

Staff-Student Consultative Committee
Minutes for Meeting No. 1 of 2016/2017

Date: 1st December 2016

Time: 2:30pm

Venue: Rm 518, 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)

Mr. Wong Wing Tsun (1st year representative)

Mr. Gong Zheng Yang Guang (2nd year representative)

Mr. Ng Ka Wai (3rd year student representative)

Mr. Teh Chi En (4th year student representative)

Mr. Tang Wai Ho (a substitute of postgraduate student representative)

Mr. Fan Kwok Lung (Physics society)

Apology:

Dr. F.C.C. Ling (Staff representative)

Dr. J.H.C. Lee (Staff representative)

Mr. Chan Ming Yan (Postgraduate student representative)

(1) Statement of Responsibilities

Student representatives should:

- consult peers about problems or issues they would like to bring to the attention of the SSCC
- communicate the concerns of their peers to the SSCC
- convey and consult their peers on solutions proposed by the SSCC

Staff representatives should:

- facilitate an environment that encourages students to raise their concerns to the SSCC
- find solutions whenever possible to problems raised by the student representatives, and explain reasons when no adequate solution can be found

(1) Feedback from 1st year student representative

Concern: The homework problems in PHYS1250 are harder than the lecture materials. Students would like to know if there is an e-forum to serve PHYS1250.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Course Coordinator (Dr. M. K. Yip and Dr. K. M. Lee).

Reply:

1. The homework problems are graded with different difficulties. Some harder problems provide training to students such that they develop the connectedness of knowledge as well as the integrated problem solving skills.
2. The e-forum is available in the Moodle page. However, most students sent questions to the instructors directly through emails. The instructors will promote the e-forum as an alternative platform in the coming years.

(2) Feedback from 2nd year student representative

Concern: There is no formal tutorial class outside the lecture hours in PHYS2260.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Course Coordinator (Dr. F. C. C. Ling).

Reply: All the examples were merged into lectures, as I prefer to discuss all examples by myself rather than by tutors. There were tutorial in the pass, but the turn-up rate was really low. That is why I put the examples in the lecture. If students prefer to have tutorials, however, it can be arranged and I can put the example class back to tutorial.

Concern: The exam problems in PHYS2260, especially those related to waves are much harder than the homework assignment. Students would like to do more exam-type problems in the homework.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Course Coordinator (Dr. F. C. C. Ling).

Reply: This was done with intention to distinguish the grade. My intention is that some of the questions in the exam have not previously been set. There were quite a lot of students getting good marks in the exam. 9/26 got mark 70 or above in the examination, and 8/26 got an A grade. Thus I don't really think the exam is really that difficult. The exam pass paper should be all in the library.

Concern: There is no feedback from the teacher after several PHYS2260 homework assignments have been submitted for a long time.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Course Coordinator (Dr. F. C. C. Ling).

Reply: There were mis-understanding with the markers that he has kept the marked assignment for some time.

Concern: The teaching style is not stimulating in PHYS2250 during semester 2 of 2015-2016.

Action item: The course coordinator (Prof. J Gao) is retiring in 2017.

Concern: There is substantial overlap in the contents of three mechanics courses PHYS1250, PHYS2250, and PHYS3350.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Course Coordinators (Drs M. K. Yip and K. M. Lee, and S. Z. Zhang).

Reply: The CDMC will discuss the issue very soon as there will be course review meetings for the entire curriculum.

Concern: The tutorial sessions in PHYS3350 are not well managed. These sessions are used to go through solutions for homework problems. Yet, the first half of the tutorial is free time for students to work on the homework problem – wasting the time of students who have already completed the homework problems, and in any case inappropriate since the students should have already completed homework problems in advance. In the second half of the tutorial, the tutor simply writes the solution on the board with no explanation, wasting the entire tutorial time as the solutions are posted anyway.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Course Coordinator (Dr. S. Z. Zhang).

Reply: I usually put the tutorial on Moodle before the tutorial, but the written solution is given after the tutorial was given. Since the tutorial occurs twice every week, the later one will know the problem anyway. I guess the only way to avoid it will be to distribute hard copies. In any case, I can make these changes next semester. I can certainly ask the tutor to make better explanations.

Concern: Many students did not take PHYS1150 and PHYS2150 before enrolled to PHYS3350 and they encountered difficulty. They suggested the department to promote these courses.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Curriculum Committee (Prof. H F. Chau).

Reply: This issue will be addressed by the CDMC.

Concern: Students appreciate the summer math training courses and ask for the possibility if they can be held in the semester time.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of Drs. M. K. Yip and F. K. Chow, who offer these courses.

Reply: The instructors are pleased to offer these courses in the regular semester.

(3) Feedback from 3rd year student representative

Concern: There is no formal lecture that focuses on the error analysis in the 3rd year lab.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Course Coordinator (Dr. Jenny Lee).

Reply: There is note about error analysis posted on the lab webpage. Students are encouraged to search more to learn about data analysis by themselves. If highly requested, we can consider preparing more notes.

Concern: Students pointed out that they lack practice exercises other than the homework problems in PHYS3551.

Action item: The course coordinator (Prof. J. Gao) is retiring in 2017.

Concern: Kittel's textbook, although a classic, is very old. The department should consider an alternative text for PHYS3551.

Action item: The course coordinator (Prof. J. Gao) is retiring in 2017.

Concern: The tutorial sessions are embedded with the lecture time but not outside the lecture hours.

Action item: The course coordinator (Prof. J. Gao) is retiring in 2017.

Concern: There is a timetable clash between PHYS3551 and PHYS3150.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of Dr. F. K. Chow, who handles timetabling matters. PHYS3551 (Introductory Solid State Physics) will be replaced by PHYS4551 (Solid State Physics), which will be offered in Semester 2 of 2017-2018. As PHYS3150 will continue to be offered in Semester 1, there will no clash between the two courses. Note that the pre-requisites for PHYS3551 will be Pass in (PHYS2255 or PHYS2260) and PHYS3351.

Concern: The lecture time of PHYS3450 is bad as the lectures are conducted at 8:30am.

Deliberation: class timetables are scheduled by the University.

Concern: Students would like to see if the department can provide facilities for printer service.

Deliberation: a frequent request, but with serious implications for how the Department can manage such a service. No resolution to date.

Concern: Students wish to know if there are opportunities to have summer internship in the finance sector. They also want to know if the department can arrange paid internship.

Action item: the University has made clear that students cannot be paid for internships. The Department is taking action to improve relationships with alumni – as evidenced by alumni talks – so as create greater opportunities for summer internships.

(4) Feedback from 4th year student representative

Concern: Students studying PHYS4350 would like to see if the lecture notes can highlight the main points stated in Goldstein's text.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Course Coordinator (Prof. S. Q. Shen).

Concern: The contents in PHYS3350 overlap with that in PHYS4350. The teaching pace of PHYS4350 is slow in Lagrangian mechanics, but too fast in Hamiltonian mechanics.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Course Coordinators (Prof. S. Z. Zhang and Prof. S. Q. Shen).

Concern: There are many typos and errors found in the lecture notes and homework assignment in PHYS4653. Students need more problem sets to practice.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Course Coordinator (Prof. K. S. Cheng).

Reply: This course is offered in bi-annual basis and 2016-2017 is the second time. In the first time I only taught half course. I will try to correct all typos I can find and provide more homework problems for the students.

Concern: Students appreciate the teaching style in PHYS4450.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Course Coordinator (X. D. Cui).

Concern: Students would like to see if the department can offer a course on quantum computing as the faculty of engineering has offered similar course (CSIS3316 Quantum Information and Computation).

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Curriculum Committee (Prof. H. F. Chau).

Reply: This issue will be addressed by the CDMC.

Concern: Students request loosening course restrictions in the pre-requisites of some computational courses offered by the Department. The reason is that there are quota restrictions for the programming courses offered by the CS department, making it difficult to satisfy the pre-requisites for some computation courses.

Action item: This matter has been brought to the attention of the Curriculum Committee (Prof. H. F. Chau).

Reply: This issue will be addressed by the CDMC.

Concern: Students questioned if they can take PHYS3999 (Directed studies) in the second year.

Deliberation: PHYS3999 is a capstone course that requires students to pass at least four PHYS3XXX courses before enrollment.

Concern: It was suggested that if the department can disclose the exam scores to students after the exam.

Action item: In a broader context, students wish to know why they perform poorly in a course. To address this issue, teachers have been encouraged to post on the course website a brief summary of student performance in each final exam question. Some students genuinely wish to better understand the course material based on the final exam. On this issue, the SSCC seeks feedback from the students on whether they would like to have a tutorial after the examination period to go through the solutions.

(5) Feedback from postgraduate representative

Concern: Postgraduate students wish to see if the department can organize coffee sessions such that research students from different groups can meet with the research staffs and teachers across the department.

Action item. This issue has been discussed at the Staff meeting as well as Undergraduate Affairs Committee in the broader context of fostering greater interactions between teachers and both undergraduate and graduate students. A small step was taken in this direction in terms of the recent farewell party for 4th-year Physics students, for which all Physics students were invited to attend. The Undergraduate Affairs committee has recommended to the Department other activities to improve interactions between students and staff. This recommendation is currently under consideration, with the principal issue being adequate administrative support to organize the events. The suggestion of regular tea/coffee sessions with graduate students has been brought up at the Staff meeting. A final decision is pending.

Concern: Postgraduate students wish to see if their duties can be arranged such as not to span the entire semester, but squeezed into a shorter period so that they can focus on their research.

Action item. This request has been brought to the attention of the DRPC Chair (Prof. J Wang), who assigns the Chief Demonstrator. At the discretion of the Chief Demonstrator, arrangements can be made with the tutor to concentrate more duties over a shorter period.

Reply: It is not academically and pedagogically sound to assign a tutor to conduct tutorial only for part of a course. The only possibility we could think of is the lab. One model is the current one, namely, a tutor is responsible for only a few experiments and hence he/she has to come over the semester for many times. Alternatively, a tutor is responsible for all experiments and then he/she could come for fewer times. But for the ease arrangement and to avoid mis-understanding of

students, we could only run either model but not a mixed one. Clearly from the TA's point of view, each model has its pros and cons.

As for which model of lab demonstration to run, I think it is better to throw the idea back to our RPGs to discuss.

Concern: It was suggested that the Department provide funds for travel to telescopes for observing and to buy computers.

Action item. At the request of a teacher, the issue of the Department providing funds for travel to telescopes for observing was considered by the Finance Committee. The Finance Committee recommended that, as is the usual practice, the funds be provided by the supervisor's personal research grant or General Expenses (GE), the latter requiring swapping of GE funds with travel funds. Desktop computers normally should be provided by the supervisor through his GE. It is the University policy that laptops cannot be provided to students, an issue that has been brought up before with no positive response from the Faculty. The SSCC recommends graduate students to write directly to the Faculty about this issue.

(6) Feedback from physics society representative

Concern: The society is lack of space to keep its property and stuffs.

Deliberation: The department can provide lockers for storage purpose. But a separate room is not available now in view of the tight usage in the department.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:10pm

MK YIP (Temporary Secretary)

1st December 2016