

Instructor: **Amato, Christopher**Subject: **CS**Catalog & Section: **5180 01**Course ID: **13987**

Objectives:

Enrollment: **70**Responses Incl Declines: **27**Declines: **1**

Instructor Related Questions: Christopher Amato (42 comments)

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

- 1 Good explanations, good interactivity. I felt engaged during lecture. Homeworks were good for exploring concepts and I learned a lot from them. Going through the book was nice. Final project is cool.
- 2 He showed up on time every day.
- 3 -Instructor was interactive and respectful of all the doubts
- 4 The instructor is a senior faculty in the school, so the knowledge from him are all cutting edge materials.
- 5 Learned a lot in this course and lecture slides were interesting.
- 6 He taught very well
- 7 Clever and patient for students' questions and requests on Piazza
- 8 Professor Amato is a fantastic lecturer and very skilled at conveying the necessary information with enthusiasm
- 9 The strengths of this course are centered around the fact that it is at a brutally fast pace. You learn a vast amount about reinforcement learning from its inception to modern-day techniques. It is hard, but extremely rewarding. You also learn many great core ideas in RL. This is thoroughly coupled with the fact that professor Amato is obviously a fantastic researcher in the world of RL.
- 10 Course is very detailed and fast paced. Start to end, there's a huge amount of learning and self-learning.
- 11 Instructor was very good, course was easy to understand
- 12 Explaining typical RL methods clearly. Providing scaffolding code to allow students to focus on the important concepts.
- 13 The were lots of assignments that forced students to gain in-depth knowledge of the course. In addition, the TA have very good knowledge of the course and encourages students to learn intuition.

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

- 1 Grade faster.
Make sure your TAs know what's going on. There was one assignment with a question that made no sense and the TAs contradicted each other left and right on piazza because they didn't get it either.
Make better scaffolding code. It got better throughout the semester, but some things made no sense. Don't store states as lists. They aren't hashable, so use tuples. Don't have me do dynamic programming on an environment where you can't simulate multiple actions from the same state. Don't force me to run cell A, run cell B, edit cell A, then run cell C. That's insane.
Make it so I don't have to copy paste code. This was done well with classes and inheritance towards the end, where we were encouraged to extend a class and override one of the methods to change a part of the agent, but experiment-running was always copy-paste.
The distribution of work was not ideal. There were homeworks due closely before and after exams. Homework deadlines constantly got extended because the pacing was screwed up. I appreciate the flexibility, but this should not have been necessary.
Don't schedule an exam on the monday after thanksgiving break! I'm going to be exhausted from travelling on sunday night, which is the best time to study. And I was spending time with my friends and family during the break, not studying. You should've had it the week before thanksgiving.
- 2 There was almost ZERO feedback on assignments. This was the biggest downside of the class. This was the first class in my entire life where we didn't talk through solutions to problems in class or the answer keys weren't given.

So much information was jammed into the semester that it was hard to learn one topic really well. Everything felt rushed, from assignments to questions in class.
- 3 I feel that I did not learn that much in this course, it would be a lot better if he spent more time on the Deep RL
- 4 The assignments can be designed and graded better. I spent too much time figured out python (esp due to the scaffolding code) than reinforcement learning. The assignments were too big to really focus on anything else.
- 5 Less assignment
- 6 Reduced workload when midterms are the same week. Having an assignment due two days before/after a midterm limited my studying/focus for the midterm exam. Also, less exercises towards the end of the course to focus on the final project. Assignments never really slowed down, which meant the final project got pushed to the side with groups cramming to work for the last week of class on the project.
- 7 Make assignments and exams less difficult and provide more material to study for the exams
- 8 Towards the end there were too many assignments along with project and exam. This made it difficult to focus on the project. I think last 2 assignments should be optional.
- 9 Sometimes it felt way too fast-paced. I know it's probably not possible to slow that down or remove content from the course but towards the end it really felt like we barely had time to understand a concept before we were moving onto another
- 10 None generally but if we were given more material on explanation of some basic mathematical proof of theories, I will appreciate it a lot.
- 11 The only critique I have is for the entire semester he put this huge emphasis on the last couple lectures, kept talking about how we were building up to the most important part of the class and these last couple lectures were the apex of it all, the most important part, the main take aways, etc. And then when we finally got to these super important lessons: The professor left campus and had other people give the lectures. One of the lectures was given by a TA, and the other was given by another faculty member who had never seen the slides before and was completely unprepared and just haphazardly gave his interpretation of what the slides were saying

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

- 12

Just organize it and prioritize it. We heard over and over again that this is a new class and therefore kinks are still being worked out. But there was stuff that was covered in class that wasn't on the syllabus. There were only the homeworks and the book to practice for the exams. So there wasn't really a good indication of what was going to be on the exams, especially the second one.

TA's actively told students to do things that were incorrect.

Homework due dates were constantly pushed because the timeline for doing them was intractable.

We often had long weekends where an assignment, a piece of our project, and a midterm were all coming up the following week within days of each other which mean it was impossible to properly prepare or prioritize any of them unless you were over two weeks ahead of schedule in preparation.

Spread out when things are due. Add recitations. Add practice exams. Give homeworks that aren't exclusively covered in the book which you can't give solutions too.

I understand that you are research faculty first, but this class really needs some love.
- 13

Prioritise how to deliver the assignments to students in terms of scaffolding code / requirements.
- 14

More think pair shares
- 15

hire more tas to:

1.

have more office hours

2.

release grades / solutions after the hw deadline

3.

prepare good starter code
- 16

Provide more hand calculated examples, especially for the material covered in the later half of the course.
- 17

Value student's time more, the load was too heavy and lot of us were unable to focus on other courses due to the amount of time needed to keep up with the rushed speed.
- 18

reduce assignment
- 19

Well, speaking for myself, I feel the time for the exam was too short, Which affected my performance. This is because it's been a long time since I sat for an exam or held a pen. I believe that if some more time is given to people like me, who are now slow and need to think properly before we write, then our excellent performance will not be on assignments and projects alone.

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

- 1

Nothing to say for this.
- 2

None.
- 3

Many (if not most) students don't speak English as a first language. Because of this, many of their questions are worded incorrectly. As a native English speaker, I thought that Professor Amato can be much more professional when trying to understand questions from foreign students. A common response was "I don't know what you mean" when it was fairly clear how to interpret their question.
- 4

The instructor spends most of the time trying to include everybody in the class and asks questions and gives feedback to every answer very leniently this creates a good environment in the class but the problem is this causes him not to cover that much in every class
- 5

It might help to include more hands on examples in the slides, and solving them in class. There must be a better way to design a course that, in my opinion, is little more than a glorified expounding of the bellman equation.
- 6

i think things were inclusive?
- 7

The instructor's strengths more lie on the teaching part. It would be better if he can also help us on the code part.
- 8

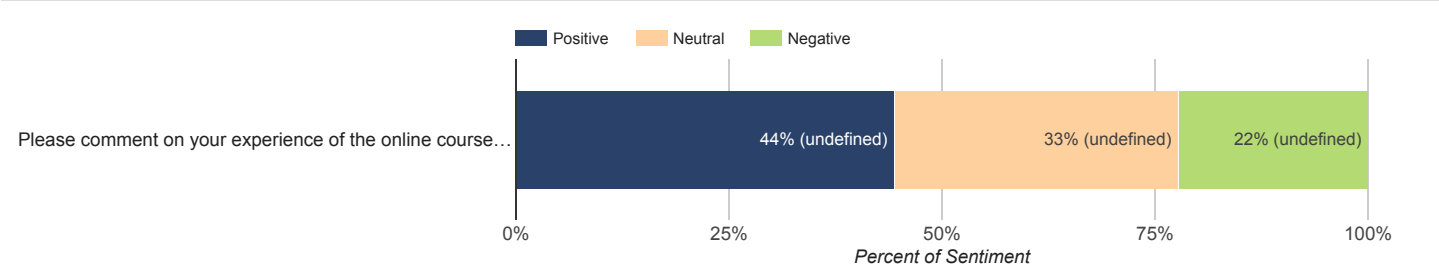
Too much time spent answering questions in class. It ended up eating a lot of class time and it was hard to focus after about 20 minutes or so of questions. I think questions are good for learning, but the class was too big and should've been broken down into 2 sections. That way, less students per class, leading to less overall questions from the audience.
- 9

No comments, instructor was very good!
- 10

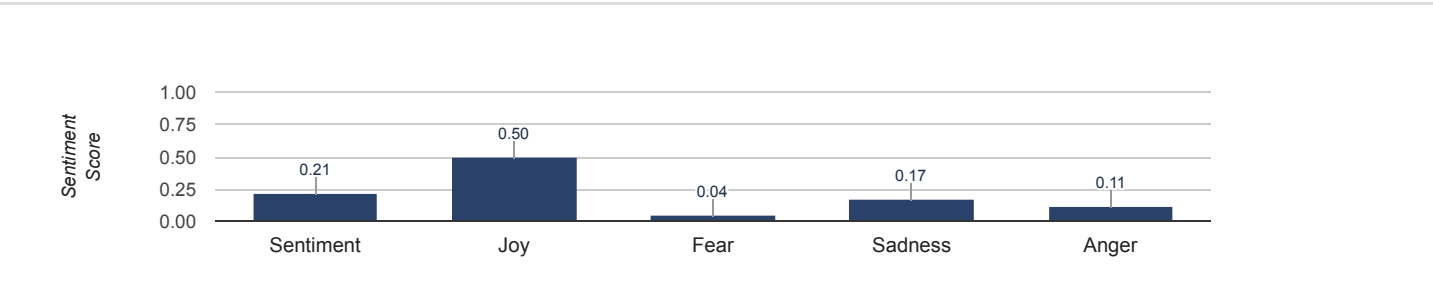
Professor has very good knowledge of the course and teaches with a lot of enthusiasm. He is very kind and tries as much as possible to be fair in his dealings. Besides from the short time in exams, I can say Professor Amato is an excellent educator.

Questions to Assess Students' Online Experience (9 comments)

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



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- 1 it was fine. Not much to say ★★☆☆☆
- 2 The overall experience was fantastic although the class pace was fast. ★★★★★
- 3 Professor and TA's answered questions in a fast manner. ★★☆☆☆
- 4 We had 1 TA that often further confused questions that were asked in Piazza. We were told to do a series of questions in a manner totally inconsistent with what was on the actual assignment.
That being said, professor amato was very understanding and gave us extra time when we needed it. And helped us work thorough problems we encountered ★★★★★
- 5 Coursework is assignment heavy with grades for assignments not reflecting the actual amount of work required for each module. Often had to neglect other responsibilities or prioritise these assignments over other courses and part time employment to try to stay on top of the program. Curving of grades ultimately has a minimal effect for those who have managed to successfully complete this module, coming from other departments. ★★☆☆☆
- 6 I attended online session very few times, mostly attended in person. ★★☆☆☆
- 7 Online course was great, piazza was very helpful ★★★★★
- 8 Good course but not organized in terms of difficulty and time, we were overloaded with assignments and weren't able to dedicate enough time into state-of-the-art relevant topics. ★★★★★
- 9 N/A ★★★★★

Student Self-Assessment of their Effort to Achieve Course Outcomes (11 comments)

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

- 1 Nothing.
- 2 None.
- 3 Learned PyTorch before taking the class.
- 4 Starting the assignments earlier. Reading the book before lectures. The lectures are fairly incomprehensible if you haven't read the book beforehand.
- 5 I felt like there was not enough time to go through the most interesting topics at the end of the semester. So I would like to restructure the course or trim the topics to finish sooner. I would also ask to either reduce the number of problems in the assignments so as to have some time outside of just solving the assignments. I was working on assignments almost everyday of the semester.
- 6 Do more reading before the class
- 7 Not procrastinate as much
- 8 Prepare in a better manner
- 9 Study more. It's a tough course and quite fast paced.
- 10 Took up an reinforcement learning course beforehand so I could keep up with the class speed
- 11 Practised writing for exams.