Advising Notes for Entrant Students

Welcome to the University of St Andrews, and to the School of Computer Science! These notes are intended to give some background to the Advising process and to the main University regulations that will affect you in your first year.

This gives the School's interpretation of various University regulations. If you discover inconsistencies between what is stated here and what is defined in the official regulations, you should treat the latter as definitive. In such cases, or if you find any other errors in these notes, please let your Adviser of Studies know.

There is a lot of information here; don't feel that you need to absorb it all immediately. Some other general reference sources:

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/students/academic/academic-advising/faqs/

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/about/glossary/

Role of Adviser of Studies

The main role of your Adviser of Studies is to offer advice regarding module choices. There are a number of factors that will affect your choices, and these can be quite complex, so it is often helpful to receive relatively impartial advice and interpretation of the relevant University regulations. However, any advice that they offer remains just that: *advice*. Ultimately, you will have to make your own decisions about your degree path.

As well as advising on the various options open to you, your Adviser will check that your choices are valid according to University regulations. To ensure that everyone goes through this checking process, the University requires that all module registrations and changes are made by Advisers of Studies.

More generally, your Adviser is always happy to discuss any problem, whether academic or personal, that you may have at University. If they cannot help directly they will suggest who can—often one of the School's Student Welfare Officers, the central Student Services, or the Advice & Support Centre (ASC).

Finally, your Adviser of Studies is also a member of staff in Computer Science, and they may be teaching on one of the modules that you take this year. You shouldn't worry, however, about this when dealing with them as your Adviser of Studies. If you decide later in your University career that Computer Science is not for you then they won't be in the least offended. Their role as Adviser will always take priority.

The St Andrews Degree Structure

Most students are admitted to study for an Honours degree. The title of the degree varies depending on the Faculty; you are in the Faculty of Science and the corresponding degree is *BSc (Honours)* or *MSci (Honours)* in a particular subject. It is also possible to graduate with a *BSc (General)*, which can be completed in a shorter time. These notes will assume that you are aiming for *BSc* or *MSci (Honours)*, that you are studying on a full-time basis, and that you are starting in first year (not direct entry to second year). If your situation differs, your Adviser will be happy to discuss the differences with you on an individual basis.

The degree is split into two parts: Sub-Honours and Honours. The Sub-Honours part takes at least two years and at most three. The Honours part takes exactly two years for *BSc* and exactly three years for *MSci*. Thus the normal time to complete an Honours degree is four or five years respectively, but it is possible to do it over five or six years respectively.

In each semester you take a number of **modules** in various subjects. Most modules take place in one semester or another, although there are a few that run over an entire academic year. Each module is at a level between 1 and 5. Many 1st level modules have pre-requisites requiring relevant school exam passes, while those at higher levels may have pre-requisites of modules at lower levels. Each module is described in the **module catalogue**, and has a unique module code representing its level and subject. For example, CS1002 is a level 1 module in Computer Science. The terms "1000 level" and "2000 level" are sometimes used to describe 1st and 2nd level modules.

Your performance in each module is assessed, through a combination of continuous assessment and/or examination at the end of the corresponding semester. The result of assessment in that module is a **grade** between 1 and 20. A grade less than 7 is a failure, while a grade of 7 or greater is a pass.

When you pass a module (whatever the grade) you also gain a number of **credits** associated with that module. You need to achieve a certain number of credits to proceed from one academic year to the next, and from Sub-Honours to Honours. For the MSci programme, you also need to achieve good enough grades in certain modules to gain entry to the Honours programme. Once in any Honours programme, your grades determine the class of your degree.

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/subjects/modules/

The Advising Process

The formal advising process takes place at three periods during the year. At each of these times you make or change decisions about your module choices.

Pre-Advising

This takes place between May and September. At this stage you make initial, non-binding, decisions about your modules for the next academic year, and submit these. Once you have submitted them, you cannot change them until the main advising meeting.

Advising

The main advising period takes place at the start of each academic year. Before you can matriculate (register as a student for the academic year) you need to choose modules for the whole year—both semester 1 and semester 2. Your Adviser will agree your module choices with you at your advising meeting, and approve them online.

Re-Advising

After advising, you have a limited period in which to change your mind about your semester 1 module choices—see **Changing Your Mind** later. If you wish to change any semester 2 module choices, this is done during the re-advising period before the start of semester 2.

Choosing Modules

There are a number of issues to consider in deciding which modules to take:

- You must take all the pre-requisite modules for your intended degree programme.
- You must meet all the relevant University regulations.
- You should consider keeping your degree options open for as long as possible.

The most important consideration is the pre-requisites. To work out which modules you need, look up the requirements for your intended degree programme in the **programme requirements**. This will tell you which 2000-level modules are required for entry to Honours in that subject. Obviously, you will need to take these modules, but not until your second (or possibly third) year. Now look up the 1000-level pre-requisites for these modules; you must take all of these. In most subjects there are two 1000-level pre-requisites for a single Honours programme, and four for a joint Honours programme.

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/subjects/reqs/

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/students/academic/academic-advising/choices/choosing-modules/

There are various other University regulations that you must adhere to in your module choices. These are outlined below in the section **University Regulations**. Check through these when making your choices and whenever you need to make a change to your modules.

Within these restrictions there is usually a reasonable amount of flexibility, and the degree structure is designed to avoid you having to commit yourself definitely to any particular Honours degree right at the beginning of your studies. It is quite common for students to end up taking a different degree from their

original intention. So as far as you can, it is a good idea to keep your options open for as long as possible. This will be affected by your 1000-level module choices; if you choose carefully you can usually keep open the option of taking three different subjects to Honours level. Alternatively, if you feel comfortable with being more restricted then you may wish to take advantage of the opportunity to take a completely different subject—perhaps something that you have never studied before. There are quite a few 1000-level modules that do not require any particular school-level qualifications.

IMPORTANT!

Changing Your Mind

As already described, the degree structure offers a lot of flexibility. There are various opportunities for changing your mind if you become unsatisfied with your current programme:

- **Changing enrolment in particular modules**: you can change any or all of your optional module choices for the current semester at any time up to the start of the second week.

- **Changing degree programme**: you can change your degree programme at any time after your first semester of study, until you enter Honours in a particular subject. The only restriction is, obviously, that you are taking, or will take, the pre-requisite modules for the subject to which you wish to change.

To make any of these changes to your degree programme you must contact your Adviser. In particular, it is **essential** that you do not simply stop attending classes in one module and start attending in another, without gaining permission from your Adviser. If you do so, you will not be registered for the new subject and will not gain credits for either subject.

University Regulations

There are quite a few regulations that affect you. This section outlines the most significant ones; for a more complete list see:

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/policy/search/?f.Category%7Ckeyterm1%5b%5d=Academic+policies

Your Adviser is happy to give advice on any of these regulations. If you are in any doubt about how they affect you, please contact them to discuss it rather than relying on rumour or your friends' interpretations!

Workload and Degree Schedule

The normal workload is 120 credits per academic year, which at 1000-level usually corresponds to 6 modules—though there are some exceptions. Most students enrol for 120 credits each academic year. If you pass all your modules (i.e. achieve at least grade 7 in each) you should be able to complete your Honours degree in 4 years (BSc) or 5 years (MSci).

The minimum workload is 80 credits per academic year (only applicable for those taking 3 years for sub-Honours) and the maximum is 160 credits per academic year (not usually advisable).

If you pass the compulsory modules in first year but narrowly miss your target of 120 credits, you may be able to make this up later and still complete your degree on time. With a more serious shortfall you may need to take an extra year.

Module Requisites

The module catalogue gives a brief description of each module and lists any pre-requisites, co-requisites and anti-requisites. It is available on the web at:

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/subjects/modules/

A **pre-requisite** for a module must be achieved before the module can be taken. This may be a school level qualification, or another university module. In the latter case the pre-requisite module must be passed (rather than just taken).

A **co-requisite** for a module must be taken along with it (unusual).

An **anti-requisite** for a module cannot be taken if that module is taken, and vice-versa, due to significant overlap in the content of the two modules.

Honours Entry

For the requirements to enter Honours in your degree programme, see:

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/policy/academic-policies-student-progression-entry-to-honours/entry-to-honours.pdf

https://info.cs.st-andrews.ac.uk/student-handbook/course-specific/sub-honours.html#Progression

Note that you need at least 80 credits at 2000 level, even though only 60 credits in Computer Science are compulsory.

Reassessment

Assessment is the process by which your performance in a module is assessed and a corresponding grade awarded. The arrangements vary between modules; in many cases the assessment is partly through practical/lab work submitted during the course, and partly through an exam taken at the end of the semester.

If you fail a module, i.e. you receive a grade less than 7, you may have the opportunity to be reassessed. This does not apply if the grade is below 4, and some modules do not offer reassessment. If you fail a reassessment your only options are to enrol in the module again, or to take something else.

Student Records

An electronic record of your academic progress is held online. You have access to this, via MySaint, and you should check it periodically. If you cannot understand any aspect of your record, or you think it contains an error, contact your Adviser.

Your Responsibilities

When you matriculate you sign up to a number of conditions. Note in particular that:

- You undertake to conduct yourself in a suitable manner throughout your studies at St Andrews.
- You must ensure that your personal details held online are kept up to date at all times.
- You must read your University e-mail frequently.

The second is significant in that if any University staff (including your Adviser!) need to contact you they will do so using your personal details online. So if your address or other details change you must update your record immediately. If you know that your address is going to change, in the next semester for example, do not update your record until you actually move there.

The last is significant in that University staff may legitimately assume that any message sent to your University e-mail account will be read within a day or two. Failure to check e-mail and thus missing a warning about something will not be accepted as a valid excuse if you fail to meet University regulations as a result!

Exams

Exams are held at the end of each semester. You have a right of appeal, within 5 working days of the results being published, if you think that you have not been treated fairly:

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/students/rules/appeals/policy/

Note that if there are any special circumstances that you feel may affect your performance in exams, you **must notify the relevant school before you sit the exam**. Failure to do so will mean that such circumstances will not be accepted as the basis for an appeal, unless there are good reasons for the failure.

Exam timetables will be published, along with other exam information, at:

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/exams/

Study Skills

Some students find it difficult to adjust to University study. Compared with school, you will find that the onus is much more on you to organise yourself and monitor your own progress. Some basic tips:

- Make sure that you make full use of the teaching resources provided by each module. This means going to all lectures, tutorials and practicals, even where this is not a formal requirement.

- Most modules make recordings and materials such as lecture slides available online. This is intended to allow you to give full attention to the lecturer rather than spending the whole lecture writing frantically. It's also useful for the odd occasion when you have to miss a lecture for good reason. **It is not intended as a substitute for attending lectures**. The main point of having lectures, rather than just telling you to read a textbook throughout the module, is to provide a human being to explain the material to you! Furthermore, lecture slides often contain just the bare essentials, which are fleshed out during the lecture. **You may find it difficult to pass a module without attending lectures regularly**.

- It can be hard to decide how much time to devote to each module. As a rough guideline, it is assumed that you spend about 40 hours per week on your studies. This includes attending lectures, tutorials and practicals, revising lecture material, working on tutorial questions, and doing background reading. So if you are taking 3 modules in a semester you should be spending around 12-15 hours per week on each module. Obviously some students will need to spend significantly less or more than this.

- If, as many students do, you run into difficulties keeping up with work on a module, you should seek help as soon as possible. In the first instance speak to your tutor or lecturer about issues specific to that module. If you have more general problems with study skills, such as organising your time or completing coursework on time, contact your Adviser or IELLI (contact details below in section **Problems**).

References

At some point you may need someone to provide a personal or academic reference, for example if you are applying for a job or to rent accommodation. Your Adviser is usually happy to provide such references, providing that you ask them for permission before naming them as a referee.

Problems

Most students encounter, at some point, some sort of problem that they find difficult to deal with themselves. There are many avenues for getting help within the University, and if you seek help early most problems can be sorted out successfully.

For academic problems related to a particular module you should first speak to your tutor. If the problem cannot be resolved you should approach, in order, the lecturer, the module/year coordinator, the school's Director of Teaching, and finally the Head of School. For serious issues there are avenues outside the school, starting with the Associate Dean (Students). To contact staff within the school, email them directly, or go to the school office to arrange an appointment.

For non-academic problems you can contact the School's Student Welfare Officers at *student-welfare-cs@st-andrews.ac.uk*, or at the University level, Student Services:

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/study/support/student/

They can offer help on many issues including:

- any routine advice
- difficulties with studies or other matters affecting academic progress
- disability issues
- financial and legal problems
- accommodation problems

A further source of help is the Nightline telephone service, which is staffed anonymously by student volunteers. The number is 01334 462266 or extension 2266, or you can email *nightline@st-andrews.ac.uk*:

https://nightline.st-andrews.ac.uk/

IELLI (the International Education and Lifelong Learning Institute) provides a range of skills development training for students:

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/lifelong-learning/

For advice on any aspect of this problem solving process, or indeed on any other matter concerning your time at St Andrews, contact your Adviser! Many issues will be beyond their expertise, but they can always give you advice on who to contact next and how to approach them.

Contacting Your Adviser

As indicated in several places in these notes, the first step to sorting out difficulties or confusion is often to contact your Adviser. There are several ways to do this:

- Call at their office, which for most people is in the Jack Cole Computer Science building.
- Ask staff in the School Office to make an appointment with them.
- Email them at the email address listed for your Adviser in MySaint.

If in doubt about whether to contact them with a problem or question, please feel free to do so!