

HT3 MURC First Meeting of Term, Minutes

Minutes of the last meeting are accepted by the meeting.

Part B and Part C courses will be extended to 90 minutes from next year. It was asked if that was for maths or for stats; it was clarified that it would be both. Discussions were had regarding computer science, but ultimately the plan is to extend times all round to 90 minutes.

It was discussed how students could be supported in transitions from years, the idea of 0th week sheets was suggested.

It was asked how people would be incentivized to complete sheets. It was answered that the sheet would be optional.

The meeting agreed that the idea of extra resources can only be a good thing.

It was expressed by the meeting that we must push for this change to occur so that it doesn't get lost among other changes.

It was suggested that it would need to be made clear that the sheets would not be extra work, but rather a useful transition (i.e. is easy). It was agreed that it should be clear what the point of the questions and sheets are. It was emphasized that we'll need to have more discussions on the matter.

It was reported that in the Departmental meeting, MURC was told worked solutions will not be released, on the basis that they want to provide the students the opportunity to work on the solutions before reading them. It was questioned how consistency is achieved with the current stats arrangement (in that, it doesn't).

It was explained that OUSU believes a student rep should exist on Faculty meetings, and suggested that such representation would be a positive if decisions such as model solutions are being made there.

It was reported that there were discussions about part B and part C students becoming 'over-reliant on lecture notes.'

It was asked what this actually meant. It was responded that it was expressed by a single lecturer, who was of the opinion that teaching should be diversified to include dissertations, mini-projects, text-book readings, etc.

It was asked if this meant lecture notes on courses assessed by projects or by papers, it was replied that it referred to the latter. The point was raised that lecture notes contain conventions used by the lecturer and examiner, that may differ from textbooks used. It was replied that the conventions used could be clear from attending lectures. It was reported that Teaching Committee gave a preference for textbooks as opposed to lecture notes.

The opinion was expressed that the approach to this would differ from lecturer to lecturer. It was also suggested that courses recommend textbooks, so this issue of convention may not be that great.

It was asked whether students are using textbooks or lecture notes more; people tended to agree that lecture notes were used more. The opinion was also expressed that this was not a negative thing, and that we should be encouraging improvement in notes quality.

The question was raised as to how this would affect people who can't attend lectures; it was responded that lecture notes are made available to people who cannot attend lectures.

Stats classes discussed one hour 45 minute exams, which is now going to Committee. It was discussed that intercollegiate part B and C classes are not effective at the moment, it was suggested at the meeting that tutors will be informed not to simply read solutions verbatim.

It was reported that arts committee intend to formalize the process of suggesting exhibitions. It was also discussed what art should and shouldn't be exhibited in the AWB, such as regarding whether plays are relevant to the maths institute and whether this is paramount.

It was asked if Proof was mathematical. It is.

It was asked if the department receives money from exhibitions. It was responded that we do, however the sums are not overly substantial.

Various meetings were not attended for various reasons.

Anita was duly elected Hertford rep unanimously.

No one came from Exeter.

Daniel was the nominee for Oriel rep (recently resigned). He was duly elected without opposition.

It was reported that the stats meeting suggested that the format for classes was not ideal.

It was suggested that tutorials may be an appropriate substitution. It was replied that the level of specialization makes this impractical. It was offered that the classes should be more closely modeled on the tutorial system – i.e. more personal engagement, rather than reading solutions. It was expressed that the quality of the classes at the moment largely depends on the tutor.

It was suggested that more liaison is required between ta and the lecturer so that appropriate material is covered.

It was suggested that giving out solutions would resolve this.

It was suggested that smaller and more frequent classes would be ideal, however it was pointed out that this varies between courses (though four a term is standard). Stats do every week after third week, and have hour long classes rather than 90 minute classes, and while this sometimes means not all solutions are covered, this is resolved by distributing model solutions.

It was suggested that the format is not the issue but rather how they are conducted.

It was reported that during the BSP project oral presentation, subfusc is required, and that this takes place in front of two examiners. The issue was raised that whether or not the person was wearing a scholars gown may influence marking, and that while this would be a slow change if we applied pressure as it must pass through the proctor, it was asked if we care enough to act.

It was suggested that we could ask students to wear commoners gowns rather than scholars gowns.

It was suggested that we send out a survey to see if people believe this does influence marking. It was pointed out that the fact that it isn't a current problem doesn't mean it may not be in the future with different staff, and also that the confidence of the individual being assessed may be affected. It was suggested

that relevant data may be available elsewhere. The suggestion to include the request in the next 4th year survey would be relevant.

It was asked if we could push to remove the scholars gown from within the department to the rest of the university, with the acceptance that the progress would be slow.

It was asked when projects take place, it was responded that these took place in Trinity. It was highlighted that we should make a request before term so people in fact bring their commoners gowns.

We agreed to raise this in JCCU.

It was reported that we previously discussed mid-term reviews of lecture courses. The suggestion to throw this at JCCU was offered. It was also expressed that the reports of the lecturers should be available to students. It was offered that this would never be agreed to by the Department.

The idea of a separate system to publicly evaluate lecturers to incentivize greater concern about performance.

It was suggested that the end-of-term questionnaire could include a question about whether lecturers responded to the survey in mid-term.

The formality of the proposed mid-term surveys was asked. The idea is that it would go straight to the lecturer. The potential for abuse of such a system was expressed. It was suggested that now that the online system is well used, the mid-term review could be conducted entirely online.

We agreed to raise the general idea of a mid-term survey to JCCU.

Not enough people give feedback to write a meaningful report, it was suggested that this is either because people felt no need to reply either due to quality of teaching or because of other avenues of feedback, or because of failure to forward the request for feedback by the college reps.

It was reported that some lecturers report the history of the maths that they teach, and that the mathematicians often mentioned are white male mathematicians as these are over-represented incorrectly historically. It was said that the suggestion is not to push the teaching of history, but rather to push that if a lecturer does do so, to suggest that a more diverse appreciation of the history of maths (i.e. less Western-based), and that this would likely be well-received by such lecturers.

It was asked how this would be implemented, it was responded that it would simply be an adaptation of how people already include such history in lectures. It was emphasized that this is simply a suggestion to lecturers who already enjoy including history of mathematics in their courses, which was agreed upon by the meeting.

‘Such a great idea’ was the phrase used.

We moved to social events. We want more social events, as this varies from college to college, so we should have more department-central events. Opinions were asked. It was expressed that we could encourage interactions between departments (e.g. crew dating physics).

It was suggested that we need an Oxford Maths Facebook group to increase socialization within the department (as opposed to the current rather ad hoc system of sometimes having it for each year group).

It was raised that at JCCU the suggestion of a MURC Facebook page was not positively received, though this was disagreed with. It was suggested that we raise it again; this was rejected. It was suggested that we just make the page given that we are a student society.

The idea of MURC social events was raised. We want to hang out with each other, so it was positively received. It was suggested that this would provide a positive avenue for further discussion related to the department.

It was reported that the department has received a private members club license to sell alcohol in the graduate part of the building; it was suggested that a similar application should benefit the undergraduates. It was explained that the licence only allows graduates and staff members specifically to purchase alcohol.

It was suggested that this is similar to the issue of the upstairs café, and that there are complicated issues that this humble secretary didn't particularly follow for this to be reasonable.

It was suggested that we ask the question at JCCU. It was also expressed that we understand the difference between grad students and undergrad students and their respective relationships with members of staff, but it would be nice to know what was happening within the department as a matter of being well informed.

We agreed to meet in fifth week.