



Submission of Topic of Broad Academic Interest: Central Exam Database

Students largely view exam databases as a highly effective learning tool that contribute to greater understanding of course subject materials. Further, having access to past exams help students feel more prepared for their finals, leading to lower levels of stress and contributing to better mental health and well being. An exam database also helps to ensure equal access to exam materials for all students enrolled in a course, leading to more consistent grade distributions. While various forms of exam databases exist at UBC, their disjointed nature makes it difficult for students to effectively use, and a desire for a central exam database exists. The AMS recently passed a motion supporting the creation of a UBC exam database as a priority for students. Exam databases have been implemented at several prominent institutions, including nationally at Queen's and McGill universities, to great popular support from students. As different academic units at UBC handle final exams and exam databases in different ways, we feel that this topic merits a discussion at Senate to frame future dialogue and assist in determining the direction of a possible university policy on this issue. Some questions that we believe should be discussed include:

1. Does the Senate feel that UBC should consider creating a central exam database?
- If yes,
2. Should the database contain past exams and solution keys, or only past examinations?
 3. Should the database be accessible to those outside the university?
 4. Should there be an opt-in or opt-out policy regarding the posting of past examinations?
 5. Should the database only host exams for a certain length of time?
 6. Where should the exams be hosted?

Supplemental Reading: Exam Database Background Information

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March 7, 2011

Central Exam Databases – Background Information

Prepared by the AMS VP Academic Office

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1 The UBC Situation

1.1 University Wide

UBC does not have a university wide central exam database, and any search on a ubc.ca website refers one to the AMS operated *AMS Exam Database*. No policy on a central exam database currently exists.

1.2 AMS Exam Database

While designed to be comprehensive, this database contains a total of two subjects, math and physics, and has not been updated since 2008. It is currently maintained on UBC's cIRcle Information Repository. The *AMS Exam Database* has a number of issues that prevent it from acting as a comprehensive exam database. A number of these were identified and communicated to the AMS by Trevor Smith, cIRcle Student Assistant. These include technical issues, administrative issues, and property rights issues, as outlined below.

Technical Issues:

- cIRcle is not willing to continue hosting the database due to conflicts with its core function as a permanent document repository, and concerns over infringing the intellectual property rights of the exam owners.
- The current host does not contain an effective search function, and is not user-friendly.

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Administrative Issues

- Maintenance of the database currently falls to the AMS Tutoring Office. Due to budget limitations, this office has been unable to invest the considerable human capital required to methodically pursue exam release and uploading to the database.
- Appropriate communication channels to faculty to facilitate exam release are lacking.

Property Rights Issues

- Individual faculty members own the intellectual property rights to exams. Release and upload is subject to the consent and conditions of each faculty member.

1.3 Decentralised Initiatives

While there is no centralised database, some smaller units within UBC provide limited exam databases. The Math Department and the Faculty of Law both maintain online databases by encouraging professors to submit their past exams for student use. Both databases are heavily stocked, with most courses represented.

The Math Department notes that this high exam release rate has not been without effort, and was the result of a sustained multi-year encouragement campaign by departmental staff. In addition to the online exam database, the department collaborates with the Math Club to offer a selection of past exams, including answer guides, to raise revenue for the Club.

2 Online Databases at Other Universities

2.1 Queens' Exam Bank

2.1.1 Services Offered

The Exam Bank is a comprehensive online database of all exams taken at Queens', and is hosted on the Queens' University Library website. Answers are not posted. Exams are maintained in PDF format, and are only accessible to those with a Queens' University account login.

2.1.2 Development

The Exam Bank was initially a project of the student society in 1999 that subsequently received support from the Registrar and Queen's University Library. Library and Registrar staff acted as project coordinators during the implementation stages, and student society labour input was phased out as exams became submitted in electronic form, rather than as physical documents.

2.2 McGill University eExams

2.2.1 Services Offered

McGill provides access to five years of final exams for the Faculties of Arts, Science, Engineering, Agriculture & Environmental Sciences, and Education in PDF format on the Library website. A McGill account login is required to access the database. While professors are not obligated to release their exams, the database is still relatively comprehensive.

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2.3 University of Auckland Exam Base

2.3.1 Services Offered

The online exam database was created in 2001 as an initiative of the University of Auckland Library to improve access to the exam collection. The University previously maintained a comprehensive physical collection. Each exam is provided to the Library in PDF format, and exams are only available for access to those with a University of Auckland account login. Exams are available online before the start of the following academic semester. Withholding of exams or sections of exams may occur at the request of the professor, but an argument must be submitted to the Exam Office in order to do so.

2.4 University of Toronto Engineering Society Skule Database

2.4.1 Services Offered

The Engineering Society maintains a database of past Faculty of Applied Science exams, with additional features that support the upload of other course-related study materials and student course evaluations. The database has the dual purpose of aiding exam preparation and offering a student centric impression of courses for the purpose of informing students' elective choices. Access does not require a login, and is therefore not limited to University of Toronto students.

2.4.2 Development

The Engineering Society and the Faculty of Applied Science offer this service in partnership, with the online database growing out of a physical repository held by the Faculty in 2005. The Faculty requires all professors to submit exams to the Registrar's Office. The exams are then passed on to the Engineering Society for upload to their database, with costs split evenly.

3 Contacts Made

Joshua Abaki, McGill University Student Society Vice-President University Affairs

Yi-Wei Ang, University of Toronto Engineering Society Vice-President Academic

Eric Johnston, University of Auckland Short Loan Library Assistant

Mar Ness, UBC Math Department Office Manager

Kieran Slobodin, Queens' AMS Academic Affairs Commissioner

Trevor Smith, UBC cIRcle Information Repository Student Assistant

Elim Wong, UBC Law Library Reference Librarian

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