

Default Report

2017 Data Science for the Public Good Summer Program Survey - Fellows2

August 2nd 2017, 7:59 am MDT

Q1 - Were the projects interesting? Why?

Were the projects interesting? Why?

Yes, very much so! There are two parts that make me enthused. First, it's the appeal that what we work on will have positive impact on the more vulnerable parts of society. Second, some if not, all the problems have not been solved before. It's being on the edge of trying something new that fascinates me!

I think the projects were extremely interesting. I think I learned a lot about new topics. I realized that I learned a lot about several different statistical techniques, like NLP, spatial modeling, and network models, as well as applications, such as crime and refugee issues.

Q2 - Which project did you like best? Why?

Which project did you like best? Why?

Probabilistic Linkage for DHS! I think part of the reason is after trying so many different things for WMATA and most of them not working out, and then, jumping into DHS: writing code and seeing results just made me swoon! Another reason might be that although it's actually "nobody's" job, I am excited about the technical challenge of merging these legacy data sets which were not originally designed to be merged. I got excited of the possible insights people could gain after merging these data sets.

This is a hard question but I think I liked the AC911 Community Indicators project the best. I was doing some very meaningful modeling that I thought would make a difference. Even though some mistakes were made at the end, I think we still will be able to turn it around and make valuable conclusions with this work.

Q4 - Comment on working in a collaborative environment.

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I think it would be great if there was a discussion between fellows initiated by the program directors on collaborative working environment. I think some of us are more team-spirited and some are more oriented towards seeking individual merit. I think a nice balance is needed especially if we are to mentor undergraduates and let some of them shine. From what I gathered from my conversations with the undergraduates, I think some of the fellows were too dominant for some undergraduates to shine!

I really enjoyed working in a collaborative environment. It was a great experience to be able to experience managing teams with different skillsets. Sometimes, I think it would be good to have interventions with the students that are struggling, and earlier so that people can catch up if they fall behind.

Q5 - Comment on your work load.

Comment on your work load.

I think the number of graduate students should be increased if we are going to 14 or so projects. I think if we had less projects, we would have been able to focus on 1 or 2 and I think one of us had been able to do that. On the other hand, I also think that the duration of the program should be longer to around 12 weeks. Most of us lost some steam during the 6th or so week and we took a breather. I think that should be accounted for! It's okay to work really hard during the last few weeks but, I think we would even have better results or outputs if we have a few more weeks!

I think the work load was a bit much in terms of the number of projects. I think being involved in four each *with the current amount of students/fellows* was a big workload. However, I think this would be helped immensely if we had a fifth fellow. So, I think it was definitely doable but it would be great if we could have another fellow or a couple more students.

Q9 - Comment on the number of meetings.

Comment on the number of meetings.

Initially, it was too much but later on, I figured out that I did not need to be in all the meetings!

I think the number of meetings was totally doable. I wish the trainings would have been a bit more spread out, because I think having some at the end would be useful and I think the trainings made it hard to get the projects started at the beginning.

Q33 - Did you find the weekly wrap-up meetings to be useful? Why?

Did you find the weekly wrap-up meetings to be useful? Why?

I think the weekly wrap-up can be improved. The concept is sound as it allows for everyone to pitch in but, I think it should strictly be focused on two things:

- 1) Here is the problem we are trying to solve.
- 2) Here is where we are stuck at. Anybody has any ideas?

I think the rest of time should be spent where the program directors actually have a speed session with each individuals on quickly recapping what they have done this week, what help they needed etc... I think these 1 on 1s would make sure that nobody is falling through the cracks and we are able to reach out to struggling students. I would argue that the program should continue to accept students who are not that good but, who show some promise to grow. I think we should do our best to reach out to students and have them grow!

I thought they were useful in terms of getting the students experience in presenting their work. I don't know if it was too useful in terms of getting feedback, but that might not have been the purpose.

Q10 - Which training were helpful? Which ones were not?

Which training were helpful? Which ones were not?

I am quite familiar with most of the training so, it was a good recap for me. I think the most useful was the GIS one, personally!

I thought the trainings were helpful, in general. The only training that I did not think was helpful was the "data science" training, where there was no statistics training at all before then, but I think people know that :)

Q11 - Which training would you recommend for next year's DSPG?

Which training would you recommend for next year's DSPG?

Data exploration! I think most students don't get what data exploration is.

Also, curiosity! If there is a way to inject or get some students be curious and write down what they want to see from the data even if they don't know how to do it, it would be a great exercise!

A "Statistics" training session, and maybe something in Julia or Python

Q12 - Did you receive sufficient mentoring? Did you find it useful?

Did you receive sufficient mentoring? Did you find it useful?

YES! I have the BEST mentors! If anything, I should have reached out more early on with some of the collaboration issues I was having!

I received sufficient mentoring, and I feel like I really learned a lot throughout the summer. I didn't really have the opportunity to talk to anyone about my goals, because I was so wrapped up in the work towards the end, but I really feel like I learned a lot from folks in the lab.

Q13 - How can the mentoring process be improved?

How can the mentoring process be improved?

I think everyone was busy and stressed out but, I would like to argue that we should do more for students who are struggling. Personally, I feel like I have let down David Park, David Hinkle and Joe. I would sit down with other students and went through their codes etc but with at least the 2 Davids, I felt put off initially. In retrospect, I think we are always going to come across difficult students who may be unmotivated. I feel strongly that we should put extra effort to get them to engage and become better students. I think this is another case of public good. Bad students may translate to bad decision making members of society later on through the voting booth to every day living.

I believe that the mentoring process could be improved by making sure that students aren't all on the same projects together and that one student doesn't have the same mentor for all projects. It makes it much harder to learn from others and make connections when that's the case. I would also suggest having time set aside where mentors and mentees get lunch together, maybe in groups. I would love to talk to the faculty in the lab outside of the office!

Q27 - Was having the DSPG alumni as part of the program useful?

Was having the DSPG alumni as part of the program useful?

Yes! Adrienne was very helpful for ARI. She is one of the most down to earth and generous person I have ever met!

I thought it was pretty useful! I didn't think they acted too different from the other students, but they were able to be very accessible.

Q29 - What did the alumni do well?

What did the alumni do well?

They brought institutional knowledge which was helpful for us in figuring out whom to reach out to etc.

The students always felt like they could come talk to the alumni, which was great. I'm really glad that they were there and that the students felt comfortable talking to them.

Q28 - What could the alumni have done better?

What could the alumni have done better?

I don't see any as of now. I think it would be great if we have had more backyard barbecue like at Aaron's place where we all get to relax and get to know each other. I understand it's a lot of logistical planning but if an alumni can each take turns to organize these social events, it would be great! I understand it was attempted early on but sort of faltered.

The alumni could have shared a bit more of their experience- I didn't really hear much about the summer before.

Q24 - How did the undergraduates perform on your projects?

How did the undergraduates perform on your projects?

Some of them like Eiriki, Craig and Ben did very well. They picked on and did not hesitate to ask for help when they needed to. Others like the Davids did considerably less. I think part of the failure is on our end and the other part may be that they did not get over their initial insecurities. More 1 on 1 mentoring would have helped.

This question is quite difficult to answer, as there is so much variety among the undergraduates. I'd be happy to elaborate on student performance, but I don't think I can say much in a small survey. Overall, I was pleased with the undergraduates, with a few exceptions. However, most of them picked up their game at the end. I think in general, the faculty could have been more involved in terms of interventions with students and assigning doable, specific tasks (which is not always possible for us to do).

Q25 - Was the diversity in skillsets and maturity within the undergraduates positive or negative? Why?

Was the diversity in skillsets and maturity within the undergraduates posit...

Despite the cases of the Davids where I believe they are not as mature as some other members of the undergraduates, I would argue that we should keep this diversity instead of a collection of students who are relatively more mature and skilled.

Instead, we should make it explicit that there is something to learn from each of us. The less skilled ones should not shy from picking the brains from the more skilled ones. This is their chance to grow. I think it should be made clear that some of us might feel dumb on certain things and slower than others and we should let them know that it's perfectly fine. Just opportunities for growth.

And for those who are more skilled, sharing with the students who are less skilled is an opportunity for them to hone their mentoring skills which is essential in any jobs in the future!

I think overall, the diversity in skillsets and maturity was a positive. It allowed us to learn from each other. However, for the students that are not as mature, I think there need to be systems in place where faculty can get involved and intervene much earlier.

Q30 - Did you find the fellow meetings after the weekly wrap-ups useful? Why?

Did you find the fellow meetings after the weekly wrap-ups useful? Why?

YES! My only regret is that we didn't go out to happy hours as much. Things could have turned out even much better if the 6 of us went on happy hours more often!

I found them useful in terms of a format to present feedback but I don't think any of our suggestions were used, which is okay but I'm not sure if this is useful then?

Q31 - Any suggestions for improving student engagement in the program?

Any suggestions for improving student engagement in the program?

I would argue for more fun games and activities led by alumni or fellows for everyone to just relax and get to know each other.

As mentioned, I would suggest having an intervention with students that are falling behind. I would also suggest workshops on career development topics, such as graduate school.

Q32 - What did you think about the Fellows office set-up?

What did you think about the Fellows office set-up?

I love it! I got to tease my three bosses and we have our privacy to vent out from time to time.

I think some of us broke down at different points in the program and it would not have been possible if we did not have an office and a very supportive family.

I really loved the Fellows office set-up. We really learned a lot from each other!

Q6 - What skills do you wish you had come with?

What skills do you wish you had come with?

I wish I was more assertive! Also, I am not good at taking credit for what I do. I have been brought up to shy from individual glory, so, it is very hard for me to take credit or want to take credit.

I think I learned everything I needed to in terms of Git that I didn't know before! I wish I had come with a bit more spatial modeling skills, but Josh was so helpful in helping us learn.

Q7 - What skills did you learn or improve on?

What skills did you learn or improve on?

Being more assertive, standing up, speaking up and maybe wanting a little more individual credit!

I improved on some modeling techniques, and lots of data/code management techniques.

Q8 - What skills would you liked to have learned or improved on?

What skills would you liked to have learned or improved on?

Model building! I missed out on that part!

I would have liked to learn a bit of coding in other languages. And I wish we had learned a bit more stats in the program (rather than just coding). I hope Josh has a workshop in the future!

Q17 - Did the DSPG program meet your expectations?

Did the DSPG program meet your expectations?

YES! I have had my BEST summer so far in the States and it's here at DSPG. The mentorship supported exceeded my expectations. I have never had this number of mentors who would show me stuffs. Usually, it's figuring things out on my own!

Yes! Definitely. I learned a lot and contributed a lot, which is a great balance.

Q18 - Would you consider working in the public sector after graduation? Why?

Would you consider working in the public sector after graduation? Why?

Yes! I do have financial & work eligibility constraints due to being an international student but, if it were not the case, I would dedicate myself to public sector work. The obvious reason is that I strongly believe as a society we should not let a group of people fall through the cracks because they do not have the financial & political leverage to have a decent living. Yes, life is not going to be fair and public sector work (or any disruptive and innovative work that improves the life of people on the margin) is our moral obligation to make this world a happier place!

Yes- I enjoy doing work that is going to have an impact on people.

Q19 - What was your favorite part of the DSPG program?

What was your favorite part of the DSPG program?

First, I have found mentors who drive me to be a better human being. At the end of the day, that is all it counts. Second, we are like a start-up. Move fast, break fast, solve fast. I very much enjoy that. It reminded me of my bitcoin days!

My favorite part was two-fold: being able to work on real-world problems that will help people and to work alongside some really inspiring and intelligent people.

Q20 - Provide suggestions on how we can improve the DSPG program.

Provide suggestions on how we can improve the DSPG program.

I think we should have less projects per graduate student and per principal investigator so that it allows everyone to form deeper working relations. More importantly, it should be emphasized that undergraduates can change projects later on if they don't think it's a fit.

I would have the workshop on stats, and encourage more than just project-based mentoring :)

Q27 - What would you change about the program?

What would you change about the program?

As mentioned before, a 12 weeks program. If it's not possible, I think the trainings could be more compact. At one point, more training wouldn't help unless they get their hands dirty with the data. I think the trainings could start earlier around 8:00 am for the first 2 weeks and then, we just get people to start working on the projects. That way, everyone will have more time for individual mentoring as they stumble on the projects.

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Q27 - What did you think about the DSPG Symposium?

What did you think about the DSPG Symposium?

I think it was done very well. I think everyone should have been reminded to have their business cards ready. Not all of us were prepared for networking so, if there is some training on that, it would be great.

I thought it was a great forum to present our work! I can't wait to see how it grows in the future.