BSc and MEng projects

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Outline

Introduction

Timing, marks and penalties

Masters level: what it means for projects

Planning and preparation for the project

The report

Project presentations

And finally . . .
Acknowledgement

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Web information on projects

- Module descriptions at http://www.cs.york.ac.uk/courses/
  - The formal description of each project module
- Definitions at http://www.cs.york.ac.uk/projects/ProjectSpecs/
  - The formal definition of each degree programme’s type of project
- Student Handbook:
  - See the chapter on projects, aka “Independent Study Modules” (ISM).
    Describes limits, penalties, submission
- Project website http://www.cs.york.ac.uk/projects/
  - Information for students
  - Marking information etc.
Where we are . . .

- You will start your project at the start of the next academic year.
- You will have a project supervisor
  - If your project supervisor is a member of teaching staff, they take over completely from your former supervisor
  - If your supervisor is a researcher, your old supervisor still sees you for pastoral issues
- You have the original project proposal
- These proposals should conform to the specification for your degree programme.
Characteristics of projects

- Check the project specification for your programme.
- Some programmes have special criteria that must be met
- For example, MEng AI students must do an ‘AI project’.
Changes to the project proposal

- You selected a project based on the project proposal
- The project is **NOT** marked against the original project proposal
- Most projects diverge from the original proposal
  - You decide the report title about a week before hand-in
  - Use a descriptive, meaningful title for what you actually wrote up
- If the project direction changes significantly you might want to agree a new outline with your supervisor
  - This can be re-checked (by the supervisors nominated checker) to make sure it still meets the specification for the programme.
Supervisions

- Supervisions should be roughly weekly (in term time)
  - average of 30 minutes per week
- If you have any problems, ask your supervisor, or the person covering for them, or any other academic
  - If you have a serious problem, do not wait for the next scheduled meeting
  - Consult Pauline on Reception, or the General Office, if you are not sure what to do or whom to see
  - We can only help you to sort things out if we know that something is going wrong!!!
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Time problems

▶ Extensions for projects are just as for other open assessments: normally max 2 weeks, ‘compelling and unforeseen circumstances beyond your control’
  ▶ Scope the work to fit the time
  ▶ Note what you don’t have time for
  ▶ You can write about what was left out in “further work”
  ▶ Write the report about what you had time for
  ▶ Make the scope clear in the introduction section

▶ If you are ill, or have other problems, talk to someone, typically your supervisor or BoS Chairman (Jeremy Jacob)—as soon as possible

▶ close to or after submission is normally too late!
Marking Criteria

- Only the report and the presentation are marked
  - These are marked against the formal definition of each course type of project (see slide 3)
  - Project marking forms and other information are on the projects website
- The project pass mark is 50% for MEng, 40% for BSc
- Issues surrounding compensation, reassessment etc are still being decided.
What’s marked by whom

- The report and presentation are marked by your supervisor and a second marker independently.
- There is an elaborate system for moderating disputed marks.
Timing, marks and penalties

Report length limits and penalties(1)

- Length limits and penalties are in Students’ Handbook.
  - Check yours, and make sure that you and your supervisor agree!
  - You must be inside both the page and word limits

- Limits not targets

- Concise project reports are best
  - Don’t pad out the report to get close to the limit
  - Proof-read and edit the report, even if it is already inside the limits
Report length limits and penalties

- In the report, you can designate unmarked appendices
  - Supplementary material that is not marked and not included in limits
  - In the declaration of the number of words and pages, you state which appendices are included and which are excluded
  - Those that are excluded are not marked

- The bibliography is not included in the limits but is marked
Timing, marks and penalties

Project and presentation feedback

- Overall marks, including the project mark, are made available in due course.
- Feedback is sent with the returned copy of the report.
- Note that, due to time constraints, the report feedback is an edited combination of the marking comments recorded on marking forms, and is not written specifically as feedback to the student.
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Masters level is nationally defined; it can be summarised as implying:

- Systematic, comprehensive understanding
- Critical awareness and evaluation
- Original knowledge or application

Project specifications on the projects website have interpreted this for each course

See slide 5
Critical evaluation and justification

- The project must meet general Masters criteria:
  - Introduce and justify your method(s)
    - Positive and negative points
  - Critically evaluate literature on the general area, your specific problem area, etc
- Critically evaluate all aspects of the outcomes of the project
- Do not assume that the reader already knows the literature
- If you don’t know what “critically” means, discuss it with your supervisor, this week!
Originality

- Originality?
  - Research in a new area of computer science
  - Extending an existing approach to a new area
  - Developing a new approach to an existing problem

- Original aspects should be clear in the report
  - Summarise the contribution of the project in the Introduction/Conclusions
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Project lectures

There will be a series of lectures to help you with your project, along these lines:

- Using \LaTeX (presented by JLJ)
- planning, drafting, and how to use a supervisor
- project method, and its write-up
- report structure and content
- academic style, including referencing
- selecting and using literature
- tips on giving a presentation
- ethical issues in projects (presented by ADNE)
Planning is **essential**

- You need to work on your own plan
  - ask your supervisor to comment on it, but don’t expect them to plan your project for you
- You might identify and schedule milestones
  - An interim report, lit. review, setting up kit, etc
- Write-up: how long do you think need? Double it!
- Write an outline plan as soon as possible
How to use your plan

- You cannot change the project deadline, but you can change your project plan
  - Use your plan to spot when things start to go wrong

- If you change emphasis, or something takes a lot longer than planned, revise the plan:
  - Can you limit or change your objectives?
  - If so, revise the plan to the new objectives
  - Check with your supervisor that you still have what's needed for a decent project.
Plan your reading

- Read round your subject area and take notes
- You need to demonstrate a good understanding of the subject area
- If you’ve done a related module, follow up on this as well, but you need to go beyond the taught material
- You don’t have to read everything in detail
- It’s not a PhD—you do not need complete knowledge of the area, but what you have needs to be sound
- Look at publications (books, papers, ...), the web (papers, applications, tools ...) and any other relevant resources
- All these can be used for ideas, sources etc, and cited in your text
Planning and preparation for the project

Plan your report

- What will you use to write it?
  - \LaTeX{} or Word, or something else?
  - Do you have the right software, skills etc?

- What will you do about figures, diagrams, citations etc?
  - Proprietary approaches, integration with text, cross-referencing etc.

- Where will you work, save your work?
  - Think about the need to back up what you are doing
\begin{titledslide}{Plan your report}

\begin{itemize}
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  \begin{itemize}
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Report explains the context and motivation

- Motivation makes clear why the project was worth doing
  - Motivation should make reference to literature (including WWW sources), other applications or products, previous attempts at the problem, as appropriate
  - The context and background of the project must be clear
- A good, critical review should reveal the project motivation
Report discusses the method or approach

- Report must discuss the method(s) or approach
- Justify the method(s) or approach(es) used
- Note that "it is the approach that I know best" may be a valid justification
- Explain why each method (etc) is appropriate to this sort of project
  - Did the approach need modification?
  - Was the whole approach relevant?
  - Were there parts of other methods added in?
A good report is often in “Lifecycle” style

▶ An engineering lifecycle is a good model for the main sections of a project report:
  ▶ Requirements: context, constraints
  ▶ Design: may be several stages
  ▶ Build: software, hardware, proof, experiment . . .
  ▶ Evaluation: product, method, results
    ▶ relate results to requirements, comment on validity of method etc
  ▶ Everything needs to be justified and explained, in the context of literature, previous work, etc
Things to avoid and to do in report

- Don’t use fancy page layouts
  - but do make it easy to read, with section headings, bullets etc
- Don’t try to “sell” your product
  - And don’t embellish the truth
- Don’t repeat content
  - but do provide clear “waymarks” through the text
- Remember to spell check and proof read
  - and check report structure, appendices, references . . .
- Don’t forget the Statement of Ethics
Avoiding plagiarism

PLAGIARISM INVESTIGATION IS NOT FUN
For you or for us

- Make sure you understand the department’s rules and the University penalties
  - Check the Students’ Handbook.
  - Check the academic integrity course on the VLE
  - Discuss referencing with your supervisor
- Put citations in as you write, not afterwards
- Cite all uses of other people’s material and ideas, not just direct quotes
- Always ask if you are not sure
- Look at the Academic Integrity site: www.york.ac.uk/integrity
Which citation style?

- Study the IEEE citation style and know how to use it
  - Record publication details as you find material
  - Citations and bibliographies in CS journal and conference papers show that various styles are available: in this Dept, we use IEEE style.
- \LaTeX{} supports several styles, and is almost idiot-proof
  - But do ask for help—it has a few idiosyncrasies
- Cite all ideas, figures, tables, data, text, code, etc.
- Cite a published version if possible
  - So, if you have used a web source of something published (e.g., in a Journal), use the full publication details, not just the website
- A good guide is that the reader should be able to easily find the source if they want to know more
- Citation style guides on the Academic Integrity site: www.york.ac.uk/integrity
Writing a project report takes a long time
- It is up to you to plan the writing of your report

You can get some help:
- You can ask family, friends, students from other departments, a commercial typist etc
- But be aware that they may have different ideas about how to present a thesis and how to cite material
- You must not ask someone from the Department, this risks allegations of collusion

Ask your supervisor to comment on a draft
- Do not expect your supervisor to proof read it
- Do not expect your supervisor to repeatedly read the same section, or to check your corrections
- Make sure there is plenty of time for the supervisor to read it!
What you can assume of the reader

- Projects are specialised, but the report should assume that the reader only has a general computer science background
  - Write to inform the reader
  - Do not assume that the reader knows the area, or the literature
- Briefly present the specialist background needed
  - Give explanations, details, follow-up sources
  - You can use “unmarked appendices” for supplementary material that the reader might need
  - Make sure that specialist terms and acronyms are introduced and explained properly
  - You could put a glossary in an “unmarked appendices” to help the reader
A good report has lots of good-quality content, but is easy to read
- Look at published academic papers for style tips, and consult the marking criteria
- Try to write clearly and objectively, avoid superfluous adjectives and padding-words

Put technical or secondary material in appendices
- A report is hard to read if it has long sections of code, big tables, multiple diagrams, or lots of secondary detail
- Put full versions in a well-labelled and referenced appendix, and extract interesting examples for the report text

Use a clear layout with headings, bullets and white space
- Make sure all tables, figures etc are clearly labelled, explained, and cross-referenced in the text
  - Remember to cite sources in the captions as well as the text
Help the reader to navigate the report

- A project report is a long document
- Even the nicest report needs “waymarks”
- Introduce every chapter and section
  - make clear why a section is there, and how it fits in to the report structure
  - Conclude chapters and major sections with a summary of key points to take forward
- Reports should not have surprises
  - They are not novels so you do not need to develop a plot
- The abstract and introduction should state clearly what the project is about and what it achieves
  - This is part of one of the marking criteria
PEOPLE FAIL BECAUSE OF PLAGIARISM

UK academic style is to explicitly reference all work that is not the authors own
(And any work that the author has published elsewhere ) You MUST cite, in text, explicitly, often, all consulted:

- Books, Journal and conference papers
- Web sites, lecture notes, provided source code, other peoples designs, etc
- And anything else that is not your own project work

You MUST cite the sources of diagrams, tables, code, etc
You MUST cite implicit use as well as quoted material
Citation

- Use the IEEE referencing style consistently
  - use [1], [2] ... in the text, and put full references in bibliography, e.g.
    [1] F. Bloggs, My Story ..., 1990 ...
- Every time you use a source, even if it is only an indirect reference, add a citation eg [1]
  - Cite every time, even if a source is used many times
  - Direct quotes must be in quotation marks, “thus”
- If in doubt, put in the citation
- Talk to your supervisor about it
Plagiarism detection

- Project reports may be submitted to automated plagiarism detection tools
  - These detect any text that is similar to a published source and alerts to possible plagiarism
  - The tools are thorough
- If the tool finds ‘plagiarised material’, staff review its evidence
  - Decisions are taken by staff, not by the tool
  - Only the human can tell if there is adequate citation
- Note that staff often spot plagiarism without using tools
  - They read widely, and supervise a lot of projects
  - Changes in writing style are easy to spot
Hints for writing a review

- It is not sensible to quote long passages from published sources
  - You get no credit for copying other peoples work, even esteemed lecturers
  - You need to extract key facts or ideas, critically evaluate, compare sources etc.

- Illustration follows . . .
Example literature use (1)

- Suppose your project is on transaction modelling, an advanced area of relational database research
- You need to summarise part of relational database theory that the reader “should know already”
  - State key definitions, citing module notes or a text book
  - Use bullet-lists or tables for conciseness
  - Cite the source clearly on each definition
  - This could be early in the Review, or even in the introduction (assumed background)
  - You could even use an “unmarked” appendix and reference this from the main text
Example literature use (2)

- Then, thoroughly review existing works on transactions and transaction modelling
  - This is not common knowledge, so needs more depth
- For instance, you might include a review section on Transactions
  - Give definitions from literature (with citations)
  - Discuss their merits critically and reach a conclusion about the appropriate definition for your project
  - Do the same for transaction modelling, modelling styles that could be used for transactions
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You submit your presentation slides as PDF the day before the presentation.

Your presentation is recorded, for later marking

An academic is present who will ask you questions at the end of the presentation

The presentation lasts 10 minutes, followed by 5-10 minutes of questions and answers.
Recommended presentation contents are:

1. Project title and objectives
2. Context: quick summary of background and literature
3. How you went about it (method, approach)
4. What you achieved: include a demo if you can
5. Evaluation: how you evaluated it and what you concluded
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GOOD LUCK!

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UG project briefing