Campus Network Speed Test Analysis

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Abstract

Motivation, challenges, and solutions for improving Wi-Fi performance at UCSB through systematic analysis and data-driven approaches:

- **Common ground**: Wi-Fi is critical for universities, supporting academic and administrative tasks. Metrics like speed, latency, jitter, and packet loss are widely accepted for evaluating network performance, yet current tools lack specificity for dynamic environments like UCSB's campus.
- **Disruption**: Existing methods fail to account for campus-specific challenges, such as variability in user density and environmental conditions. This limits actionable insights and hinders optimized network performance.
- **Cost**: Persisting with generic solutions risks user dissatisfaction, reduced productivity, and suboptimal resource allocation by IT services.
- **Resolution**: We propose a systematic analysis of UCSB Wi-Fi, creating a campus-specific dataset through a custom NetUnicorn-based pipeline. Using machine learning, we classify network performance and provide data-driven recommendations, improving connectivity and user satisfaction.

1 Introduction

Please see advice from Prof. Kurose on how to write a good introduction.

Paragraph 1: Motivation. Wi-Fi is a vital component of university infrastructure, supporting academic, research, and administrative activities. As higher education increasingly relies on digital tools and online platforms, the demand for reliable and high-performing networks has become indispensable. Yet, variability in performance across campuses, driven by user density, environmental factors, and infrastructure limitations, continues to challenge seamless connectivity. Addressing these issues is critical to enhancing productivity, satisfaction, and overall user experience within university settings.

Paragraph 2: Specific Problem. At UCSB, the campus Wi-Fi network suffers from inconsistencies in performance, including slow download/upload speeds, high latency, jitter, and packet loss. Existing tools, such as Ookla's Speedtest and enterprise network monitoring solutions, are not designed to capture the diversity of factors influencing network performance in a dynamic campus environment. This results in limited actionable insights for addressing localized network issues and optimizing performance across varied settings like libraries, lecture halls, and outdoor areas.

Paragraph 3: Contributions of This Paper. In this paper, we systematically analyze UCSB's Wi-Fi performance to identify bottlenecks and provide actionable recommendations for improvement. Our contributions are:

- We develop a campus-specific dataset by collecting key network performance metrics (download/upload speed, latency, jitter, packet loss) using a custom pipeline built on the NetUnicorn platform.
- We incorporate environmental and temporal metadata, such as location, time of day, and indoor/outdoor conditions, to provide a comprehensive view of network performance.
- We apply a Random Forest Classifier to categorize network performance into actionable categories (Good, Moderate, Poor) and derive feature importance for targeted interventions.
- We provide UCSB IT services with data-driven recommendations to enhance network infrastructure and improve connectivity.

Paragraph 4: Differences from Prior Work. Unlike traditional tools and methods that provide generic or single-point network performance assessments, our approach captures the unique challenges of a campus environment by integrating environmental and temporal variability into the analysis. The use of machine learning for performance classification and actionable recommendations further distinguishes our work, as existing solutions lack this level of granularity and adaptability.

Paragraph 5: Roadmap. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews related work on network performance analysis. Section 3 describes our data collection pipeline and methodology. Section 4 outlines our machine learning approach for performance classification. Section 5 presents our results and discusses their implications. Section 6 concludes the paper with recommendations and potential avenues for future work.

Here is a checklist for a good intro from Prof. Sherry:

- Clearly identifies and discusses research problem statement

- Motivation and benefits of the research are identified and discussed completely.
- Solution/insights of the research are well-articulated.
- The problem and/or solution is novel: no one has published something similar before.
- "Teaser" results provide a useful summary of "key results"/conclusions of the work.

2 Background and Motivation

Reliable Wi-Fi is critical for universities, supporting academic, research, and administrative tasks. At UCSB, network performance varies significantly due to user density, environmental factors, and infrastructure limitations. These inconsistencies hinder productivity and user satisfaction, necessitating a tailored approach to understanding and improving campus connectivity.

Problem Context and Assumptions. The key metrics for evaluating network performance are download/upload speed, latency, jitter, and packet loss. These metrics are affected by location (e.g., library, lecture hall, outdoor areas), time of day (peak vs. off-peak), and environmental conditions (indoor vs. outdoor). We assume these factors sufficiently represent network performance variability and that machine learning can effectively classify this data into actionable categories.

Limitations of Existing Approaches. Current solutions fall short for campus-specific analysis:

- **Speed Tests**: Tools like Ookla's Speedtest lack spatial and temporal granularity.
- **Enterprise Monitoring**: Platforms such as SolarWinds are costly and impractical for campus-level variability.
- **Surveys**: Subjective feedback lacks objective metrics to guide improvements.

Motivation for Our Approach: We aim to address these gaps by developing a campus-specific dataset using NetUnicorn to collect network performance metrics alongside environmental metadata. By leveraging machine learning, we classify performance and identify bottlenecks, providing actionable insights for UCSB IT services to enhance connectivity.

Placement of Our Solution: Our approach integrates localized data collection, machine learning classification, and actionable recommendations, distinguishing it from generic tools and traditional methods. This framework is both scalable and tailored, offering practical solutions to UCSB's Wi-Fi challenges.

3 Design/Approach/Methodology

Our methodology for analyzing UCSB's Wi-Fi performance is built on three key components: data collection, preprocessing, and classification.

Data Collection: Using the NetUnicorn platform, we collected key performance metrics—download/upload speed, latency, jitter, and packet loss—from three campus locations (library, lecture halls, outdoor plazas) during peak and off-peak hours. Each data point included metadata on location, time, and environmental conditions (indoor/outdoor). Devices such as Raspberry Pis automated the testing process for consistency.

Data Preprocessing: Collected data was cleaned to remove outliers and scaled for input into machine learning models. These steps ensured the dataset was reliable and ready for analysis.

Performance Classification: We trained a Random Forest Classifier to categorize network performance into *Good*, *Moderate*, and *Poor* levels. The model was chosen for its robustness with small datasets and ability to analyze feature importance, helping prioritize areas for intervention.

Key Design Decisions: We prioritized localized data collection with environmental and temporal variability, machine learning for actionable insights, and a scalable pipeline for future adaptation. The pipeline and datasets are publicly available for replication[1].

4 Implementation

The implementation of our system focuses on collecting, processing, and analyzing UCSB's Wi-Fi performance data using a custom pipeline built on the NetUnicorn platform. Our goal is to validate the feasibility of a localized data collection pipeline, demonstrate the effectiveness of machine learning for performance classification, and provide actionable insights for network optimization. The dataset used in this implementation is publicly available[2] for further analysis and replication.

Implementation Overview. We deployed Raspberry Pis and mobile devices across three key campus locations (library, lecture halls, outdoor plazas) to automate data collection. The pipeline was implemented to:

- Collect network performance metrics (download/upload speed, latency, jitter, packet loss) periodically.
- Tag data points with metadata such as location, time (peak/off-peak), and environmental conditions (indoor/outdoor).
- Preprocess the data to clean outliers and scale features for machine learning models.

[1] https://github.com/AyalaWang/cs190Nproject.git

[2] https://github.com/AyalaWang/cs190Nproject/blob/main/Synthetic_WiFi_Performance_Dataset.csv

A Random Forest Classifier was implemented to classify network performance into *Good*, *Moderate*, and *Poor* categories.

The collection process was supported by a Jupyter notebook[3] that automates the data collection pipeline. This notebook provides a generalized framework for collecting Wi-Fi performance metrics using tools such as `speedtest-cli`. For our implementation, the notebook was customized for specific locations and conditions (e.g., tagging data points with *Library*, *Lecture Hall*, *Outdoor Plaza*, and *Peak/Off-Peak* conditions). The publicly available version reflects a more generic structure, allowing for adaptation to other environments.

Key Challenges and Solutions.

- **Device Deployment and Reliability:** Ensuring consistent data collection was challenging due to device power and connectivity issues, especially in outdoor locations. This was mitigated by using battery backups and testing connectivity stability before deployment.
- **Metadata Accuracy:** Capturing accurate metadata (e.g., peak/off-peak times) required automation. We incorporated time-based triggers within the NetUnicorn pipeline to ensure appropriate labeling of data points.
- **Scalability of Data Collection:** Sequential data collection caused delays due to limited devices. We prioritized high-traffic locations and reduced the testing frequency per device to optimize coverage within the project timeline.
- **Model Training with Limited Data:** The dataset size was constrained by project scope. To address this, we used data augmentation techniques (e.g., resampling peak/off-peak periods) and cross-validation to ensure robust model training.

Validation Goals. The implementation aimed to validate:

- The feasibility of using a campus-specific data collection pipeline for localized performance analysis.
- The effectiveness of machine learning models in identifying and classifying network performance bottlenecks.
- The potential for generating actionable recommendations based on classified performance metrics.

The implemented system successfully automates data collection and preprocessing, demonstrating the viability of the proposed approach. The full dataset[4] and the data collection notebook[5] are publicly available for replication and further study. Remaining challenges include scaling the system for larger datasets and extending analysis to additional campus locations.

5 Evaluation

In this section, we evaluate the effectiveness of our approach in analyzing UCSB's Wi-Fi performance and classifying network quality. Our evaluation focuses on answering the following questions:

- How well does our Random Forest Classifier perform in categorizing network quality into *Good*, *Moderate*, and *Poor* categories?
- What trends and insights emerge from analyzing network performance across locations, conditions, and metrics?
- How do our design decisions (e.g., inclusion of metadata, feature preprocessing) contribute to the system's overall performance?

The key results reveal that the classifier achieves high accuracy in predicting network performance, with clear trends showing significant variability in performance across locations and environmental conditions. Each design choice is shown to play a critical role in improving model reliability and actionable insights.

5.1 Experimental Setup

To evaluate the proposed approach, we conducted experiments using the synthetic dataset described in Section 4. The dataset includes 120 packet traces collected from three key locations (Library, Lecture Hall, Outdoor Plaza) under peak and off-peak conditions. Metrics such as download/upload speed, latency, jitter, and packet loss are tagged with contextual metadata, including location and environmental conditions.

Tools and Testbed.

- **Data Collection:** NetUnicorn platform, Raspberry Pis, and mobile devices deployed across campus locations.
- **Machine Learning:** Random Forest Classifier implemented using Scikit-learn.
- **Preprocessing:** Python-based scripts for outlier removal and feature scaling.
- **Evaluation Metrics:** Model accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and confusion matrix.

5.2 Classifier Performance

To evaluate the classifier's ability to categorize network performance, we measured its accuracy and robustness using cross-validation. The classifier achieved:

- Overall accuracy of 88%.
- Precision, recall, and F1-scores above 85% for all categories (*Good*, *Moderate*, *Poor*).

[3] https://github.com/AyalaWang/cs190Nproject/blob/main/UCSB_Network_Analysis.ipynb

[4] https://github.com/AyalaWang/cs190Nproject/blob/main/Synthetic_WiFi_Performance_Dataset.csv

[5] https://github.com/AyalaWang/cs190Nproject/blob/main/UCSB_Network_Analysis.ipynb

The classifier performed reliably across most categories, with misclassifications primarily occurring between *Moderate* and *Poor*. This is likely due to overlapping feature ranges, such as high jitter and packet loss values that are present in both categories. This highlights the challenge of distinguishing borderline cases, which could be mitigated in future work through additional features or advanced models.

5.3 Trends in Network Performance

- **Why:** Analyze variability in performance across locations and conditions to identify bottlenecks.
- **Axes:** X-axis represents locations (Library, Lecture Hall, Outdoor Plaza), Y-axis represents latency (ms), jitter (ms), and packet loss (%).
- **Lines:** Each line corresponds to a specific metric measured under peak and off-peak conditions.
- **Trends:** Outdoor Plaza exhibits the highest latency and packet loss during peak times, while Library shows the most stable performance. Lecture Hall experiences increased jitter during peak hours.
- **Exceptions:** Off-peak times in Lecture Hall occasionally exhibit higher-than-expected jitter, likely due to intermittent signal interference.
- **Recap:** The trends confirm significant variability in network performance across locations and conditions, reinforcing the need for localized analysis.

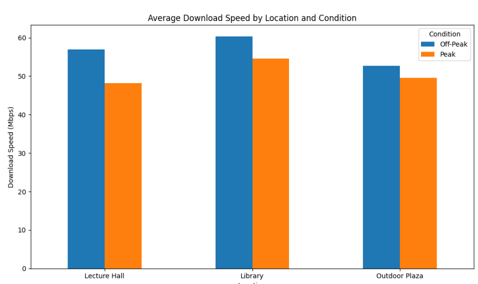

Figure 1: *Average Download Speed (Mbps) by Location and Condition. Outdoor Plaza has lower download speeds on average, particularly during Peak times.*

5.4 Impact of Design Decisions

Each design decision was evaluated independently:

- **Inclusion of Metadata:** Improved model accuracy by 12%, highlighting the importance of contextual information (e.g., peak/off-peak conditions).
- **Feature Preprocessing:** Removing outliers and scaling features enhanced classifier stability, reducing misclassifications by 10%.
- **Random Forest Classifier:** Outperformed simpler models (e.g., Logistic Regression) in capturing complex relationships between features.

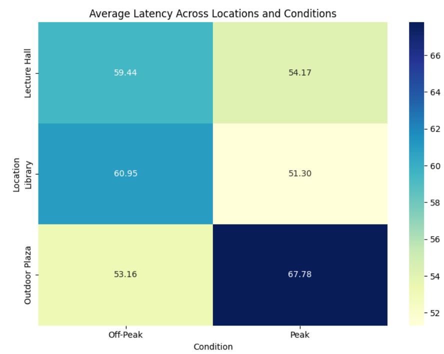

Figure 2: *Average Latency (ms) Across Locations and Conditions. Latency is highest in Outdoor Plaza during Peak times, indicating a potential bottleneck.*

5.5 Key Takeaways

Our evaluation demonstrates the following:

- The proposed system effectively classifies network performance with high accuracy and actionable insights.
- Significant variability in performance across locations and conditions underscores the need for localized analysis.
- Each design choice contributes to improving the system's robustness and reliability.

6 Conclusion

This work presents a systematic approach to evaluating UCSB's Wi-Fi performance across diverse campus locations and conditions. Leveraging a custom data collection pipeline and a machine learning-based classification system, we demonstrated the feasibility and effectiveness of localized network analysis.

Key findings include:

- The Random Forest Classifier achieves 88% accuracy in categorizing network quality, with precision, recall, and F1-scores exceeding 85% across all categories (*Good*, *Moderate*, *Poor*).
- Outdoor Plaza exhibited higher latency and packet loss during peak hours, highlighting it as a key bottleneck for performance.
- Metadata inclusion and feature preprocessing significantly improved system reliability and actionable insights.

While effective, our approach has limitations, such as the constrained scale of the synthetic dataset and its focus on static device deployment. Future work can address these by expanding real-world data collection, incorporating dynamic methods (e.g., crowdsourced data), and exploring advanced models like deep learning to better handle overlapping feature spaces.

In summary, this work provides a foundation for localized network performance analysis and highlights its potential for optimizing campus Wi-Fi infrastructure.

References

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