Databases Feedback

You know your coursework mark (emailed). You know your overall course mark. So work out your exam mark. (=total mark - 0.2*coursework average)

79 students attended the exam

For the exam element only, the average was 54.2%
4 students got <30%
14 students got 30->39%
13 students got 40->49%
22 students got 50-59%
11 students got 60-69%
15 students got 70-100%

For the combined coursework and exam for those 79 students that attended the exam, the average was 58.9%
1 student got <30%
5 students got 30->39%
19 students got 40->49%
17 students got 50-59%
17 students got 60-69%
20 students got 70-100%

Lesson 1: Do the coursework. The coursework uplifts many students, helping 3 students get above a tolerable fail rather than an outright fail, and 12 students to get a pass rather than a tolerable fail.

Lesson 2: Study. You should spend at least 50 hours revising for this module (we allocate at least 70 hours for revision for this module). I don’t believe some students (e.g. the 31 that got less than 50% in the exam) studied for more than 10 hours on this module.

How to study: Go to lectures. Get a pen and paper out at the start of the lecture. Make at least 1 page of A4 notes during the lecture to remind yourself of the topic. Highlight items I stress. Make notes about problems previous years’ students had and how to avoid them. Read the section of notes covered after the lecture (and preferably before). Ask a question if you don’t understand. Read the textbook or online material for topics you find difficult. If a friend does the work for you, you will not benefit.

Revising: You should now be in a good position – a whole set of notes and 20+ pages of A4 notes made at the time of the lecture and more importantly when you understood the lecture. Now spend a minimum of 40 hours reading and rereading your notes. Memorise as much as possible. Practise examples and check your answers. Spend at least 10 hours trying past exams. If you don’t do ALL of these techniques, don’t expect more than 50%. i.e. revision for exams IS LIKE A FULL TIME JOB.

Lesson 3. Answering exam questions. Students who fail all had at least one thing in common. They could not answer all of a question. Straight away many of these students lost 12% plus because they left off at least a 6 mark question. (This demonstrates to me that they did not spend more than 10 hours revising). Put the work in to answering the question.
If its worth 6 marks – spend 12 minutes constructing and writing an answer. This leaves plenty of time to concentrate your effort in your weaker areas and reread your paper.

Answer the question. You should know how to define a term, name a term from a definition, give a generalisation of a term and give a specific example of a term (e.g. transitive dependency – some students wrote it is a dependency that is transitive – this may seem clever/funny, but it attracts zero marks, and loses you 6% because it demonstrates you don’t have a clue [again reinforcing the less than 10 hours revision]).

4th Normal form – do you remember the lecture where I said 50% of students leave that question out, 25% get it wrong (usually by writing something about BCNF), and only 25% get a reasonable attempt that can get some marks? Also do you remember I asked you all if you thought you could do better (more than 75% of the cohort agreed)? Also do you remember it occurred in the revision lecture? Well, only around 25% of students were able to answer that question in a reasonable way (so most students attempting that question lost 12%). If you had made your own notes in that lecture (and the revision lecture), spent 3 hours revising and practising it (I gave 20 lectures, so spend 3 hours revision on each lecture topic), then you would be able to get 12% on that one question.

Other problems I pointed out that occurred in the exam were – wrong notation for ER diagrams (particularly leaving off relations or using the incorrect symbols), writing just a few sentences for a large amount of marks (the PHP etc question for 7 marks was a particular one for this), B-Trees gave many a problem, and basic thing such as the earlier normal forms – second and third.

Lesson 4. Attend lectures. There is a high correlation between attendance and exam result. This is why we stress lecture attendance. If you attend and then do other things like talk, use your computer/smartphone/tablet, you will not benefit – there is no magic lecture material absorption just by being there – attending to write your name on the attendance list is just not recognising that we are trying to help you. Attendance lists and feedback on your attendance is to help you take responsibility for your own study, to help you self-evaluate, perhaps this has not been communicated to you in a way you understand. Guess what – this is what any good employer will want from good employees.

Lesson 5. Self-directed learning. Speak to employers (IBM are coming here on Thursday 17th March). Ask them what skills they most want. Apart from technical skills, they most want staff that can self-motivate and self-study. Start now. Get used to it. Demonstrate it as your strength, and you will go a long way. Take an internship. Take a summer vacation job (in the IT industry). Don’t sit in lectures like a fish. Participate, find out what active learning is. Find out your best route to learning and understanding your subject. Achieve your potential – get great marks in all your courses.