

TRUSU Computer Science Club
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DECEMBER 3, 2015

Dear Sir:

The Computer Science Club is a student-run organization which represents the interests of and advocates for students enrolled in Computing Science courses at this university. As you can no doubt agree, TRU, the Faculty of Science, and the Department of Computing Science have a responsibility to ensure that quality course content is delivered by knowledgeable and competent professionals. Additionally, they should act with integrity and professionalism in managing programming or course offerings and policies affecting both prospective and current students - the parties to whom they are accountable.

With these responsibilities in mind, the Computing Science Club is compelled to assert its responsibility to express the severe dissatisfaction of its students with the instructional quality and course content of COMP 3450: Human-Computer Interaction, previously an elective but now a required course for Bachelor of Computing Science students.

The rapidly-changing and continuously evolving nature of our discipline is a fact we are well aware of, and can appreciate that delivering courses which remain educational and relevant in their content can be a challenging process. Many instructors at TRU who deliver quality courses are required to invest time in preparing course materials, assignments and exams which provide value for students, as is the nature of education in our field. COMP 3450, suggests tangible deficits in this regard, with its syllabus and content falling short of current methodologies in user-centered product and user-experience design, a deficiency particularly noticeable for students who pursue self-directed study in these domains, work with these areas as part of their part-time or Co-op employment, have taken courses in the social sciences, or simply spent time building software for people in other courses or projects.

The textbook for the course is sorely outdated, missing or making inaccurate statements about then-current trends in technology and interaction design. Examples include closely studying 2003 virtual reality game Second Life, the Palm-Pilot's interface, the inappropriateness of mobile phones for geolocation, or the use of flashing lights and reverse video to attract a user's attention. Some material was recognized by students as contradictory to existing knowledge from elsewhere in the program, or simply incorrect. This was difficult to attribute to the course materials themselves or the instructor's limited knowledge of the material. Many students quickly became frustrated with the age, triviality and sometimes irrelevance of the material in the textbook, lectures, and exams, which in cases simply required and encouraged rote memorization of specific pictures from the textbook irrespective of the student's understanding of underlying conceptual learning outcomes.

Lectures for the course were particularly troubling, as students became frustrated with the material, instructor continually reading from slides, and his recognizable unfamiliarity with the course material. No efforts to engage students in lectures or seminars were made, and when students asked questions about the material, the instructor was unable to answer them effectively. This led students not to ask questions at all, and eventually attend class only to

participate in mandatory lab assignments due in class and receive their attendance mark. This was a sore point for many students who, despite the lack of instructional value in lectures, found the workload of the course excessive.

While completing a semester-long group project with limited direction and submissions due at weekly or bi-weekly intervals, students were bombarded by a surprisingly large number of often poorly-defined lab and individual written assignments, which many students struggled to complete in class time. These were a challenge for them to balance with other academic commitments, made more stressful by changes to assignment scopes or timelines, often in cases where some students had already completed the original assignment as described. Students remarked that, despite the absence of content, the workload in the course was more extreme than other heavy upper-level courses offered by the department like Software Engineering, Operating Systems or Ethical Hacking, and project-intensive courses like Mobile Application Development. Students found this particularly frustrating in light of the nature of the course work, which many remarked had little benefit in helping them meet the educational outcomes of the course and served little purpose other than to occupy students.

A concern for students is COMP 3450's failure to assist students in achieving the outcome described in the course outline. Some of the core ACM/IEEE knowledge areas on the course outline do not wholly map to the course content, as certain areas were either not present in the course content or replaced by other material. Other elective areas were omitted entirely. In addition, many workshop and lab topics or tools outlined in the syllabus were not included, like GUI design principles with Sublime Text and jQuery UI. Several students specifically remarked that they do not feel able to effectively demonstrate a level of comfort with some of the key desired outcomes from the course, and will be pursuing self-directed study elsewhere to attempt to meet these deficits.

While Dr. Park means well in his efforts to deliver the course, even buying poster board and markers for one lab assignment, we feel it unfair of the department to continually place him as an instructor for courses where he has limited expertise in the subject area, and cannot effectively plan and deliver quality course content. This is not the first time in which he has been put in such a challenging position unfair to him or his students, as was also the case with the Database Systems course in Winter 2015. While it is understood that the department has to ensure the equitability of instructor workload and accommodate changes in staffing, we know that you recognize that the department's foremost responsibility is to its students, and that continuing to provide a course of such quality is inexcusable, reflecting poorly on TRU's Computing Science program, the department, faculty of science and the institution as a whole.

The undersigned dutifully stress the need for reevaluation of and redesign of COMP 3450, made even more pressing with its introduction as an upper level requirement for the BCS degree. With the ever-increasing importance of designing user-centered interactions and user experience becoming well-recognized and important skills for graduates, the need for quality content and selection of a more appropriate instructor for this course is more apparent than ever. In addition to the ACM/IEE knowledge areas, many willing industry professionals would serve as a valuable resource to help the department correct deficiencies in this course's implementation.

The computing science club and concerned students are eager to provide assistance with this process to ensure that the changes made are effective and meet the needs of students. Please inform us of your intended course of action to correct these shortfalls by December 22, 2015, as we trust they can be resolved effectively within the department.

Thank you for your careful attention to this matter.

Kind regards,

The undersigned
