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DM502 Programming A, Fall 2010, Action Plan

The course DM502 Programming A was evaluated as it is a first year course. Out of the 77 students, 44 have answered the course evaluation sheet. One of them only answered partially.

The course seems to have been at the right level for most of the participants as demonstrated by their use of time and their relative assessment of difficulty and work load. There are some outliers, though, which are probably due to the diverse background of the participants (computer science students vs mathematicians and others).

With respect to the relation between the teaching and the exam, the course and their studies, and the general evaluation of the course, we can see a very clear division between the computer scientists and the mathematicians. The computer scientists can clearly see the relevancy of the course for the exam and their studies and more than 90% are satisfied witth the course. On the other hand, the mathematicians have a hard time to see the relevancy of the course for the exam (more than every third) and for their studies (every fourth). As a result, every fourth mathematics student was dissatisfied with the course while only 56% were satisfied. In total, approx. 80% are satisfied.

The teaching material seems to be mostly okay (with potential to improve in the next iteration of the course) with the verdict on the book being very unclear. There is very positive and very negative opinions on the book. For the next iteration of the course, alternative books could be considered, especially if one of them covers the parts of the course where extra notes had to be used.

The use of projects for the exam was received well and seen as appropriate. It seems logical to continue with this exam form.

Students were overall very satisfied with the teacher (academic level >95% postive, pedagogical >75% positive, preparation >90% positive, commitment >85% positive). Students were also quite positive about the three teaching assistants.

In general, most people felt that they had the right qualifications for the course. But among the mathematicians, only slightly more than half the students felt qualified for the course. This is surprising, because this year also among the computer scientists there were a significant number of students that had never programmed before. It seems that these students could follow the course and thus perceived that they had the right qualifications. The same situation was obviously perceived very differently by the mathematicians. The reasons for this are not clear from the evaluation, but it might be related to a better support by peers inside the computer science class.

For the next iteration, the following actions should be considered:

- Assess the entry qualifications of the participants at the beginning of the course and adjust the speed accordingly. Use continuous in-class assessment to make sure that the vast majority is following.
- Think about extra support in the first three weeks for the weaker candidates, possibly supplemented by some more formal buddy-system among the participants (e.g. pair strong and weak).
- Look for a book which covers more of the course topics to unify the lecture material.
- Try to unify the experience for the two major groups (computer scientists and mathematicians).

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