

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.

Comments Report

1. Introduction to Databases [INFR10080_20-21_SV1_SEM1_ONLINE_CACORE19] -

1.7) What did you find most valuable about the course?

- - The learn page was well organised and it was clear what is/isn't examinable!
- I liked that we had to submit reasonable attempts for the tutorial exercises since it forces you to actually engage with the tutorial questions but it doesn't stress you out.
- Engaging and high-quality lectures
- Great level of detail the tutorials when into
- It was well organized. The lectures were live and recordings were available. Tutorials were helpful.
- Learning SQL has been a very valuable skill I am glad to have gained this year.
- Learning SQL is a very valuable skill to have.
- Paolo is a very passionate and caring lecturer who takes time to thoroughly explain the materials, give examples and answer students' questions - thank you Paolo!
- Paolo's attention to detail and reliability are two huge positives when it comes to this course. He is good at explaining the material and takes time to answer questions. The tutorials for this course were meaningful and directly related to the content we had been taught that week and offered good opportunities for practice. The worked examples he takes the time to go through in lectures are invaluable and something I wish more lecturers did.
- Paolo's examples during lectures were very useful. For difficult concepts he really took the time to explain and give examples. The tutorials were also good.
- Professor
- The SQL assignment was really useful and greatly helped my understanding of database queries. It is also very useful for the future. I have a deeper understanding of why a database system is well designed and how to do so.
- The commitment of the lecturer and how interesting he made the subject
- The course organizer is well-prepared and very eager to help.
The coursework for SQL was good and fun to go through.
Questions on Piazza get answered pretty quickly.
The material is organized and easily accessed.
- The examples provided for each concept in the lecture slides, and the level of engagement on Piazza by the lecturer. I also like how neat and tidy the Learn page is compared to other courses.
- The interactive tutorials and especially lectures ! I don't get any of those in any other course... it really resembles the "university" feeling unlike the rest of my courses.
- The lecturer is really engaged in teaching and explain the examples very detail.
- The lectures and the tutorials. I had my tutorial with the lecturer and overall I love his dedication. He is always engaged in the course, the lectures are well structured and extremely useful because he goes through many live examples to explain everything. He has always been very quick to respond to questions on Piazza and he is really thorough in his answers. One of the best Informatics courses I have had in terms of structure and quick response to student feedback.
- The lectures were very clear and easy to follow. I appreciate that they were live.
- The lectures were very informative and interesting.
- The range of ideas, along with the mixture of theoretical and practical aspects. The SQL assignment was not trivial, and the tutorials are really really good.
- The structure and the way the material was taught was excellent. The lecturer spent lots of time for examples during lectures which made them fun, engaging and very productive
- The structure of the assessment really helped me to catch up with online teaching.
- The teacher is very involved and likes doing his job. The weekly assignments covered all the notions and made us stay up to date with the course.
- This course leads me know what is FOL at the first time and it is so interesting! And Dr. Paolo is really nice! I love his humor and wisdom.
- Tutorial exercises

- We are not only learning the SQL language but also the principle and the design of the database. We get very clear teaching syllabus and every arrangement, such as weekly tutorial exercise, online test, SQL assignment and the exam. That's the course with the best experience I took so far, and I must say that Paolo is a fun, patient and responsible lecturer, I am really appreciated for all of his efforts.
- Well structured and delivered lectures
- knowledge about managing the database
- lecturer was amazing at answering questions
- lectures were very engaging and informative
- teacher try his best to answer our questions in the class and tutorials and the slides contains most of the content we need
- tutorial exercises

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

- Allow extensions for the SQL assignment
- As much as I sympathized with Paolo for getting a hard time from some of the students about the way this course is tested I cannot help but agree (the online test not the SQL assignment which I have absolutely no complaints about). The way he was originally planning on administering the online test: the first 70% being multiple choice questions and the last 30% being open-ended questions which would only be marked if all the MC questions were correct seemed extremely impractical. If someone managed to get full marks on the multiple choice questions then you could say at the very least they will get a third of the marks for the open-ended questions, which effectively eliminates any grade between 70% and 80%, the most sought after band of grade! The way the test was eventually administered was entirely multiple choice but employed the use of negative marking, and not just a few marks off to put off guessers but to actually deduct the number of marks the question was worth had you gotten it right. This system does not just discourage guessers but it negatively impacts those of us who are genuinely very enthusiastic about this course. It's also not like the test being multiple choice makes it much easier in the case of this course, as in most situations all the possible answers can be given as options and it is not narrowed down for us at all. I compared marks with a friend once the feedback came back, I only got three less marks than him out of a hundred but because of the way the questions were weighted I got about 8% less overall. I know this kind of comparing and focus in marks is exactly the sort of thing Paolo does not like but it was really just spurred on by the fact we didn't feel the test was fair and we wanted to ascertain how badly we had been effected by it. I don't see how either only marking the last questions if we got the first ones right or so heavily negatively marking our answers appropriately measures our understanding of the material and it is incredibly disheartening to feel that you are not being tested fairly when you have tried so hard. Paolo has said on the piazza page that he is not a fan of grades in general as he feels that becomes the focus rather than the learning experience and that people compare too much, but the reality of being a third year student is that these things are important and that fair testing goes a long way to supporting us in our learning journey at university.
- Better organization, but surely it was due to the pandemic and the online format of things.
- I did not like the online test. I studied very hard and after doing well in all the tutorials and the sql assignment, I did pretty bad in the online test. Too many questions were 0 or 16, some even were 0 or 16 with negative marking meaning a single question could affect your grade with a range of around 30 marks for a question (-5,0 or +15). Paolo was fair allowing 24 hours for the test, but I had a tough time with the multiple choice formate and marking style for it.
- I found it a bit weird that contributions on piazza count towards the final grade as it's a lot harder for shy students to post something but then again they only count for 3% so it doesn't really matter if you don't get the marks.
- I honestly can't think of any improvements. I really enjoyed it. Thanks Paolo.
- I only want to attend this course again in the classroom and lab.
- I saw some really important posts on Piazza, related to coursework and assignments (e.g. notes on running pgteach on dice or the script for checking for forbidden words on the sql assignment). Sometimes it is easy to miss them and I would love if they could be added as an Announcement on Learn as well.
- I would add more personalized feedback on the online test.
- I would make tutorials in person. Other schools have done this and it makes it be worth it to be in Edinburgh.
- In the SQL Assignment a fellow student provided test data which was extremely helpful, I'd suggest for future years that this is provided.
- Maybe don't have a negatively marked test, I feel they are quite unfair
- More TAs, Smaller tutorials, Dedicated feedback for tutorial work.
- Remove overall negative marking (per-question negative marking is acceptable) from assessment. Make the hours spent teaching each subject proportional to the number of marks/questions in assessment that will be dedicated to that subject. Extra tech instruction for the professor, he was constantly having tech issues that disrupted learning, including poor mic quality, whiteboard constantly freezing, etc. Release a test database for students to practice their queries on for the SQL assignment rather than relying on a generous student to make the assignment possible.
- Too much time was spent on simple examples for some aspects (eg. nested queries, basic SQL). Spending more time on a more complex example would be more useful. Some aspects which were more complicated (like domains and active domains) could have used more time to solidify our understanding. Parts of the course were mentioned, but then heavily assessed in the online test. I think that was a bit unfair since we glossed over them.
- Tutorial exercise feedback would be good (but I understand this is time consuming and maybe infeasible for tutors). Please upload the notes you make during the lecture examples, it's very hard to keep up.
- With lack of in person classes and tutorials piazza questions should be answered quicker and more detailed feedback should be given for the courseworks.
- maybe take more examples to explain some complicated stuffs.
- more examples in the slides
- no
- none
- none it was really well taught

2. Introduction to Databases -

2.1) What advice would you give to a student taking this course in future?

- Actually, knowledge about FOL is a little hard, it is better that students should learn the Discrete Mathematics in advance.
- Be more patient to the lecturer since only one lecturer takes care all the things
- Closely following the teacher and go back to see the slides and recordings if you met some problems, this will helps all the time
- Do the tutorials and practice SQL whenever you can. The PostgreSQL server provided by Informatics is an excellent playground to test ideas and learn concepts. Also attend the lectures as you will regret missing out on Paolo's teaching.
- Do the tutorials and watch the lectures.
- Don't fall behind - the content is easy enough to grasp as long as you keep up and ask questions if you're confused. The tutorials are really useful. Use Piazza - the lecturer has been great with keeping up with those questions and answering quickly.
- Go to the lectures and keep track of deadlines.
- It is a very cool course and if you have interest in databases, you should definitely take it.
- Keep on top of the lectures and tutorials
- Participate and engage in tutorials! It's very useful!
- Pay attention during examples in lectures.
- Pay good attention and make notes on lectures, and try to finish all tutorial exercises
- Practice with the tutorials and if you don't understand something skip through the lectures to the relevant part as Paolo has more likely done a worked example in class.
- Prepare to study a lot of theoretical stuff. This course goes really in depth about databases are structured.
- Start coursework early and make use of Piazza
- Study the basics of Relational Algebra, Relational Calculus, and First Order Logic, from ANY other source before taking this course, it will be a lot less painful than trying to learn it from this course firsthand.
- Take it! you would not regret if you wanna learn the knowledge of database.
- The tutorials are super helpful. Active piazza forum with meaningful questions.
- Try using some of the software you're provided optionally, it helps your understanding substantially.
- Watch the lectures and do the tutorials.
- go through tutorials and coursework carefully, you will enjoy this course when you solving difficulties .
- go to tutorials
- study the lectures and tutorial sheets

3. Introduction to Databases -

^{3.2)} Please add any other comments you have about workshops, tutorials or labs on this course

- Given the current circumstances the engagement in tutorial would be better if students were to be invited more to answer the questions from the tutorial.
- Good approach of having 10% of assesement from completion of tutorial assignments. This gave clear motivation of completing and attending the tutorials each week.
- I have appreciated the fact that the professor has valued the effort rather than only succeeding
- I want to learn more about SQL, it seems very important.
- Online tutorials were a positive experience.
- Paolo was a complete delight in the tutorials, very useful, always very willing to help
- Perhaps a different platform should be used for tutorials, it was a bit painful to use the Blackboard Collaborate whiteboard for drawing/ writing out solutions.
I like that submitting an attempt at the mandatory exercises counts towards the grade - this means you make sure to spend time doing the tutorial exercises each week, and the exercises are very useful for your understanding.
- The tutorials could be a bit more interactive (though of course only applicable when online)
- The tutorials were really useful for understanding. I think they would have been more useful if more interactive, but I get that it's difficult to do with so many people taking the course.
- Tutorial exercise and the tutorial is actually a good arrangement to make sure that I'm not behind the progress. It always pushes me to catch up the content at that week.
- Tutorials were not helpful, the prof moved too slowly, we would never cover all of the questions in time, and polite requests to speed up or move on were often ignored or openly criticized, which, suffice to say, just wasted more time.
- Would have been better if marked but I understand that not many TAs are assigned too this course
- tutorials are well-organised, you can learn a lot from them.

4. Introduction to Databases -

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

- Don't like that the bulk of lectures is examples that are then erased and often with errors making it hard to take my own notes.
- Dr Paolo is very talkative and I like his class so much. But seems like at the start of the semester, the internet connection is not too good, maybe because no one has ever done this before, but later, Dr Paolo gradually find a good way and everything goes well
- He very rarely finished a lecture in the correct time slot so many of the videos on Media Hopper are half of one subject and half of another. This does not make the individual subjects very accessible for revision, maybe consider editing together videos into topics as every other prof managed to do.
- I dislike Learn and Blackboard. I wish we could use the old submit command on DICE and the old informatics course pages. Multiple people had issues with coursework submission and I think submitting code over Learn is a terrible idea. The lecturer had difficulty with blackboard almost every session, and it seemed to be an issue with Blackboard rather than the lecturer's fault. It also took me until the end of the course to find where I could access the Blackboard recordings.
- I like the use of the table for displaying the materials. I would suggest it for every course.
- I was happy that lectures were added to Media Hopper Create afterwards. I was also happy this course recorded some of the tutorial sessions, great for revision.
- It is better if the professor could provide us more materials about FOL.
- It was well presented.
- Learn sucks. Please go back to using the inf webpages of the past.
- Paolo adapted to remote teaching really well (even if he doesn't particularly like it) and I do not feel my learning for this course has been hindered by remote teaching.
- good!
- very well organised and delivered

7. Introduction to Databases -

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

- Actually, I don't think the online teaching model affects this course IDB too much, cause it needs many blackboard showtime to explain the examples, so share the screen directly is better and more clear than everyone sits in the big classroom watching the same big screen.
- Being able to watch videos later, sped up, was helpful.
- Did not really notice a big difference other than seeing friends in person when attending lectures. Definitely harder to stay focused for entire duration when watching online but it is what it is. The tutorials were good.
- Hybrid teaching will be much more easier to be distracted by the things around you. But we also get some advantage from this, such as I can wake up just before the class or tutorial and do not need to experience the bad weather on the way school. Generally, I like both of the ways, but I think I will choose to have hybrid teaching due to the safety reason
- I like being able to work on my own schedule so the hybrid worked well for me
- Lectures online and live (interactive) have been great.
- Live lectures that go at a perfect speed. Well organised material, you can find everything you need in learn no need to subscribe to a bunch of useless platforms. By the way it wasn't hybrid, I had zero in person hours during the whole semester so please don't called it hybrid it is only online, keep it real
- Paolo tried his best to make it work with the hybrid teaching. It has worked well
- Sending tutorial exercises through learn was ok. Online tutorials were ok.
- The live lectures worked very well, I found it easier to ask questions in the chat than I would have in person.
I think it works very well to split the grade between different types of activities, occurring at different times during the term (assignment, tutorials, online test, final exam).
- The tutorials and course content was great. Dr Guagliardo was great at explaining concepts/problems and did his best to keep up with questions over the chat. Piazza has been really useful for questions.
- There was no hybrid approach for this course. The online teaching was not good for me, but Paolo did the best job he could given the circumstances.
- To start with, this is not hybrid teaching - this course, along with all others, is entirely online!
This is the only course I had with live lectures and this was really important to me because this is the closest I will get to normal lectures this semester. The lectures are really fun and really useful. I think this course is an example of how an online course has to be organised and structured.
- We can watch the recording again and again if we cannot understand something.
- Worked very well
- entirely online, no hybrid learning
- the use of blackboard and ssl psql on screen in lectures and tutorials

- 7.2) 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?
- Best approach of online teaching so far. The live online lectures made the course more interactive when compared to pre-recorded lectures. Lectures were also recorded and could accommodate different timezones.
 - Blackboard was terrible. The tutorials would have been more useful in person as they could have been more interactive - with the course size this did not seem possible over Blackboard. Submitting code over Learn was not good.
 - By the way it wasn't hybrid, I had zero in person hours during the whole semester so please don't call it hybrid it is only online, keep it real.
 - Online lectures were not good.
 - Please make tutorials in person. We need good reasons to be spending this much money on a flat ... just to be at home all day.
 - Please put some more effort into the production quality of materials. Another course I took this semester had well-edited pre-recorded content, uploaded by week in convenient subfolders on learn, with a personalised message at the beginning of each week checking in, reminding us of everything we should achieve that week. By contrast, this course had no pre-recorded content, just the live lectures uploaded afterwards, with no editing at all, every technical problem and random tangent left in.
 - Sometimes the blackboard messed up when live
 - The pandemic is so sudden and it is a such big challenge for everyone, also for their devices. An upgrade for the LEARN page may help the online classes go well and distribution of good and helpful devices to the tutors could also be taken into the consideration.

11. Thank you -

11.1)

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

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.

- A very interesting and enjoyable course.
 - Dr Paolo has been one of the best lecturers i've had so far during my degree
 - I don't know who these other people are that you asked me about. I only provided feedback for Dr Paolo Guagliardo.
 - It's only 3% of the grade, but I dislike that Piazza participation is part of the grade. It feels like an arbitrary way of following the University Common Marking Scheme, without actually improving my understanding of databases. It makes answering questions a race, which seems pointless. I would suggest having some of the tutorial questions marked for an attempt, and some of the tutorial marked for correct answers. Even counting attendance of tutorials/lectures would be better.
- I disagreed with the online test for the course only having the written answers marked if all the multiple choice questions were marked and I am glad this was changed. I think the online test was difficult with the modifications made (some questions were perhaps unfair), but I also think it's a more suitable way of assessment since everyone's written answers cannot be marked.
- Overall I've really enjoyed the course!
- Take this course, it's not too difficult and sometimes it's quite interesting.
 - Truly the worst course I have taken in 5 years at Edinburgh.