

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?

- Go to the tutorials
- If you don't enjoy relatively abstract mathematics, you may want to stay clear. There aren't too many long derivations or hard proofs, so you don't have to be brilliant at manipulating equations, but you do have to enjoy building intuition for abstract mathematical concepts.
- If you want to progress with ML beyond standard regression, then definitely worth taking course.
- Start the assignment as soon as possible, take notes in class, use the additional material, buy Barber's book, attend the tutorials when possible, ask questions if you did not understand something.
- Take it if you're interested in the mathematical part of machine learning. It's a helpful background for understanding papers.
- The lecturer is very good, plus you can watch the recordings in speed 2.
- This is not a very practical course, if you are in the machine learning path but you are more interested in practical applications probably you don't need to take this class.
- Unless you have a strong statistics background, do not take this course, you will struggle. It's really a continuation of MLPR.
- You don't need to know anything about graphical models before the course. All you need is some probability, statistics, calculus and linear algebra -- the same level required for MLPR. That being said, this course is more rigorous and mathematical and the exercises are more about solving mathematical problems than intuition like in MLPR. There aren't many proofs, though, so you don't have to have an extensive maths background. Also, there is practically no programming involved (only for the assignment but it was really simple and short).

Comments Report

What did you find most valuable about the course?

- The content of the course was very coherently structured.

The assignment involved a genuinely interesting application of the theory learned during the course.

The key mathematical theorems were presented with great clarity, and at the right level of generality IMO (disclaimer: I have a pure math background, so others may find it unnecessarily abstract)

- Its maths, but it's related to some applicable things.
- Professor is very clear at explaining and the notes are very well done.
- Really well structured notes. Clear practical examples.
- The course has been excellent and certainly one of the best courses I have taken this year. Everything is very well made and organised, from the lectures to the website, tutorial materials and assignment, and Michael is very friendly and good at explaining the subject. The slides are comprehensive and well written and designed, and I have found the lectures to be at just the right pace, detailed and challenging but not excessively so. The tutorial exercises are very helpful for understanding the lecture material and the solutions clear and detailed.
Thank you very much for all the effort you have put into the course!
- The course overall was very structured and the expectations were clear. For each section we were taught we were given well-defined learning outcomes at the beginning to introduce us to the topic and also at the end to summarise. I feel this approach was really helpful in understanding the motivation of each topic. The assignment was very interesting, engaging and challenging. The expectations for each question was a real help too.
- The lecturer explains every point very clearly and gives us enough extra materials to reference to except for the lecture itself. Thank you very much.
- The lectures were extremely well structured and often presented the topics in an unusual way, which helps understanding.
- The tutorial sheet and the tutor explains questions with detail.
- This course is great (and challenging), professor and TA are really helpful and good at explaining the contents of the course. Slides and additional material were really helpful. Recorded lectures. Good tutorials. The assignment was really challenging but a very good learning experience.
- Very good course organization. Professor Gutmann was very well prepared
- It taught the things I'm most interested in, in computer science, but with a mathematical approach. Also the way the course was structured helped me tremendously, the sections, motivations and teaching points outlined for each section really helped me understand why we were doing each part of the course.

Comments Report

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

- I would *start* every topic with a quick intuitive example that a student can hold in mind whilst making sense of the general theory. Often, examples were presented after the theory, which I think is the wrong way round.
- I fully appreciate that putting such a large course together for the first time must require a great amount of work, and you've really done an excellent job. If you wanted to make the course even better for future editions, I think the main improvement would be to have lecture notes. The slides are great but for individual study and reference lecture notes are usually better as the material is presented in a more compact way and things can be explained in more detail.
- I hadn't done mlpr so I found the speed at which we went through the final topics to be a bit quick.
- It could be useful to focus more on how the theory introduced can be used in practical and real-world applications
- Not many, very happy overall with the course. Maybe there could have been two smaller assignments, allowing coursework to be spread over a longer period of time. More a general programme suggestion as there were many assignments due around the same time and very few in the middle of the semester even.
- Spend less time on graphical models and more on the end of the course (factor analysis and after)
- The Assignment was too long, took many more hours than expected.
- The assignment should be worth more towards the final mark (many of us dedicated too many hours for a 20% assignment). I would have liked if the course covered state of the art algorithms, like deep Bayesian networks. Lectures were too early in the morning.
- The tutorials are definitely NOT representative of the lecture materials. There is too much in the tutorials which is barely covered in the lectures. During lectures, lecturer spent a lot of time (first 5-6 weeks) on graphs, while rushing through the more difficult part of the course in very little time.
- Tutorial questions a bit too much? But the tutor is excellent.

Comments Report

Please add any other comments you have about workshops and tutors

- Longer tutorial sessions would be nice, and more challenging exercises. Some of them were good but the majority was just algebra. The tutors themselves were very nice and competent.
- More ppl need to turn up to tutorials.
- Some tutors are not well prepared. However, my tutor () definitely helped me understand the more difficult things.
- Some tutors just reviewed the concept of lecture and that didn't help. Some helped to conclude the lecture and that's great.
- my tutor was excellent