

University of Michigan

Winter 2021 Instructor Report With Comments

EECS 590-001: Adv Prog Lang

Westley Weimer

12 out of 42 students responded to this evaluation.

Responses to University-wide questions about the course:

	SA	A	N	D	SD	N/A	Your Median	Univ-wide Median	School/College Median
This course advanced my understanding of the subject matter. (Q1631)	8	3	1	0	0	0	4.8	4.6	4.6
My interest in the subject has increased because of this course. (Q1632)	7	1	3	1	0	0	4.6	4.3	4.5
I knew what was expected of me in this course.(Q1633)	6	4	1	1	0	0	4.5	4.6	4.5
Overall, this was an excellent course.(Q1)	9	2	1	0	0	0	4.8	4.4	4.5
I had a strong desire to take this course.(Q4)	7	2	2	1	0	0	4.6	4.1	4.5
As compared with other courses of equal credit, the workload for this course was (SA=Much Lighter, A=Lighter, N=Typical, D=Heavier, SD=Much Heavier). (Q891)	1	3	4	4	0	0	3.0	2.9	2.9
How did you participate in this course? (SA=Attended most synchronously, A=Attended most asynchronously, N=Attended most in person, D=Attended some in person and some online) (Q1854)	11	1	0	0	0	0	5.0	4.8	4.7

Responses to University-wide questions about the instructor:

	SA	A	N	D	SD	N/A	Your Median	Univ-wide Median	School/College Median
Overall, Westley Weimer was an excellent teacher.(Q2)	10	1	1	0	0	0	4.9	4.7	4.7
Westley Weimer seemed well prepared for class meetings.(Q230)	11	0	1	0	0	0	5.0	4.8	4.8
Westley Weimer explained material clearly.(Q199)	11	0	1	0	0	0	5.0	4.7	4.7
Westley Weimer treated students with respect.(Q217)	11	0	1	0	0	0	5.0	4.9	4.9

Responses to questions about the course:

	SA	A	N	D	SD	N/A	Your Median	University-Wide Median
Prerequisites provided adequate preparation for this course. (Q61)	6	2	2	1	0	1	4.6	4.4
The textbook made a valuable contribution to the course. (Q64)	4	1	3	0	0	4	4.5	3.8
I felt included and valued when working with other students. (Q253)	6	2	1	0	0	3	4.8	4.5
I felt comfortable asking questions in class. (Q521)	7	3	1	0	0	1	4.7	4.2
I developed confidence in my abilities as an engineer. (Q1769)	6	2	4	0	0	0	4.5	4.1
I developed the ability to solve real world engineering problems. (Q1770)	5	5	2	0	0	0	4.3	4.1
The discussion section was a valuable part of this course. (Q1771)	4	2	3	2	1	0	3.5	4.1

The medians are calculated from Winter 2021 data. University-wide medians are based on all UM classes in which an item was used. The school/college medians in this report are based on classes that are graduate level with enrollment of 16 to 74 in College of Engineering.

Written Comments

How did the teaching techniques (e.g., certain technologies used, specific approaches to testing and assignments, asynchronous or synchronous teaching methods, instructor flexibility, class interaction, small group work, other teaching methods) of this course serve the aims of this course/ or serve your learning in this course? (Q1872)

Comments
I think the approach of having two-word quizzes on the readings is great. It makes us accountable enough that I make sure to do the reading, but it also gives us some control over our own time if we aren't able to read as in-depth some weeks.
The teaching methods were effective, though I'd have liked to have office hours with the main instructor at least once in awhile, maybe a bi weekly office hour would suffice.
590 website was easy to navigate
I really enjoyed the midway lecture break and trivia! It was a nice recess and helped me to refocus for the second half of the lecture.
I think having the classes be mostly synchronous was a decent way to emulate the in-person experience, since we had a chance to participate. It wasn't perfect (as you'd expect), but I understand it's the best we could do given the circumstances.

Given your experience in this course, what teaching techniques do you think the instructor should continue to use in the future (e.g., certain technologies used, specific approaches to testing and assignments, other testing methods, asynchronous or synchronous teaching methods, instructor flexibility, class interaction, small group work, other teaching methods)? (Q1873)

Comments
Continue to have the class be based on medium-sized homeworks. It's a great balance between being somewhat challenging, but neither too high volume nor too high stress.
All methods seemed good. I'd take another class in the same format
I appreciate the fact that 590 didn't have any timed exams.
I think having the partner-based homework assignment was a great idea, we were able to better test each others' understanding and help each other with things we were confused with. Having someone to discuss the final homework with was a great way to make sure I was learning things correctly.

Comment on the quality of instruction in this course. (Q900)

Comments
Wes Weimer is easily one of the best instructors I've had in my entire academic career. He cares deeply about the students and the material, and his passion really shines through. I've never seen another professor spend so much effort answering every single question on Piazza, or just be as well-prepared for lectures.
Incredible quality. Wes is a talented software engineer and researcher as well as a strong orator. This combined to offer interesting, practical, and easy to understand lectures even when topic became dense (notation overload due to PL techniques).
Wes is an excellent teacher. I took this class primarily because of the good things I had heard about him from classmates. I was not disappointed.
I also really appreciated the long write-ups Wes would write on the Piazza forum. His level of transparency and genuine care for his students learning is practically unrivaled in CSE.
I do think that Wes runs the risk of sounding patronizing in some of his more long-winded replies (especially to questions that really only need a simple answer) but in general I think he walks the line well.
Professor Weimer always answered students' question with respect and provided detail explanation which was very helpful for me.
This class was excellent. Wes really knocked it out of the park with his instruction. He was always really enthusiastic and (dare I say) genuinely funny. The class participation helped make it just a little more than a typical Zoom lecture, so I appreciate the work put into incorporating that into the class.

How might the class climate be made more inclusive of diverse students? (Q910)

Comments
Synchronous lectures likely made it difficult for students in other time zones (or students with alternate sleep schedules...)
I felt very included at all times, and noticed none of my peers experiencing exclusion. It would probably help to allow some student teamwork as the experience was isolating, but beyond that I saw no issues.
It's good enough
Wes goes out of his way to make the class as inclusive as possible and welcoming of students from diverse backgrounds. There are probably ways to improve but nothing immediately comes to mind.
Having a 5 to 10 minutes student gathering during the discussion section was helpful.

What were the strengths of the course ? (Q953)

Comments
Everything!
The instructor's ability to explain complex PL ideas clearly.
Great teacher, fun lessons, interesting papers to read about
This class certainly challenges students to think abstractly and to apply course concepts in novel ways on the homeworks.
Professor Weimer's kind explanation as well as his responsiveness to students' question on Piazza
Definitely the thought put into this class. It's apparent that Wes put a lot of consideration into every detail, from lectures to grading, and even sharing with us some pedagogical theory. Overall, he was very transparent about his policies and procedures, and even gave us detailed explanations that justified them. He made it so we felt comfortable asking questions, whether it be in class or Piazza, and I think that really sets the standard for any type of university class.

What suggestions would you make for improving the course ? (Q955)

Comments
Some of the later topics like type systems felt like they weren't really addressed in the homework assignments. I would have loved to get a chance to implement some of the type checking or type inference algorithms, do an actual project with dependent types, or something along those lines.
More team based work, maybe rotational.
The HW6 source code is a disaster and should be reworked to be more compatible with today's technologies. It is a real stain on what I thought was otherwise a brilliant course.
Make 490 an actual prerequisite so people who don't know OCaml can't join, I had no idea what OCaml was before this class and that really backfired for the last homework
I think I would have preferred it if the scope/size of hw6 was expanded a bit and hw5 was canceled. Hw6 was really interesting and it would have been nice to have a little extra time to work on it and build something more fully featured. If not that, then perhaps a multi-day take home exam. I like the fact that 590 doesn't have any exams but some sort of long term assignment that recaps everything we've done over the semester would be nice.
It is already perfect, but I could think the this class will be much better if I took it in in-person.
I would suggest making the discussion section longer. I know the class is already 2 hours long, but I feel like we tend to run out of time in the discussion and don't have a chance to go over more practice problems.

Among the courses you have already taken, which proved the most (or least) effective in preparing you for this course, and why? (Q1098)

Comments

EECS 490 was likely the most helpful as it introduced basic type theory and operational semantics. In general, having taken proof-based math courses would be extremely useful as the course assumes general mathematical maturity.

The formal verification course last semester by Karem Sakallah (EECS 598) prepared me well for many PL topics.

I'd think 490 would have been effective had I taken it

EECS 490 provided a lot of good prep (naturally) but other than that I think 376 material was very applicable.

Taking an undergrad programming languages class definitely helped, at least with understanding the terminology being used. Of course this class goes much further, but knowing what terms to look up is half the battle.

functional programming, which helps better understand lambda calculus