

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?

- Begin assignments as soon as you get them, and following recommended reading is helpful for choosing a subject for the final report.
- Do not take this course unless you have a very solid mathematical background. Virtually no help will be provided by the lecturers to students with a neuroscience/humanities background.
- Do not underestimate the assignments - they take really long time to complete. But overall it's worth the struggle - the material covered is extremely interesting.
- Don't freak out when the first assignment comes through, it is challenging but worth the effort.
- Don't take it unless you love that field and you're sure about it.
- If you are really interested in the subject, this is a great course! You will learn a lot if you dedicate a lot of time to the assignments because they require you to think for yourself.
- Interesting course, but assignments are very demanding.
- Start the assignments early and get ready to read a lot of new, interesting and challenging papers.
- The topics that the course covers are really interest, a complete journey to many interesting areas of cognitive neurosciences. However, I was *highly* disappointed with what I could learn during the course, because despite the breath being huge, the depth at which each topic is covered is too shallow and I could not get a good understanding of any of the subjects because everything was too fast and not thoroughly covered
The assignments where quite challenging and through them I was able to learn a lot. However, through lectures and other resources to be honest the learning outcome is deficient.
- Unless you are really interested in this subject, you should look elsewhere
- Work hard on the assignments. Read along with recommended reading if possible

Comments Report

What did you find most valuable about the course?

- A broad overview of the field with key areas of research clearly highlighted
- Encourages us to think critically about any results we see and to look a bit more closely at the theory behind the research. Everything was grounded in applications which made learning methods so much easier and more interesting.
- Instead of coding something correctly, the course requires us to think more about how and we get the results and analyse them.
- The course introduced computational cognitive neuroscience which I think was interesting.
- The large array of topics covered in it, which showed you a overview of the fields and the advances of the last 10 years (this is an advantage, but at the end it is so broad that it becomes a *huge* disadvantage of this course)
- The lectures and how the assignments provide a practical view of the theoretical content explained in class.
- The lectures were well organised and interesting.
- The material covered is great in scope and the way it was presented. Assignments were challenging (in a good way) and helpful for understanding the course material.
- The subject was extremely interesting to me and Dr Series was happy to answer any questions that I had whether or not they related to the course content or not.
- Very interesting lectures that cover a wide range of topics and some important theories in great depth. The assignments are very challenging and you learn a lot.

Comments Report

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

- A few pointers to reading material that would make assignments more understandable
- Almost no feedback was provided on coursework, and many students had to personally ask for clarifications about marks and feedback. Assignments often assume knowledge that goes well beyond what is explained in class, making the gap between what is covered in lectures and what is asked in the assignments unnecessarily wide.
- Maybe more mathematical details would be better
- None, it was probably my most interesting course
- The final assignment is not clear in what it wants.
- The labs could be more useful for the assignments and the deadlines for the assignments were too close to other course's deadlines. Maybe switch from Matlab to Python/R for the coding parts.
- The lectures are not related at all to the content of the labs or assignments. The lab assistant was never very helpful and the assignments were too much work. This should have been a 15 or 20 credit course instead of just 10.
- The requirements in the course description do not match the actual requirement. I withdrew from the course as the difference in description and reality was much bigger than in any other course.
- The room allocation chaos (which is more of an organisational thing) was really disturbing (there were few occasions many of us had to sit on the floor). Also, recording of the lectures would have been great. And the feedback on the second assignment was really confusing - it contradicts the suggestions made by Sam via email (regarding the structure and presentation), and has no indication of why exactly the marks were taken out. I feel like too much focus was given to the presentation/formatting despite the fact that it was not required to be a report (in contrast to the first assignment that required a report-like style). Also, despite the course being 10 credits, the assignments seem to take a good share of time (they are interesting and useful, but might be worth giving them more credits, or making course 20 credits itself). Also not sure why Sam has read the same lecture twice :)
- The topics of the course are simply fascinating, however:
 1. There are too many topics to cover, so many, that at the end none of them end up being covered in good way. I would suggest to narrow the scope of the course, and rather give each topic a bit more time and much more depth, for students to truly understand this topics
 2. The lecturer might be an excellent researcher, however, the lectures where to simple, shallow, and fast. I understand that at MSc level it is a twofold learning, I must dedicate a lot of independent time to read and research my interest, BUT I also expect the lecturer to put in effort in the lectures and thoroughly guide and explain the topics. This was not the case with this course. The lecturer did effectively introduce the topics but none of them was covered in a thorough way .
- The workload for a 10 credit module seemed like a lot especially for assignment 1.
- The workload was well above any other of my 10 credit courses, I would increase the number of credits this counts for - it's more like 15/20
- Update the prereqs! This course is maths-heavy and the current prereqs do not really reflect that. Other courses are more specific and adequate about their prereqs. Especially the first assignment was difficult, it was the one I spent most time on during this semester. I learnt a lot from it, but there wasn't really time to work on the labs anymore. Perhaps the course should be worth 20 credits.

Comments Report

Please add any other comments you have about workshops and tutors

- For labs I found the tutor didn't seem to have looked at the material in advance sometimes so couldn't offer specific help when I got stuck
- I asked the tutor about the first assignment and he said "it's supposed to be hard" and then gave no further information.
- I feel like labs were confusing and lacking any support (it was more like read the task, try to guess what was asked, google methods and see if they work). I feel like a better lab book/explanation/helper code would have been beneficial. We did not get much help from our lab assistant either.
- Really appreciated the follow up notes from the labs
- The assignments were so time consuming that there was basically no time left for the labs.
- The labs were really interesting. But they were so long that even if one dedicated extra time to them outside lab sessions, they were almost impossible to complete (time wise).
It was really useful that the lecturer provided the solutions, good point!
- They weren't incentivised so I didn't do them :(