University of Michigan
Fall 2019 Midterm Instructor Report With Comments
EECS 398-001: Special Topics
Nicole Hamilton

25 out of 58 students responded to this midterm evaluation.

Responses to questions related to the course:

	SA	A	N	D	SD	N/A	Median
I had a strong desire to take this course.	18	5	0	1	0	1	4.8
This course advanced my understanding of the subject matter.	12	10	2	0	0	1	4.5
My interest in the subject has increased because of this course.	14	7	2	1	0	1	4.6
I knew what was expected of me in this course.	7	6	8	3	0	1	3.7
Work requirements and grading system were clear from the beginning. (Q232)	6	9	6	2	0	1	3.9
I am learning a great deal in this course.	14	8	1	0	0	1	4.7
The amount of work required so far appears to be appropriate for the credit being received.	12	9	2	1	0	1	4.5
Overall, this is an excellent course.	13	8	1	1	0	2	4.6

Responses to questions related to the instructor:

	SA	A	N	D	SD	N/A	Median
Overall, Nicole Hamilton is an excellent teacher.	14	7	2	1	0	1	4.6
Nicole Hamilton gives clear explanations.	12	8	3	1	0	1	4.5
Nicole Hamilton acknowledges all questions insofar as possible.	16	8	0	0	0	1	4.8
Nicole Hamilton uses class time well.	10	8	6	0	0	1	4.3
Nicole Hamilton seems well-prepared for each class.	13	5	6	0	0	1	4.6
Nicole Hamilton uses techniques to foster class participation.	11	11	1	1	0	1	4.4
Nicole Hamilton treats students with respect.	16	6	1	0	0	1	4.8
Nicole Hamilton is teaching in a manner that serves my needs as a student.	14	9	0	1	0	1	4.6
Nicole Hamilton is willing to meet and help students outside class.	18	6	0	0	0	1	4.8
Nicole Hamilton is enthusiastic.	21	3	0	0	0	1	4.9
Nicole Hamilton keeps students informed of their progress.	14	7	3	0	0	1	4.6
Nicole Hamilton sets high standards for students.	14	9	1	0	0	1	4.6

Written Comments

What are the major strengths of this class? What is helping you to learn? (Q979)

Comments
Feels like we're learning a lot, wish there were more checkpoints just to make sure my team is on target.
It is really geared to making the student learn. Professor Hamilton makes herself available for any and all questions, but forces us to learn on our own, which makes us have a much stronger grasp over the material.
The fact that this is a project based class and that the course is structured such that the material learned in class helps guide you in the project and vice versa is a helpful way to learn.
I think the amount of material covered is good. The slides are also good for going back and solidifying understanding.
The stuff we are learning is coo. Project based class is fun
Applicable large scale design problems.
One major strength is its ability to combine a bunch a subjects related to computing, programming, and computer science into a systems project that is both easy to understand on a surface level for family and friends, but complex enough to impress employers and recruiters.
The major strength of the class is the project content, the homeworks and labs. Hands on experience really helps me learn.
Major strengths include the breadth involved in the system design project as well as the ability to teach high level concepts to first time learners.
The labs help me learn.
– labs – office hours
The disorganization of the class is negatively affecting my learning experience

How can Nicole Hamilton improve this class? If possible, give specific examples. (Q980)

Comments
Perhaps providing her objectives for each class, letting us know what she intends for us to learn. She provides an agenda which is helpful for managing time, but I am not always sure what she wants us to learn from each lecture.
While I understand the material taught in class and the material taught is interesting and valuable, I feel as if I am unsure of the overall objective of each class.
I think that some of the lectures seem very heavy on the code. Converting those to labs might be better.
you dont have to be so worried about not showing code during he lectures. Just make sure that the code you do show is targeted and specific. Eg. if you want to highlight how a semaphore can be used to make an array thread–safe then there is nothing wrong with showing a minimalist section of code displaying that idea. Dependency guidelines are unclear for code outside of our engine (important) and style guidelines are unclear for code inside our engine (less important). I think the first hw assignment would go over better with students if the autograder gave more helpful feedback, and the assignment would still get across the ideas you want but in a way that feels less antagonistic.
Hardware: This class requires students to gain access to a computer of decent power (better than a laptop) that can run for a long period of time as well as large amounts of storage. The common way to do this is through cloud services like AWS, but students can also obtain their own hardware as well. The problem with this is that it can end up costing money to get access to either of these. This gives an unfair advantage to students who are willing to pay for an A. In the future I would like to see University provide the hardware for each team so that everybody is on equal footing with hardware, but until then I would like to see some sort of check put into place to balance the field for teams who decide to “throw money at the problem” and get way better results then other teams. There is some value in making students be creative in how the obtain hardware, but I feel the monetary aspect is enough of a negative, that the usable resources should be standardized. If this is unfeasible, I think it would be good if you could make a list of what students did in past semesters to get around the hardware problem that all could see to at least level the playing field a little. Organization: This Semester:

Comments
I would appreciate it if you post the slides for a lecture before class. You have forgotten a few times this semester, so this is just a reminder. Future Semesters: This class is experimental and evolving each semester as more and more students take it. I feel you have improved in this area from previous semesters, but there are still areas that could be improved on. I would like to see you use the resources available to you to help improve this class. EECS 485, EECS 482, and EECS 486 (Information Retrieval only Winter Semester) all cover similar material as this class and I think they could provide you with valuable resources that they have built for their classes that they will let you have access to. EECS 485 even has a project to build a simple search engine in Python. It would be cool to see this class have a similar class homepage to EECS 280, EECS 285, EECS 490, and EECS 485. You should also ask your IAs about resources they found helpful when taking this course and provide it for future semesters. You could even make your own exit surveys and have the teams provide with some. I think this could really help future semesters. Also, keep bugging DeOrio about helping you develop this class. DeOrio is one of the best teachers I have had at University of Michigan and he has a real passion for teaching and is constantly trying to improve the classes he teaches. He made EECS 280 a much more organized class and he is currently working on EECS 485. I would love to see you convince him to make this class his next project with you. I want to see this class get a full course number and provide an MDE experience I think is missing from current CS MDEs. Labs: As you know from last semester, I think the labs for this class really help students get used to working with the libraries we need to use for this course and complement the lecture material, by allowing you to step through the process. It also helps get the point across of breaking a project down into small pieces and building each of those. I think its good for the IAs as well. Students get to know them better and feel more comfortable approaching them with questions. Idea for other labs: Making a stream wrapper for basic system IO calls. Making a simple hash function or even a simple hash table.
Maybe speaking a little bit slower would help.
I think the content's structure and order could be revised. For example, there are three lectures covering threads, processes and locks. Each lecture covers a little more details than the last. I think it might be better to give a general overview. Then cover threads, then locks and processes. I think that would be a better flow because if I have confusion of a particular part of threads, I could go back to the threads lecture, instead of going through all three to find the part that I'm looking for.
I would recommend front loading more work in the class for the future, so that teams can start crawling and working faster.
Doing great!
She's already an amazing instructor.
– better team selection than just arbitrary "Hey make your own groups on the first day" – gives an unfair advantage to preformed groups – sure preformed groups can exist but there should be a better teaming mechanism for others Idea one: Speed dating. Have 5 or so minutes each where people rotate and get to know each other. Idea two: Collect student information and preferences and prior knowledge and create balanced teams More ideas: http://facultyguidetoteamwork.umn.edu/how–do–i–form–successful–teams TL;DR there has to be a better way than "Form teams on day one. Oh, you still don't have a team? People who don't have teams raise hands. There, another team" More cons to "alright first class is over now you mingle and figure out who to team with" – You are stuck with the first group of people you meet. No one seems like a bad teammate in the first 5 minutes of conversation. – If you talk to a separate group after 5 minutes it can be thought of you not trusting your first group and they may find someone else. – Less vocal and more introverted people will especially Fall trap to being a team with the first group they meet
Separate lab/discussion please

Comments

Please enter any additional comments you have for Nicole Hamilton. (Q981)

Comments
Excited to see how the rest of the semester progresses!
I (and all of my friends in this class) are amazed about how well you dealt with your personal tragedy. We are all very sorry for your loss.
You should be proud of how wonderful this class is and how far it has come. I'm always excited to come to class and learn from you.
I really enjoy you as a teacher and this class. I think it offers something no other MDE offers currently and I hope to see it become a permanent class in the future. I hope you enjoy teaching at Michigan and continue for a while. You add a lot of value to the CS department. Have you considered teaching 281? If you get the chance if think you should.
Overall, I think there should be more assignments and labs! Those are super fun and good for just getting our feet wet.
Prof Hamilton is doing a great job teaching the class. Super knowledgeable and makes the class fun to be at. I also really appreciate that she wants to meet with teams outside of class, it shows she really cares about her students and their success.
N / A
N/A