RSCS Course Peer Review
Terms of Reference
August 2016

Background and Purpose

The Research School of Computer Science (RSCS) Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) reviews the Student Evaluation of Learning Support (SELS) returns at the end of each semester. Those courses where the student satisfaction rating (question 6) have an agreement rate (agree & strongly agree) of less than 60% are considered for peer review. This document outlines the process, the terms of reference, and the format of the report associated with that peer review.

It is important to note that while SELS scores may be used as a trigger for peer review, there can be many reasons for a low satisfaction rating. The primary purpose of this peer review is to try and identify these reasons and where applicable make recommendations for how a course may change in order to improve student satisfaction.

Process

The peer review of the selected courses will be carried out by a peer review panel. The peer review panel will consist of a small group of three to four academics, chosen by the Associate Director (Education), with all but one being from RSCS. The ADir(E) will assign one of RSCS academics in the panel to be the Chair. The Chair will be provided with the list of courses to be peer reviewed. The Chair will assign two academics from the panel to peer review each course in the list, as described below.

The peer review for each course will be conducted by two academics, with one taking the lead and the other acting as a sounding board. The Chair will collect a report from the course convenor for the course (details of the report are given below) and provide this to the peer review leader. The peer review leader may then seek additional information as they see fit.

Course Convenor's report

The course convenor will provide a report that addresses the following:

1. Factual information on the course
   - Description, learning outcomes, prereqs/coreqs, logistics (lectures, labs, etc)
   - Grade distribution, comparison with previous years, cross cohort comparison. Student Services can be contacted for this data.
2. Assessment items.
   - Mapping of assessment items and learning activities in the course to the course learning outcomes.
   - Examples of marked assessment items.
3. Feedback to and from students
   - How, what and when.
   - Feedback from any others.
4. Reflections on the course
   - Changes from the last version; issues; what went well, what didn't.
5. Comments
6.  
• Thoughts on the course.  
• Suggestions for change.

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The peer review should consider the following:

1. The information provided on the course. Does it cover all that is required? Does it allow students to make informed choices?
2. The level at which the course is pitched. Is it appropriate? Is the mark distribution justifiable, especially when comparing student performance across different courses? Is there a high dropout rate, and if so why?
3. How well the activities of the course (lectures, labs, forums, PAL etc) support student learning.
4. The assessment scheme and items. Was the right mix of assessment items used? Are all the learning outcomes clearly mapped to assessment items? If not, why not?
5. The feedback provided to the students during the course. Was this timely? What form did it take and was this adequate in the eyes of the students? Was any feedback sought from the students? From any others? How and when was this done? What information did this contain? How was it acted upon?
6. Any other items that in the eyes of those performing the peer review may have influenced the satisfaction of students with this course.
7. What changes should be made to the course.

Report Format

The peer review report should include
• Details of who undertook the peer review and their role, with a timeline of key dates.
• A copy of the convenors report.
• Details of any additional information sought or actions taken by the review panel in order to address the terms of reference.
• Detailed comments against each of the terms of reference.

There will be one such report for each course being peer reviewed. This will then be discussed in the panel. The reports will be handed over to the ADir(E) by the specified deadline.