

## Distributed Systems, Fall 2011 – Response to Course Feedback

This response gives our comments on the feedback you provided, both through the feedback form as well as during the last lecture in December. There were a total of 10 replies to the feedback form and everyone seems to have answered the numerical questions and 8 students have provided some additional verbal feedback.

In summary, the feedback seems very positive and students have appreciated the course. This is shown by the good overall scores in the feedback system and in the comments made during the last lecture. The workload has been estimated to be on the high side by many, but I will address this in more detail below.

Below I will address each of the verbal comments, grouped according to the kind of feedback given. I have not edited the comments at all, except for splitting one longer comment under two headings since it made points relevant to two topics. I've taken the liberty of translating the two comments made in Finnish for the benefit of international students. Any errors or inaccuracies in the translations are mine. A summary of the numerical scores is given at the end of this document.

### Positive comments

- very useful content
- The exercise sessions were very useful and provided a lot of clarification to topics which were a bit unclear after the lectures. The exercise assistant really knew his stuff.
- Very nice course and excellent teaching method.
- The course was laborious, but not too laborious. Overall the workload was good. The exercises were good and supportive to learning objects and lectures were interesting and rewarding.

Thank you for these comments. It's nice to hear that you liked the course.

### Timing and Workload

- I would prefer that the course did not start during the 1st period. I didn't have time to attend the lectures before the 1st period ended.
- Kurssin työmäärä meni ihan överiksi suhteessa jaossa oleviin opintopisteisiin. Pelkästään 6 laskuharjoitusta + luennot olisi jo ollut kuinkin 4op edes hommaa. Tähän päälle Home exerciset niin työmäärä oli ehkä 7op hujakoilla. Tällainen on epäreilua koska mm. opintotuki maksetaan opintopisteiden, ei työmäärän mukaan. Ylityöläiden kurssien tuloksena menee tuki katkolle tai tulee burnout. Jo siinä vaiheessa jos kurssi pitää venyttää 9 viikkoon, pitäisi herätyskellojen soida! Asiat ei ole erityisen vaikeita omaksua, niitä on vain ihan liikaa (4op kurssille). Tällä työmäärällä sanoisin että kurssi on helpompi venyttää 2 periodin pituiseksi 8op kurssiksi, kuin tyypistää 4op kurssiksi.

Esim viimeinen home exercise oli suoraan 1/3 toisen 4op kurssin työmäärästä??? Huh huh. (snip, continued below)

(Short translation of the last comment: The course was far too laborious.)

Starting in the middle of the first period was an experiment we did in order to give more time to students for learning. The workload was kept at the same level as last year which should have eased the load over the semester. As was pointed out in the last lecture in December, many people had not fully realized that the course starts on week 4 and would therefore increase the workload at the end of the first period. This was also a bit of an oversight on our part since we had forgotten to think about this issue. We will think about other solutions for next course.

Concerning the workload, the feedback is very mixed. The numerical scores point more towards laborious, but the verbal feedback is more mixed. In the last lecture in December, one student even “complained” that there wasn’t enough work to do in the course. Comparing against other courses in the department, I’d say we’re about average, or slightly above average. Most courses have a lot more weekly exercises (6 per week seems typical, we had a little bit over 2 on average) but might not have home work assignments or have slightly lighter home assignments.

### Miscellaneous

- Harjoituspisteitä sai ehkä liian helposti. Useimmat ulkomaalaiset opiskelijat eivät olleet tehneet tehtäviä, mutta silti merkitsivät tehtävät tehdyksi (tämä taitaa olla lähes tapa). Itse en merkannut tehtäviä vaikka niitä yritin tehdä etukäteen. Jotkin tehtävät olivat ehkä hieman epäselviä? Laskarit olivat tenttikysymyksiin verrattuna vaikeampia.
- (continued comment) Lisäksi häiritsi, että laskareissa tehtäviä tunnuttiin ilmoittavan heppoisin perustein. Itse vaikka en osannut jotain tehtävää tehdä, jätin ilmoittamatta, silti laskareissa olin pienryhmästäni usein ainoa joka osasi keskustella aiheesta yhtään mitään. Kurssikalvoilla sanottiin, että plagioinnista kurssi keskeytyy saman tien. Näin ei kuitenkaan menetelty, kun eräs opiskelija jäi kiinni siitä että ilmoitti ei-läsnäolevalle laskaritehtäviä ? Noh, tämä ongelma ei ole mitenkään helppo ratkaista...
- There were some activities that had anything to do with the objective of the course. We do not have to know the hypothesis of induction or how to access the remote computers in the university. If this would be voluntary, it would be ok.

(Short translations of first and second comments:

1. Too easy to get exercise points from weekly exercises. Most foreign students simply marked exercises even if they hadn’t done them properly. Some questions were unclear. Exercises were more difficult than the exam.

2. Many people marked exercises even if they hadn't done them. The writer felt he/she was the only one in the small group who was able to discuss the question during the session. Some students had marked exercises for absent students and there was no apparent reaction. What happened to the zero tolerance policy announced on the slides?)

Concerning the exercises, these kinds of issues are not new to us, but we do not have a good idea on how to handle them. In the end, it's the student's own opinion on whether he/she has done the question well enough and I remember from my own study times that this can indeed be debatable. I'll talk with the people who organize the orientation course for new master students and see if they could bring up this topic there. We have long suspected (known to some extent) this to be going on, but if it's any consolation, the people we suspect the most of marking exercises when not having done them, typically fail the exam, so in the end they get no benefit from this.

Concerning the apparent ineffectiveness of the announced zero tolerance policy, this is not the case. We have identified cases of plagiarism in the home exercises and all cases are being dealt with according to the full disciplinary process. The new process, in effect since November last year, mandates a few steps before being able to fail a student, but the required steps are being taken and the policy announced on the slides will apply as written.

Concerning the last comment, this is a master level course in computer science. Both of the things you mention are very basic tools and if you really haven't learned them by now, it's about time you learned them. Proof by induction is covered in bachelor's studies or even in high school. Proving the correctness of distributed algorithms is vital and the use of induction in the course illustrates this through a concrete example. We chose that example because the proof is very easy, but should serve to illustrate the point about the difficulties of proving more complicated algorithms.

A distributed system is by definition a collection of individual computers (acting together to appear as a single system). In order to exploit the resources in the system, you need to be able to start programs on other nodes. How else would you imagine doing that except by means similar to the ones we covered in the exercises?

Kurssin tavoitteet olivat minulle alusta saakka selvät ("tiesin, mitä minun tuli oppia")

- 0 ei kommenttia
- 1 eri mieltä
- 2 enimmäkseen eri mieltä
- 3 ehkä
- 4 enimmäkseen samaa mieltä
- 5 samaa mieltä

**Keskiarvo**

Kurssilla käytetty materiaali (esim. tehtävät, luentomateriaali, muu kirjallisuus) tuki oppimistavoitteiden saavuttamista

- 0 ei kommenttia
- 1 eri mieltä
- 2 enimmäkseen eri mieltä
- 3 ehkä
- 4 enimmäkseen samaa mieltä
- 5 samaa mieltä

**Keskiarvo**

Toiminta kurssilla (esim. aikataulutus, ohjaus, muu opetus) tuki oppimistavoitteiden saavuttamista

- 0 ei kommenttia
- 1 eri mieltä
- 2 enimmäkseen eri mieltä
- 3 ehkä
- 4 enimmäkseen samaa mieltä
- 5 samaa mieltä

**Keskiarvo**

Kurssin arviointi (esim. harjoitukset, työt, kokeet, niiden keskinäinen suhde) mittasi keskeisten oppimistavoitteiden saavuttamista

- 0 ei kommenttia
- 1 eri mieltä
- 2 enimmäkseen eri mieltä
- 3 ehkä
- 4 enimmäkseen samaa mieltä
- 5 samaa mieltä

**Keskiarvo**

Kurssi oli työläs

- 0 ei kommenttia
- 1 eri mieltä
- 2 enimmäkseen eri mieltä
- 3 ehkä
- 4 enimmäkseen samaa mieltä
- 5 samaa mieltä

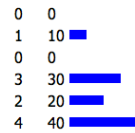
**Keskiarvo**

Annan kurssille kokonaisutena arvosanan

- 0 ei kommenttia
- 1 1
- 2 2
- 3 3
- 4 4
- 5 5

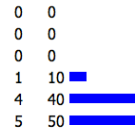
**Keskiarvo**

lkm %



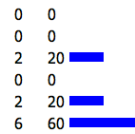
**3,8**

lkm %



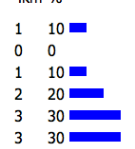
**4,4**

lkm %



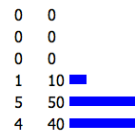
**4,2**

lkm %



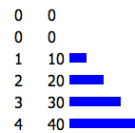
**3,9**

lkm %



**4,3**

lkm %



**4**