Coursework commentary 2018–2019

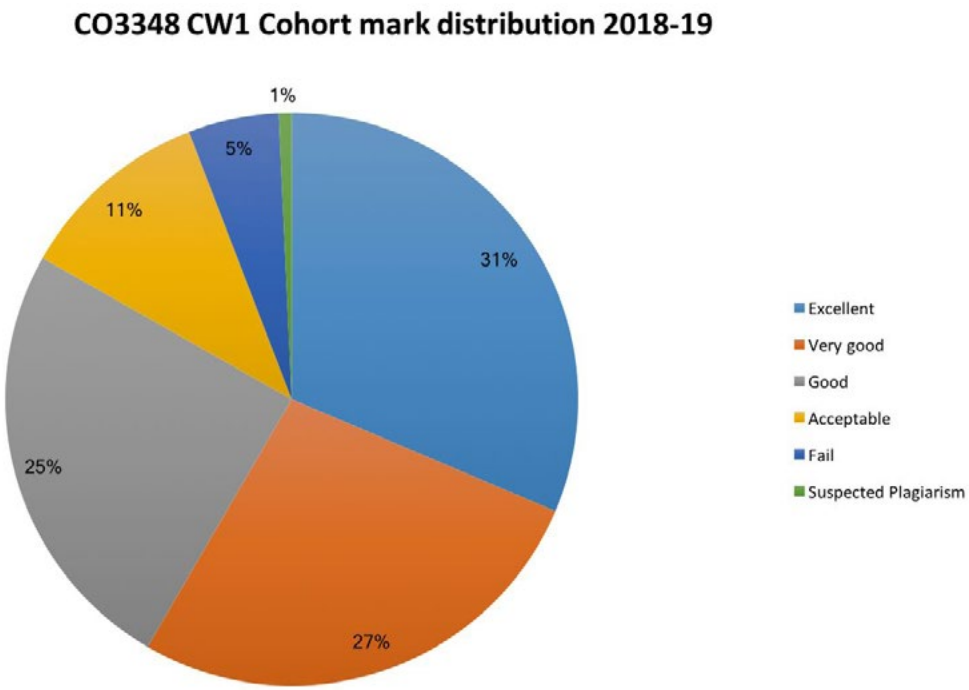
CO3348 Interaction design

Coursework assignment 1

General remarks

This coursework assignment required students to apply their skills in exploring user interactions with so-called smart domestic appliances. They were to explore currently available smart devices and to consider the challenges faced by users when encountering new ways of operating the equipment to do familiar tasks, and of being faced with interfaces to enact unfamiliar functions on the devices. Students were to propose interaction design exploration strategies that they could use to investigate the devices, and to provide a written report presenting the outcome of their investigations and reflections. Good answers demonstrated a scientific, objective approach to the question rather than an experiential, subjective approach.

See the 2018–2019 CW1 cohort mark distribution below:



The graph above shows a spread of marks across the cohort with the majority of students achieving excellent, very good or good grades. Some students did however fail the coursework assignment.

Comments on specific questions

While there were very good investigations detailed in some reports, the most common weaknesses shown were:

- A widespread assumption that technology was smart because it was controlled through a smart phone, rather than being smart because it could undertake tasks that were not previously possible by using

embedded computing technology; such as calculating water requirements in a smart washing machine based on the weight of the clothes and the degree to which they were soiled. This demonstrates a weakness in the critical evaluation and over-reliance on personal experience, rather than the ability to observe others and their use of technology.

- This lack of critical reflection led to an assumption that all technology and change is good, without balancing the change with the needs and wishes of users.
- Shallow use of Internet searches. In many cases all references were from websites, even if the reference was to a published paper. This is a recurring weakness. It might be appropriate to encourage students to use a tool such as Google Scholar and an appropriate bibliographic system such as Zotero.
- As with last year, there were a number of examples of gross generalisations about the technical competence or interest within the broad demographic. Several students seemed to think that someone in their 50s is old and has no interest or competence in the use of technology. Others made quite inappropriate characterisations about lifestyle, interest in technology and wealth.

Submissions that were off topic, demonstrated limited ability to critique, lacked a conclusion, or were too short in length, were also marked down.

While many reports were well presented, an unacceptably large number were not properly structured, lacked covers and contents' sections, used an informal style, and/or had poor grammar/spelling.

Weak submissions presented ideas with little or no supporting evidence. Submissions that gained better marks included relevant suggestions for usability principles that would be relevant for exploring this topic.

Outstanding submissions showed that a rich spectrum of materials had been accessed and considered, and conclusions drawn from objective analysis. In detail, the students who achieved outstanding grades were those who had critically considered the value of smart functionality and the quality of the interfaces supporting that functionality.