

## Coursework commentary 2015–2016

### CO2227 Creative computing 2: Interactive multimedia

#### General remarks

The coursework assignments this year dealt with particular types and examples of art-works, focusing on the physical but also requiring students to think about the digital aspects. For both coursework assignments, an in-depth investigation of a particular area was required, and then the development of an artefact based on the investigation. In the case of Coursework assignment 1, the area was guerilla art, and students were required to discuss an aspect of guerilla art, and then develop their own artefact which was inspired by what they had found in their investigation. For the Coursework assignment 2, the subject was physical art, of which 'The Kelpies' was given as a sculptural example. Again, a discussion of the area, followed by an artefact inspired by their investigation, was required.

Students were also asked to develop their ability to critique work – their own and others' – by providing self-reflection for each of their own artefacts, as well as critically examining the Coursework 1 submission of another student.

At level 4, examiners expect students to be able to present coherent academic writing, with proper referencing and citation. In addition, insightful analysis and discussion of creative artefacts is expected, and students should demonstrate that they are developing these abilities.

It is important to note that many students lost marks needlessly, in both submissions, for not following the instructions regarding the format for submission. These are not given as hoops for you to jump through, but they make the task of marking more straightforward for the examiners. If examiners are spending extra time looking for files that have not been correctly named, or have been placed in folders that have not been specified, this detracts from the overall work. Marks are deducted in these cases.

#### Comments on specific assignments

##### **Coursework assignment 1: Banksy and guerilla art**

There were four parts to this coursework assignment, and most students made a reasonable attempt at all four parts. The first part required an investigation of the work of Banksy. Here, students were expected to read appropriate books and articles in order to gain a background understanding of the context in which Banksy's art and political statement exists. The second part required a discussion of the links of the context of guerilla art to digital art. The third part was a creative exploration of Banksy's work and the making of an artefact, while the fourth part was simply the listing of a fellow student who would be the swap partner for the next coursework assignment.

In general, the work was approached well. While a few students submitted incomplete attempts, where they omitted some of the sections, most students attempted all sections. However, just under 10% of students did not submit part C, which was their own artefact, and because this section had a significant number of marks allocated to it, all of those students did not pass the coursework assignment. It is always a good idea to submit work for each part, even if you have not done as complete or high-quality work as you

would have liked. For those students who did make a complete attempt, all passed, and some obtained very high marks. There were some excellent submissions, including a few which obtained marks higher than 95%.

For the first part, discussions that were clearly focused were the ones that obtained high marks. One essay, less than 3 pages long, but clearly focused on the clash between guerilla art and the impact of its own success on how it can continue, obtained almost full marks. The writer ended with the insight that, using as an example Banksy's 'be-musement park' in Weston-Super-Mare, 'it may well mean that rather than become a victim of his success – a success so plainly at odds with his origins – he has chosen to make his success into a guerrilla act in itself.' An essay does not have to be long to be good, but it does need to have a clear thread and a clear structure. Weaker essays were ones that primarily described Banksy's work, and showed many examples of images that he has left on walls, etc., without providing any insights or discussion, or without linking them to the broader landscape of guerilla art.

The examiners were pleased to see that, in general, candidates are managing to produce appropriate academic writing, including correct citation and referencing; this was evident in both the first and second parts of the coursework assignment.

For part B, again the need for a clear and focused essay was paramount. One successful essay was bold enough to say that the links between guerilla art and digital art are quite slim and mentioned that, apart from Banksy's explicit digital work (a video called 'Rebel Rocket Attack', and his work on the opening credits for 'The Simpsons'), the most significant parallel is the ability to reach a much larger audience. This insight was preceded by a clear discussion and some well substantiated views of what digital art actually is – though this is itself still an open question.

Another extremely strong submission started with a similar comment that 'Banksy faces the same challenge as certain digital artists, challenges of accessibility and cultural relevance, and often shares the same goal of widespread proliferation' and went on to make some very interesting points about similarities and differences. Students also mentioned some guerilla artists who work primarily in the digital domain, and also felt that overcoming technology limitations is similar to the overcoming of the physical constraints that guerilla artists often work under (short painting times due to security issues, and needing to overcome physical limitations to get to places they might place their art).

The third part of the coursework assignment was the place where students were able to develop aspects of their creativity, in a constrained setting. Quite a few students chose to replicate versions of Banksy's work, which was acceptable but did not obtain particularly high marks in respect of the creativity aspect. Not all students included an interactive aspect, and these were seen as weaker submissions. However, there were some extremely strong submissions, and the examiners were impressed by the creative and insightful qualities shown by students. Some notable examples included: a sketch that took the game-show 'Wheel of Fortune' and highlighted the poverty or disease that most of the world lives in; a sketch that allows the user to 'be Banksy' and create their own guerilla art; and a very clearly motivated sketch that allowed users to create their own art, but strongly based on four important premises: juxtaposition, the use of flashes of colour, working on many levels, and a quote by Banksy himself that "art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable". This final sketch was excellent, as were the

student's insights into their own process of creation, their technical achievements and their artistic impact.

Some students did not comment their code well, thereby losing marks unnecessarily. Examiners are not looking for comments simply for the sake of them; they do help in the readability of the code and they also help examiners to establish whether the student understands what they have produced, and whether the code is of good quality. If an examiner has to spend a great deal of effort working out how a piece of code works, because it has no comments, or because the choice of variable names is not sensible, they are likely to award lower marks.

For the final part, a very simple task, some students lost marks for not providing all of the information required: details about the swap partner, and the context in which they are known.

### **Coursework assignment 2: Physical art: 'The Kelpies'**

The second coursework assignment began with a requirement that students critique another work, and then went on to give an opportunity to examine the links between physical art and digital art more deeply, starting with a particular metal sculpture called 'The Kelpies'. Fewer students omitted sections than in the first coursework assignment and, as a result, a lower number of students did not pass. There were also some excellent submissions, again achieving marks in the 90s.

The first part, the critique, was done very well by some students. Those who did a good job were able to provide an insightful comment on both the technical and creative aspects of their swap partner's work. Weaker submissions suffered from some of the following: comparing the work being critiqued with the student's own submission; not providing an assignment mark as requested; giving a straightforward average of marks for each section to obtain a total (instead of a weighted average); focusing only on the essay and the technical aspects of the implementation, and not considering the creative aspect of the artefact or its impact. Some students failed to comment on the submission's own critique, where given. In contrast, particularly good critiques also contained suggestions to the student of areas that could be improved, in all of the different sections required, such as discussing artistic and technical choices, making the code less memory-intensive, and the suggestion that the student should 'Evaluate your own work!'

For Part B, students were also expected to write in an academically rigorous way, which not all managed, though a significant number did. Some students included comprehensive references at the end of their essays, which was good, but failed to include citation through the essay itself. A lot of students made comparisons between the work of Andy Scott and that of John Lopez, which was appropriate; however, those that included a broader consideration produced better work. Some students compared the Kelpies with other equine sculptures; while others looked at similar techniques to Scott's. The latter were usually more interesting; in this case looking at an approach, rather than simply at an outcome, provided a deeper analysis.

For Part C, students produced some nice work, some of it more technically focused, but of a high standard. Very good examples focused on the lighting aspect, and though they did not quite achieve all of the technical aspects considered, also provided insightful reports and evaluations of what had been done. Another implemented a tool that allowed the

user to interactively create the 'skin' of the Kelpies, using rectangular textured shapes.

It is important to be able to produce work that has impact, as well as being technically strong, and a few students managed this to a very high degree. A particularly good example was one that considered the agricultural and transport contexts of the horses that contributed to the original sculpture, and created a moving sketch showing the more emotional side of the work. This sketch was not particularly innovative in its interactivity, but scored strongly through all of the other aspects, as well as including the student's own comments on their interactivity choices. Another moving sketch contained good interactivity, and was based on the Keats poem "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles". The technical work was strong, as was the impact, though this submission lacked the student's own discussion of the impact and of their own work. Another nice idea that focused on impact and creativity linked the Kelpies to the myth of Avalon.

Apart from those submissions that omitted one of the sections, the work was of a generally high standard, with most candidates including most if not all of the desired aspects.