1. Introduction and welcome

Welcome messages from UCL’s President and Provost and the Computer Science Head of Department, information about the scope and purpose of the Student Handbook, and general advice about changes to information through the year.

1.1. Provost's welcome

Dear students,

To those of you who are returning, welcome back. To those of you who are new, congratulations for choosing UCL as your university.

Whatever your degree programme, your UCL education will take you deep into your chosen field and give you its broader context in our rich multidisciplinary academic culture. It will help you develop your skills and your networks and prepare you for your future.

We want you to learn how to think, not what to think, through UCL’s research-based approach to education. Our students are our partners and contributors, working alongside world-leading academic staff to pursue excellence, break boundaries and make an impact on global challenges.

As we embark on the next academic year, UCL will make sure that the restrictions and negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021 do not prevent your full engagement with teaching and learning and student life. We will make sure that as a student you connect well with people (your peers, teachers, researchers, and other UCL communities), with knowledge and research, and with the wider world. We will deliver this unique Connected Learning approach through enhanced online resources and remote teaching, as well as through face-to-face teaching on campus.

I warmly encourage you to shape your journey at UCL. Take our university-wide surveys and make your voice heard. Work in partnership with academics to make your programme of study even better.

UCL is a community of great minds. You are a valuable member of that community. I hope you will take every opportunity to shape your time with us, so that your experience is the best possible.

Dr Michael Spence
UCL President and Provost

You can find the latest UCL information on the Coronavirus at: www.ucl.ac.uk/coronavirus.
1.2. Head of Department’s welcome

Welcome to UCL’s Department of Computer Science.

Almost exactly thirty years ago, I joined the Department of Computer Science; the world and the department were different places back then (there was no web, no WiFi and nobody I knew had a mobile phone). I joined as a new PhD graduate to work on networked multimedia – video conferencing and we contributed to the early development of that area in the UK. Who knew at that point that the technology I had been working on would play such a significant role in society during a pandemic. Over the last 18 months, like businesses and universities the world over, we have embraced technology developed by computer scientists to carry on – in our case making the biggest transformation to the way that university education has been delivered since its inception in medieval times.

This year will be different again, with the pandemic still underway but a return to some face-to-face teaching for some of our students (but not all, at least in term 1). Like last year, we will all have to adapt to the new situation we face, seeking to retain the best of what we have developed over the last year, fusing that with a more traditional approach we all still believe has to be at the heart of university education. Like last year, we value the student voice – last year’s course reps did a stellar job, working with academics and professional services staff to shape what we do and we expect more of the same this year.

As I said last year, there are some constants: this is a department that is staffed by world leading researchers, committed teachers and dedicated professional services staff, and populated by some of the best students the world has to offer. Our graduates are still doing well, are still working in some of the world’s leading companies, or are starting their own, or are engaged in PhD studies. Not only did COVID-19 not change any of that, it increased the demand for the skills our students have to offer. Companies have realised that there are technological alternatives to traditional in-person ways of working and working people have realised that technology provides alternatives to living close to their place of employment and an inevitable daily commute.

It remains an exciting time for computer science – the discipline is strong and is growing in exciting directions, often in collaboration with other disciplines: AI and data are central to the future of medicine; robots will form an important part of the lives of your children or grandchildren; quantum technologies may revolutionise computing in future. I could go on. Since the 1950s our subject has been known for constancy of change and it is part of the DNA of computer scientists to embrace, adapt to, and drive that change. It will continue to shape not just the future of university education and research, but the future of society.

So, whatever this year may bring, throw yourselves into it – think about what you are learning and what you can do with that. Be curious. Challenge received wisdom. Learn from others and learn the value of what others know. Think about the impact of technology on society. In a few short years, the future of society will be in your hands and this is your opportunity to prepare to take on that responsibility.

Prof Steve Hailes  
Head of Department

1.3. Teaching and Learning Team welcome

A warm welcome to our new students and welcome back to our returning students.
We are very excited to have you with us this year and we're looking forward to supporting you through your time with us. We hope this handbook will serve as a useful companion on your academic journey: it sets out key contacts in the department, and the wide array of academic, pastoral, and welfare support options available to you as a UCL student. It also includes the broad framework of rules and regulations that govern our degrees.

In addition to the handbook, your programme has a dedicated member of the Teaching and Learning Team who can advise you on a whole host of issues and can connect you with the best source of support. You will meet your Teaching and Learning Administrator online during induction week, and you can find their details on the Teaching and Learning contact page.

We will be introducing a Computer Science Student Intranet (after reading week of term one), which will become a live space where you'll be able to connect with news, events, and current goings on around the department and faculty. The intranet will grow and evolve as we better understand your needs, and we will work with you through your Student Representatives to get your input and make this a useful resource for all our students.

You can get in touch with us via email, drop-in to one of our regular online sessions, or make an appointment for a face-to-face chat. However you choose to reach out, the team is here to support you throughout your time with us.

Best wishes for the year ahead.

Lewis Griffin & Jo Stiles
Departmental Tutor, Teaching & Learning Manager

1.4. About the Student Handbook

The Computer Science Student Handbook for is intended to provide you with key information regarding the Department of Computer Science and its taught degree programmes. It includes details of academic requirements, notification and explanation of codes, regulations, policies and procedures, as well as the other aspects of University life – sources of help and support, student representation, social opportunities, and facilities and resources available. Additional programme-specific information is detailed in the Programme Summary, which relates specifically to your year of entry.

Where information is available via UCL Students webpages or in the Academic Manual, which you should familiarise yourself with, this has been summarised but not replicated in full. Instead, links are given to the relevant materials so that you can be sure you are accessing the most up to date information.

You should be aware that in some cases departmental and faculty rules override the default rules specified in the Academic Manual. If you take modules owned by other departments, you should ensure to refer to the Handbook, or equivalent, for those departments.

1.5. Possible changes to information due to Covid-19

UCL will do all it can to support you during the on-going Covid-19 pandemic and please be assured that your safety is our top priority. However, we would ask you to please be aware that the information and advice provided in this Handbook, university web pages, and Moodle pages may be subject to change.
In order for us to be as agile and responsive to your needs as possible, the most current information on services affected by Covid-19 is available on the UCL website and can be accessed from the main Students’ webpages, which include frequently asked questions (FAQs) that may help you with any queries that you may have:

- UCL Students webpages

Advice and guidance on the support available to you can also be found on the Student Support and Wellbeing webpages:

- Support During Covid-19 Outbreak

When the campus is open, you can also access support from the Student Enquiries Centre, though please note that this may need to physically close depending on circumstances:

- Student Enquiries Centre

You can also log a query with UCL’s new online enquiries system and self-help centre, askUCL, which is always open:

- askUCL

And the CS Teaching & Learning Team, your Personal Tutor, and our teaching staff are also here to assist you with any queries you might have:

- Staff relating to programmes and modules

If you are ever unsure as to where to direct a query, your Programme Administrator will be able to help you find the best source of support and guidance. You can contact them directly or come to one of the departments regular drop-ins.