

Practical Tips for Engaging Students in Team Formation for Multi-Discipline Computing Projects.

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ABSTRACT

In this note, we provide three top tips for organising a large scale event designed to engage students in team formation for multi-discipline computing projects.

Leeds Metropolitan University's Innovation North Faculty of Information and Technology has an innovative curriculum design. In order to facilitate student engagement with a new cross-faculty module (designed to build upon previously acquired study skills and allow students to develop their range of research methodologies); a large scale event was held in November 2006 for over 700 final year undergraduate students. This one and a half day event included a number of exercises designed to help students meet peers from other computing disciplines with a view to working together to develop a project as part of a multi-discipline team in the second semester.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.3.1 [Computer Uses in Education]: *Collaborative learning.*

General Terms

Human Factors.

Keywords

Group work, collaborative learning, team formation, multi-discipline computing projects, student engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Previous experience of engaging students in multi-discipline, cross-faculty projects at Leeds Metropolitan University highlighted several factors that required careful consideration if this new module was to be successful. Recognising that there are several factors potentially contributing to the high stress levels experienced by many students, especially in their final year, and that working in a team brings its own pressures, we developed an event to support students and facilitate their team formation.

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Organising an event for 700 students over a one and a half day period is a huge task; our top tips are presented here.

1.1. Tip 1: Communication & Preparation

- Ensure that everyone involved in the module (including both academic and administrative staff) delivers a consistent message to the students;
- Try to involve some students in your ideas as they will often point out flaws in your planning and offer an insight into motivating factors to encourage other students to participate;
- Choose a venue where all students can attend at the same time. If this is not possible, invite mixed groups of students to create a multi-discipline environment.

1.2. Tip 2: Get the Timing Right

Timing is crucial. Students need:

- To be introduced to the module and the expected learning outcomes;
- To understand their individual specialist skills and what they can offer to a multi-discipline computing team;
- To have this type of supportive event at the time they are most actively engaged in their work – in our case Week 3 of the module.

1.3. Tip 3: Incentivise & Organise the Activities

Make it fun!

- Muffins (rather than biscuits) are a highly motivating factor in attendance;
- Choose a great location so students (and staff) want to come along;
- Organise an appropriate icebreaker activity which forces your students, staff and other stakeholders to talk to each other in the context of the event;
- Facilitate the communication process. Create an Exchange Board and provide students with sticky labels, name badges, networking sheets, pens, and so on so that they have a means to contact each other during and after the event.

2. CONCLUSION

Students appear to be willing to participate and engage as long as there are clear motivations for doing so. Staff engage with the process if it is organised and supported by a team with dedicated responsibility for running the event itself.