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. Advanced Database Systems [INFR11199_20-21_SV1SEM2_ONLINE_CACORE19] -

What did you find most valuable about the course?

- great that the lecturer adjusted the live lecture content according to student questions/ problems (identified e.g. by questions asked on Piazza; create a new slide deck with further examples to explain content in more detail)
- live lecturer were a good recap of the week's content
- quizzes were challenging and helped retain and consolidate the acquired knowledge
- quality of the recorded lectures: clear explanations, good slides with a lot of helpful and detailed examples

- Best course I took this year. Well organised, good material, excellent teaching. Like wow, finally a teacher who can actually teach. The coursework while challenging is fun.
- Comprehensive, gives all the details, fast paced but manageable, interesting
- Interesting course material and well-structured lectures
- Lectures are very well presented. Makes learning easy, and a pleasure.
- Live Discussion sessions
- The coursework (building a simple database system in Java) was quite cool and helped me understand how databases work "behind the scenes".
- The coursework was enjoyable and interesting
- The coursework was really good. The specification was really clear and it was nice to start it from scratch. The right amount of challenging, finally felt like a University level coursework
- The coursework was the most interesting part of it as I could see the difficulty of implementing some of the course topics.
- The lecture slides are really good, very informative and easy to follow. The lecturers are great at engaging the students, I appreciated the quizzes.
- Weekly quizzes with explained solutions.
- after studying this course I have a clear overview of the DBMS
- live lectures
- pre-recorded lecture and live discussion all help.
What improvements, if any, would you make to the course?

- Although the coursework was really interesting and challenging, it was too challenging for a week and a half deadline towards the end of the semester where students are under the stress of other deadlines and honour projects. The information volume each week was at some weeks too much to comprehend. I'd rather instead of scanning all the big picture to focus only on some aspects and take it slow with detail.

- Coursework - the main coursework was not related to databases but was related to object oriented programming.

- Coursework should be given earlier and with more preparation (and practice?), tutorial sessions would be good, release the "flipped classroom" materials earlier.

- For me it was confusing that the common join syntax (select ... from ... join ... on ...) was not used. I have never seen the other syntax before and in industry and standard SQL tutorials I have only seen the "join" syntax so far. If there are specific reasons why the other syntax is used, it would be great if this could be explained shortly.

- I found it hard to stay engaged with the course due to no tutorials or labs.

- I would give more time for the coursework, and try to work through it in several weeks at a steady pace. Probably also have some sort of tutorials or q&a's specifically for coursework related topics.

- I would've liked to have some lectures dedicated to NoSQL Databases (i.e. MongoDB and how it's different from SQL databases).

- Please improve or remove the theory of query evaluation, I really didn't get the single bit of it, or what is the intension of using that?

- Release the coursework earlier or allow for more time.

- The coding coursework not only did not teach me anything, but I don't think I used any skills or knowledge I learned from the course. I spent a week coding in Java, and learning about the visitor pattern and other small Java quirks which probably won't be that useful later in life due to how old Java 8 is at this point. I think if more of a boilerplate was given, and we spent our time focusing on the interesting bits / doing more relational calculus -> algebra conversion, that might be more worthwhile.

- The quizzes are a bit too much for my liking.

- Weeks 5/6 were hard to understand and rushed.

- More practice and homework on writing sql; the week 3 and 4 material are so abstract; only one homework is not much; add material about noSQL like MongoDB.
2. What advice would you give to a student taking this course in future?

- Be good at JAVA.
- Coursework is brutal, start early. Material is okay in itself.
- It’s a Good course, but only join when you have some knowledge of programming.
- Not much useful
- Start coursework as soon as it is released
- Start on the coursework early unless you're really skilled at coding.
- Start the coursework as soon as possible and keep up to date with lecture content
- Take it. A well thought, interesting, and rewarding course.
- The course is challenging but good. If you're focused on Software/Back-end Engineering then I would recommend it. It's very theory-heavy (OS-concepts and some algorithms) so be prepared for that. It also has a Java coursework (implementing a simple database) which is reasonable.
- To make sure they learn Java for OOP and Data Structures before the coursework is released.
- You need some programming experience
3.2) Please add any other comments you have about workshops, tutorials or labs on this course

- I liked that discussions covered almost all of the weeks topics, but I would prefer it to be a bit more practical.

- There were none which meant there was no indication of what to expect from the exam or assignment.
4. Advanced Database Systems

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

- Easily accessed via learn
- Finally a course that used the university's systems as they should be. Piazza + Learn, a combo all courses should migrate towards.
- Flipped classroom is only useful if you have enough time to look at the material beforehand which often was not possible.
- I felt the pre recorded classes were really long. All videos the same length, so would prefer smaller videos for specific topics so if I need to rewatch it is easier to find the info I look for.
- I really like that the slides are full of step-by-step examples of algorithms, queries, etc. It makes it much easier to understand some otherwise dry topics.
7. Reflecting on your experience of hybrid teaching and learning on this course, what has worked well for you?

- In an online learning environment, flipped classroom is good.
- No hybrid teaching, all online
- Recorded lectures really helped
- Some weeks had four lectures. I think this was because the videos were shorter than 50 minutes so the lecturers snuck in some extra stuff. This didn't work for me: it takes more time to absorb things from a video so four lectures is just four lectures, when there should only be three.
- The lecture slides + explanations were really good, questions on piazza were answered very fast; the organisation + description of the programming assignment was clear enough such that the assignment was doable without labs or sth similar. Therefore remote learning worked well for me and I would go so far as to say that it worked even better for me, because I could re-watch more complex parts of the lectures several times.
- The way they did the quizzes during lectures worked well (with a poll within Blackboard I think).
- This course did not employ hybrid learning, i.e. all activities were virtual.
- This was an online course, not a hybrid course.
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?

- Don't lie to students.
- I would like to have more interaction with my classmates. This course structure for me felt specially challenging as the only live session was a discussion and there was not a lot of participation in it.
- N/A
- Please release the material earlier, it is not helpful rushing to understand 5 lectures of material in 2 days before the live session. Online tutorials would be good.
10. Thank you -

10.1) 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.

- Great course overall!