Part I: Describe

Workshop Title: Are they “getting it?”: Informal progress reports in the classroom
Date: 10/28/2009
Location: Caldwell M-8 (conference room)
Attendance: 10 – 15 people
Presenter: Dr. Deanna Dannels

Purpose Statement and General Overview:
The goal of this workshop was to introduce different approaches for conducting informal progress reports. The workshop was limited in scope in that it only focused on only reporting that is done in class and that has no direct impact on the student’s grade.

The workshop itself was very brief lasting less than an hour so unfortunately not that much material was covered. Most of the workshop was spent having the attendees participate in active learning tasks. I’ve broken down the workshop into three distinct sections with two of sections requiring participation from the attendees.

First, we were asked to discuss with a partner a time when we tried to incorporate progress reports. Specifically, we were to focus on what we thought could have been done better for those reports and why we didn’t get the ideal results. Both my partner and I had not done informal progress reports, so we discussed the problems we had administering more formal reports. The outcome from our group was that we found it difficult to explain to students that progress reports are to evaluate their progress and not the final product. We felt that when we gave a student positive feedback about their progress that they felt their work was complete.

After discussing our personal experiences in small groups we were brought back together as a larger group where we shared some of our experiences with the presenter. A few of the other shortcomings are found in the list below…

1. Progress reports lack context (students don’t see the big picture)
2. Professor’s find it difficult to leave significant feedback for students
3. Hard to clearly define the scope of the progress report

The next portion of the workshop was spent with the instructor giving examples of different approaches to giving informal progress reports. I’ll briefly highlight two of the examples that were given.

2 Minute Updates: A two-minute update is when students are given only 2 minutes to share the progress of their assignment with the entire class. The instructor encouraged doing these updates weekly with the content of the update focusing on what they have done, what they are working on, and what resources might they need.
**Project Hot Seat:** A seat is placed in the front of the room and any student is welcome to sit in the chair and ask for general advice on their project or even specific questions. The primary feedback is to come from the other students. The teacher can step in when needed, but is encouraged to let the other students participate as much as possible.

The final portion of the workshop was another active learning task. The instructor used this time to have the participants return to their groups and discuss how they could apply one or more of these techniques to their classrooms. Our group came up with some interesting ideas, which I’ll share more about in the analysis section.

**Part II: Analyze**

My choice of this workshop was based on two factors. First, the timing fit my hectic scheduling. The second factor was though I appreciated progress reports as a student, but had rarely thought to incorporate them in my classes. My goal was to go and get a better understanding of how others were able to successfully incorporate it into their curriculum. I left achieving my goal, but not in the same way that I expected to when I arrived.

My past experience had been in giving formal progress reports (e.g. milestones of a larger project) so when reading the workshop description I didn’t really even pay attention to the “informal” portion of the title. I wasn’t the only one to do so as evidenced by the other participants responses to the first active learning activity, where almost all the responses were about formalized progress reports. It was after that exercise that the instructor changed my perspective and opened me up to a new teaching tool, the informal and ungraded progress report. The point of these reports was not for evaluating the students, but rather as a tool to enhance their learning.

The remainder of the workshop was spent highlighting different examples of how to conduct an informal progress report. I found the 2 minute update example to be the most relevant to me. As a computer science professor it is not only an effective way to get progress from the student, but it also teaches them skills they will need for the workplace. Many engineering companies regularly ask their employees to give brief updates of their current status to their managers on a weekly basis. Having the same situation in the classroom gives students the opportunity to share their progress in a manner consistent with what they will need to do in industry.

I plan on incorporating two of the examples given in an upcoming computer science class. As part of a semester long project I will have teams give bi-weekly two-minute updates. I would also like to incorporate an online tool where students can ask questions, which I will then answer in class. While this tool would be similar to a forum, the response would be done in person and not online allowing for a more personal and interactive answer.

In conclusion there are two things that I would like to follow up with. First, I would like to talk with other computer science faculty and see what other forms of progress reports
they have found to be successful for students in our field. The second item that I would like to investigate is an online tool (http://moderator.appspot.com) that can be used to have students anonymously submit and prioritize topics they want discussed in class.