Dear Peter Freeman

I would like to give some feedback for Unit 3 “Introduction to Programming”.

Having never done any type of programming before this unit was a learning opportunity for me. I felt supported throughout by Peter, Jose (a GTA) and Alex (who enjoyed the unit so much the previous year, he came back onto the unit this year to help us out, as well as enjoying the unit a second time) in all aspects of the Unit.

The Learning Materials were clear and I liked the use of interspersed video’s explaining key concepts along the way. This together with synchronous tutorials were beneficial to the learning experience. I particularly liked that Peter was flexible to accommodate an additional “Pacific” time zone tutorial each week. This allowed me to participate in live tutorials instead of being a spectator in the recorded version only.

After using BB for discussions in Unit 1 and then moving on to Slack in Unit 2 and 3 was a positive and a natural progression for me, as moving to a “text message” type platform made communications in real time easier, rather than the somewhat cumbersome and formal nature of BB, that requires logging in each time. Peter’s use of Slack for communications on Unit 3 was thorough, insightful and helpful. Due to my extensive engagement on the Unit, I don’t recollect a time where I did not receive a reply from Peter, either through Slack or Git Issues, with Slack being a very supportive and community environment.

The structure of the Unit is enjoyable with learning about methods of programming, setting up the machines and actual programming being a good progression of steps. I particularly enjoyed using GitHub and Git Issues where I got experience in using these tools for the first time in a supportive simulated environment, preparing me for using them in the real world.

Peter’s willingness to spend time one-on-one or in small groups in ad-hoc Zoom sessions to problem solve or explain concepts in very beneficial. Having both Alex and Jose on the course as backups for Peter is also very useful as on more than several occasions they have assisted me in trouble shooting problems, and explaining concepts to further my knowledge. Jose is very technically knowledgeable and Alex too would Slack post with information and some independent Zoom sessions were organised with Alex to explain concepts. Having someone like Alex as a more permanent fixture in the future, I believe would be a sound consideration.

In my opinion this Unit perhaps more than others can quickly spiral out of control for those who don’t keep up, apply themselves or struggle initially with concepts and having both Jose and Alex as Peter’s backups, allows students the best opportunity to learn while keeping a pace.

My recommendation for improvements:

I would have liked to spend more time with Sprint 2 as this was very interesting (actual coding and gaining experience in GitIssues). However, due to the way the Unit is structured, there was a very condensed period of time between Sprint 2 and the coding projects. This was very stressful. If there was a further week in between Sprint 2 and the coding project, this would be advantageous to the learning and wellbeing of students. Perhaps extending this course by 1-2 weeks, particularly towards the end of the Unit would allow some more time between Sprint 2 and the coding project to realistically apply what has been learnt.

Definitive clarity on deadlines would also be helpful as formal documents on BB were contradictory to actual deadlines. Clarity around those deadlines would have made this Unit much less stressful for me.

Overall, this is a great introduction to programming, as a tutor Peter makes this course easy to access for those with no prior knowledge, helps students feel at ease with what can be difficult concepts, insightful and is always willing to spend time on posting/replying in Slack, tutorials and ad-hoc Zoom sessions. His knowledge of programming and around the Variant Validator tool is obvious, and what could be a very “dry” subject of programming he makes fun, interactive and interesting. His use of modern technology such as Slack, VM’s, Pycharm, Git and others is very appropriate to this Unit

I have very much enjoyed this Unit and learning from Peter!

Best wishes

Anup Patel