Informatics Student Course Feedback 2020/21
http://www.inf.ed.ac.uk/teaching/surveys/2020-21

This report contains feedback from students about a course taught in the School of Informatics during the 2020/21 academic year, in response to the following questions:

- What advice would you give to a student taking this course in future?
- 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, tutorials or labs on this course
- Please add any other comments you have about the presentation of course materials online and their accessibility
- Reflecting on your experience of hybrid teaching and learning on this course, what has worked well for you?
- Is there anything else you’d like to tell us about your experience of hybrid teaching and learning on this course that would help us improve our approach?

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.
What did you find most valuable about the course?

- All the techniques learnt.
- Assignments and lectures
- At a high level, a lot of the content was very intriguing and this seems to be an area of study I may wish to explore further in the future.
- Enjoyed the tutorials found them to really expand my knowledge.
- Everything apart from using haskell :D
- Having the tutorial exercises count towards your final mark was really good as it made me give them a good attempt before the tutorial when I might usually only have a read over, this meant that each week I had a chance to actually put the material into practice which really helped my understanding, and when I went to the tutorial as I actually had answers to compare I got really helpful feedback. The lecturers were helpful and friendly which was really great. I had an issue with the marking for the first coursework and I emailed the lecturer who was incredibly helpful - she responded to my emails incredibly quickly, was helpful and supportive, and got me a successful remark.
- I absolutely loved the topics and the first coursework was really fun! Tutorials and quizzes done very nicely and helped me a lot with understanding the material. Also piazza is very wholesome! I liked how active everyone was and how I was free to ask any questions without feeling scared that they sound stupid.
- I can learn many things from this course.
- In depth discussion of essential algorithms and practical assessments
- Lectures presented things in an interesting way, which shows what applications things would be useful in.
- Lots of valuable knowledge about basic AI and how to implement them.
- Nice AI course
- Nice and challenging contents
- Some new algorithms and searching strategies.
- Stepping through algorithms in the lectures. The tutorial engagement forced me to do the worksheet that helped with my learning.
- The coursework was fun.
- The coursework
- The knowledge about agents and how they are programmed
- The opportunities to implement and utilize the knowledge learned to create agents.
- The tutorials complemented the course material very nicely, and the fact that participation in them counted towards our grade gave us some extra motivation to actually put in some effort into them. I think that really helped me understand the material and will make revising for the exam much easier.
- There was plenty of opportunity to engage with the course material from quizzes and to tutorials to courseworks.
- Tutorial exercises and live meetings as well as lectures.
- Tutorial questions that are marked based on effort in my attempt, not its quality.
- Using Haskell and PDDL to implement AI agents
- Very interesting course, and is taught well
1.8) Overall, the course materials and pre-recorded lectures were quite confusing and not easy to understand. I got a bit lost at the end of the first half of the semester. I still mean to go back and try to revisit and understand that part. Also, fell far behind on lectures in the second semester, but this was due to lots of coursework across the courses, not an RA specific issue. It was hard to catch up though, since the lectures were long, with long video content each week.

I feel the coursework are a bit weird, but I don't think it's a drawback of the course or suggest any improvement really. Maybe just my personal feeling.

I got a bit lost at the end of the first half of the semester. I still mean to go back and try to revisit and understand that part.

Add coding labs / workshops haskell topics were much harder than first year and PDDL would be nice to have more experience before doing coursework on them.

Already perfect.

Answers for the quizzes would be very nice to have, so that we could at least know the standard expected answer.

Coursework 1 needs adjusting, it focusses too much on using haskell to solve the problems rather than implementing what we learn. I found the way the course is structured to be fundamentally flawed and illogical. Firstly, giving us a coursework on Haskell with little to no Haskell support except piazza questions which took a few hours to get answer, when we had not covered Haskell since the beginning of first year. It's fine to give us coursework in languages we are less familiar with but there needs to be more labs/resources to support this. Even an optional tutorial on Haskell before the coursework would have been nice. Secondly, the engagement mark is, in my opinion, a bit silly. I often found myself cramping my completion of the tutorial sheet on the previous week's material, which I only finished on Friday, in on a Sunday night to meet the Monday morning submission deadline. As a result I learnt little from my attempts at these sheets and was instead trying to get something submitted for the sake of getting the points. On top of that, 20% of the entire course based on these sheets alone and 0% for actually attending the tutorials makes no sense. It doesn't encourage us to engage and for me, had the opposite effect as I felt ill prepared for all of my tutorials due to the Monday deadline. I am sure you are also aware of the massive volume of coursework we have had at the tail end of semester 2 across all courses. Due to this, I and most of the people I know studying in informatics in second year this year had to stop watching lectures just to make sure we met the coursework deadlines. Therefore I was unable to complete the tutorials as I hadn't covered the content required for them and thus lost 6% for ‘engagement’. This is in my opinion, unjust. A lot of us have suffered a considerable loss of around 5% due to the lack of communication between course organisers and the way in which this course assesses. This really put me off the course as I felt no matter how hard I try now, my mark won't reflect what I really deserve. Engagement assessment is something I really think you should review.

Getting through the lectures every week was a struggle.

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I got a bit lost at the end of the first half of the semester. I still mean to go back and try to revisit and understand that part.

Also, fell far behind on lectures in the second semester, but this was due to lots of coursework across the courses, not an RA specific issue. It was hard to catch up though, since the lectures were long, with long video content each week.

It was quite hard to do cw1 and reuse haskell. Somehow provide perhaps some example functions.

Maybe more programming questions for the tutorials. I felt like there was too much theory that couldn't be translated as code throughout the course. This made me feel unprepared for the coursework which mainly had a programming component. There was also a lot of pseudo code, and saying how a code works is just different than letting the student implement such a code and see how it works for him/herself.

More evenly weighted assessments, CW1 seemed much more difficult than CW2 given they were worth the same marks. I felt I had a good understanding of the topic, but failed to demonstrate it through a technical implementation.

More interesting coursework

More labs/workshops on the programming languages used for course works.

More time for workshops

No Haskell, or at least teach us it a bit more and have more tutors who can help. The cw1 could have been done in python, which we are more likely to use in future.

Overall, the course materials and pre-recorded lectures were quite confusing and not easy to understand.
I felt that the lectures were aimed to students who have enough background knowledge about AI, not the beginner. The explanations made by lecturers were sometimes quite hard, and needed extra time to search for additional resources about the course materials, such as Youtube videos which explain better and easier about the topics.

Also, I personally think that using Python would be much better than Haskell for courseworks. Since Python is being used a lot in the field of AI, using Python for courseworks would be more preferable.

- PLZ don't use haskell for cw1 : ( It is pain for me.
- The coursework can be more well-planned as there is some bugs and problems for coursework 1. Anyway, coursework 2 is good.
- There was a lot of confusion in CW1 regarding the minimax algorithm as the instructions changed throughout the term. While it's a good thing to adjust CW, there were many Piazza questions relating to both variants which made me feel like I'm missing something. Also, many lectures were really long.
- This is minor, but to improve some of the clarifications and specifications in the coursework handouts. Some details weren't said explicitly, and details of the coursework changed after it was released. This might cause confusion for students.
- Weekly handins were annoying, especially when the expected solution was unreasonably long.
- There are lots of reading materials, but what we have learnt is the easiest one. Simplify the materials or do not let students read too much.
What advice would you give to a student taking this course in future?

- Definitely go to the tutorials and put effort into them. If you start doing them and showing up from the first week then it will be much easier to stick to a schedule and you will remain motivated for longer. Also try to keep up with the lectures every week, because if you miss one, then it's really hard to understand what's going on in the next ones.

- Focus on gaining a good understanding of the underlying algorithms

- I'd recommend them to take it, but keep in mind the amount of space dedicated to formal logic and FOL, which seems wasteful.

- If you are struggling with Haskell start CW1 early. It's challenging on its own and Haskell makes it even more difficult.

- If you do not have sufficient background knowledge in AI, think twice before deciding to take this course. This course is not designed to beginners.

- It is an interesting course and you can learn many thing from here. The lecturers are good.

- Just take it, very good course.

- Learn Haskell. Have a strong math background on probability

- Learn haskell.

- Learn some Haskell.

- Make sure you revise Haskell and don't leave it until you have to revise - start before/when the coursework is released.

- Make sure you revise/learn Haskell beforehand and make sure to attend tutorials

- Put efforts

- Re-learn Haskell

- Readings help a lot

- Recommend

- Revise Haskell over Christmas.

- Revise haskell

- Revise haskell and go to the tutorials.

- Start coursework early, possibly the day it is released.

- Start cw1 early

- Try it if you have the choice

- You really need to sit down and think about this course. It requires time and effort, but it is very rewarding.
Please add any other comments you have about workshops, tutorials or labs on this course

- Again, programming could help a student better than only showing pseudo-code
- Again, tutorials are a bit lackluster due to being online I guess, but my tutor was very helpful and diligent.
- I didn't like the formula of tutorials as we were just going over the solutions. It makes sense, but it feels like a waste of time when you can just look at the solution pdf yourself.
- I liked the tutorials, and I liked that we were forced to do them even if we would be wrong. It helped in my understanding of the material.

No.

- See my general comment above.

- The tutorial is quite boring

- The tutorials were super helpful although halfway through the semester people stopped attending so the tutorials got very quiet which was good as we got one on one help but was also a bit of a shame.
  Labs in Haskell would have been helpful.

- Tutor was amazing so helpful with all the problems I had.

- Tutorials were good for asking questions and talking about problems, labs could have been more on the programming languages we used.

- Very helpful tutorials! I feel a lot more confident with material thanks to them

- tutorials not that helpful.
4. Informatics 2D - Reasoning and Agents -

4.1) Please add any other comments you have about the presentation of course materials online and their accessibility.

- 1 hour 30 minute online lectures are hard to keep concentration on.
- I can learn many thing from the course material through online learning.
- I think that it would have been better for the second part of the course to have one powerpoint per lecture (merge all of them) as it can be tedious and hard navigating and finding the specific content you’re looking for.
- No.
- Presentation was very nice! Everything is very organised
- Pretty nice
- Really enjoyed lectures were well presented
- The course materials were super easy to find and access, the organisation was great. The quizzes were helpful but I stopped doing them towards the end as I ran out of time, so I think multiple choice questions only would have been helpful as I would have been a lot more likely to attempt them as they would have been quick to do and given instantaneous feedback.
- The learn page has a nice layout and the grouping of content into weeks and sub group of lectures works well.
- The slides as well as the teaching was heavily skewed towards a theoretical component. Theory was a bit difficult to follow given that everything sounded so abstract. The examples didn't necessarily made the theory easier to understand. I'd prefer more programming to let the students see how the theory and accompanying pseudo-code worked.
- Very good, well organised. Only small thing would be a better course index, to help find specific topics easier when searching., but that is nit-picking.
7. Informatics 2D - Reasoning and Agents -

7.1) Reflecting on your experience of hybrid teaching and learning on this course, what has worked well for you?

- Being able to watch lectures at 1.25 speed due to having a lot of content!
- Course was well presented considering the circumstances.
- Everything worked very well.
- Flexibility in watching lecture timings and the ability to rewatch lectures.
- High level of flexibility
- I managed to complete 140 credits by balancing the course load appropriately.
- It works well for me
- Lecture recording were really good quality, piazza and Q&A sessions were very useful as well. Overall I felt connected with other people a lot more despite having everything online.
- Nothing special
- The hybrid teaching has worked well. The most useful thing was Piazza as it was great for getting help.
- The lectures being styled how they are. They were broken down into 15 minute pieces which really helped, as opposed to just recording an hour lecture and sitting and watching it.
- Tutorials
- Tutorials and pre-recorded lectures have been good. It has not been so much 'hybrid learning' as there have been no in person activities but the online materials have been presented well.
- Tutorials aren't that good online
Is there anything else you’d like to tell us about your experience of hybrid teaching and learning on this course that would help us improve our approach?

- Keep online learning an option at all times please.
- More time during tutorials/workshops
- N/A
- No
- No, already good enough.
- Nothing

The only thing I would say is tutorials are the only time we get to interact with any of the other students on this course and it would have been great if there was a higher attendance rate and people were asked to put their cameras on so it would have felt a bit more normal and friendly. Also maybe using breakout rooms so we had to interact with other people on the course.

- Tutorials do not work. The lack of contact with other members of my course also made some group work very difficult, so group work online should never happen again.
- Was sad of the lack of in person tutorials hope they return next semester when restrictions are eased.
10. Thank you - 

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your response and comments will be fully considered.

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Please provide any additional comments you may have about the course, the teaching on the course or the resources that support it in the box below.

■ N/A

■ No

■ Thank you so much for this course! It is my absolute favourite this year! Very well organised and the atmosphere is wholesome