

Staff-Student Consultative Committee
Minutes for Meeting No. 1 of 2018/2019

Date: 5th December, 2018

Time: 1:00 p.m.

Venue: Rm 518A, CYM Physics Building, HKU

Present:

Dr. J. J. L. Lim (Chairman, Staff representative)

Dr. J.C.S. Pun (Staff representative)

Dr. M. K. Yip (Staff representative)

Prof. H.F. Chau (In attendance)

Miss Chan Ying Wai (1st year representative)

Mr. Yeung Ryan Wai-Yen (2nd year student representative)

Mr. Wong Hong Tsun Thomas (3rd year representative)

Mr. Zheng yangguang Gong (4th year student representative)

Mr. Chan Ho Cheung Jacky (Postgraduate student representative)

Mr. Yiu To Chung, Martin (Physics society)

(1) Feedback from 1st year student representative

Concern: The assignment due date of PHYS1150 (Problem Solving in Physics) was before the tutorial class.

Deliberation: The tutorials review problems, different from those in the assignments, to help and guide students in solving their assignment problems. Normally, the tutorials are held before the corresponding assignment due date. On occasions, however, scheduling of tutorial classes was affected by the university holidays, thus students were only able to attend tutorials until after the corresponding assignment due date. Although on these occasions the instructor considered postponing the assignment due date, ultimately no such change was made because graders reported difficulty in returning the answer scripts timely if the due dates of two assignments are very close in time. Moreover, students' workload would greatly increase if they strived to finish two assignments at nearly the same time. Instead, to help the students with their assignments, the instructor posted the solution of the tutorial before the due date of assignment.

Concern: The tutorial classes for PHYS1150 covered many good examples demonstrating application of the theory taught in class. Students asked if these examples could be included in the lectures as some students missed tutorials due to a timetable clash.

Deliberation: Lecture need to balance between teaching theory and demonstrating application. Numerous graded examples were included for illustrating application; the tutorial class then discussed more problems over a broader context. Students who have timetable clashes should read the solutions and approach the instructor for assistance.

(2) Feedback from 2nd year student representative

Concern: Students requested to have lab sessions in the morning and reading week, because they had serious timetabling problem.

Concern: Students are concerned that some lab tutors were not familiar with the experiments and some of them replied questions with Mandarin.

Deliberation: The committee sought feedback from the Chief Laboratory Demonstrator (Lilian Lee), and her answer is as following.

“First, regarding the time of the lab sessions, some students did request to perform the experiment in the morning. The lab technician in HOC 203 arranged all of the time and dates of the experiments. He has once told me that some of the experiments require at least a few hours of preparation, so having those experiments done in the afternoon is inevitable. To remedy the situation, he provided a significant number of days for lab sessions, starting from Oct 2 to 30 Nov, Monday to Friday, reading week inclusive. Therefore, I believe there should be enough choice for the students to conduct the experiment without having timetable clashes.

As for the lab demonstration, the lab technician and I have gone through the all of the experiments with some of the demonstrators in late September, with two demonstrators absent. I have asked the absent demonstrators to go to the lab to familiarise themselves with the experiment, but they seemed reluctant to do so. I also provided some sample reports for them to follow before the start of the lab sessions, which I hoped could facilitate their understandings of the lab procedure and the expected results. They should have plenty of time to prepare for the teaching since I announced the lab duties to them well before the commencement of the lab period. On the assignment of the lab teaching, I limited the number of experiments to each demonstrator is responsible for to a maximum of two, mostly of the same course as well. They should have taught the same experiments repeatedly throughout the semester.

Finally, I am afraid I can hardly manage the teaching language of individual tutors as English has always been the sole teaching medium in HKU. I will reiterate the language policy of HKU to the tutors in the next semester.”

Action: The matter has been brought to the attention of Dr. Jenny Lee, the laboratory coordinator.

Concern: Students taking PHYS2260 (Heat and Waves) described that the weighting of heat and waves was unbalanced. The time spent on the latter part was inadequate.

Action: This issue has been brought to the attention of Dr. Meng Su, the course coordinator.

(3) Feedback from 3rd year student representative

Concern: Students taking PHYS4850 (Particle Physics) reported that the course had no derivation for the formulae taught and no examples for illustrating application. There were no tutorial classes to discuss questions and the one and only one tutorial class was held at the end of semester (course summary only). They stated that homework problems were mostly hard facts rather than applications of theory.

Action: This issue has been brought to the attention of Dr. YJ Tu, the course coordinator.

Concern: Students taking PHYS4450 (Advanced Electromagnetism) reported that the course had no tutorial class.

Action: This issue has been brought to the attention of Prof. XD Cui, the course coordinator. Note that Prof. Cui was undertaking a Croucher Fellowship, and the original replacement teacher invited to teach this course pulled out so that another replacement teacher had to be found at the last minute. Nevertheless, someone needs to keep an eye on external replacement teachers that they satisfy course needs. A suggestion is to appoint an experienced tutor. This issue has been brought to the attention of Prof. HF Chau, the Chair of the Curriculum Development Committee.

Concern: Students taking PHYS4653 (Cosmology) described that the homework had very few questions; and the solutions not posted. They also stated that the tutor discussed solely the homework answers during the tutorial class and there were no tutorial problems provided in the whole semester.

Action: This issue has been brought to the attention of Prof. KS Cheng, the course coordinator. This specific issue brings forth a larger issue: teachers should seek feedback from students about their tutors and tutorial classes.

Concern: Students taking PHYS3350 (Classical Mechanics) found that the handwriting of the instructor too small to see on the whiteboard.

Action: This issue has been brought to the attention of Prof. ZS Zhang, the course coordinator.

Concern: Students taking PHYS4350 (Advanced Classical Mechanics) reported that the examination covered chapters 1 to 7, but the course materials covered 10 chapters.

Action: This issue has been brought to the attention of Prof. SQ Shen, the course coordinator. While the course coordinator need not necessarily let students know that only a portion of the course material will be tested, be aware that students will thereafter complain if this happens.

This specific issue brings forth a larger issue – teachers should seek feedback in class; in turn, students should bring up issues during class. The latter message has been emphasized to student representatives to pass on to their peers.

Concern: Students taking PHYS1650 (Nature of the Universe) reported that the instructor did not clearly state the scope of the test. They also asked that the instructor state clearly the chapter numbers related to the lecture material.

Action: This issue has been brought to the attention of Dr. KM Lee, the course coordinator.

Concern: Students taking PHYS3650 (Observational Astronomy) described that there were too much content in this course.

Action: This issue has been brought to the attention of Dr. J Lim, the course coordinator. On seeking feedback from students, one suggestion was to test only a portion of the material covered.

Concern: Students suggested that if the department can provide both morning and afternoon lab sessions because they had timetabling problem.

Action: The matter has been brought to the attention of Dr. J. Lee, the laboratory coordinator. See also feedback from Chief Laboratory Demonstrator above.

Concern: Students suggested that if the department can provide transparent course information, e.g. to provide a course list at least one year in advance to the offering year. They explained that that the information will greatly help preparing the study plan.

Action: This issue has been brought to the attention of Prof. HF Chau, the Chair of the Curriculum Development Committee.

(4) Feedback from 4th year student representative

Concern: Students taking PHYS4450 (Advanced Electromagnetism) reported that the teaching quality was bad. The instructor read directly from the equations.

Deliberation: As explained above in response to feedback from the 3rd year representative

about the same course, the instructor was a substitute teacher found at the last minute. Apart from the specific action notifying the course coordinator and Chair of the Curriculum Development Committee, student representatives should once again remind students to provide early feedback to the teacher and the Staff Student Consultation Committee. An experienced tutor may help the situation in some aspects.

Concern: Students taking PHYS3351 (Quantum Mechanics) reported that the tutorial class had low attendance because the tutor just recited the solutions to homework assignment during the class. They suggested that the department better match tutors with courses.

Deliberation: Students should send early feedback to the teacher.

Action: This issue has been brought to the attention of Dr. W Yao, the course coordinator. Once again, student representatives should once again remind students to provide early feedback to the teacher and the Staff Student Consultation Committee. Teachers should also seek feedback from students about their tutors and tutorial classes.

Concern: Students had concerns on the usage of computer room in that some users were not science students.

Deliberation: It is a university policy that students taking a major and minor in science is eligible to use the facility.

Concern: Students taking PHYS4850 (Particle Physics) reported that the course material was not self-contained and the recommended books were not helpful. They also suggested that the department develop a new course in quantum field theory to fill the knowledge gap.

Action: This issue has been brought to the attention of Dr. YJ Tu, the course coordinator, and Prof. HF Chau, the Chair of the Curriculum Development Committee.

Concern: Students taking SCNC3111 (Frontiers of science honors seminar course) reported that the course was not worthy of 6 credits.

Deliberation: This course is managed by the Faculty of Science; students should send comments to the Faculty of Science.

(5) Feedback from postgraduate representative

Concern: Postgraduate students suggested that the first year graduate students should take Research Ethic course in the second semester instead of the first semester.

Action: This issue has been brought to the attention of Prof. HF Chau, the Chair of the Curriculum Development Committee

Concern: Postgraduate students reported that they had difficulty to enroll the CETL course (Certificate of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education) because the CETL offered very few places in each semester.

Action: This issue has been brought to the attention of Prof. HF Chau, the Chair of the Curriculum Development Committee.

(6) Feedback from Physics Society representative

Concern: As always, the Society requested a society room to serve as an office as well as a place for students to gather and study. The society also asked for more locker spaces before the room is available.

Deliberation: The department is facing a shortage of space, so the society should consider to book Rm 522 for their activities.

Concern: A request for printer service in the computer room.

Deliberation: Should the department consider allowing students to hand in electronic homework?

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

MK YIP (Temporary Secretary)

5th December, 2018

Addendum: The minutes were tables at the Physics Department Staff Meeting on 1 Feb 2019. The following recommendations were made:

1. Lecturer's (perhaps through their tutors, or through anonymous means) should seek feedback from students early in the semester on classroom issues, which could be as simple as: "your writing is too small."
2. Lecturer's need to be clear early in the semester on tutorial scheduling; apparently some courses do not have tutorials.
3. Lecturer's should seek feedback from students about the content and teaching performance of their tutors early in the semester.
4. Staff representatives should remind peers constantly that they should provide feedback to lecturers and tutors early in the semester. If they are uncomfortable to voice their concerns directly, they can voice their concerns through you, and you can notify the SSCC staff members.
5. Course coordinators consider electronic submission of assignments or laboratory reports that require students to print their submissions.