

Columbia University: School of Engineering

Spring 2021 SEAS Midterm Evaluation



Course: COMSW4111_002_2021_1-INTRODUCTIONTODATABASES: COMSW4111_002_2021_1 - INTRODUCTION TO DATABASES

Instructor: Donald Ferguson *

Response Rate: 109/246 (44.31 %)

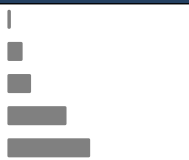

1 - Instructor: Organization and Preparation

Donald Ferguson

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means			
Poor	(1)	4	3.67%					
Fair	(2)	12	11.01%					
Good	(3)	14	12.84%					
Very Good	(4)	34	31.19%					
Excellent	(5)	45	41.28%					
Response Rate				Mean	STD	Median		
109/246 (44.31%)				3.95	1.15	4.00		

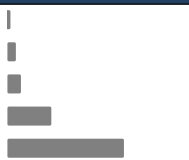

2 - Instructor: Classroom Delivery

Donald Ferguson

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means			
Poor	(1)	2	1.83%					
Fair	(2)	9	8.26%					
Good	(3)	14	12.84%					
Very Good	(4)	35	32.11%					
Excellent	(5)	49	44.95%					
Response Rate				Mean	STD	Median		
109/246 (44.31%)				4.10	1.04	4.00		

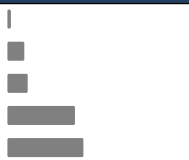

3 - Instructor: Approachability

Donald Ferguson

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means			
Poor	(1)	1	0.92%					
Fair	(2)	5	4.59%					
Good	(3)	8	7.34%					
Very Good	(4)	26	23.85%					
Excellent	(5)	69	63.30%					
Response Rate				Mean	STD	Median		
109/246 (44.31%)				4.44	0.89	5.00		

4 - Instructor: Overall Quality

Donald Ferguson

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means			
Poor	(1)	2	1.83%					
Fair	(2)	10	9.17%					
Good	(3)	12	11.01%					
Very Good	(4)	40	36.70%					
Excellent	(5)	45	41.28%					
Response Rate				Mean	STD	Median		
109/246 (44.31%)				4.06	1.03	4.00		

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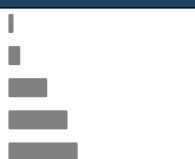

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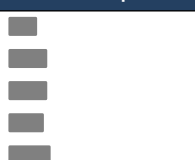
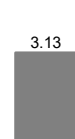
Instructor: Donald Ferguson *

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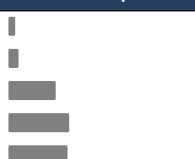

5 - Course: Amount Learned

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means				
Poor	(1)	3	2.75%			Question			
Fair	(2)	7	6.42%						
Good	(3)	23	21.10%						
Very Good	(4)	35	32.11%						
Excellent	(5)	41	37.61%						
Response Rate				Mean		STD		Median	
109/246 (44.31%)				3.95		1.05		4.00	

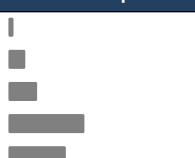

6 - Course: Appropriateness of Workload

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means				
Poor	(1)	17	15.60%			Question			
Fair	(2)	23	21.10%						
Good	(3)	23	21.10%						
Very Good	(4)	21	19.27%						
Excellent	(5)	25	22.94%						
				02550100					
Response Rate				Mean		STD		Median	
109/246 (44.31%)				3.13		1.40		3.00	

7 - Course: Fairness of Grading Process

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means				
Poor	(1)	4	3.67%			Question			
Fair	(2)	6	5.50%						
Good	(3)	28	25.69%						
Very Good	(4)	36	33.03%						
Excellent	(5)	35	32.11%						
				0	25	50			100
Response Rate				Mean		STD			Median
109/246 (44.31%)				3.84		1.06		4.00	

8 - Course: Overall Quality

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means				
Poor	(1)	3	2.75%			Question			
Fair	(2)	10	9.17%						
Good	(3)	17	15.60%						
Very Good	(4)	45	41.28%						
Excellent	(5)	34	31.19%						
				0	25	50	100		
Response Rate				Mean		STD		Median	
109/246 (44.31%)				3.89		1.04		4.00	

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9 - Enter any additional comments here

Response Rate	25/246 (10.16%)
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• His way of teaching is very unique, he tells about the concepts and how they work in real world from his huge experience in this domain. He holds OHs almost every day to help people with assignments as he doesn't want students to be stuck in simple problems for hours and still not get it, he values time and thinks it's not worth spending loads of time in simple cases. He is so far one of the unique professors I have come across who makes sarcastic jokes in the classes, I laugh almost in every class of his. Last but not the least, he along with his TAs work very hard on setting up assignments testing our knowledge on applications of the concepts in real world. He cares about the students and their progress in this course.

• 1. The programming track is toooooooohard for first-time learners. The homework and take-home midterm this semester is way too difficult. Also, we have a non-programming track. It is unfair that students taking the programming track do not get extra credits on the extra work, much more extra hours (no sleep for nights), and much more difficult problems. For example, in homework, the programming part only counts a few points. We felt frustrated that all the hours of effort we put in and eventually we get to receive the same points as the easier questions in the non-programming homework. We would really like to learn the programming part, but the points should reflect the effort that we put in. At least we get to have extra points.... 2. The homework takes tooooooooh much time to complete and there is a lot of classes to take including the recitations. It is nice that we can lower the level or cut down on the amount of the problem. Then there will be fewer recitations to take. This course takes me over 30 hours a week. It is insane. I have other 3 courses with a heavy load. I have cut down significantly on my sleep time just to write the programming part of the homework. There are even nights that I did not get to sleep. I hope the Professor can consider the workload and make some changes after the midterm. From what I've heard from classes before, the workload is not this crazy. Please consider that many courses required the students to take a cumulative final exam. I cannot imagine if this kind of workload from DB class lasts till the final week... 3. For the testing of the programming part in the homework, we need more specs on which test to complete. Like in homework 1, there is no instruction on testing the PK failure but it counts several points. There is no clear instruction on writing the function code, but at least the testing requirement should be given clearly. It is not fair to deduct the points that are not defined in the homework instruction. Please consider giving the points back to us. Thank you. 4. I like to give a big thank-you to the Professor and the TAs for your hard work on the lecture, the design of homework, and the almost ad-hoc problem-solving in recitations and TA sessions and on Piazza. I appreciated it a lot and I learned a lot from the course design, including theory, SQL commands, and building up the database function with python. Thank you so much!

• The programming track assignment was too hard, and the midterm was challenging either. The time I spent on the assignment was probably the sum of my other three courses and more. The course title should change to Advanced Object-orientated Python Programming instead of Introduction to Databases. The assignment's content is barely taught in class when the assignment was released, e.g., the concept of the index. Do not ever take this course! This course will mess up all of your academic schedules, and it can even make you feel depressed. Surprisingly, there is a significant gap in workload from previous student evaluations. Taking this class was probably the worst decision I ever made in my life. I think I will be screwed if the course keeps going like this until the final.

• Classes can be condensed and should be divided over 2 days

• Professor Don is one of the best professors I've taken a class with and I've learned a lot through the course. The efforts he undertakes to teach the class are beyond comparison.

• This class is pretty messy, the lectures are hard to follow. There's no structure or plan or "table setting" so you don't know why things are being taught. Each topic is discussed for about 5 minutes and many details and context quickly brushed over. There are way too many recordings necessary to watch in order to do well in the class. The homework is poorly prepared and is unnecessarily evil. 90% of the homework is trying to figure out what is being asked, figuring out the design choices of the skeleton code, and debugging. Very little homework time is actually learning concepts. The submission process is incredibly tedious and takes very long. Perfection is expected from the students at every step, but it seems the teaching staff doesn't have the same expectations of themselves. All that being said, the teaching staff is incredibly available and very knowledgeable about the topic.

• Piazza may get too crowded at times, but that is only because there are more than 200 kids in the class

• Workload of homework is tooooooo huge!!! I have spent 80% of time this semester on this course. And for points of the programming track, I think the portion of programming part is not proportional to the time I spent. And usually there are some mistakes in the skeleton code given to us, then we need to spend extra hours to fix these mistakes ourselves or via piazza, which I think waste a lot of time. Overall speaking, I think Prof. Ferguson is a good person and he wants to teach us a lot but sadly it's too much for me...

• The most disorganized class I have ever taken. Sufficient amount of materials are not covered in the lecture. You have to attend all office hours and recitations to know what is going on in class. Each week there are about 3 hour of random last minute OH and recitations. Everything is disorganized and HWs does not reflect what you were taught in class. Piazza is a mess, everything is a mess. Exams are extremely long and you have to start learning new materials during exam and you have to attend countless office hours and recitations to learn new material during exam.

• Very great class, very lucky that I've taken it!

• Humor = amazing Amount learned = incredibly high Workload = high but worth it. Not an easy class.

• Professor cares deeply about the students and is always willing to help at anytime (literally)

• 1. TOO MUCH MISTAKES IN HOMEWORK AND MIDTERM!! The mistakes will waste us a HUGE amount of time to debug and question ourselves! That is pointless. If the example output is wrong, does it mean whoever prepare this homework also do not know what the correct solution is? Each time we need to waste a huge amount of time to follow changes and re-clarifications. Sometimes when we do homework early, we will understand the question as the way we see it. Then suddenly, TA post some extra requirements, then we need to re-do it. So why not make it clear while posting them and make it mistake-free? 2. The homework is also toooo long! It always take student double time to finish it than other classes at CS department... Some part of the homework is irrelevant to what we learned at class. 3. The recitation is during weekend! If extra two hours are needed to cover materials that are supposed to be in the lecture, then does it mean the time management during lecture is not reasonable? If extra two hours are needed to explain the homework, does it mean the homework is either too difficult or too long? 4. Unreasonable grade distribution of each questions. Some takes 20 minutes to finish and they worth the same as the ones that we need to spend ten hours on.

• This is an informative and helpful class. I am and hope to keep enjoying it.

• Prof Ferguson is very engaging during lecture and explains concepts very clearly. The homework is quite long, but not unreasonable -- what bothers me is that it doesn't seem to be proofread before it is sent to the students. Therefore, there's quite a long list of errata for me to compare my homework against, which is cumbersome. Unfortunately, TA office hours are not well distributed for me, as I work during the day. Additionally, there is recitation that is required in order to complete the homework, which is an addition to the already significant workload. I think most of my quibbles with this class would be resolved if the HW/take home midterm was presented more clearly (and without mistakes). I love databases and SQL and am very glad to take a class that is so practical and applicable to "the real world"!

• I have never taken a computer science class in my 4 years at Columbia where I feel as supported by the teaching staff as I do in this class. They offer office hours all the time, Professor Ferguson is incredibly approachable and seems to want the students to actually do well in his class, and both the TAs and Professor Ferguson are very active about making sure that students feel that they can take the time they need to in this very weird moment.

• Amazing course!

• Professor Ferguson and his course is the best I ever take during my life.

• The instructors are angels. The student workload is high, but the level difficulty is appropriate and it's satisfying to figure things out.

• Pros: Professor tries very hard and has many office hours and recitations. Overall well intended and answers questions on piazza immediately. Cons: Very disorganized. Needs to focus his presentations and homeworks. Class is simplistic but it's made harder artificially through an increase workload which is not always beneficial

• Prof Don and TAs organize the class so well on designing the HW to push us learn more!

• I love the practical take on the subject by Professor Ferguson. It is different from similar courses I have had in the past and I am learning a lot.

• This course should have better TAs. There are mistakes in the assignments which are not expected. Someone with a good CS background will be helpful.

• This class has been enjoyable so far, and I feel like I'm learning at a good pace. One thing that has been frustrating is that I often find myself spending more time trying to interpret or ask questions about provided code and instructions, and less time on the actual material. For example, HW2 programming was very inconsistent with parameter/return value data types. Overall, I think having an additional proofread through all of the assignments (perhaps a TA who didn't write them can attempt them) before releasing them would reveal some of the inconsistencies that can result in students most of their time doing work that is not the emphasis of the assignment. I really appreciate how available and willing to help professor Ferguson and the TAs are. I feel supported and like my learning is a priority, but feel like some tweaks here and there could go a long way for the remainder of the semester.

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• I would have liked to have received the first assignment back before the second was due so I could be confident that all my databases were set up properly. There's a lot of fine details in this class and I feel that would have helped