Questions

What do you currently know about ML?
What excites you most about the field?
How do you dream of applying machine learning?
What do you prefer: understanding the nitty gritty math details of these algorithms and building understanding from the ground up, or building more advanced/complex/powerful algorithms on the cutting edge using a decent amount of abstraction? Some mixture of the two styles? How much of each and why?
What other fields are you interested in? This could be literally anything (art, music, particle physics, botany, writing, cancer research, finance, space exploration…)
Check out some of these machine learning model descriptions/competitions/projects...what excites you most and why?

Response Summary

(Please note this was a pretty small sample size → roughly 10 of my peers, interviews conducted in person)

- The majority of people i talked to were more interested in learning about the cutting edge of the ML/AI field (even if that meant using abstracted tools) → a small amount of the nitty-gritty mathematics seems appropriate, just to build some ground-level confidence in the first principles
- Folks who have a clear sense of what field they want to enter in the future are most interested in ML projects related to that field (for example, a lot of my friends are interested in the medical field so they are very interested in machine learning applications that relate to personalized medicine, etc)
- As a first order of business, people want a clear sense of what ML/AI is and how it works (go beyond the buzzwords)
- People like free choice and creative liberty -- the space to independently put together what they've learned
- Not too many people are familiar with Kaggle

My main takeaway:
Based on this, I think the ML psets should introduce students to a variety of core AI building blocks, with the aim of helping students develop the literacy they need to later branch out and apply these techniques to problems and fields they're most passionate about. A "capstone" or "free choice" project at the end of the curriculum would be very appealing!