

Intensive Foundations of CS (Fall 2023)

Instructor: **Ali, Mona**

Subject: **CS**

Catalog & Section: **5001 35**

Course ID: **20425**

Objectives:

Enrollment: **24**

Responses Incl Declines: **21**

Declines: **0**

Instructor Related Questions: Mona Ali (38 comments)

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

- 1 This course gives a good beginning to the rookie coder. The course has a great structure and a great pace. But the instructor is bad and she can't speak clearly about the needs all at once and is having problems communicating with the TA. She doesn't even understand VScode and has to resort to ta for VScode issues.
- 2 She would help me with setting up the environment
- 3 I like the course structure. Each week, there's a clear focus or topic, which is consistently reflected in both the online and offline class materials, as well as in the assignments. As for Professor Ali, her responsiveness is commendable. She actively engages with students who show a willingness to communicate. Additionally, she is always ready to offer support and assistance whenever possible.
- 4 Compute Science concepts
- 5 Instructors are very responsible and respond to student's questions very timely and in detail.
- 6 I think the professor is very enthusiastic, and she is enthusiastic to let the students learn more.
- 7 high standard of homework grading
- 8 It leads the beginners to programming and introduces basic concepts.
- 9 Provided after-class tutorials, but this actually created more workload and left us less time to finish the assignments or self-study.
- 10 Mona is a hard working professor and I am more than glad to take her course. I wish we had more time to go over more concepts and go more in depth to learn for her homework since they are very challenging
- 11 very knowledgeable; responsible on piazza; care for her students
- 12 Professor Ali is accessible outside of the class

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

- 1 To further enhance the quality of this course, there are a couple of areas where improvements could be beneficial. Firstly, revising the grading scale might help in providing clearer benchmarks for success. Additionally, addressing issues related to the clarity, accuracy, and consistency of the assignment requirements would greatly assist students in understanding and meeting the course expectations. These points will be elaborated upon in the following section.
- 2 Make it clear when describing the assignment instructions. Specify any rubrics or important points in advance.
- 3 I think the class could be a little richer. But classes are actually very active at the moment.
- 4 For the final project, please organize the requirements of final project better. the requirements document is bit hard to read. If possible, focus on several key concepts that we are expected to learn. There are too many of them to track. I don't think expected learning concepts should be covered by the optional TB session. Even I am fully understand and appreciate that professor is doing this for the students own goods.
- 5 pay attention to assignments and avoid typos/confusing wording
- 6 Make the requirements clear once and for all and leave no stone unturned.
- 7 Be a rational grader. She gave me 18/20 for the first assignment, and 7.5/20 for the other assignments, even though I have put in the same work, nothing has changed
- 8 more coding skill
- 9
 1. Be more prepared of the teaching content. Sometimes it seems that she doesn't understand what she is going to teach.
 2. Reduce unnecessary and time-consuming requirements on homework. Repetitive work is just a waste of time, what we need is the training of logic.
 3. Be consistent and clear when giving requirements on homework. She changes requirements when the deadline is very near and everyone has to make urgent changes. And, make the guidance of each homework simple. A lot of long announcements are distractive and hard to follow.
 4. Show respect to students' works. The feedback and grade she gave to students' homework are negative and dampen students' enthusiasm.
 5. Spend more time on explaining useful knowledge and skills, instead of explaining for herself.
 6. Organize teaching time better. Her teaching schedule is not clear, and compulsory extra-sessions occupied lots of time out of the regular class time.
- 10
 1. Prepare better for the lecture
Professor Ali frequently made mistakes during lectures, especially when answering students' questions about the assignments. She forgot about the requirements she put on the assignment a couple times and gave us the wrong answers.
 2. Provide clearer standards for assignments
The requirements for the HW and final project are extremely unclear and hard to read. Besides that, Professor Ali does not put all her requirements in the homework's document. Instead, she requires us to communicate and posts questions on Piazza. This created a lot of confusions because I cannot guess all her standards. Also, she changed her requirements frequently which means that I have to redo my homework and project and this created lots of stress.
 3. Communicate better with Tas
Professor Ali set a couple after-class tutorials which is good for helping us understand the materials. However, the concepts that provided by the TA in the tutorials or TA office hours or Piazza posts are often contradicts with professor Ali's standard. It seems like she has poor communication with her TAs.
- 11 Make requirements clear and post them early! Don't always change or add new requirements.
- 12 maybe the lecture hours could include more preparation for homework and any other projects that we will do in the future but we also need time to go over the theories so honestly I think it would have been better if we had another 90 min lecture since this course is very intensive and we are naturally in a rush to complete the CS foundations.
- 13 We need more detailed rubrics.

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

- 1

1. There are several aspects of the grading system in Professor Ali's course that I believe could be improved for a better learning experience:

A. Grading Scale Fairness and Consistency: The 4-point grading scale used by Professor Ali poses significant challenges, particularly when compared to departmental standards and the grading practices of other professors. For example, a minor formatting issue in a correctly functioning code can result in a 3-point grade, which is only 75%. This is well below the department's passing threshold of 83%, making it exceedingly difficult to achieve a passing grade under this system. Anything less than a perfect score is effectively failing, which seems unduly harsh and unfair, especially considering that in other courses, students often receive grades above 90% or even perfect scores. Addressing this discrepancy would align the course more closely with departmental standards and ensure a fairer evaluation process.

B. Grading Scale Precision: The grading scale also lacks precision in differentiating the severity of issues in assignments. Currently, the grading approach does not distinguish between having several minor issues and just one minor issue, both of which result in the same 25% deduction. Similarly, the presence of one bug and several bugs in the code are treated identically, each leading to a 50% deduction. This approach fails to accurately reflect the actual performance on assignments. A more nuanced grading system that considers the number and severity of errors would better represent students' efforts and the actual quality of their work.

C. Impact on Student Motivation: The current grading system, with its rigorous standards, has a considerably harsh impact on student motivation and emotional well-being. In a course that is already challenging and demanding, such a stringent grading approach can create a learning environment that feels unsupportive and overly stressful. Instead of fostering a positive and encouraging atmosphere, it tends to exacerbate negative emotions like anxiety and frustration. This, in turn, can dampen students' enthusiasm and willingness to engage with the material. A more balanced approach, which recognizes and supports the learning journey and effort, could create a more conducive environment for academic growth and personal development.

2. Additionally, the clarity, accuracy, and consistency of assignment requirements have been issues in this course. There have been instances where errors in the requirements were corrected one day before the deadline, and new requirements were added also just one day before the deadline, leading to confusion, frustration, and additional workload. Providing clear and stable assignment guidelines well in advance would greatly assist in effective planning and execution of assignments, reducing undue stress.
- 2

First, we always face the situation that we need to change, or sometimes rewrite the whole assignments several times before the assignment deadlines, not because we want to, but because the instructor didn't make it clear when releasing the assignment, or change the assignments just before the deadlines. It would be greatly helpful if we could have more stability in the assignment requirements, or receive these updates well in advance. Second, the grading parts didn't follow the rubrics sometimes. For example, if the full mark for one assignment is 4, we got 1 point when our code successfully pass the autograder and finished all the parts (maybe with one minor error or poor practice), but in the rubrics it is said "You put effort into your answers, but they are mainly incorrect or missing." Aligning grades more closely with the stated rubric criteria would aid in understanding the expectations and areas for improvement. Third, we need to implement some principles or concepts that are not taught in advance but used in the assignment. For example, for the final project, we are told to use MVC in the design. However, we are not given any code examples to illustrate this, like what goes into models, views and controllers. The general concepts may be taught, but it's really hard for us, the aligners, to really understand what goes to where without having examples. And it is just several hours before Milestone1 submission that we, for the first time, saw a real example of how to refactor the code to follow MVC. A few code samples demonstrating the implementation of these concepts would be extremely beneficial, especially for those of us who are visual learners. Fourth, we felt like the instructor let the teaching assistants do too much things, or to say illustrating using examples. The TAs worked really hard to help us, like having tutoring buddy sessions, but I don't think these should be their jobs. The main example illustration should be from the instructor, not the poor TAs. For example, for the final project, almost all the examples on how to use streamlit, how to write the main and the pages, etc. are taught during tutoring buddy sessions, not in class. The teaching assistants have been incredibly supportive, however, I feel that some of this instruction could be more effectively covered in the regular classes. This would allow the tutoring sessions to complement the lectures, rather than serving as a primary source of instruction.
- 3

For example, if we have a group discussion, we can actually learn another lesson. Each group can be changed to different students for discussion.
- 4

More generous on homework grading.
- 5

please provide more model solutions
- 6

N/A
- 7

The fundamental of programming course is supposed to help student transition into more advanced courses. But all she did was giving student a hard time and make them question themselves
- 8

talk too much concepts and formatting
- 9

The feedback and grade she gave to students' homework are negative and dampen students' enthusiasm.
- 10

Can not think of any strengths for now
- 11

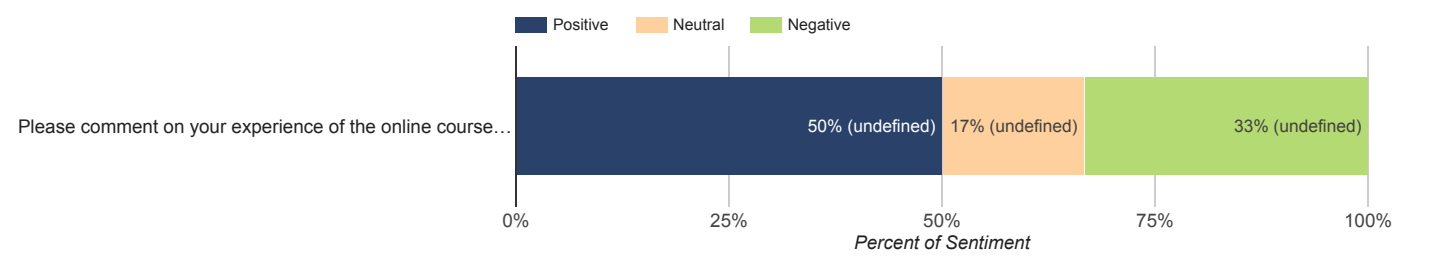
Mona is very strict but she sees the potential and gives chances to students. She is available outside of class but most other students just jump off their seats to talk to her so it is hard to find her time. I also think that all her homework very, very relevant. Her invention of 1:1 additional support with TAs have helped me. I just wish I had chosen Jackie from the start as my TA as he is one of the best TAs and he is a patient educator. Mona has given me an opportunity to redo homework which helped me feel better in terms of eliminating my FOMO.
- 12

Too heavy emphasizes on style, docstring, and error handling, etc, insufficient teaching on how to write good code (in terms of logic and syntax, not style).
- 13

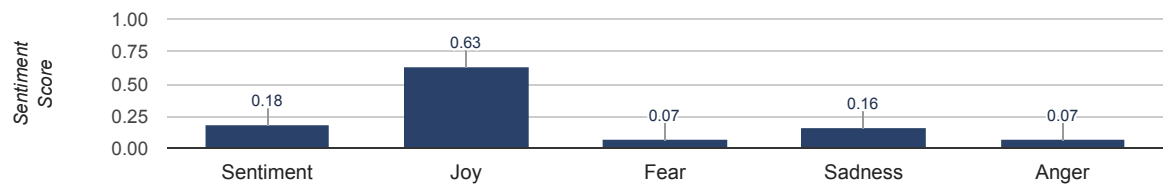
The lecture overall is good, but I suffered a lot from the assignments. It isn't right that I spent ten hours on finishing an assignment but then half of my points is deducted for a docstring error. I think the most important thing for beginners is to build our confidence. It is ok to warn us for these kinds of errors and maybe deduct 0.5 point for each, but what happens in this semester's assignment evaluation is too much.

Questions to Assess Students’ Online Experience (12 comments)

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



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- 1 Online source is okay and well-organized. ★★★★★
- 2 I really liked professor Laney Strange's videos, the other videos are mediocre ★☆☆☆☆
- 3 I've found the content of the modules to be beneficial. However, I did notice an issue with the formatting. It seems that the title numbers and names in the index sometimes differ from those on their individual pages. Perhaps this is something that could be looked into for greater consistency? ★★★★★
- 4 very good ★★★★★
- 5 Very good ★★★★★
- 6 it will be nice to have scripts of the on-line videos. I don't need to watch the entire video just to find something. ★★★★★
- 7 The use of Piazza is helpful, but over-use of it can be distracting. For example, the instruction posted too many announcement on Piazza instead of sending emails. And, I may receive email notice of the instructor replying to others, but it is not relevant to me. ★☆☆☆☆
- 8 The online materials are really helpful. ★★★★★
- 9 while Mona is on top of her game with Piazza the pre recorded lectures on Canvas were too high level and were not efficient to prepare for the homework. ★☆☆☆☆
- 10 I don't like the online modules at all. They are badly designed and they do not cover the necessary concepts and knowledge we have to learn. ★☆☆☆☆
- 11 good ★★★★★
- 12 I like the online course part. Videos are very helpful. Expecting more videos to cover more useful information though. ★★★★★

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 I hope the assignment instruction be more specific.
- 2 Nothing, the instructor's grading doesn't make sense
- 3 To improve my experience with this course, I could have started working on the assignments earlier. This would have helped reduce stress and allowed ample time to address any problems that might have arisen.
- 4 need more coding practice, not concept
- 5 I am working hard to study this course, and I also spend a lot of time on it every day. I hope I can be successful in this class.
- 6 N/A
- 7 Select another section that is taught by another teacher.
- 8 Pick a better instructor.
- 9 Used the first few weeks of school to try to get a better understanding of the homework and the structure of cs and python in general.
- 10 read more supporting material
- 11 make more office hour appointments, communicate with TAs more often