

Informatics Student Course Feedback 2017/18

<http://www.inf.ed.ac.uk/teaching/surveys/2017-18>

This report contains feedback from students about a course taught in the School of Informatics during the 2017/18 academic year, in response to the following questions:

- What would you say to students interested in taking this course?
- What did you find most valuable about the course?
- What improvements, if any, would you make to the course?
- Please add any other comments you have about workshops and tutors

Each course organiser receives this report as well as statistics on multiple-choice responses. All these reports, together with student feedback about individual members of teaching staff, are collected and sent to the Director of Learning and Teaching.

Please note that these are personal responses from individual students: some courses only have a few responses and a small sample can be unrepresentative.

Stereotyping and bias, especially unconscious bias, is a serious concern in any survey gathering personal responses. All students received the rubric below before completing the surveys, and you can read a brief introduction to issues of unconscious bias on the university web pages at <http://edin.ac/2iypZBv>

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Rubric given to all students taking the end-of-course feedback survey

We value your opinions on the courses you take here at the University, as they allow us to shape future delivery and development. We welcome constructive comments about your courses, whether positive or negative, and ask you to give details about any issues in order to help the course organiser to understand and address them.

We encourage you to be aware of the potential for bias in the completion of these questionnaires, so we have developed resources which may be helpful to you:

- Equality, Diversity and Unconscious Bias (<http://edin.ac/2iypZBv>)

You also have a responsibility to provide feedback in a manner which does not breach the University's Dignity and Respect Policy:

- University of Edinburgh Dignity and Respect Policy (<http://edin.ac/1Cq0VZY>)

The results of the questionnaires will never be analysed in a way that seeks to identify individual students from their responses. However, should you wish to remain anonymous, please do not identify yourself in your answers to the survey questionnaire implicitly or explicitly.

Comments Report

What advice would you give to a student taking this course in future?

- Attend all the lectures as they are very informative.
- Be prepared to be intellectually challenged and do the readings before each lecture otherwise you will understand only half of it.
- Computer security is something that every CS/AI/SE student should at least have some basic understanding of. Expect to spend lots of time on the assignments.
- It is not an easy course. It is important to do the reading.
- It will be challenging but rewarding, prepare to work hard and feel proud at the end.
- It's a challenging course.
- It's a fun and good course, but be prepared to study a lot of cryptography and discrete.
- It's a lot of work so be prepared. If you did not enjoy INF2C - Computer Systems in second year, you are unlikely to enjoy a large chunk of this course as well. It is much lower level than what you are used to.
Also, take Computer Communications and Networking first.
- Just take it you will not regret it. It is not only an engaging and interesting course it will also improve the understanding of your own online security and allow you to improve it. Such a worthwhile subject because of all the improvement it will bring into your personal life alone
- Prepare to work on your own and exchange ideas with fellow students.
- Quite challenging but really fun, would recommend
- Start early with the coursework. Easy looking tasks can consume hours to figure out the last detail which is missing to solve the task. Take notes during crypto. Get / rent the textbook from the library! It seems to pair really well with the course.
- Try to finish all of the courseworks, no matter its score will be concerned.

Comments Report

What did you find most valuable about the course?

- All the practice we what in concepts both during the tutorials and the coursework
- By far the best thing about this course was Kami. Big thumbs up.
- Coursework 1 about network security introduced a couple of useful tools for managing networks etc., which I found quite useful. Courseworks and labs had a lot of interesting challenges
- Courseworks, and continual narrative of importance of security (with case studies along the way)
- Current examples of security breaches were helpful in connecting the course content to real world applications. The coursework was very interesting, and I learned a lot from doing the coursework
- I learned the most from the assignments
- It is a very fascinating subject and I feel like a better computer user knowing everything that we have studied in this course. This should be a mandatory course for all Computer Scientists.
- Kami was really enthusiastic and she gave good examples during the lectures.
- Learning about protocols and exploits was incredibly fun and informative.
- Lots of interesting content in the lectures, particularly liked seeing how the topics linked into recent incidents in the news. Coursework exercises were interesting.
- Presenting the real-world examples of security issues -- students could clearly see the aim of learning all of this.
- Assignments were useful and provided hands-on experience, which I really appreciate.
- The breadth of topics within security that it covered
- The lectures are good.
- The recording of the lectures.
The informative slides to refer back to.
The layout of the coursework.
- The teachers were ready to answer any additional questions and spent a large amount of time making sure we understood the answers given, which was highly appreciated and made me feel like they really cared about our knowledge of the material
- To carry out exploits etc. by ourselves. This gives a better understanding of how they work in detail.
- Tutorials were very good.
- The content of this course is satisfying because it contains knowledge in different domains.
- The courseworks were very valuable. Though they can take a long time to do, they were very informative on the protocols and attacks we learnt in the course.

Comments Report

What improvements, if any, would you make to the course?

- Better preparation for the lectures, especially for the demos
- Changing between topics was really confusing and messy for me -- at first I saw no clear structure in the course.
- I understand that in this course we are required to work out the solutions on our own, but I feel that sometimes we were given too little hints. Fellow students and I were spending sometimes hours on figuring out the solution because we had no guidance.
- Coursework 3 was very badly written. I had to dig into last year's course webpage to find the previous version of the coursework sheet, as this year's was VERY modestly explained, to the point it was hard to understand what you're expected to do. I don't think the lectures explained the topics relevant to that coursework well enough. Also, one of the lecturers was, for some reason, very reluctant to post lecture recordings, even though video recording of lectures was one of the things EUSA negotiated to be made available to students university-wide, and the lecturer admitted to having recorded them. I don't find the lecturer's explanation that if you showed up to the lecture, you don't need the recordings at all. With the course running in semester 1 and the exam in April/May, it would be quite helpful indeed to be able to go back to such recordings, especially that themes like cryptography were very often explained/elaborated on the blackboard (which of course wasn't recorded).
- Coursework could have been worth more credit as, especially for the second one, they took a lot of work.
- Have the coursework come out on the previously state time. It became very hard to manage all deadlines when you didn't know when it would be released and due. Also put all lecture recordings online. Not because I didn't attend lectures but because of clashes with joint degree subject and so that we can work through stuff at our own pace, as sometimes I found the lectures went too fast but I'm aware this is sometime due to the lack of background knowledge on my part and not something the lecturer is doing.
- I felt like I could "get by" through the course without studying crypto as the lectures went by, given that there was less continual assessment on it. I'm going to be retroactively studying this section a lot more in comparison to the rest of the course content.
- It would be lovely to have labs in the same format as the assignments.
- Less cryptography and more user security
- More hints in the coursework document or more support in the form of open lab/question sessions with a tutor or similar things.
- More labs to undergo some exploits, instead of the coursework asking you to know how to use tools you really haven't ever used.
- More labs would have been helpful for the assignments.
- The courseworks material either wasn't covered in lectures or was extremely vague. I understand the importance of researching things ourselves however I think some stronger starting points would have been helpful.
- The first coursework was a bit more organised than the second one. There was nobody to ask for help with the second coursework. We had a slack group but no instructor to answer our questions. A piazza page would have been useful. I would have liked to have the course lecture slides posted earlier than on the day of the lecture. I would have preferred to have the tutorials posted earlier as well. The second coursework was kind of difficult. Myrto's demos during the lectures were useful, but some of them were too easy and she could have spent the time on something else. Although we were shown demos of buffer overflow, some written examples for it with have been really helpful for the coursework. Kami went sometimes a bit too fast through the explanation.
- The lectures were recorded but not posted online for the students to access. Any lecture missed then caused an immense gap in my knowledge, especially as the material taught was not easy by any measure. I understand that attendance is important, however illnesses, emergencies and other valid reasons can make it impossible or even worse - pointless (having my glasses in repair for over a week meant that even though I attended the lectures I had a very hard time following any of them since I was unable to see what the teacher was writing or pointing at). The release of the coursework was late which led to the deadline clashing with other major coursework deadlines. This was not an issue with only this course but many others this semester which led to courseworks being due in week 11 and heavily harming any final year student's ability to work on their projects. Also, Computer Communications and Networking should be a prerequisite. Or at least recommended prerequisite.
- There is too much content and crypto is very hard. Videos posted online would be helpful.
- More information on the coursework sheets.

Comments Report

Please add any other comments you have about workshops and tutors

- I love how varied tutorials were! The last couple of weeks on web security felt a bit demotivating though (not sure how this would be improved - just felt like I wouldn't gain much from it).
- I loved the tutorials on cryptography with Myrto! Also the lectures of Myrto and Kami were great, the interactive style and their passion helped to stay attentive and arouse interest.
- The tutorials were excellent though the room assignment was not ideal and changed without a convenient way of checking this.
- They were very useful but it would have been nice with more labs.
- Tutorials were very informative, the tutor was attentive and willing to help. The practical exercises were challenging and fun.
- Tutors would sometimes not know how to explain the subject material very well, specifically some of the protocols.