Report Comments

Results were collected during the implementation of a new course evaluation system.

Guide to the Interpretation of Course Evaluations at UT Austin
The goal of course evaluation process at UT Austin is to drive teaching excellence and to support continuous improvement in teaching and learning experiences. The two sets of scales used for core evaluation questions and the associated weights are:

Strongly Agree (5)
Agree (4)
Neutral (3)
Disagree (2)
Strongly Disagree (1)

Excellent (5)
Very Good (4)
Satisfactory (3)
Unsatisfactory (2)
Very Unsatisfactory (1)

The Mean is calculated by adding all of the weights for a single question and dividing by the number of respondents. The course workload question is not averaged.
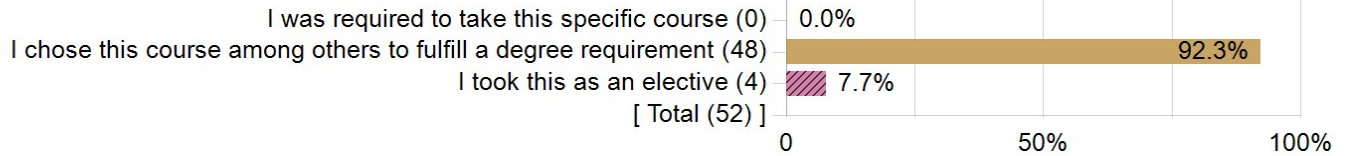
The number of students (e.g. Respondents) marking each option is reported for each of the items. These frequency distributions provide information about the level of student ratings and the spread and shape of the class distribution of responses. The distributions thus provide a picture of student perception of a course.

Course evaluations provide snapshots of student perspectives on their course-level learning experiences. Most experts on teaching evaluation advise that no one method gives the complete picture of an instructor's teaching effectiveness; multiple and diverse measures, on multiple occasions, are advised to give a full picture of the teaching effectiveness of a particular instructor. Moreover, other factors, such as size of class, level of the class, and content of the course, can cause small variations in the ratings. Therefore, student perspectives for a particular instructor or course should be interpreted as a snapshot, and not as providing complete information on the teaching effectiveness of that instructor.
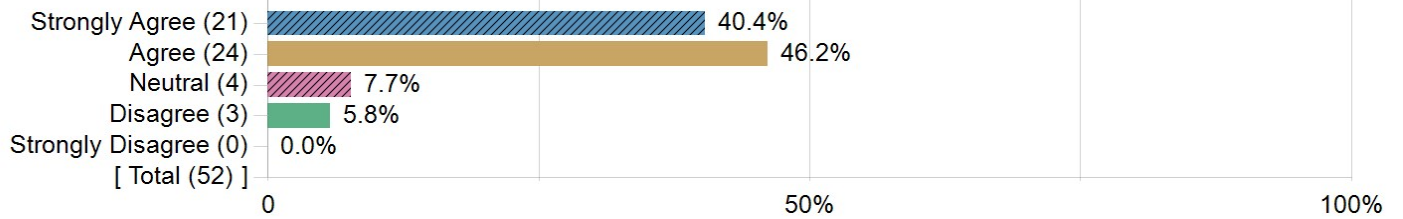
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Course Questions

Why did you take this course?

I was required to take this specific course (0)	0.0%
I chose this course among others to fulfill a degree requirement (48)	92.3%
I took this as an elective (4)	7.7%
[Total (52)]	

During this course, I gained a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Strongly Agree (21)	40.4%
Agree (24)	46.2%
Neutral (4)	7.7%
Disagree (3)	5.8%
Strongly Disagree (0)	0.0%
[Total (52)]	

Statistics	Value
Mean	4.21

The course was well organized.

Strongly Agree (33)	63.5%
Agree (10)	19.2%
Neutral (4)	7.7%
Disagree (5)	9.6%
Strongly Disagree (0)	0.0%
[Total (52)]	
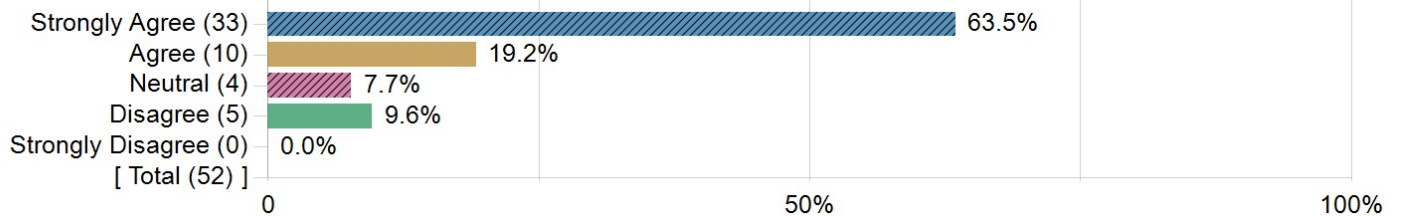
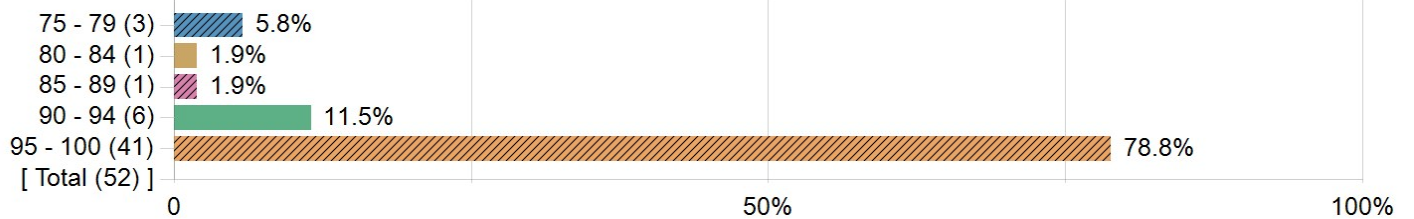| Statistics	Value
Mean	4.37

Overall, approximately what percentage of the course meetings did you attend or complete (online, in person, or asynchronously)?
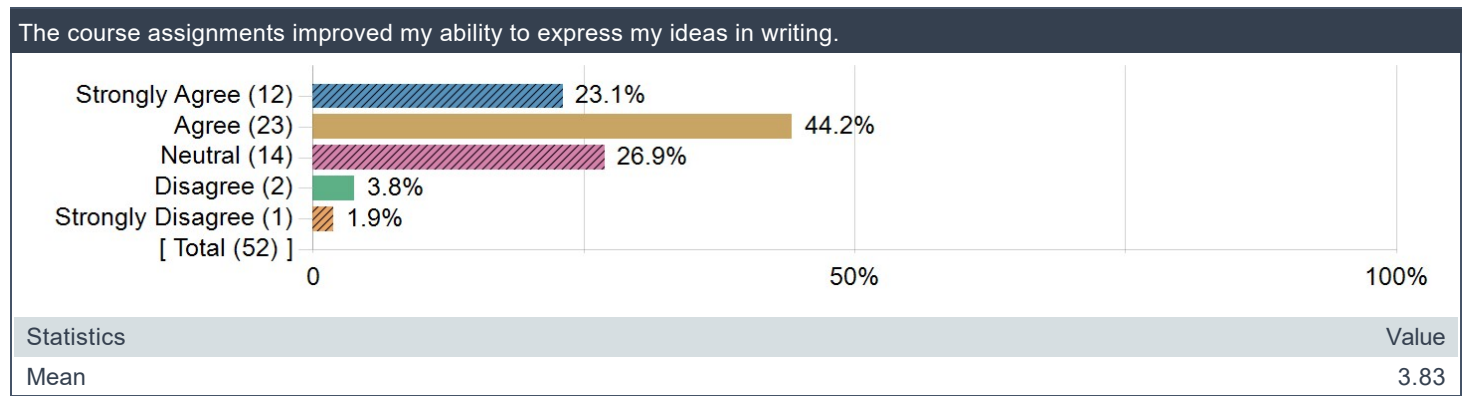
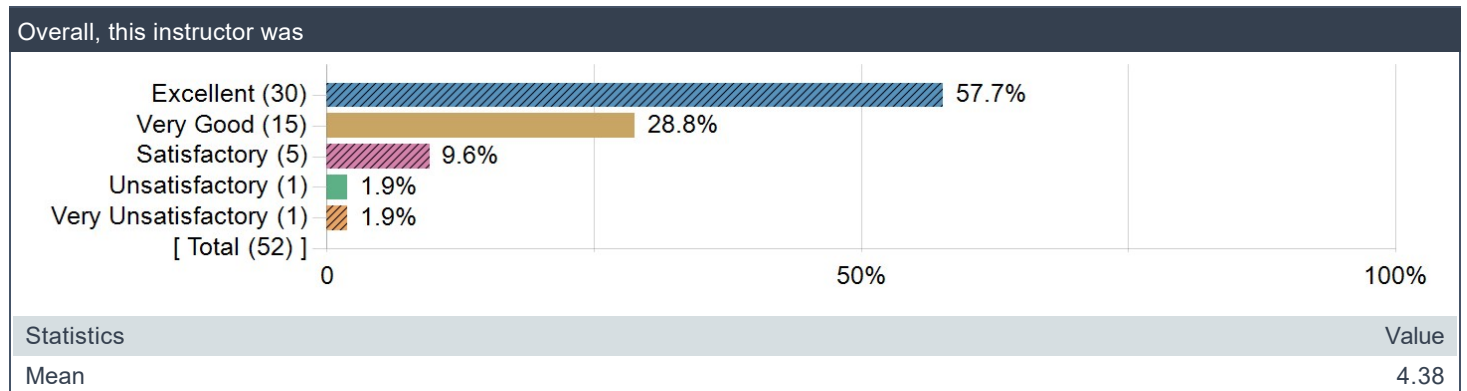|	
75 - 79 (3)	5.8%
80 - 84 (1)	1.9%
85 - 89 (1)	1.9%
90 - 94 (6)	11.5%
95 - 100 (41)	78.8%
[Total (52)]	

Statistics	Value
Mean	94.71

The course assignments improved my ability to express my ideas in writing. (Flag Question)

The course assignments improved my ability to express my ideas in writing.

Strongly Agree (12) — 23.1%
Agree (23) — 44.2%
Neutral (14) — 26.9%
Disagree (2) — 3.8%
Strongly Disagree (1) — 1.9%
[Total (52)]

Statistics	Value
Mean	3.83

Instructor Questions

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Responded	Mean
The instructor clearly explained the course objectives and expectations.	61.5%	34.6%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	52	4.58
The instructor fostered an inclusive learning environment.	63.5%	32.7%	1.9%	1.9%	0.0%	52	4.58
The instructor effectively explained the concepts and subject matter in this course.	55.8%	26.9%	13.5%	1.9%	1.9%	52	4.33
The instructional techniques kept me engaged in learning.	61.5%	23.1%	9.6%	3.8%	1.9%	52	4.38
The instructor checked for student understanding of the concepts presented in the course.	61.5%	32.7%	1.9%	3.8%	0.0%	52	4.52

Overall Questions

Overall, this course was

Excellent (18)	34.6%
Very Good (19)	36.5%
Satisfactory (12)	23.1%
Unsatisfactory (2)	3.8%
Very Unsatisfactory (1)	1.9%
[Total (52)]	

Statistics	Value
Mean	3.98

Overall, this instructor was

Excellent (30)	57.7%
Very Good (15)	28.8%
Satisfactory (5)	9.6%
Unsatisfactory (1)	1.9%
Very Unsatisfactory (1)	1.9%
[Total (52)]	

Statistics	Value
Mean	4.38
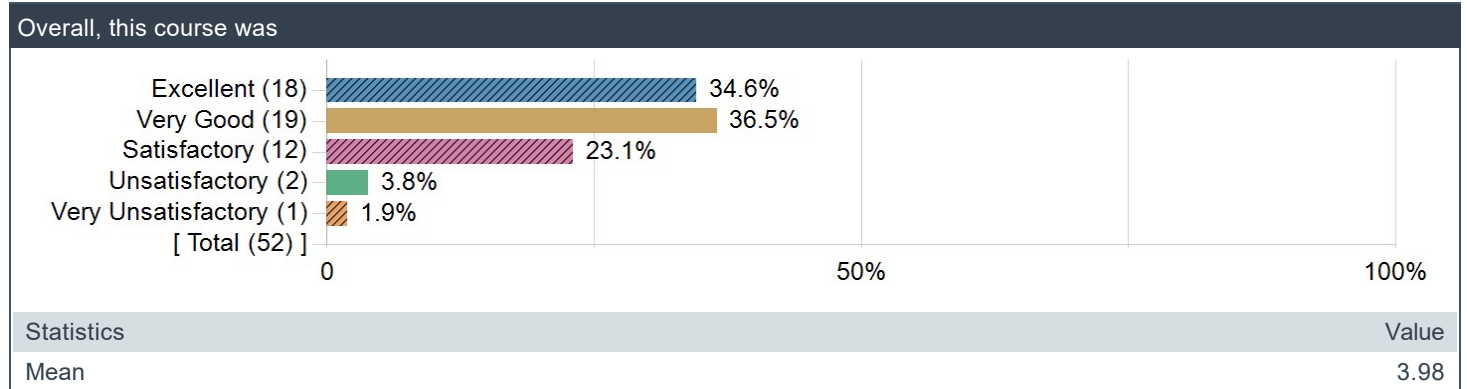
College, School, or Unit Questions

The instructor fostered a classroom environment in which all students could feel free to participate fully.

Strongly Agree (36)	69.2%
Agree (15)	28.8%
Neutral (1)	1.9%
Disagree (0)	0.0%
Strongly Disagree (0)	0.0%
[Total (52)]	

Statistics	Value
Mean	4.67
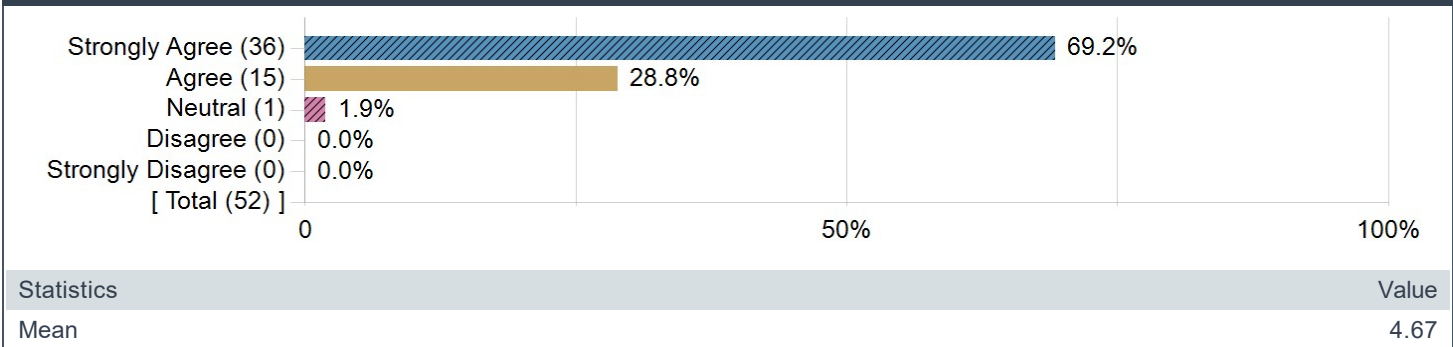
Comment Questions

Identify aspects of the course that were the most effective in helping your learning.

Comments
The content of the actual projects was good and helped me learn a lot about how backend meets with frontend.
The projects were the main learning point for me. The class is organized in such a way so that the projects aren't related to the material taught in class. As a result, I was forced to learn a lot about software engineering through my own research, which is a really good simulation of how things are going to be when I'm working as a software engineer one day. Essentially, learning concepts and tools by trial and error is much more effective when it comes to software development than traditional lecturing and studying is. In addition to this, the professor's lectures were very engaging, and as a result much easier to follow and absorb material from.
– in–class cold–calling and quizzes motivated me to pay attention – exercises helped me implement what I learned and get a more solid grasp of the material – I appreciated having the TAs and Dr. Downing in–class so that I could ask for help on the exercises (I found the quizzes and exercises to be a bit stressful due to their timed nature)
The papers were a really good way to learn more about a topic and encourage our own exploration of new ideas. In the same vein, the examples of particular design choices and strategies presented in class deepened my understanding of the concept, especially when both the correct approach and common incorrect approaches were discussed.
I found the lectures to be very informative, but I also learned a lot, if not more, through the group projects we had. I think they were more effective for me because I wasn't familiar with the tools we used prior to this course.
I found the
The professor has a deep knowledge of Python.
Explained concepts very clearly. Conversational style of teaching made things much easier to follow.
I liked the group projects, it taught me a lot about creating a full stack web app.
the group project was really helpful
lecture
The group projects were very good in helping my learning.
The project caused me to learn a lot, as well as lectures.
Lectures, Readings, Projects
IDB project
The notes were clear and concise, and the quizzes always directly contained the content of the previous lecture so they were easy to study for.
The cold calling in class kept me attentive. The lectures were interesting and informative.
Although it was nerve–wracking, Dr. Downing's cold–calling on us was very effective in helping me learn. It forced me to pay extra attention and make sure that I was actively learning. I also never felt embarrassed if I did not know something which made the process that much easier.
Posting notes on Perusall for quizzes
I really enjoyed the cold calling and how it forced you to constantly be paying attention. This helped my understanding of python a lot.
Having to do the project entirely on our own gives a more realistic simulation of industry work in the sense that we have to learn new technologies as we are using them.
I enjoyed that the projects were open ended. this simulated a real world SWE environment more accurately than any other class I've taken. It also allowed for personal expression in code.
The IDB Project was most helpful in my learning, because it required me to work with others to learn rather than being taught it directly by a professor.
Project based learning is always a good way to learn material
chatgpt
The exercises in class were very helpful in tying together the material that we learned in class.
I think the project felt like it prepared me for the real world more than any other class I have taken so far
I learned the most in this class from independently learning how to do the projects. Although it was probably one of my least favorite parts of the class, I do admit it forced me to learn and was the source of most of my learning in this class.
The style of teaching really helped stay engaged and topics were well explained.
The cold calling forced me to pay more attention during class

Comments
Although most of the projects required self–learned skills, this helped tremendously the learning process and being able to really dig around the internet. Helped my resourcefulness quite a bit.
The quizzes were good ways to ensure both my attendance and me paying attention, and were very helpful in making me actually learn what was being taught.
The project that we did in the course really taught me about how software engineering in the real world works. It was really nice to see how to work with a team on a project that would take a whole semester to completely finish. I also learned a lot about developing website including making a frontend and hosting the website.
Very clear explanations during lecture, and very structured course
The exercises in class
Learning more content about Python was super useful.
Lectures were very clear and thorough
The projects force students to learn the intricacies of software engineering, from back–end to front–end.
I liked the cold calling, it kept me engaged.
Groupwork and helpful teammates
Nothing in the class felt like it helped my learning. Everything that I picked up from the projects was self–taught and what I could have learned from doing my own side project outside of class. I was a bit disappointed by the material taught in class. I wanted to learn about best practices in designing software (ex: how authentication works), but instead I feel like we just got another object–oriented programming class (which was also the case with the majority of the papers).
The notes posted daily and the class recording helped me prepare for the daily quizzes.
This course forced us to learn everything on our own in order to develop the central project. It took a lot of self study and frustration in order to be able to complete the project.
The lecture style involved a conversation with the students about the material being discussed. I thought this helped me stay engaged for the duration of the class.
Having the group project was effective because it required you communicating and working with others. Sometimes you can see your members make mistakes and you can also learn from those as well.
Loved Professor Downing's lecture style. Posted notes helped a lot as well.

Identify the aspect of the course that you found most challenging, why you found it was challenging, and suggest one thing that could be done to help future students meet that challenge more effectively.

Comments
The aspect of this course the most challenging was no doubt the attendance quizzes. They were too difficult, did not have enough time, were too complex, and overall an unnecessarily stressful.
In the previous prompt I said that learning everything by myself was effective, and in deed it was. However, sometimes I would feel a bit lost. I can imagine that students with no prior internship or project experience see this as a much bigger issue. To solve this, I would suggest maybe having a bit more resources on the tools required for the projects (Like a tutorial module or something among those lines).
The group dynamics – I had a lot of trouble with a groupmate and had to bear the brunt of the work for several phases. My team was siphoned off into two sub–teams, so the rest of the group didn't see what was going on. I felt very burnt–out and still feel a bit resentful that I had to sacrifice time from my other classes to do a very disproportionate amount of work. In the future, I would like TAs to play a greater role in monitoring our progress and individual contributions during the mentor meetings.
The quizzes for each class were sometimes hard to complete on time due to the amount of code we needed to comprehend. I would say going over the lecture notes the night before definitely improves performance, but perhaps adding an additional minute of time may give students a chance to properly understand the question and recall the knowledge needed to answer it.
Sometimes I found the quizzes trickier than expected despite attending every lecture and reviewing both the Perusall notes and previous lecture before every class, because sometimes it'd be over content that was before the lectures I reviewed; I think it'd be helpful to know what lecture the quizzes will be over.
I thought that the IDB project was challenging just because I did not have too much experience with web development. Given the purpose of this project, I can't really suggest much aside from possibly giving a brief overview of front–end, back–end, databases, and how they all interact with each other. It doesn't have to be anything too complicated, but a brief introduction to how these parts of web development are related to the project that we were going to be given.
The curriculum was largely unrelated to our projects.
I found the daily quizzes to be tedious.

Comments
lecture material didn't match project assignment, wish we could have more lectures relating to full stack development
project is chaotic. more structured steps in project phases would be nice.
The in person quizzes were a bit challenging, and the requirement for an A should be dropped a couple to account for forced absences and incorrect answers.
I found Phase II was disproportionately time–consuming in relation to the other phases. In Phase II I spent about 45 hours, whereas I spent less than 25 on the others.
Projects: Even seeing other groups and how they implemented things helped pretty minimally, especially at the beginning phases.
Quizzes
I didn't really like how we only knew if there was an exercise a couple minutes before class, as I would've liked to do some extra preparation for them beforehand. I think that having a warning a couple days before an exercise would give students more of a chance to familiarize themselves with the content.
The projects were the hardest part. To meet that challenge, future students just have to take a lot of initiative to figure out how the tools they use are implemented.
Sometimes the specifications for the project were a bit confusing, so aligning what is on the rubric with exactly what is said in class would be helpful.
It was difficult learning web development on my own time, but it was an important part of this course. I would suggest putting out some React resources (like a textbook) to better help students.
The most challenging aspect was the fact that the class had absolutely nothing to do with the project. I wish you had given at least a brief summary of how to do each component of the project.
Having to do the project on our own is the most challenging aspect of the course because there is little to no overlap with the class material. One remedy to help reduce the level of challenge is to have more starter resources available as well as more active TA's.
I felt that, especially for backend, phases 1 and 2 was where the majority of the work occurred, I wish that the workload was balanced more effectively between all phases.
The essentially mandatory attendance policy was a challenge mostly because besides quizzes, there was no reason to come to class. The material covered in class was really only important for the next couple classes at most, and often felt like time that could have been spent better elsewhere.
One of the phases of our project clearly had 60% of the entire project's workload in it. I think it would be better if that workload was spread to the later phases where it felt like we had little to do.
10 am quizzes
The quizzes being everyday made the class feel very hard especially since they were only 1 minute per question. I did like how there were attendance quizzes somedays though. The quizzes I think are just too difficult for their time constraint, I feel like there should be a reduction in the level of difficulty on the quizzes or there should be more leniency on how many you can miss.
I think that the limited amount of work relating to the lectures made it really hard to actually remember the information in the long run since it was harder to find ways to apply them and set them in memory
Having little to no guidance on the projects was definitely the most challenging especially since I came in with no prior experience with anything regarding websites, REACT, or typescript. However, I understand this is done purposely for our learning and also simulate real–world software engineering assignments so I'm not sure what to suggest to improve in this other than perhaps more guidance.
I would have liked it if there were more time on the quizzes because sometimes reading and understanding the code takes longer than the allotted time.
Having to learn how to use the various tools to create the website was difficult and sometimes quite time consuming. Having more guidance on this would be useful
I'd say the requirement of being able to learn your skills and asset at home. Learning to be independent (and then, once again, to be interdependent amongst your teammates) was a huge challenge for me, but it all worked out in the end.
The exercises did not have enough time to be done a lot of the time. This issue was especially bad when there were few TAs, so you didn't really have help, so getting stuck on even one road bump could be enough to fail the exercise immediately. Giving more time, and trying to ensure the TAs were here more often might help, but I know scheduling isn't easy.
The aspect of the course that I found most challenging was the quizzes in the morning. If I was late to class or slept in, then I would miss the quiz and there are only 8 quizzes you can miss. For future students, I would say that they wake up earlier and try to be in class 5 minutes before it starts. This gives you time to set up your laptop to take the quiz and also some leeway in case you do get there late.
The most challenging aspect is figuring out the projects with your group. This is also the most rewarding part of the course.
The projects – i think providing more resources to figuring out the unfamiliar platforms would be helpful even without having to teach them in the classroom

Comments

The most challenging part of the course was completing the daily quizzes because the projects we had to complete were very different than the quizzes we had in class. I think if we had quizzes on perusall that did not affect your grade, that could be a great way to practice what you learned before taking the actual quizzes in class.

Quizzes could be over many things and sometimes hard to study for and were pretty short. Sometimes spent a lot of time reading the question and then the time would be up very quickly.

The most challenging part of the course would have to be the projects. These projects will take 10+ hours to work on per week and you must learn how to do each task with little guidance from lectures. There are of course office hours and previous projects that you are able to reference that does remedy the difficulty of the class.

I think the quizzes seemed too hard and often times seemed like they were trying to trick us instead of testing our understanding. Especially in the morning with only four minutes, it would have been nice if the quizzes weren't "trick questions" If the quizzes were meant to gauge participation and attendance and played such a crucial role in our grade, I think they should have been easier or more forgiving with the number we could miss.

Daily quizzes/lecture material structure could be changed to better reflect IDB project

The grading scheme felt extremely unfair given the lecture material being unrelated to the projects of the class. The attendance quizzes and exercises were both based on lecture materials almost entirely irrelevant to the project we worked on, and despite being attendance quizzes they were felt extremely unfair in terms of time given and difficulty. I barely have enough time to read through all the question before the quiz timer runs out and autosubmits. I've talked to several students in the class and they all feel as though the quizzes should not be this difficult if they're only meant for attendance.

The same goes for exercises. For the more difficult exercises, it feels like there aren't enough TAs in the room to help everyone, so it's difficult to get help. It would be really helpful if exercises were started during class, but could turned in before the end of day instead of the end of class.

with the current grading system, having a low quiz or attendance grade makes it pointless to even try in any of the other categories. Even though I put in a significant amount of time and effort into making sure my group understands and does well on each phase at the start of the year, with my recent quiz grades being low I don't see the point in trying anymore since I'll be capped at a B– regardless of how amazing the project turns out.

The most challenging aspect of the course was the big disconnect between the course content and the projects. It almost feels like taking two different classes at the same time. I would suggest having some of the course content relate to the projects so that we can use more of what we learn in class for the projects.

The aspect most challenging is the main project of the class, in which you have to develop a website with a group of 5. If you're lucky, you get a good group. If not, you're in for a semester of pain. That aside, it still takes a lot of study and frustration in order to produce a working product.

The project was definitely the most challenging aspect. It was rewarding when my group could get everything working, but really hard when we struggled with some portion of the assignment. It was also hard to balance and find time to complete the assignments within my group.

The most challenging part was working with several people to create an entire website because not everyone has the same drive as others, resulting in some conflict or disappointment. I would suggest the assignment of teams be based on a form that considers the person's goals/drive for the class whether it be they want to make the best site and will dedicate as many hours needed or if they're just trying to pass the class.

The projects. What we had to use for the projects wasn't taught in class, and we instead had to self learn. It was the most challenging aspect, but I did like that we were forced to teach ourselves the content. Also the GitLabs of the past groups make it very easy to learn.