

Meeting SAT Computer 10-04-2024

Present:

- Dan Witzner Hansen (HoSP BSWU)
- Louise Meier Carlsen (Co-HoSP BSWU)
- Patrick Bahr (HoSP KSD)
- Luca Maria Aiello (HoSP KDS)
- Alessandro Bruni (substitute HoSP KCS)
- Malthe Rødsgaard Pabst Lauridsen (KDS)
- Lena Winther Jensen (KSD)
- Cristina Avram (BDS)
- Paolo Tell (guest)
- Mette Holm Smidt (ProCoor BDS/KDS)
- Allette Bjørn Bundgaard (ProCoor SWU/CS)
- Marc Kellaway (ProCoor SD, Secretary SAT CS)

Absent:

- Therese Graversen (HoSP BDS)
- Theodor Christian Kier (KCS)
- Marco Carbone (HoSP KCS)
- Nicklas Ostfeldt Gardil (BSWU)

Minutes:

1. Approval of agenda

The agenda was approved.

2. Approval of minutes from meeting 13-03-2024

No comments to the minutes received within the 10 working days period. Minutes approved.

3. Exercise classes

Luca: This is the main subject of today. Perhaps we could list the themes we would like to discuss.

During the following discussion topics and notes were listed on the whiteboard. The final state of the whiteboard is found by the end of the document.

At the session yesterday about education some of the subthemes were about the exercises. How they are managed, how to help the TAs handle the session, how to ensure the quality of the instructions etc. Separate themes emerged, and one of them was feedback. Student do the exercises to get feedback, and often they feel that the feedback is too minimal. Another theme that emerged was attendance. Often students do not go the exercise classes. Perhaps this is a symptom that the structure does not work, and people think it is a waste of time.

Louise: I have two points. One is, that there can be an issue with this special thing at ITU where exercises always are always scheduled right after the lectures. This means you only study for the subject once a week instead of two if they were scheduled apart. Another thing is that this makes it difficult to convey the difference in the role of the exercises between courses. Some are for training, some have actual learning goals, some are more for advanced students.

Marc: Some courses are scheduled differently, with lectures and exercises separate. We ask the teachers before the scheduling about this, so it is already an option for the courses. If it were to help, we could also invent more labels than just "Exercise".

Paolo: I think I would prefer no labels other than the name of the course. Another thing: Is this running on the assumption that the exercises classes are managed by the TAs?

Lena: It is very different between the courses, and definitely something to discuss. Sometimes it feels that more could be done with the exercises.

Patrick: Regarding the teachers role?

Paolo: I think it depends on the purpose of the session. This is very different between the courses.

Louise: I think from the students perspective it would be nice to have a course over more than one day a week. I have a question to the students: How many days do you study a specific course, if you only have it one day at the week?

Malte: We tried this on the 1st year with Linear Algebra, and my experience was that we just spent more time overall on preparation, so it really depends on the purpose of the exercises.

Louise: I've met the issue on more advanced courses, where the lecture goes through what is needed for the exercises, which means you will not have time to solve the exercises prior to the exercise class.

Cristina: I also think an issue could be the format where the TAs just present the solutions. In my experience no one does the exercises then because they feel there is no reason.

Lena: Algorithms and Data Structures could be a good example. They have a structure, where there are classes, where you are supposed to try working on the exercises yourself, and the TA session, where you focus on how you are supposed to proceed to solve them. Such a structure might make a difference.

Cristina: I think it definitely doesn't work if there is not a set-in-stone structure. The people come with completely different expectations and demands. I am currently TA on the new statistics course, and people come with completely different things.

Marc: Isn't there a set structure from the course manager?

Cristina: Only for the first weeks. Since there now is no set structure, we have tried what we thought was best. Originally people came to work on the exercises from the same day and could ask questions on this, and by the end of the day we did a Mentimeter on what they wanted us to focus on next time. This worked great until the exercises got harder, and people fell behind and wanted to ask about previous lectures also.

Alessandro: People are on different levels and have different needs. That is acceptable. In Discrete Math I tell my TAs they should try to arrange themselves in different ways for people with different needs. Some want to see an example; some might want to discuss solutions. It surely creates a mess if there is no structure set, but we also need to consider the different needs.

Cristina: It is also an issue that people do not really use StudyLab, even though we try to refer them to go there.

Allette: Do you have an idea why people do not take advantage of StudyLab?

Cristina: Perhaps they are not stressed enough?

Louise: We just had the semester meeting, and some students said they did not attend the exercises classes, but would like to have more live coding. But then we talked with the course manager, and live coding was already part of the exercise classes.

Malte: As I student I feel that sometimes we do not know the purpose of the exercises. It would be nice with concrete example – like “we are doing this as practice for the exams” or similar. Most usually go to the exercise classes in the beginning, but then later on start to prioritize between the mandatory activities and the exercise classes.

Lena: I think I have mentioned this before, but in the beginning of the programme we all ran around like a chicken without a head, and then later on it started to make sense why we needed to learn this and that, so we have to learn to navigate.

Luca: A bit more guidance from the teachers might help with this.

Lena: I think every single educator already mentions this, but a chicken without a head cannot really listen. There will probably always be confusion the first couple of months.

Luca: Confusion is understandable. Is there anything we can do to lessen it?

Lena: For some people it will be inevitable, but I think for my cohort, we have been good at sharing that it is not unusual to feel like this. So, peer support does help.

Cristina: People really like it when we first give them proper time to try themselves, and then directly after show how to approach it. I know it is not applicable for alle courses, but works fine when it is.

Louise: How do we raise attendance?

Lena: I am not sure. I think the exercises hours I attended has been the ones with most structure. It helps when it is announced beforehand what the exercises sessions will be used for. If people know the purpose, then probably more will go there.

Malte: I like the idea of knowing why I am doing a certain exercise class.

Lena: A solution if people want to do different things could be to have one room focusing on the earlier stuff, and one focusing on what was on the current lecture. We did that in Algorithms and Data Structures – some TAs focused more on theory, and some more on the hands-on stuff. In order to achieve higher attendance, the TAs need to know what is expected of them. If you find the exercise classes useful, then you will go there.

Louise: I agree. Transparency regarding the learning goals at the exercises will improve attendance.

Lena: It will also help the TAs to prepare better. What I am supposed to do, and where can I refer people, if they want to go outside of this.

Cristina: There will always be some people coming prepared with very specific questions, almost having private sessions, and then also a lot of people just waiting for the solutions.

Lena: 2-3 students are always prepared, but those are usually not the ones needing the help the most. The question is how to also support the students sitting in the back waiting for them to go away.

Cristina: I have asked why people do not use StudyLab more – it seems they are afraid of asking stupid questions. This is why we use Mentimeter. People seem more comfortable with that.

Louise: Could we try to do some labeling of the exercises into different purposes? If we were to support this transparency, what type of labels could then be worth putting on exercises?

Lena: It depends a lot of the course.

Paolo: I think it would be easier for the course manager if there were no labels, and everything was just the course. No splitting into lectures and exercises either.

Louise: How about the structure of the exercises? Is this a discussion or a workshop?

Lena: So, this could be hands-on working on the exercises, or just a run-through of the solutions.

Allette. At the meeting with the SWU students we talked about peer grading. How do you feel about this? It seems that the students liked it.

Lena: In the beginning I did not understand it at all, but now I think there is a lot of meaning to it. It is nice to see what other peoples solutions are, to get inspiration on how to tackle problems. After our studies, when we are going to work, there will also be code review, so it is a good skill to train.

Paolo: Don't you already do this naturally in the study groups?

Malte: That is the experience from Data science - we are good at talking with each other. I guess it depends on the study environment.

Lena: We talk a lot to each other at SD too, but it is a different thing to look at other peoples code when they sit next to you, and you can ask questions, and then trying to understand someone's code when they are not there.

Paolo: People were coming to me to say that they did not feel they got enough feedback. To increase feedback, we tried to introduce peer review. The issue is that after a couple of weeks some students just give very superficial feedback – “looks good” – and others spend too much time giving too detailed feedback. I agree that it can be useful, but it is difficult to implement.

Lena: It works quite well in Discrete Math.

Patrick: When we see people give too superficial feedback, they are asked to do it again.

Alessandro: It is also more easy in math. With programming it is more complicated.

Patrick: It also takes a lot of TA hours to handle.

Paolo: I guess am conflicted here. I can see what it can do, but I think we should have it in the curriculum, if needed.

Lena: Why I am fond of peer reviewing is that it encourages a culture of giving feedback, and helps people learn how to give positive feedback.

Paolo: I agree, but have not found good way to implement this yet.

Lena: We also have a responsibility as students to actually participate. We have chosen to be here, and if other people take the time to give feedback, should you not also do the same?

Louise: We have considered trying with Chat GPT, but sometimes it might be wrong.

Paolo: I think I have a strong opinion on this. You are saying to have the systems automatically generate feedback to an exercise? I encourage this behavior, and think the TAs could help the students doing this. But not to use Chat GPT to automate the process. If the students can not use the system of their own, what is the value?

Louise: In some cases, the students could develop long prompts that gave nice feedback, but the conclusion was that Chat GPT cannot stand alone, but work as support for the students.

Palolo: Why do you want to have another student to generate the feedback from Chat GPT instead of the student doing the work themselves? What is the value here?

Louise: It is because the exercises need to be graded, but apart from that they also need to get some feedback. And this could help the students in giving peer feedback.

Luca: Are there other points we should look into

Lena: I have a question on the TA hours: How come the rates are so fixed? I have been TA in two courses, and there was a lot of difference in the workload.

Mette: I am now talking in the TA support role. It's been like that forever – just like with the scheduling. We have a budget, and before the semester we ask the HoSPs to reach out to the CMs on their needs. It is easier to handle a budget with some fixed boundaries, but of course it would make sense to look into where people actually attend and where to use the budget best. Of course, as a course manager, if you have budget for 3 TAs, you could use it for 2 TAs with more hours. It is not set in stone.

Lena: Regarding attendance: Perhaps the TAs could be looking in to how many are attending? Cohorts are different. When I took Mobile App Development, more people attended than what I see know, when I am TA in the same course.

Cristina: One solution could be making attendance mandatory.

Marc: That would cause a lot of additional administrative work for both SAP and the course. Whenever we have a rule, people need to be able to apply for an exemption, which needs to be handled.

Lena: It depends on the course. For some courses you need to be there due to group work. I think it is more important how many people participate, rather than how many people show up.

Louise: It is mandatory to be present at KU.

Malt: Making thing mandatory, when there are also your student jobs on the side, could risk make people postpone courses.

Luca: Perhaps a take-home message could be to do something about the structure. Managing the sessions in such a way that the structure is clear for both students and TAs. That we could work on.

Lena: I think the structure thing is quite important. Perhaps the lectures when planning could take more into consideration how the exercise classes are to be used and what should be expected from the TAs.

4. Information from SAT Members

Lena: People from the cohort starting autumn 2024 are starting to ask about the Research Project and what they are supposed to do. Last year Sofie reached out to anyone who might want to come and present their project, which was a success. I was thinking of doing the same, but might not have the time though.

Whiteboard from discussion of exercise classes

