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Guidelines for preparing talks and documentation

Overview

The Mini-Conference is an important annual event, and constitutes the main departmental review of progress.

Students are asked to give a short presentation (about 15 minutes), primarily about the status of their progress; subsequently an independent panel of computing academics will interview each candidate to discuss with students topics such as overall progress, and departmental and supervision issues.

While the Mini-Conference is not part of the Annual University Review of students' progress, it does “feed into” it: if any problems are identified in the panel discussion both the supervisor and student will be informed, then giving them time to resolve the problem, to get “back on track”. In this way we hope to avoid placing students under additional formal Division Reviews.

Since the Computing Department views the event as an important process, participation in the Mini-Conference is compulsory for all students.

- Normally students who enrolled in 2007 do not need to present, nor do any who are due to submit their thesis before the end of first semester 2007. Please inform your supervisor and Agnieszka Baginska if you think you do not fall into those categories, yet feel you have a compelling reason why you should not participate in the Mini-Conference, and we will consider your case.
- If your inability to attend has any reasonable explanation (e.g. attendance at some other conference) please inform Agnieszka Baginska as soon as possible, and we will rearrange your talk and panel interview for some other time.

The Mini-Conference is not a test; it is rather to inform the Department about progress. **An important fact to bear in mind is that some students do get into difficulty from time to time, and often it is not their fault; it is the Department's responsibility to look after all students, and to try to catch those (hopefully rare!) difficult cases early.**

The format for this year's event is similar to that of last year, and reflects the comments and feedback we had from the various departmental and university-wide postgraduate focus groups. In particular the Department aims to foster a strong intellectual environment based around active research topics, and providing the forum in which students can talk about their work to a wider audience is one of the purposes of the Mini-Conference. In addition we have

- Scheduled the talks based on research groups, to make it easier for students to attend talks they might be interested in (and to support their friends!) Please note that attending other talks is not compulsory;
- Assigned academics on the Panels both to interviews *and* talks so that students can normally expect that the academics on their Panel will be listening to their talks;

- Provided detailed guidelines for the preparation of documentation and talks to set out specifically what is expected.

The remainder of this document sets out guidelines for the preparation of your talk and other documentation. Please read it carefully.

Specific guidelines for preparing talks

Presenting technical material in an informative and interesting way is a skill, and generally it takes a lot of practice to do it well.

Your talk for the Mini-Conference will be only 15 minutes, with 5 minutes for questions, and so there is just no room for serious technicalities. Thus you should speak about your own research, something you have been working on, and you should give a **very brief** self-assessment of your own progress. Remember that the panel are not experts in your area, thus it's pointless to be too technical, or too high-level either.

The following guidelines are an indication of what you should prepare.

- No more than 7–8 slides total;
- Spend about 2–3 slides on the introduction and background to your research topic — give a little example to set the context. Try to think of the simplest example which illustrates the point of a topic in your research work. Use plain English and diagrams for this part.
- Have one slide on which you make it clear what your research question is;
- You must include some technical contribution of your own work. But keep it very simple. Choose the smallest possible example to illustrate your points, *e.g.* the difficulties of the situation which you are working on, or how your mathematical model may be extracted from the problem domain *etc.* Keep this part down to about 2–3 slides. The emphasis here should be on trying to get the audience to see that there is really something in what you are doing — without your explaining the full detail and intricacies of the area at length. Don't worry that you're being “too trivial” — you are the expert, not your audience!
- Have one slide detailing your outcomes. Do not list papers here — they don't say anything about what you have achieved! Instead think of what technical problems you wanted to solve, and summarise your progress on their solution to date;
- Have one slide illustrating a timeline for your overall project. For this part include an overview of what you have done so far, and where it is leading in the context of your thesis.

Documentation to prepare for the panel You will have a self-assessment form (available for download), and in that form you are asked for information regarding your progress.

- Again, do not list papers published under “Progress to Date”. The panel's job is to evaluate your progress for themselves, and they can't do that from a list of titles. Instead say what problems you have solved, or what tool you have implemented, or what tests you have designed and carried out.

If you have published (or have submitted) any papers in a conference or journal then list them in “Research Papers Published or Submitted”.

- Similarly, in “Next Year’s Plan” do not say things like “I intend to publish two conference papers next year”. Say what problems you intend to tackle, and how you think you might go about it.
- You must also provide some written technical material for the panel.
 - If you are in your second year, and you do not have any papers, you should at least submit your literature survey and your project proposal.
 - If you are in your third year or beyond, you should submit a draft of a conference paper, or a recently-published paper, or something that could go towards being a draft chapter in your thesis.
- In the section “Other Issues” you may write about anything you feel is relevant to your progress, including things you don’t like about how the Department is managing your research. Please be honest — this is important, as we cannot help you unless we know about the details of your case. If you do not want your supervisor to see what you have written, then write “Confidential” at the top of the form. Only the Director of Postgraduate Research, the HOD and the other members of the Panel will see it.
- You are also asked to email Melina Chan a short abstract of your talk using word format, to go into a proceedings. Please use the subject line **Mini-conference 2007**, and email the abstract not later than Wednesday 13 June.