for? Maybe tutors are not appropriately plugging

in the gaps, this may require departmental-wide sessions to ensure consistency, but it may be better to promote better practices among tutors. Likely a very college dependent issue.

Maybe students are concerned about impressing their tutors?

Likely not, but maybe a time issue, especially if there are not office hours.

May need to explicitly request extra meetings with tutors.

College tutors are there to help you, rather than assess you.

Could try to add office hours to best practice for tutors in next JCCU, more likely people will go to these rather than explicitly emailing their tutors to request it.

If there is not that much demand, would it be better to do this through the lecturer? Can we encourage this?

Ultimately, we have tutorials which are intended to help with this issue.

Lecturers almost always happy to answer reasonable questions. May be worth raising this at JCCU, and putting into first year end of year questionnaire whether people would like this. Firstly we should check with Earl and Neale that department is willing to do this, for cost reasons.

We can't mandate colleges to do drop in sessions, but can try to get this in best practise.