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Individual Course Report - CSCE423 Sec. 001

CSCE423 Section 001: DSGN&ANLYS ALGORITHMMS

Semester: '13-'14: Spring Semester

Survey Trigger: UNL Spring 2014

Instructor: Stephen D. Scott

Students: 45

Respondents: 43



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Evaluation of Course and Instructor

Base Questions item 4

	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate Student
1. My year in college is:	0	3	8	20	12

Base Questions item 5

	4.0 to 3.5	3.5 to 3.0	3.0 to 2.5	2.5 to 2.0	Below 2.0
2. My overall grade point average is:	19	19	4	1	0

Base Questions item 6

	More than 18 hours	15 to 17 hours	12 to 14 hours	9 to 11 hours	Less than 9 hours
3. I am enrolled for the following number of credit hours this semester:	1	5	25	11	1

Base Questions item 7

	More than 40 hours	30 to 40 hours	20 to 30 hours	10 to 20 hours	Less than 10 hours
4. I currently work the following number of hours per week at a job:	0	3	11	19	10

Base Questions item 8

	Yes	No
5. This course is my major field of study:	40	3

Base Questions item 10

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Indifferent (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	N/A 0	mean	mode	Std. Dev.
6. I see myself as a motivated student in this course.	2	2	2	19	18	0	4.14	4	1.04
7. I was academically prepared to take this course.	0	0	5	20	18	0	4.30	4	0.67
8. I was challenged to think in this course.	1	0	1	17	24	0	4.47	5	0.77
9. My course grade will be a fair representation of my learning.	2	5	7	18	11	0	3.72	4	1.12
10. I treated the instructor fairly and respectfully.	1	0	0	16	26	0	4.53	5	0.74
Question Set Statistics							4.23	5	0.92

Base Questions item 12

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Indifferent (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	N/A 0	mean	mode	Std. Dev.
11. Before taking this course, my interest in this subject was very high.	0	4	5	23	11	0	3.95	4	0.87

12. I understand the objectives of this course.	0	1	2	22	18	0	4.33	4	0.68
13. The organization of the course topics is reasonable and logical.	0	3	2	15	23	0	4.35	5	0.87
14. The pace at which course topics are covered is reasonable.	1	3	1	20	18	0	4.19	4	0.96
15. This course helped me improve my rational thinking, problem-solving and decision-making ability.	1	2	1	19	20	0	4.28	5	0.91
16. After taking this course, my interest in this subject is very high.	3	2	5	16	17	0	3.98	5	1.16
Question Set Statistics							4.18	4	0.92

Base Questions item 14

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Indifferent (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	N/A (0)	mean	mode	Std. Dev.
17. The textbook, workbook, and/or lesson notes help me understand course material.	2	2	5	20	14	0	3.98	4	1.03
18. The method (or methods) of presenting information in class enhances my learning.	2	1	3	17	20	0	4.21	5	1.01
19. The coursework helps me understand and apply the subject matter.	1	2	3	19	18	0	4.19	4	0.93
20. The amount of coursework is reasonable for what I am expected to learn.	1	3	0	26	13	0	4.09	4	0.89
21. Testing methods fairly measure my understanding of the course material.	2	6	5	19	11	0	3.72	4	1.14
Question Set Statistics							4.04	4	1.01

Base Questions item 16

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Indifferent (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	N/A 0	mean	mode	Std. Dev.
22. The instructor is prepared for the class and is concerned about his or her preparation.	1	1	1	8	32	0	4.60	5	0.85
23. The instructor makes good use of class time.	2	2	3	11	25	0	4.28	5	1.10
24. The instructor is enthusiastic and interested in teaching this course.	0	0	3	9	31	0	4.65	5	0.61
25. The instructor treats students in a professional manner.	1	1	1	13	27	0	4.49	5	0.86
26. New concepts and examples are clearly explained at a level students can comprehend.	1	3	2	15	22	0	4.26	5	1.00
27. The instructor motivated me to understand and apply course concepts.	1	3	2	15	22	0	4.26	5	1.00
28. The instructor provides useful feedback on how I am doing in the course.	3	4	7	16	13	0	3.74	4	1.20
29. The instructor is accessible for help outside of the classroom.	1	0	1	20	20	1	4.38	5,4	0.76
Question Set Statistics							4.33	5	0.97

Base Questions item 18

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Indifferent (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	N/A 0	mean	mode	Std. Dev.
30. The classroom physical environment (e.g. temperature, lighting, acoustics) is	0	0	1	19	23	0	4.51	5	0.55

comfortable for learning.										
31. The classroom is free from outside distractions.	0	0	2	20	21	0	4.44	5	0.59	
32. The classroom design and furnishings do not interfere with my learning.	0	0	1	19	23	0	4.51	5	0.55	
33. The classroom has adequate instructional equipment and technology.	0	0	2	17	24	0	4.51	5	0.59	
Question Set Statistics							4.49	5	0.57	

Base Questions item 20

34. What are 1 or 2 specific things that helped you learn in this class?

- Good examples and game days for group work were helpful.
- The text (Cormen et al) was very helpful, with reasonable proofs (usually), illuminating examples, and thorough explanations on both technical and intuitive levels.
- The games were very beneficial to me. Applying the concepts learned in class in a small group setting and then later being tested on them was very helpful.
- Topic Games and Homeworks
- The group games were a great way to apply what we had learned and work with other students. I think there should be more of these types of activities.
- The availability of the professor in his office. That helped me clarify many questions that I had about the homework and concepts of the lectures.
- N/A
- Professor Scott does an excellent job of helping the students understand.
- The quizzes and the games helped a lot in keeping the students interested and to easily understand the concepts. Kudos to the instructor for that idea.
- Great lectures, I enjoyed Scott's teaching.
- * instructor was very helpful.
- Lecture notes, class walkthrough, youtube
- How to use certain techniques depends on the depth of a problem

- The slides and examples are well made and thought out. I appreciated having a reference sheet for exams.
- games helped alot
- Slides provided by instructor were useful
- proper quizzes, specially designed homework problems.
- The lecture notes were printed and handed to the students during/before we had the in-class lecture.
- Talking about exercises in class. Researching topics online
- The teaching style was great, and I really liked receiving the slide handouts to take notes on--they made it much easier to take notes while also paying attention.
- The instructor himself is very passionate in teaching materials to his students and the way he gives lecture is really amusing. Learn in fun indeed.
- Running examples after learning a new algorithm or method helped me understand the concepts.
- The in class game exercises were a huge help when I didn't fully understand something and your slides were always well written and useful.
- Dr. Scott's lectures and powerpoints
- The teacher's enthusiasm for the subject and his willingness to slow down the pace as much as necessary for me to understand the material
- Awesome Teaching.
- Games are really helpful in understanding the subject.
- The professor's examples
- The combination of Dr. Scott's enthusiasm and a well-scoped amount of coursework helped me learn in this class.
- The group problems before each quiz was a good way to help learn the algorithms.
- The examples were very good and always helped put better light on the topic.
- The textbook was very helpful.
- The professor did a brilliant job of explaining concepts clearly.
- Examples and complete explanations, instructor seemed to care if students were catching on.
- Class is well organized.
- - explanations and walkthroughs during class time for algorithms - great thing to have in this class.

- Instructors explanations and slides
- Professor Scott was an excellent teacher
- The instructor was charismatic and knowledgeable.

Base Questions item 21

35. What are 1 or 2 specific things that caused a problem with your learning in this class?

- N/A
- While rarely hampering my learning, the lectures were enlightening on only a few occasions. Stepping through algorithms is something I can read in a text, and proofs were presented by a combination of powerpoint presentation and speech (which is a technique that I find difficult to follow and highly inferior to simply reading the proof). Further, the professor's whiteboard technique was sloppy: He often failed to erase the whiteboard, simply writing around or over previous comments or sketches.
- There was no problem for me.
- NA
- The projector in the room is sub-par, it could be better.
- Most of the material covered in the class I have seen presented before, either in earlier classes or through my own research, so I felt no motivation to pay attention as I was not learning anything new. All of the homework assignments were graded by students, so when it came time for the mid-term, students were unable to asses what it was the professor would look for while grading. This made taking the mid-term more difficult as we had to asses on the fly what the professor would grade to.
- It wasn't immediately clear that we would need to read the book to have an understanding of what was not covered in class. In the beginning, I was under the assumption that all the material would be covered in class.
- The ultrastrict gradings kinda decreased my interest to do well in the course.
- None
- I was expecting at the class to explain the algorithm completely with simple examples Handout slides examples are not clearly explained most of the cases.
- I'm not usually a fan of the testing formula in which test questions are as difficult as or more difficult than homework problems. My reasoning is that homework assignments are allowed a week or two to complete, and yet something of the same length and similar difficulty is crammed into an hour or two. This is a minor complaint, though, since I have never tested well due to working very slowly in an effort not to miss anything.
- n/a

- Grading
- No standard answer available for the homework and quizzes.
- N/A
- understanding the concepts. In class they made sense, but when we had the homework it was hard to apply
- TA is not that helpful.
- I think we spent a little too much time going over the homework questions, I feel that time would have been better spent going over the core concepts so we have a better basis on how to solve the homework in general instead of that specific problem.
- student grading policy. It's not fair to ask student for grading other students' homework
- n/a
- There was only one midterm and it was weighted very heavily. Because I did poorly on this one test, my grade in the class is heavily jeopardized.
- Nothing, Really!
- Sometimes instructor changing slides too quickly, it's a little bit hard to follow while taking notes.
- Having to learn Latex
- n/a
- It would be nice if the exam problems were more knowledge based instead of problem-solving based.
- I would have liked the professor to work more problems.
- I can't think of anything in particular.
- Very poor assistance from the teaching assistant. Inconsistent explanations. She wasn't prepared to help during office hours.
- Course material is difficult.
- - very heavy focus on following rubrics, which are unknown to the student before they can do a homework assignment. Grades are given to show the student how well he/she understands the course material, not necessarily to show how well they followed a rubric that they have to guess at to attempt to score well on a homework assignment. - many questions were asked before every assignment (quiz or homework) that hinted to what would be expected on a question worthy of full credit. For quizzes this was not an option, as the time taken to ask the question and reformat quiz answers could be counted against the student as time lost to complete the quiz or assignment.
- NA

- Fellow students wasted a lot of class time asking stupid questions, but Professor Scott was commendable in his patience.
- The instructor was overly verbose, and this caused two problems. The first is that the material was covered at a snail's pace, and it was quite frustrating to attend class when we would spend hours on the same material. The other problem was that the material was explained... with lots of words, but it was still never quite clear. There are exceptions to this, of course; there were many times I praised the instructor's pace because the material was difficult for me to grasp. However, it detracts from the material more than it adds.

Base Questions item 22

36. Please provide 1 or 2 practical suggestions on ways to help improve student learning in this course.

- Having the students grade homework seems strange, I would discontinue that.
- I encourage the professor to stop using the powerpoint presentations. This material could be learned much better by a combination of reading the text and in-class discussion and algorithm analysis/design. While it was nice to have a pre-typed copy of the notes, I got almost nothing from lecture, except those times where we actually worked an algorithm or proved something as a class.
- Professor Scott has done a phenomenal job at teaching this course. I honestly do not have any practical suggestions other than to continue doing a great job!
- For the midterm exam, students may need more time.
- In a few cases I think we were short on examples. With this type of course, because the subject matter is so abstract (and even more so once P/NP discussion begins), I think having several concrete (but varied) examples for each topic could really help out.
- Introduce material that is less common and not presented in previous courses. Everything prior to NP completeness was presented, if not briefly, in CSCE310. Give the students a way to assess how you will grade the mid-term. On homework, since students were the graders, we got accustomed to how our peers would grade, and when it came to the way the professor graded the mid-term, it was drastically different.
- Give specific goals for reading and practice outside of class.
- None
- Its better to explain an entire algorithm with a simple examples. If so, a student know how the algorithm codes are working at each level. Sometimes the instructor take examples but not explaining how the entire algorithm works. Especially before a quiz we are doing a game sometimes I just don't understand why we are doing it and how it works. Its better to make sure that everyone understood the concepts behind it. Some classes I really enjoyed the games because I understood the concepts really well. Also I believe before we start a game its better to explain how a particular algorithm works with a simple graph or with a set of numbers. If the student get the concept properly even student can tryout game problem him or herself rather someone do it for her or him

- i wasn't a fan of the students grading homeworks as i feel everyone tried to grade scared and takes points off so they didn't get deducted
- I would agree that Dr. Scott is very enthusiastic about teaching this course, however, I feel the grading by both him and the TA was harsh and can somewhat be called unfair. I realize this is a graduate course but compared to other 800 level grad courses, this course seemed to have an unusually high expectation of students that may not have had previous exposure to algorithm concepts.
- Provide standard answer for the homework and quizzes.
- It would be nice to implement some algorithms in a programming language. In CSCE 310 with Dr. Bourke, we did such implementations and I believe it really helped my understanding of some of the more abstract material (i.e recursion is easier to see with programming in my opinion)
- Make the game days about questions more similar to homework and exams. I could do the quizzes and most game days, but when it came to the questions on the homework and exams I had a difficult time figuring out how to solve them.
- Maybe longer period for the homework? Or more quizzes.
- I would have liked some more direction on the peer grading of homework, algorithms is a fairly broad and complicated subject so I found it difficult to accurately grade my peers work in a fair and consistent manner.
- n/a
- I would very much like to see 3 or 4 smaller tests than one massive midterm that can ruin my grade.
- Scrap the idea of student grading papers. Be a little more generous with grades.
- Slow down a little bit in slides changing.
- Read the book
- I think having students grade our homework is a risky idea. Some students could be very lenient, and others could be very strict. I completely understand helping the TA with grading to make her job easier. My concern with the grading was with questions where there could be a good amount of partial credit. This completely depends on who the grader is and how lenient they are feeling. My idea would be for students to grade quizzes, where the questions are straightforward and there isn't a lot of room for (mis)interpretation.
- The solutions to homework and quizzes should be handed out in printed format at the least
- Show more examples from the textbook.
- Make sure to pay attention in class because the professor actually lectures well. Also, read the accompanying chapter in the textbook.
- Grading should be done by someone knowledgeable of the material that has already completed the course, not students.

- Hold some help sections. Need more TA office hours.
- - if for every question given on an assignment, there were some better hint as to clear weights given to points expected in an answer. Saves class time, homework time, and lost points.
- Don't let other students grade the homework. Homework grades were very inconsistent and it was hard to get points back if a student who didn't know the material gave you an incorrect mark on a problem.
- Tests were a little long consider the nature of this course is less systematic and more critical thinking. I always felt rushed.
- Clearer examples and more time spent on algorithm time analysis.

Base Questions item 23

37. Other comments that you would like to make:

- It was a great class.
- I cannot recommend this class. Most of the class is skill-and-drill for algorithm writing, with a focus on a few basic algorithms (rather than TYPES of algorithms). The two weeks that are spent on NP-completeness are about as theoretical as the class gets. In my opinion, if you'd like practice writing algorithms, pick up the text or try out the Graph Algorithms course; if you'd like information on NP-completeness, pick up the text or try out a complexity course. Very little in this course cannot be learned through other courses or simply practice. Also, the homework assignments were graded by students in the class. I understand that the professor and grader have limited time, but I never received useful feed back on the homework without taking to the professor and the grading style changed with each assignment. I cannot recommend this professor. I found him cold and, on more than one occasion, condescending to students in the middle of class. His presentation style is nothing special -- he uses a powerpoint presentation developed by another professor, which follows the text almost exactly. As an educator, he brings very little to the class.
- I very much appreciated professor Scott and am looking forward to taking more courses taught by him in the future.
- The peer grade system of homework is inappropriate for this class, sometimes the graders messed up.
- The instructor was excellent and willing to help at any time. He accommodated me when I was out of school for my wife's surgery. He is *clearly* focused on making sure the students understand and engage with the material, as opposed to simply lecturing and moving on.
- The professor is really nice and opened to any questions from the students. I really liked the games in class that forced us to think and work in groups.
- This course progressed incredibly slowly, although from observing my peers, I feel that the slow pace was necessary to not lose the slower members of the class. This is disappointing, as the slow members are holding back the higher members of the class.

- Most of the lectures and readings seemed to be focused around understanding existing algorithms. Translating that into creating our own algorithms on homework assignments and exams was challenging. More focus on creating algorithms in class would be helpful.
- The instructor was very enthusiastic and kept the interest of the students going throughout the course time. Would love to take another course if only he can bite back on the grading.
- I've found the way things are weighted and graded in this course to be very questionable. First, quizzes are worth a large chunk of your grade and don't test you over the core class concepts at all. Also, this is true for both the homework and the quizzes, I felt like I was nickle and dimed for very small errors. This is a subjective matter, but I am not the only one who feels this way. Even if you understood a complex problem on a fundamental level and had the correct general solution, you could easily end up missing more than half the problem's points on trivial matters. Finally, he needs to be less ambiguous about his expectations for problems on tests. There was one problem on the midterm with a very obvious solution that would have given full credit, but because it said "efficient solution" many students decided not to write that down, instead trying the much harder approach that most likely ended in partial credit. It's like I missed points because I thought the problem was harder than it actually was due to ambiguity in the wording, which really isn't acceptable from a grading standpoint. Also, it really isn't acceptable to let students grade their own class's work. This is only going to lead to problems.
- All the class techniques are good. Better to give a quiz at the end of the class because for some reason if someone getting delay for 5 min that person no need to rush him/herself to complete the quiz.
- good teacher, fun class
- N/A
- Excellent professor
- Overall, I enjoyed this class. It would be nice to have practice questions to help study for exams.
- I could say this about any class, really, but making it easier to determine your current grade would be helpful. The midterm email was very helpful, but it would be awesome if that info was live-updated with each homework on the website or somewhere.
- None.
- Probably one of the best algorithms courses I have ever taken. The homework was always a fun challenge and the classes were usually interesting.
- Dr. Scott single-handedly restored my faith higher education.
- Great teacher.
- Great class!
- The grading of other's homework did not seem necessary. It did help me understand the one problem I graded better, but there should be a better way of doing this.
- I do not necessarily like the student grading the homework. I feel the TA grading will be better or

42. The grader's fairness in grading is	10	15	9	2	6	1	3.50	4	1.31
43. The timeliness with which the grader returns the graded materials is	12	17	12	0	1	1	3.93	4	0.89
44. The grader's feedback on written work he or she graded is	11	8	12	5	6	1	3.31	3	1.37
Question Set Statistics							3.75	5	1.21

Grader Text Response

45. What strengths does the grader display?

- General knowledge of course material.
- Lina's timeliness in response to my emails was appreciated.
- I didn't interact with the grader very much. Hard to say.
- Handling the grading of a lot of abstract homework in a reasonable time. There are not always simple yes/no solutions to the coursework, and the grading can be very time consuming.
- Availability
- The "grader" Lina Yu was not actually the one grading the assignments, it was students who were grading. The "grader" did nothing and was no help at all. In the future, have the grader actually grade.
- NA
- Pretty much none
- The grader spend sometime to explain things well. However, sometime the grads are evaluated by students. Most of the times their grading is not correct and reducing marks without a proper explanation. Each time I have to check and needed to meet the grader to justify that my answer is correct which is a burden. Sometimes quizzes also even if we explain how it works the grader doesn't pay much attention on considering to alter the given grades.
- knows her material
- patience, proper hint for the homework problems.
- The ability to clearly make point of errors and how to correct them
- Helpful if there were questions
- The graded quizzes never seemed to take too long to get back to the students.
- Chinese speaking?

- What comments are present are helpful in seeing where I messed up on a problem
- n/a
- A friendliness with students and an objective, fair approach to grading.
- Punctual and Respectful.
- Very reasonable grade.
- n/a
- Tells students why they missed what they did.
- None in particular
- Knowledgable and kind.
- Fast grading with quick responses.
- Willingness to meet and discuss issues
- Never talked to her except when she gave me her work to do.

46. What areas does the grader need to improve in?

- Communication with the professor to know the specifics of what is allowed on certain homework assignments.
- The grader often seemed to have a difficult time reading my solutions when I went to her for assistance or had a problem with how my assignment was graded (frankly, at no fault to my solutions, which are precise and clear). Her explanations were consistently unclear and difficult to read. She was, on at least two occasions, entirely wrong in her explanation or reasons for deducting points from homework problems.
- Again, not certain. Didn't interact with them.
- More feedback on why points were deducted would be helpful.
- The "grader" Lina Yu was not actually the one grading the assignments, it was students who were grading. The "grader" did nothing and was no help at all. In the future, have the grader actually grade.
- NA
- I know there are a lot of students, but get more TA's instead of outsourcing work to the students. Also, I understand why you don't want to give us answers to the homework, but come on! There is seriously nothing more annoying that getting a question wrong with poor comments that don't explain anything, and then not being able to see a correct answer. Again, many students learn by example, so this is downright unacceptable and lazy from an academic standpoint.
- I believe grader must do the thorough checking in the home work assignments.

- explain why you missed points
- Grading is too stringent.
- N/A
- Grades somewhat harshly
- The credit taken off for slight mistakes on quizzes even though it's clear the algorithm is well understood by the student seemed incredibly harsh. I went in to ask about my first quiz after getting a lot of credit slashed off for a tiny mistake, but I didn't after that because I was convinced I wouldn't be able to get any points back. Maybe a rubric could be included with the graded sheet to at least justify the points taken, but as a student I'm of course obligated to request that they be graded more about understanding than about computer-brain perfection.
- Well, when asked about questions, she usually just pull off a google page and says: here, the answer. I mean I've given each question a fair amount of my own thinking and want to see if I'm on the right track. All she can give as feedback is some solutions online. So, I stopped once for homework questions and never went again. Overall grade for TA? C+.
- I would appreciate more detail in why points were deducted.
- she do not provide any useful information when ask homework questions
- n/a
- A more active role in the class might be helpful, for instance coming to class sometimes.
- Be more open to multiple answers. Be fair while grading, but don't expect perfect answers.
- More comments.
- She was un-moving in her resolve to not give out any more points, even if points were required.
- n/a
- Graded some quizzes potentially, if I only messed up at the beginning I would get very little points.
- Be consistent in grading all students
- Not prepared to help during office hours. She was not involved enough in grading. She did not appear to review the grading given by students. She gave incorrect information during office hours. I confronted Dr. Scott and he offered a solution. Very very poor quality of help. Made me feel unintelligent when offering incorrect solutions during office hours.
- Need more office hour to help students.
- Students grade homeworks. Grader grades quizzes. Nothing wrong here for homeworks, but quiz scores are sometimes unfairly judged, because the unwritten "focus" of the quiz may be on pictures drawn or paragraphs written on the quiz sheet. The student sometimes doesn't know which one to focus on, unless it's written in the quiz prompt, and shouldn't be penalized for missing the focus if there were no having clear guidelines stated on the quiz sheet.

- being on the same page with the instructor about grading policies on specific homework problems.
- It was quite obvious that she did not take the time to review the students grading of the homeworks because they were inconsistent and unfair. She was never able to answer any of the questions I had for her and instead I had to ask them in class.
- Why am I doing the grader's job?

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