

# 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 the lectures - the slides are great but the lecturer gives very good supplementary explanations.
- Definitely start early on all the courseworks, they ALL take longer than you may initially estimate. Also plan your time wisely, you can spend an infinite amount of time on the courseworks if you were to want to, but that's not necessary. It's not worth letting other courses come second when it most likely won't increase your grade in this course by much.
- I had some previous experience with TF and keras that helped me to focus in the actual experiments and not in solving code issues.
- If you are in the machine learning path, you definitely have to take this class!
- Only take this course if you're ready for some really really tough learning experience.
- Pick something nice for the group project and you'll have a good time. Also install conda with Intel's MKL libraries for non-potato speed when training neural nets.
- Start work on the assignments as early as possible. It will take a while to get your code working, and then you still need plenty of time to run the experiments.
- Start working on assignments as soon as possible. Master python before taking the course, invest in a good GPU.
- This is more like a 30 unit course (15 units per semester) - it is a lot of work but worth it in the end I think.
- To make sure they really read the description, and maybe match all the criteria, because is a very demanding course.
- Useful course.
- Very good course but take it only if you're ready to work hard.
- be prepared for a very different 2nd semester with groupwork
- know how to code

## Comments Report

What did you find most valuable about the course?

- Choosing your own topic for the second part of the course. Allows you to do something you like (RL for me!).
- Got a lot of practical experience with Deep Learning
- I learned a lot, like way more than any ML course so far and I had to read a lot of papers on a lot very new concepts to be able to keep up with the tasks of the course. It has been a great lesson. The Piazza forum was great and people wanted to help you, but at least in the second semester it was mostly do it on your own.
- I really learned a lot. This course requires far more work than any other course and the weeks before the deadlines are very stressful, but it is incredibly instructive, both in terms of deep learning and research skills (organisation, writing...). Instructors were very responsive and made themselves available.
- Learnt about research methodology and some practical problems and hacks around them
- Practice part
- Report writing was a very nice practice before dissertation writing.
- Semester 1 Labs and Courseworks.  
I learned a lot by implementing ML algorithms in numpy and running experiments on that code.
- Teamwork at the program
- The assignments were really helpful
- The exploration of different machine learning methods
- The hands-on approach was great. I now have some working code I can start from for other projects. The tutors were very helpful on Piazza.
- The lab material was very detailed, and the tutors/professor were always available for questions.
- The project in the second semester where we got to explore our own research questions, it was incredibly fun to do a 'proper' project and investigate a topic/dataset of our choice.
- The weekly labs/notebooks were very detailed and helpful.
- This course focus on the practical part instead of the doll theories.
- This is the one course where machine learning skills are applied in practice, in relation to the rest which build up theoretical foundations.
- coursework 3 and 4, also implementing a CNN, now I understand cnns

## Comments Report

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

- Announce that the second semester is a group project earlier. It was tough finding people with similar interests in less than a week. Fix GPU clusters... seriously. We didn't even try to use them.
- Assignments 3 and 4's deadlines were too close in time, the goal of assignment 3 was to prepare a baseline a draw a plan for assignment 4, which is worth almost twice as much, but I found that they required almost the same amount of work. I would make assignments 1 and 2 be more important to the final grade.
- Could be split to two course, one for computer vision, the other one for nlp. Which help student go deeper. Lecturer speaks too fast, with too many subjects and contents in just 50 mins. Every time Professor asks if anyone has question, there comes the silence. Simply because we could not catch up the materials. It will be fine if one lecture extended to two class time.
- Having more organised lectures that give more information about the material would be a good thing to have. During the lectures we were just given a few points and we were supposed to find, and teach ourselves everything we were supposed to know. Because of the assignments pressure, we did not actually have enough time to learn a lot of things, even less learn them in depth. The labs of the first semester should have been organised differently I think. The notebooks contained a lot of useful information but it would be good if at the start of each lab the tutor gave a small talk about the material that will have been covered in the lab. As for the second semester, well there were no lectures so I have nothing to add.
- I heard a lot of complaints about it being too hard for some. But I thought it was ok, kind of slow in the beginning though.
- MNIST is not a very interesting dataset for cw1 because everything but sigmoid has similar performance. Maybe give indications/tutorial about how to organise experiments. I feel like I eventually learned it at the very end of the course, and it would have been useful to know it earlier. Make cluster more reliable for semester 2, and set up shared workspace for each group instead of individual (avoids duplicating data, facilitates sharing of results). I would have preferred to learn about advanced deep learning techniques in semester 2 lectures instead of guest speakers (it's still interesting so maybe just give them to EdIntelligence). Don't give deadline extensions so easily, it just expands the stress time.
- More reliable computing power, it's been annoying to have to delay working on coursework because the cluster has been down.
- Probably unavoidable but the course was very large.
- Semester 2  
I was a bit disappointed that there are no more lectures and that all we have to do is run experiments in high-level libraries such as keras. It is not very interesting.
- The delivery of lectures could be more interesting
- The lectures in semester 1 sometimes felt rushed.
- This course hurt so much, as it takes a lot of time to run experiments and write the report. It should not have 20 credits, it should have 40 in its present form. Perhaps remove one coursework or remove some aspects... I burnt my computer from running experiments on it in the first part and in the second part I had to deal with the GPU server which is not so great. It's good that it exists, but it really needs more computing support allocated to it.
- This isn't the fault of the course per se, but it did not scale well with the number of students that took it. Informatics needs to limit the number of MSc students it accepts, there are already too many this year and it affects the quality of all of our courses!!
- Would you please improve the GPU cluster further? Really thanks for your effort so far.
- the coursework part

## Comments Report

Please add any other comments you have about workshops and tutors

- Didn't make use of those except group meetings in the second semester. Very tutor dependent but we had a good one.
- Good man
- Haven't used it.
- I personally didn't benefit from the first semester labs, but the second semester office hours were helpful.
- Lab sessions in semester 1 were not very helpful. In future I think it would be better to suggest students work through the notebooks before the labs and come along to discuss/ compare answers. Tutor groups in semester 2 gave us a chance to see what other groups were working on, which was good, but they were not actually useful beyond that because we were all doing very different things.
- Labs in semester 1 are pretty good but tutorials in semester 2 were rarely useful
- Steve Renals was my tutor and he was a fantastic resource during our tutorials, and I always felt we left the tutorial understanding more than when we went there. I did think the format of spending the majority of the tutorial listening to other groups ask about their project which were completely unrelated to ours was a bit boring though.
- The tutors did an excellent job of answering as many questions as they could on Piazza and dealt very well with the large number of stressed students.
- Tutorials could have been easily replaced by email communication, my tutor did not prepare the tutorials properly.
- It just seemed irrelevant. I never attended a lab, only once. I wish I had skipped tutorials but I'm on a visa