

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?

- Be prepared for a lot of work
- Don't take this course unless a) you fully understand the pre-requisites b) meet them. If distance students, don't expect much help from the course organisers.
- Do not expect subjective assessments of your work, do not expect any meaningful feedback on your assessments. Do listen to class sessions/Q&A - this is your only chance to see "live" delivery. Expect to be ignored on forums - do not expect answers from course organisers. Do not attend labs - these are waste of time. Do not get upset if you can't understand/learn the material you pay for. If you can avoid this course - do not take it
- Good to know as much of the maths background as possible before hand so you can focus on the application of the techniques in a machine environment.
- Install python and test Jupyter BEFORE you start. Pay someone to do it if you can't. And ignore all Unix Dice stuff, if all you know is Windows.
- Do the Andrew Ng Stanford University Machine Learning course on Coursera first. If I hadn't done that I would have failed. They explain things at a level which (quite rightly) is not explained on a Masters
- get the maths and python nailed before you start

Comments Report

What did you find most valuable about the course?

- Firstly to set the context: this is the only UK uni which offers a complete distance learning Masters in Data Science. At a very reasonable price. For that alone this is valuable.
As for specifics: 1) Access to excellent training material 2) opportunity to network with and get help from other students
- Having previously looked at a lot of the similar material using both R and Matlab it was good to see a Python perspective on it.
- I liked the tools and libs used. I liked to coverage. I liked the labs a lot.
- Machine Learning is a fascinating subject of great personal and professional interest. I learned something through Assignments but it is hard to learn from my mistakes because neither solutions nor feedback of what was expected is available
- The lab exercises were very good

Comments Report

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

- Can't think of any it met all my requirements.
 - Clearly state EVERY pre-requisite BEFORE course starts. Clearly segregate requirements for Distance Learning and ordinary students. Completely reorganise and record new lectures - neither current materials nor delivery are acceptable. Hold timely class meetings/Q&A sessions - some were cancelled with no warning and no opportunity to learn. Completely and fully revisit Assignments, these are currently inadequate. Clearly and fully advertise both pre-requisites and assessment criteria for Assignments. Guarantee fully comprehensive feedback for every question in every assignment. Completely eradicate "things we have not explicitly taught" expectation in Assignments, Stop using unprofessional language such as "this is crap" in lecture materials. Promptly and fully respond to student questions posted on the forum. Provide solutions to previous exams. In a nutshell - redesign the whole course, it is not worth the money asked for it as it stands
 - Firstly to set the context: I was the best student on my last masters and I struggled on this one. Quite a lot of the issues I faced were not your responsibility but you only need to do a little more to help students like me a great deal. I'm willing to bet most students would pay more for it. I would.
Some more context: Students like me are awfully motivated, despite our not participating in all activities. I have a demanding full-time job with quite a lot of travel and where work spikes. The only way I can manage study is if I can prepare before the course and cram activities into "ordinary work" weeks. This time I was behind from day one and kept losing ground instead of catching up.
 - 1. Upload all information at least 1 month in advance
 - 2. Offer one simple installation guide - instead of 3-5 unaligned pages with conflicting info, no machine, putty the things I wasted time with which it turned out I had no use for
 - 3. Offer optional paid help: I would have paid 200 pounds for help with the installation. I spent 40 hours and failed and had to make do with a virtual box. Things: It's not your fault. But I wouldn't mind paying. I kept uninstalling and reinstalling. Let me offer 2 examples from the online labs which helped restore my sanity and prevented me from failing: My data sets were corrupted every time and I lost weeks. Turns out you need to download them in a zipped file and then unzip them. The other was when I copied and pasted code and it didn't work. Turns out you need to delete commas and rewrite them in Jupyter when you are working in a virtual box. I was scared to death of having to install the new virtual box version and didn't and luckily I got through
 - 4. The tutorials are awesome: We had this sort of interaction on my other masters and the feedback is awesome. Turns out you learn a lot from the students, many of whom are awfully helpful, as is the tutor mind you...
 - 5. Release the solutions for the labs right away. Those who don't want to look at it for 2 weeks don't need to. Here is how I learn: read the solutions and then try to redo them. I only need help for the stuff I cannot understand and redo.
 - 6. Have a simpler communication system: Piazza is a waste of time and in case you didn't know: virtually everyone thinks its crap and a waste of time. if it has to be used, pre-define topics so we have a chance of navigating. An ideal state is emulating the tutorials with one question for each "topic" and then I am willing to bet everyone gets their questions answered. Take extra lab sessions for instance: if we had one link we could see when they were scheduled, if we were attending and ideally we could plan this in advance,
 - 7: Consider having a Q&A for all topics: similar to the tutorials
- The summary is that for distance learns it is ALWAYS better with written, asynchronous, interactive forums as opposed to verbal, classroom, one-off sessions. Having said that, please don't misunderstand me: I consider myself fortunate for this opportunity and my overall experience is very positive indeed.
- None, I think it is excellent.
 - At least touch on more advanced topics. Like where to go next. In the end these models are only the beginning.
 - Would have been nice to have a section that just briefly introduced the latest cutting edge like deep learning and reinforcement learning etc and beyond.

Comments Report

Please add any other comments you have about workshops and tutors

- Excellent
- These completely lack any meaning or purpose for Distance Students - simply replace them with Q&A sessions
- To be fair on a Masters I need to be able to do a lot of basic stuff without needing babysitting, so I can't fault any of you. Same thing applies to the classes. If I can't participate and spend the time required then I can't criticize anything
- Well didn't really manage to get as much from these as I should have. The time constraints due to work commitments and the volume of material to cover meant I was usually behind schedule all through the course. However the material was useful and well-structured I just couldn't find enough time to spend with them. Will probably go over these again after the course has completed.