Meeting SAT Computer Science 13-09-2023

Present:

- Dan Witzner Hansen (HoP BSWU)
- Marco Carbone (HoP KCS)
- Therese Graversen (HoP BDS)
- Patrick Bahr (HoP KSD)
- Luca Maria Ariello (HoP KDS)

- Marius Thomsen (Student rep., BSWU)
- Theodor Christian Kier (Student rep., KCS)
- Sofie Kramshøi Nielsen (Student rep., KSD)
- Maja Styrk Andersen (Student rep, KSD)
- Lena Winther Jensen (Student rep, KSD)

- Trine Møller (Observer, Study and Career & Guidance)
- Mette Holm Smith (Observer, Prog Coor BDS/KDS)
- Allette Bjørn Bundgaard (Observer, Prog Coor SWU/KCS)
- Marc Kellaway (Prog Coor KSD) (Minutes)

Absent:

- Juraj Septák (Student rep., BDS)
- Louise Meier Carlsen (Co-HoP BSWU)

Minutes:

1. Approval of agenda
As proposed by several SAT members previously, timings have now been added to the individual points. This - and the agenda in general - was approved.

2. Approval of minutes from meeting June 21 2023:
No comments to the minutes received within the 10 working days period. Minutes approved.

3. Information
Simon has left SAT so there is a free seat for the remainder of 2023. To even out the representation from the different programmes it would be useful to have someone from BDS or KDS.

4. Update from study programmes
Maja: The average grade for the reexam in Algorithm and Data Structures was 1.8. I think this should be addressed. I have also talked with an expert in software engineering, who could confirm, that the reexams in the course have gotten harder and harder for each year over the last years.

Patrick: The difficulty might change from exam to exam, but then there should be a similar adjustment in how it is evaluated, so that if the exam gets harder, the grades will not necessarily be lower. It is also very difficult to judge the hardness of an reexam from the average grade, as people might not have shown up.

Maja: Only 2 out of 22 did get the grade -3. The rest showed up and made a try.

Marius: There is also an issue with the statistics and evaluation not showing results from all versions of the course.

Therese: We will look into this.

Marco: This is very relevant, as it concerns 3 of the study programmes represented here in SAT.

Maja: If you do that, you should also look into the grades for Introduction to Database Systems, as I think the students in general underprioritize this to have time for Algorithms and Data Structures.

Marc: I will look into the statistics for Algorithms and Data Structures and Database Systems, and share the data with SAT as soon as I have it. I suggest, though, that we postpone the discussion to the November meeting, where a visit from Riko and Thore is currently being planned.

Maja: Another thing is, that when we talked about this at the last meetings, there were comments about the students going to the reexams being a different cohort. I think that in order for us to be able to work together, it is problematic, if it is seen this way by the teachers.

Luca: What exactly is not accurate in this?

Maja: All students have 3 exam tries, so we shouldn't be treated differently just for going to the reexam.

Therese: You should not be treated differently, but we do know there is a difference, as the reexam consists of both students not showing up for their first try, and students who failed their first try.

Maja: It made me feel that some students are considered second division students for taking the reexam.

Marco: We need to evaluate these things, so sometimes we need to make categories to discuss.

Lena: I think it is very fair point about the different statistics, and I also agree there shouldn't be different treatment of the students. But we should be able to talk about the different reasons for people going to the reexam.

Patrick: I think it was me who said it, and I still think that if we see the result, we need to know the background. For instance, we know that students who fail the first exam tend to also fail the second exam.

Luca: There are no difference in how we view the students, but we still need to talk about the different factors, and this is one of several factors.

Marius: I have also brough up previously, that students have written me, that the reexam in Algorithms is much more difficult, and that they feel they have been treated like second class students, when approaching teachers regarding the reexams. Not in general, but it happened on this course. And everyone says the reexam was a lot harder.

Luca: We have many conundrums to solve here.

Therese: You should remember that these interactions are part of a context. On my course the exam is oral, so the reexam is exactly the same, but I am often approached in a very rude way regarding the reexam, so we need to remember that the teachers are subject to pressure on this too.

Maja: I think new students with no experience of coding feel the exams are harder and have a greater tendency to postpone to the reexams.

Theodor: On the KCS programme we had a very good intro to the research project. It was really nice to have all the centers come down and present what they do. Sometimes you can easily forget how much cool research is going on at ITU. As people are spread out on different courses, I haven't heard anything specific from the programme.

Marius: SWU has been off to a fairly good start. There have been a few issues with getting the reading material in due time before the classes, but this has been fixed. The group forming has also worked well, but as always felt slightly chaotic. I think the courses should check before the hand-in date, that everyone is in a group. Otherwise, the courses seem to be good and working well.

Lena: I can say the same from KSD. I was a tutor, and we had a great study start, and some great new students, who seem to be good at using each other in a positive way. I am also TA in Software Engineering, where we can see that a lot of people are postponing the course. We will keep looking into the reasons for that. In general, the new students are busy and confused, just as expected.

Marius: I forgot to mention, for Grundlæggende Programming there have been complaints of the large gap between the two parts of the course.

Dan: The course manager has checked with the students, who did not agree among themselves if it works or not.

5. Spring evaluations SWU + KSD (postponed from June)

Patrick: For the spring, two KSD courses jump out. Introduction to Database Systems will be taught by a new teacher next time, so things might change. Frameworks and Architectures for the Web still have an issue with students not liking the teaching style of the course manager. The main complaint seems to be that it feels intimidating to some students. As for the content, some students think it is too much, and some students think it is too little. Apart from this, I do not see any major issues with the KSD spring courses.

Sophie: I know these issues with Frameworks were present last year as well, and that the cohort that time tried to give feedback and advise in the evaluation. Can you say something about how this has been used?

Patrick: Last year there were issues with both the content and teaching style, and it seems that students like the content more this year, so this has improved. But there were still complaints on the teaching style.

Sophie: What I want to know is if something has been changed. I have talked with students who feel their borders have been crossed.

Patrick: I did talk with the teacher on trying to be more inclusive, but it seems it did still not gel with the students.

Lena: I took the course last semester. My experience was that the material was very nice, and I loved the project, but as some point I opted out of the lectures, as they just consisted of the teacher reading from his PowerPoints, which make it difficult to take part.

Sophie: This corresponds to what I have heard.

Lena: One time I experienced him pointing out people and asking directly at a lecture. It is unfortunate, but I do not feel he is doing anything in bad will.

Marius: That sounds another issue I also have experienced. In general text heavy PowerPoints is an issue.

Lena: If I understand it correctly, there are no rules saying that you need to have power points at lectures, but if the PowerPoints and the teaching style go together, it is more beneficial.

Therese: Students like the teachers to have PowerPoints as a way of providing quick lecture notes.

Patrick: I have no other points from the evaluation.

Dan: For SWU the courses did well overall. There were issues with User Experience and Web Programming as well as the 1st Year Project – both having new teachers, and both courses on the 2nd semester, which is very unfortunate. For User Experience we had an external teacher with a lot of new ideas, some working and some working less well. We will have a new teacher on the course next time. For 1st Year Project there is an extensive load in managing the course, but I believe once the new teachers get more acquainted with the course, things will improve.

Marius: I had both courses, and they had very different issues. One the 1st Year Project the old teacher came in and gave a guest lecture in a way that was very different than the main teachers, which caused some confusion. With User Experience there was an issue with illness, so the teacher had to reorder the course.

Dan: For the 1st Year Project we also wanted to introduce some new subjects, but these things take time. The new teacher will be a post-doc, but have a background in the SWU programme, so know a lot about how the programme works. Overall, I'd say that there is always some that can be improved according to the students, but it is still up to the individual teacher to decide the didactics on the course – and then there are always some students who will like it, and some students who will not like it.

6. Summer University evaluations (20 minutes)

Patrick: Applied Information Security did not go well. There was an emergency, so we didn't have a teacher. We had a similar issue last year, so something is difficult with establishing this course. We will probably not offer it next year. In a way, this also applies to the Algorithms course – it is difficult to find people to teach in the summer.

Lena: All people I have talked are giving much credit to the TAs on Applied Information Security. They handled the situation very well, and I hope some of this credit is passed on to them.

Patrick: Yes, I will pass it on. There is also another issue, which is that it is difficult making a summer course similar to a normal course, when the structure is so different. It is not clear, if students can gain the same from a summer version.

Sophie: Regarding Algorithms: I am not sure we can blame the lower ranking only on the compressed format. We should also consider that there were different teachers for each lecture. That said, I still think it is very good to have the summer university courses to help even out the workload.

Marco: Summer courses can be great depending on the course, but is often a bad idea, as you will not learn things as good as during a semester. How To Make Almost Everything seems to work well, but it is not a form any course can fit into.

Sophie: We just have different opinions and will probably not reach agreement. For some students it is better to have time to focus on just one thing. Another thing regarding Algorithms is that the normal course has a lot more options regarding the TAs sessions and your individual preferences here.

Marius: I think hard theoretic stuff is difficult to learn properly in 4 weeks, but the short timeframe works well on more hands-on stuff. We might want to look at what other universities do if we want to improve the summer courses.

Luca: It is a matter of resources. Our main issue is not having enough resources for this.

7. Suggested SAT meeting structure going forward

Marc: Based on the feedback from SAT I have two suggestions – a yearly structure and a meeting structure

For the yearly structure, I have made an overview of the various items we need to do at specific meetings in 2024 as part of the ITU policies, to make it possible for SAT to see, where there is space for other things. In addition to this, I suggest we hold 2 meetings in February, so we have proper time to discuss the evaluations, as requested by many SAT members, as well as to give the HoSPs a chance to incorporate the feedback from SAT into their Study Programme Report. I also suggest that we make it a fixed point to discuss the goals and working methods of SAT overall in the last meeting in December, where the new members usually join. We do not need to decide this now – I will put it on the agenda for the December meeting, so the new members also will be part of the decision.

As for the meeting structure, I suggest we merge the separate points "Information" and "Update from study programmes" into a shared "Information from SAT members", and place this last in the meetings, with 15 minutes allocated. If things are brought up here, that need a wider discussion, then SAT can always decide to put it on the agenda for the next meeting. The idea is not to silence anybody, but to give you more time to discuss the actual points on the agenda, as there has been a tendency for the updates from the study programmes to evolve into longer discussions, and this way eat up a lot of the meeting time.

SAT approved to try the suggested new meeting structure the next meeting.

8. SAT talk SAT /Marco (25 minutes)

Marco: One thing I want to point out before we do a round on this: Often we end off discussing very specific things on a point, but I think we should only do that if the issue is becoming a general problem. Start with talking to the course manager first, and if that does not work, then talk with the Head of Programme. SAT should be more for high level things, and we need to find a way to optimize, so we can spend the time we have together in the best way. Consider what is relevant for everyone. Discus it with the head of programme before bringing it here. Sometimes a problem with a teacher or a course can be fixed on a low level, and we should rather use these meetings to discuss how to develop the programmes.

Marius: I have a suggestion. If we move the smaller points to side meetings, then we could be having almost workshop meetings, and consider things like providing guidelines to improve the teaching standards. Perhaps invite teachers to help them.

Therese: I cannot see that go down very well with the teachers. It would be a pretty hard criticism, and would almost feel like a disciplinary action.

Theodor: As this is the organ closest to the students, I think it is important we have our updates, but I don't think we should talk too much in detail about issues that could have been solved by just talking with the Head of Programme. It is very nice, when SAT is involved and makes recommendations to the Board of Studies before a decision.

Patrick: What I am looking for from these meetings would be discussion about strategic issues, overall structures, alignment – something that goes beyond individual courses. I think it is best to keep it at this level mostly.

Therese: Development of the courses would be interesting, but there is not knowledge enough here for a scientific discussion on how to teach or the actual content. It is nice to have checks on what is going well, but maybe not so much lingering discussions on it.

Maja: My perception is that the students often come with a lot of criticism, and the teachers then get defensive. I second working on developing the programmes and doing things more on a high level. The new agenda format might help with that, and the same with the new year plan for the point of action. I am also curious about how it looked before when there was more development in SAT.

Sophie: First of all, I think it is a great idea not to be so specific, and rather talk more strategic. I am also very curious on how it looked back then when there was more focus on development. But I still think it is important with a slot for the students, so there is a space for people not used to speaking their mind. I think SAT should be a place a place where the student voice can be heard. The tone can be very rough – both from the student and the teacher side - and I would want for SAT to be able to listen to each other a little better. As a new student the tone was a little overwhelming when first starting here.

Dan: I agree with what I have heard. We should consider the synergy, that sometimes an issue is raised, and then you can see that another program has the same issue. So, we need to find a balance between the details and the overall view. I don't know how to solve for both, but we should consider this.

Trine: In some of the other SATs the student counselling has a fixed point to tell about what they have noticed. I'll be happy to do this here too.

Therese: It would be nice to get information from the student counselling.

It was decided to add information from the student counselling as a fixed point onwards.

Trine: I can mention another thing I have noticed. In SAT GAMES they are very good at talking about visions and dreams instead of diving into problems. So, it is very much about how we frame the things that we talk about.

Lena: I agree with a lot of you, that there is no need to go too far into details, but I also appreciate being able to bring some of the voices of the students here and share what the temperature is among the students right now. It could be done with meetings with the Head of Programme, but I think it is good to share this between the programmes.

Luca: I agree with most of you, these are very good points. May I suggest that as a general pointer we aim for points which are either cross-programme or regards future planning? Personally, I can say, that at some point KDS would need a reform, and to be able to discuss these kinds of things here would be valuable.

Patrick: I think that there are two things. First what you summarized – a consideration of whether an item be on the agenda at the meeting at all. But you can also apply this to the information from the students since we often end up discussing very specific things. It would be nice, if the students reporting also take into consideration how deeply we need to go into what they report. I was also talking to Marc about the idea to have a talk like this yearly, or perhaps every semester.

Sophie: I really second that.

Lena: Marco, you mentioned that previously SAT used to work in a different way?

Marco: It used to be much shorter. The students didn't say much, which is why we introduced the point with information from the study programmes. We had items regarding reforms, for instance when we were creating Computer Science there was a committee, and things were brought here for feedback. We still had the fixed items, but we also had items on the new stuff. It was rare that something was brough up by the students, but it did happen.

Allette: I just came to think of another example. When we introduced KDS, it was the first MSc programme at ITU with no specialisation, so when discussing the programme and the background for this, we also discussed whether should keep having specialisations on the other MSc programmes in the CS department.

Theo: I have in interesting point from the last meeting at the Board of Studies related to this. KDDIT are making changes to their specialisation courses to put lower pressure on the students, so they will consist of one just big 15 ETCS course in the future.

Luca: These are excellent points! Both cross-programme and long-term.

Marc: Perhaps the Head of Programmes could share some of their long-term plans and ideas for the programmes at some point. It is not necessarily something you know of as a student, and might help giving context in SAT for a more long-term focus.

Maja: I second the idea of hearing more about the long term planning.

Marius: I think specialisations work best if they are more about different approaches rather than subjects.

Lena: Another question: When we are here as student representatives, how much are we supposed to bring our own voice?

Marco: The way I see it, you represent the programme, but also can have your own voice.

Marc: There are no formal rules on this. You are here as yourself foremost, but should also represent your fellow students to some degree.

Marius: Let's say we should discuss specialisations. I am expected to make a form and ask the other students what they think.

Marc: I think in general you should ease off a little on the forms, as the student opinion rarely is coherent, and forms often mostly give you the loudest or most angry voices. Or at least be careful not to think it gives you a full or even objective picture.

Allette: You should also be careful not to take all the problems of your fellow students on your shoulders.

Theo: In my experience, we often are not listened to as students, if we do not back up what we are saying with the help of the forms.

9. AOB:
This was Sophies last SAT meeting, as she is finishing the programme. Maja and Lena step in as the official replacement(s) for KSD.