Poster paper

Incentives to Increase Class Participation at Postgraduate Level

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The Master of Computing (MComp) programme at UNITEC aims to produce "well-rounded" computing professionals who are conversant with ethical, managerial and social issues, and not just technically competent. (Unitec, 1999) Most MComp students have completed bachelor's degrees in science or engineering, in environments where the focus was on lectures, practical classes, tests and examinations, and assignments usually involved solving mathematical problems or gathering information and reporting it in an uncritical fashion.As a result, MComp lecturers have found it necessary to experiment with a variety of ways of encouraging students to participate in masters classes.

Perhaps predictably, the most successful approaches have involved assessing student participation in some way including:

- in-class debates
- marks for attendance and for quality of participation
- students writing critical reviews of other students' presentations
- student presentations which are assessed by the lecturer and the rest of the class
- students presenting a risk analysis with the rest of the class playing the role of project steering committee..

Those students who were unused to making presentations or participating in debates often had difficulty with their first attempt but most showed significant improvements in later attempts and also contributed more freely to class discussions. The opportunities to assess each other and act as steering committee seemed to increase their level of involvement and participation. The experience of writing reviews of each other's presentations proved useful in improving their own presentations and in honing their critical skills for later assignments and particularly their dissertations/theses.

Assessing quality of participation and presentation required lecturers to develop and use formalised criteria in order to be able to give helpful feedback to students and have evidence in case of a student appeal against the grade awarded. This was extra work but beneficial in many ways.

References

Joyce, D. (2002) "Designing, developing and delivering postgraduate computing programmes". In S. Mann (Ed.), *Technology and Innovation: New Understandings and Influences* Hamilton: NACCQ, 249-252.

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