Discrete Structures (Fall 2023)

Instructor: **Hamlin, Ariel**
Subject: **CS**
Catalog & Section: **5002 02**
Course ID: **17352**
Objectives:

Enrollment: **96**
Responses Incl Declines: **26**
Declines: **2**

Instructor Related Questions: Ariel Hamlin (41 comments)

Q: What were the strengths of this course and/or this instructor?

1	Strengths: Lenient in grading
2	Less quiz will be better after so many homework.
3	I believe it provides good foundation to lead into my future classes.
4	Instructors were enthusiastic about the subject matter.
5	She clearly loves the material and brings a great energy to lecture. It was also very helpful to have lecture notes posted online. Fast, informative Piazza responses.
6	Professor Hamlin is very passionate about some of the topics covered in this course and is a fun and energetic professor. I believe she cares about her students and wants to see them succeed, despite some communication issues.
7	Contain lots of cat related story love it.
8	The instructor valued our learning significantly.
9	Her energy
10	The instructor displayed enthusiasm for wanting us to succeed. The instructor understood our background is not in CS or math, and instructed us in an appropriate manner.
11	Ariel is doing great. I like this course.
12	Strengths were her ability to make people laugh during a stretch of serious information.
13	Ariel was really approachable, kind, and get things lighthearted and positive. I loved her lecture style of live note-taking and problem-solving that I could follow along with. She was generous with taking questions and pausing to make sure students could ask questions during lecture, and responded quickly to messages on Piazza and email to make sure she was helping students.
14	The enthusiasm and energy she brought to class.
15	class interactions and atmosphere was awesome and higher than my expectation

Q: What could the instructor do to make this course better?

1	Be more prepared for lectures. The instructor would make several mistakes during class when giving examples and would not have their notes organized. It is frustrating as a student to come to class when the instructor has to correct several mistakes during and after lecture.
2	Provide coherent notes and lecture material for us to follow. Professor often made mistakes that had to be corrected by a TA in lecture and would excuse it as the notes that she was following did not belong to her. Providing students practice problems to learn content - we were given homework and graded on them without any sort of practice. We later were given practice problems from another professor teaching this course but often times did not really help with the homework. Be available for students: Me and several of my classmates have not heard back from the professor asking for help or questions for weeks. TA and professor office hours were sparse which made it very hard to ask questions. I have even reached out and asked for more assistance and was told that there wasn't anything they could do. TA's do not seem to be aligned in material. Most of our homework was written by a TA (our midterm was also mostly written by a TA). This was a huge disconnect from what the professor was teaching in class and the kinds of questions we were expected to answer with not way to practicing (refer to second point). There needs to be more introductory material or resources for students who do not have a background in math. As a student who had recent experience in math courses this was not difficult for me, but for students who have not taken a math course in a very long time, they were thrown into a class that did not provide enough context to help them succeed in a program that is advertised to accept students of all backgrounds. This is probably the biggest thing that needs to be improved on for this class.
3	The textbook was awful compared to other textbooks covering the material and did not map to the course well. It would have been nice to have a formal text that maps well to the material we are covering. The instructor provided handwritten notes that were generally quite good, but this is not the same as a peer-reviewed textbook mapped to the material. 5001 uses a module-based model that would have been extremely helpful here. I'm disappointed this wasn't also used for 5002.
4	I didn't feel like she came to lecture prepared or that much time was getting put into the course. Lecture often included mistakes (including about important material) and was disorganized. We had very few practice problems that weren't graded, and those that were provided were from different instructors, which were often different from the problems in lecture and graded materials.
5	please make the material covered in lecture relate to homework, quiz and exams
6	I think Professor Hamlin is a great professor, truly. I don't know if this was an off semester, if this was a new course for her, or what happened, but this course felt very all over the place. Lectures often felt rushed through in an effort to cover material. Sample problems covered in class were very surface level and did not help with solving actual homework/quiz problems whatsoever. TAs even said homework problems for this section of the course were far more challenging than ones they had been given when they took the course, and on multiple occasions the solutions TAs would help you come to during OH were not even the correct solutions. Considering this course is meant to be an introductory bridge course to prepare students with no background for success in the MSCS program, I do not think this course did a great job at that. I know several students who frequently felt stressed out, overwhelmed, confused, or just flat out dumb this semester as a result of this class. There was a blatant disconnect between the material we would cover in class and what seemed to be expected of us on homework assignments. If this had been the first and only course I took as a part of the Align program, I truthfully don't know if I would have continued with the program.
7	A few times, I do feel that the materials covered is not clear explained.
8	The instructor could enhance lecture preparedness by reviewing materials in advance. This proactive approach would minimize confusion for students and facilitate a smoother understanding of the content.
9	I think that this instructor could prepare her classes beforehand.
10	Provided homeworks that had more problems in quantity, for us to practice more. Instead of having short homework assignments with complicated, difficult problems. Consistency wins over short brilliance.

Q: What could the instructor do to make this course better?

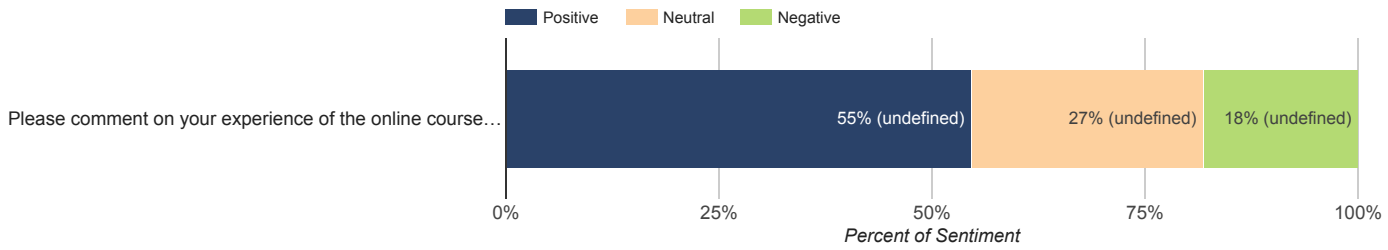
11	I think the questions for weekly assignments are little tricky. They are not hard, but the questions are difficult to understand.
12	Teach the material instead of joking around. She spent 90% of the teaching time telling us the wrong information to then say she will correct it in her notes and post online. Neither the quizzes nor the homework ever matched what was taught in class.
13	Some of the more difficult foundational concepts could have been taught differently or reinforced more than just a brief introduction in lecture. For example, the philosophy behind induction is something I struggled with and once we were given assignments that really pushed us to expand the application of induction to say, graphs and geometry, I realized I didn't have a strong enough understanding of it. More time spent on understanding how to think about certain math concepts would have helped me I think (and talking about "why do we care about this concept" is always helpful.)
14	Come to classes prepared with your own notes.
15	the speed was a little bit fast.

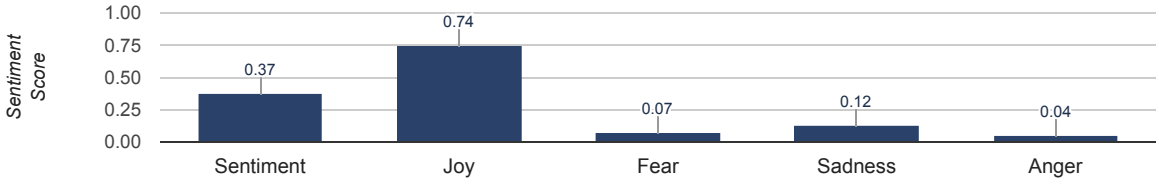
Q: Please expand on the instructor's strengths and/or areas for improvement in facilitating inclusive learning.

1	Doing great!
2	It is very important to understand that this course is "sold" as a program for students with no background in computer science including this course. That is why I consider that the instructor could improve his pedagogical techniques to make the transfer of knowledge more efficient for students who do not really come from STEM areas. An instructor can be very good in their field, but teaching requires different skills.
3	Areas of improvement: Be more prepared for lectures with notes they are familiar with.
4	I would say, the TAs from this course are not participating on piazza. Most questions were answered by the instructor and the TA called Akshar.
5	All needed is in the statement above.
6	Quizzes (all = 20%) were nearly equal to exams(all = 25%) in grading weight. I don't think this was very fair, as the material covered in quizzes often had no opportunity for clarification in class before being tested on the subject. The lack of a formal layout of topics in scope for quizzes vs. exams made them difficult to study for. Would have shifted the weighting to 15/30 or 10/35. This was made worse by the lack of a reliable textbook that mapped well to the quiz topics.
7	She was engaging which was good but could have a stronger grasp on the material before teaching it. If her students are doing better than she is in the course, something's wrong.
8	Ariel did an excellent job of facilitating inclusive learning. I felt so comfortable and welcome in lecture and office hours. On one occasion a student posted a rude post on Piazza and she even handled that perfectly - she deescalated and reminded everyone of the class policies on respectful communication and I appreciated her response and her tact so much.
9	I think this course could be improved by becoming more beginner-friendly. The Align program is meant to be for students with no CS background or knowledge of CS. Yet, this course skimmed over topics very frequently. If you weren't familiar with a topic covered, good luck, because all you would get was a brief vocabulary overview, a few surface level problems (that were very frequently incorrect and had to be corrected by a TA or revised later on Piazza) and a prayer. You were on your own. Being that this course is meant to be an introductory one, topics should be covered and explained as if students have no prior experience with or knowledge of them. If there is an inability to do so based on time constraints, then supplemental material should be provided to students so they can learn more outside of class. If this is not possible, then perhaps look into splitting the course into two so that topics can be properly covered, taught, and explained to students.
10	Please use the online textbook like the other professor.
11	N/A

Questions to Assess Students' Online Experience (11 comments)

Q: Please comment on your experience of the online course environment in the open-ended text box.





1	Love the resource section for all the class materials. ★★★★★
2	No online option, would be great to implement ★★★☆☆
3	I wish the professor recorded all the lectures ★★★☆☆
4	The course content posted in Piazza helps to going through this course ★★★★★
5	The textbook is clear and easy to understand. The exercises from the book are very helpful. ★★★★★

Q: Please comment on your experience of the online course environment in the open-ended text box.

6	I came into the program with recent math experience so many of these concepts were review or I have a good familiarity with the math concepts needed to do well. ★★★★★
7	5001's use of canvas was great, I wish 5002 also used online modules that covered the material in the same depth. ★★★★☆
8	It would have been helpful if there was a better remote option and lecture recordings in case emergencies got in the way of attending in-person lecture. ★★☆☆☆
9	There was not much of an online element to this course. Canvas was not utilized at all, everything was through Piazza and Gradescope. I didn't have a problem with this, though it was annoying to not be able to view your current grade in the class based off graded assignments unless you calculated it manually. I do wish the online course environment was utilized more to share resources for topics covered in class since most topics were covered very briefly using very simple examples that did not translate to homework/quiz questions. If there wasn't time to deep dive into the topics covered in class, supplemental material should have been provided online since this class is meant to be a bridge course for students who have no background/knowledge of the topics and to prepare these students for the MSCS program. It often felt like you were on your own to figure out what you didn't understand, and did not feel like a class to prepare you and get you ready for the MSCS program. ★☆☆☆☆
10	This class was in person ★★★☆☆
11	It was great, my professor is a wonderful instructor, I really liked the course environment and learned a lot from the course. She was amazing! ★★★★★

Student Self-Assessment of their Effort to Achieve Course Outcomes (10 comments)

Q: What I could have done to make this course better for myself.

1	Ask more questions.
2	Prior to enrolling in this course, it would have been beneficial for me to review foundational math concepts in computer science.
3	I think this program should ask for a minimal background in discrete
4	Study the textbook more.
5	I could have done more practice problems of my own, instead of the ones just provided by the course.
6	When doing the quizzes, I should have be more careful reading the specs.
7	Had more communication from professors and TA's. TA's office hours were hard for someone who worked part time.
8	I wish I would have covered the topics on my own before the semester began. The "math prep" courses that were offered to help "prepare" for this class were not helpful whatsoever. The topics covered in the prep course did not correlate to the topics covered in this course. Lectures in this course often felt very rushed and all over the place. Majority of the time a topic or example problem would be explained or solved incorrectly, and the professor would have to double back and try to reteach the topic/example correctly. This just made things ten times more confusing, especially when it is a new topic to the student and/or you are already struggling to understand it.
9	Read the textbook more
10	I did not do well in quizzes, so I am supposed to work harder and resolve the problems.