

Southern African Computer Lecturers' Association (SACLA)
24 – 26 June 2014

MINUTES OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT (HOD) COLLOQUIUM
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 25 JUNE AT 13H00 AT NMMU,
PORT ELIZABETH

Distribution: The minutes of the HOD colloquium are, as agreed by participants, to be made available to the respective HoDs and distributed after their approval.

Host Institution: Department of Computing Sciences, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

WELCOME

The HOD Colloquium was hosted for the first time as a workshop of the SACLA conference in 2014. The departments for all ICT departments in South Africa were invited to have a presence and discuss contemporary issues of ICT education and departmental management in the South African context.

PRESENT

Department Heads:

Jean Greyling (NMMU), Bennet Alexander (CPUT), Elize Ehlers (UJ), Greg Foster (RU), Jan Kroeze (UNISA), Manoj Lall (TUT), Antoinette Lombard (VUT), MJ Matjuda (UL), Jane Nash (RU), Lisa Seymour (UCT), Ntosh Wayi (UFH-EL).

Facilitators from NMMU Department of Computing Sciences:

Andre Calitz, Jean Greyling, Clayton Burger (minutes).

DISCUSSIONS

1. STUDENT NUMBERS

Student numbers are sharply increasing beyond the capacity of many computing departments in SA. Issues that must be considered for the sustainability of computing education in South Africa include:

- How do universities respond to the increase in student numbers?
- How can project generation, supervision and collaboration be managed?
- How can external examiners be sourced when there is a finite set of examiners?

Various universities share the same trend in postgraduate policies, specifically regarding examination. In M and D programmes, most universities can no longer appoint internal examiners and must source external examiners for the treatise/dissertation/thesis.

Resolution: A list should be generated and managed as part of SACLA to keep track of competencies of examiners in each university to assist in sourcing examiners for projects.

A number of postgraduate supervision-related questions were raised, specifically:

- How can part-time students be effectively managed at emerging research institutions?
- What is the typical student-to-supervisor ratio employed (such as 1 D, 1 M and 2 Honours per supervisor)?
- How can team supervision be employed to lessen the workload of staff?
- Two models were discussed:
 - Single supervision – provides better identity to the student and higher research output for staff;
 - Co-supervision builds research capacity in staff.

2. SOUTH AFRICAN COMPUTING ACCREDITATION BOARD (SACAB)

The SACAB was founded to investigate accreditation of Computing programmes in South Africa. Andre Calitz was appointed as chair of the board. The consensus of the board which drives its vision is that departments will not be accredited, but study programmes will be. The Seoul accord (agreement between ABEEK, ABET, ACS, BCS, JEBEE, IITPSA (CSSA) is a baseline for accreditation, but the choice will remain with the universities in question. The initial pilot rollout of the accreditation will happen through an institution, such as the NMMU, to allow the SACAB to determine the best course of application. News from the SACAB will be communicated to all computing departments.

3. WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING IN COMPUTING PROGRAMMES

This topic was suggested by Lisa Seymour to discuss support for integrated learning from industry. It is critical to recognise that it is expensive in terms of academic time to produce the right academic profile which focusses specifically on “soft skills”, such as competency profiles of business analysts. This must be incorporated and built into academic workload. Effort is provided by companies, but assessment is done by the universities as part of postgraduate diplomas and undergraduate assignments. There is a large need for these programmes, but funding models and time allocation models in departments do not make provision for them.

4. PROBLEMS FACED BY HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS

Various brief discussions were held concerning general departmental issues, namely:

- The handover of HoD positions requires a time overhead, so it is beneficial for HoDs to run more than a single term. This is handled differently at various institutions.
 - NMMU, Rhodes, UNISA, UL and UJ have 3 year contracts as additional contracts for academic staff members;
 - UCT and TUT have a similar setup but for a duration of 5 years;
 - VUT has a mixed setup based on phased in period. Some HoDs are permanently HoDs, some have 3 or 5 year fixed term contracts;
 - CPUT appoints HoDs for the tenure of their permanent employment.
- Employment of contract staff is an issue in most universities due to the new labour law act and limited number of permanent positions becoming available. There is also pressure from universities to make use of equitable employment strategies which is not practical in a Computing discipline given the disparity of income between academia and industry.
- Orchestration between departments in the same organisation is a large issue as some universities have up to three or four separate ICT-related departments which do not communicate. The groupings of CS in science faculties, IS in business faculties and EE in engineering also creates a communication divide. To increase collaboration UCT is currently investigating a virtual school of computing across faculties.
- Entrance criteria of programmes given the faculty in which the programme runs. An example is computer science students typically being required to have completed physical science in Matric, despite the fact that it is not seen as a core prerequisite to the programme.
- There are challenges at various institutions of staff not studying further to increase their academic title or research output. An example of a strategy to combat this is how Rhodes handles sabbaticals. If a staff member without an M or D applies for a sabbatical, that sabbatical must be used to make progress in the next highest qualification.
- Quality management at institutions is not uniform and appraisals are not always being used for accurate assessment, but are instead seen as a “chore” without tangible benefit to the study programmes. The open question raised is how can excellence and performance appraisals make a real difference to a department?

5. OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION AMONGST DEPARTMENTS

Two major opportunities for collaboration were discussed, namely:

- The sustainability of HoD colloquiums as part of SACLA. This assists in departments sending staff to the SACLA conference and encourages dialogue between departments.
- The creation of an online repository of information which lists academics at each SA institution and lists their academic expertise to simplify the process of obtaining external examiners and moderators. This will be investigated by NMMU and communicated further by the next SACLA.

6. THE NEW PROPOSED GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY FOR CESM 6

CS/IS is currently in CESM 6 which is in the second band of the four-band model. Given the drivers for more IT professionals, there is a need to increase the funding and support to ICT departments based on the CESM model. The CESM model is expected to move to a three-band model with revisions made to reassess each subject's weighting. ICT should move up to the second band of the new model which should secure more support due to the "scarce skills" argument.

7. UNIVERSITY WIDE COMPUTER SCIENCE/ENGINEERING ADVISORY BOARD

A university wide advisory board was suggested by Charles Pritchard of Intellect who questions the role of institutional advisory boards operating as silos. The major argument against integrating each institution's advisory board is that each university has factors which serve to differentiate the institutions, such as: location, expertise and industry interactions.

There are different policies in place in different institutions regarding the communication of career adverts. Some institutions allow direct communication with students, while other institutions force the industry partners to communicate to the students via the graduate placement office. The concept of an integrated advisory board was not supported given the unique identity of each institution.

8. ROLE OF SACLA

There were accreditation issues with SACLA 2014 given the change of requirements for ACM accreditation. As proposed to be discussed at the AGM, SACLA can be supported by the ACM directly if it falls under the umbrella of the SIG CSE group. The direction proposed is to have SACLA serve as the South African chapter of SIG CSE. A concern was raised that the IS portion of ICT might be lost if SACLA becomes a chapter of SIG CSE.

There were issues with prior SACLA conferences, such as desk rejection of papers due to limited reviewers or reviewer expertise variety and conferences not running (such as Botswana University in 2013). These issues pose a threat to the continuity of the conference and are being addressed by creating an active following for SACLA that has momentum as well as relevance.

9. FUTURE HOD COLLOQUIUM

It was agreed that the HoD colloquium was successful and useful. The colloquium serves a dual purpose of encouraging dialogue between departments as well as providing a medium for interacting with the SACLA chairs prior to the AGM. A suggestion made was to stream the colloquium for HoDs who cannot attend.

10. Closure at 16h40

It was agreed that the HoD colloquium minutes will be distributed to all present for approval.

(Note: The minutes were circulated December 2014. Approved by Prof Lisa Seymour and Prof Elize Ehlers)

Group photographs

