

Graduate Students' Forum

Minutes: 13 May 2013

Attending: SB Simon Baker (MPhil)
SMB Sandro Bauer (NLIP)
LG Lise Gough
VI Vaiva Imbrasaite (Rainbow)
AK Andreas Koltes (CompArch)
RK Ramana Kumar (PLS) [Secretary]
AR Andy Rice (GEC) [Chair]
MS Malte Schwarzkopf (SRG)
KS Kumar Sharad (Security)
DT Daniel Thomas (DTG)
IT Ivo Timoteo (AI&B)
GT Graham Titmus (SysAdmin)

1. Apologies

Jon Crowcroft (JC). Matthew Grosvener (MG), with MS kindly substituting.

2. Minutes of last meeting

Approved.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

i. Sys-admin Issues Document.

DT summarises the issues for GT, and we discuss.

a. Compute

Overheads of Condor are too high for short (hours) computing jobs. But we haven't found a better alternative. Quickly provisioning virtual machines to specifications would be great, but too labour intensive. AR: Support for short intensive jobs at a fixed specification would be worthwhile. MG: Do people need more than their desktop machine (e.g. overnight)? AR, SB: NLIP needs more than their desktops. MS: Amazon EC2 gives free compute credits to researchers, and may be worth using (transport confidentiality requirements permitting).

AR: The story so far is that every group is solving this problem their own ad-hoc way. GT: Would a central Hadoop service be worthwhile? MS: Anil has a license for a system that could be useful.

Action: All to provide GT with a list of people with particular compute needs and how they are or are not already met.

b. Storage

GT: Now have funding from the School of Technology to upgrade Filer (for speed and size), and will address Big Disc after that. Size isn't the only problem, it's also bandwidth. The aim is to be upgraded by September.

Backups, especially automatic, can be difficult because of Kerberos. GT: We haven't looked into supporting automatic or streaming backups before but should investigate now.

- c. Snapshots

Can they be made not world-readable? MS: May contain sensitive data; find goes looking in them. GT: We don't have control over the permissions. DT: The induction day should make clear that snapshotting is happening, and what the risks are. GT: Retention at induction day is not great; it would be better to make the webpages better.
 - d. Server Rooms

Screens and trolleys? GT: Would be great, though there's not much room there. Update (DT): A trolley has been bought, and tried, and it's great.
 - e. Faulty Hardware

Should not be given back or given to other people. GT: This shouldn't have happened. AR: Instead of a clean install after a fault, perhaps swap hardware and diagnose the problem elsewhere.
 - f. Remote Boot and Login

Kerberos tickets expire randomly. SSH alias server sends you to another machine where you have to kinit again. GT: Need to clearly identify steps that can be taken to resolves various Kerberos situations and publish them.
 - g. Printing

Transparency in images in pdfs get printed as black squares. DT: Ancient version of Ghostscript somewhere that can't handle it. Also, print queue sometimes silently discards jobs.
 - h. Laptops

MS: What is the policy on provision of machines: laptops or desktops? GT: No strong policy. MS: Perhaps should be an option on arrival alongside choosing OS.
- ii. Unofficial PhD Guide.

AR has LaTeX source code for 2005 version (and no later version has been found). AR has asked Martyn Johnson for GSF group space, where the sources will go. They can be found at `/usr/groups/phdguide/phdguide.git`.
SMB has looked at his sections and found various minor things to correct.
VI has not looked yet.
 - iii. Cutlery.

Rainbow group has good distinctive supply (and VI brought a sample). DT has bought plain supplies for DTG. Will do another spoon survey next year.
 - iv. Three Minute Thesis Lunches.

No volunteers have come forward within GSF to run these.

Action: All to email their group to find a volunteer.

4. Departmental announcements

Action: All to encourage their group to fill out the PRES and PTES (Postgraduate Research/Taught Experience Survey).

5. Staff Student Consultative Forum (DT)

i. Windows.

We have been told to look at the website; the website says we are allowed to open the windows.

ii. Food.

The Maths department have had a similar problem with food quality, and no major success resolving it. The University's preferred suppliers are the only food suppliers allowed to serve, and this is guaranteed by contract until 2015. Hence, it is a university-level problem. DT has contacted CUSU, but without much hope. There is a conflict of interest in that the person in charge of food for the university also runs the university catering company. Might need to organise boycotts or petitions. AR suggests talking to the GU, which DT will do when the new GU president arrives.

6. Research Development

Nothing to report. Will see what happens after University-wide meeting on Friday 17th.

7. Student feedback

(a) DTG (DT)

Nothing to report.

(b) CompArch (AK)

Nothing to report.

(c) PLS (RK)

Nothing to report.

(d) MPhil (SB)

Nothing to report.

(e) NLIP (SMB)

CL people want to attend courses on Management of Technology and Innovation, and think they are not allowed. But that is not true, they are allowed.

The printer for the NLIP group breaks repeatedly. AR suggests pointing this out to one's supervisor as well as sys-admin.

(f) AI & Bioinformatics (IT)

Nothing to report.

(g) Rainbow (VI)

Nothing to report.

(h) Security (KS)

Nothing to report.

(i) SRG (MS)

Nothing to report.

8. Date of next meeting

June 27th for breakfast/brunch (10:30am).

9. Any other business

Food safety training to be organised by AR, DT, and VI.