

Default Report

2017 Data Science for the Public Good Summer Program Survey - Alumni
August 2nd 2017, 7:57 am MDT

Q1 - Were the projects interesting? Why?

Were the projects interesting? Why?

Yes because our strategies to address the problems were very creative. We either repurposed data creatively, or came at the issue from a creative angle.

Overall, yes. However, I feel that there might have been a few too many projects to get the maximum interest out of them, if that makes sense? Each student really only had the opportunity to dip their toes into the projects and in talking to some of them, they definitely had wished they could have jumped into them more. But overall, the projects all seemed to have a clear purpose and reason which always makes them more interesting.

Q2 - Which project did you like best? Why?

Which project did you like best? Why?
I liked the Arlington community project because the questions were very well-defined at the beginning of the program. We also got to collaborate with local non-profits and understand their place in providing for Arlington residents. Because they were less experienced with data and statistics, they also seemed most grateful for our work.
I personally, enjoyed working on the ARI project quite a bit this year. It really let me challenge myself and learn new skills. But, I always love hearing about the work the 911 proejcts are doing.

Q4 - Comment on working in a collaborative environment.

Comment on working in a collaborative environment.

Collaboration will always have its challenges, but it's important for us to learn.
Overall, I appreciate the collaborative nature of the lab.

I think overall it was pretty good this year. But definitely not as good as last year. I think it was nice the grad students had their own space, but it definitely made them less accessible than Sam was the year before. And I think allowed them to take on more of the work and not necessarily spread it across the students as well as they could have. I feel like the grad students were a little overloaded and the students were a tad bored at times. But, overall, everybody was nice enough and worked well to put together some awesome projects. In the future, I would make the alumni role a little different, it was a weird in between to be in. And kind of made it uncomfortable at times. Maybe advertise them as a source to go to like Dan for questions. And maybe put them in charge of organizing a few out of office experiences to build the connection between grad students and students. But, again, overall the summer went very well and I am being a bit picky.

Q5 - Comment on your work load.

Comment on your work load.

Based on the expectations I understood from faculty and the expectations I had for myself based on last year's experience, I thought my workload was challenging but manageable. I never felt too stressed, but also had enough work to stay late/come early plenty of days. Issues arose when other students' expectations of me did not match my own. I think this could be helped in the future by better-defining roles and expectations of students within each project.

My workload was fine. I very much tried to be as effecient as possible and finish between my 8 hour day. There were a few times I took work home, but usually that was because I was having fun with the project and didnt want to stop working, but wanted to sit on a couch.

Q9 - Comment on the number of meetings.

Comment on the number of meetings.

Much better than last year! For my projects, we had a perfect number of meetings (granted, I stopped going to most 911 meetings because I was the only student working on the fire subproject).

The meeting count was fine. I was not here the first two weeks, so I cannot speak about the heavier meeting weeks. But I always felt like my time was well spent.

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?

No. I liked the idea behind them (give students practice presenting), but I don't think this set up was effective at providing that practice. We should probably do a weekly kick-off OR a weekly wrap up, but not both.

I personally enjoyed them. I thought it was a great way to hear what the other projects were doing and bolster respect for eachothers work. It was also a great time to sit and reflect about what we were doing and what we wanted to do. I think, everyone would have gotten more out of it if there wasn't so many projects going on. And if it didn't go on for so long.

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

Which training were helpful? Which ones were not?

For students with little technical experience, these trainings can become overwhelming quickly. Jumping into advanced things like webscraping, apply functions, shiny, etc. overwhelms students and just confuses them more.

I think these more advanced topics should only be taught to students on relevant projects. For example, this summer, we were all in the webscraping training. Only a few students actually mastered the skill, though, and Dan had to reteach them after the training anyways.

I was not here for the training but people seemed decently prepared when I came

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

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

Students should be taught what tidy data is and how to profile data. This way when their first instruction for each project is to profile data, they know where to start.

Trainings for (1) tidy data, (2) profiling data, and (3) cleaning data would be helpful. Another recommendation is that Dan thoroughly explain his organization of project folders on the front end of the summer so that students and fellows understand why it's important they follow his instructions (memory/storage, security reasons, etc.)

I would say that each project should be given a list of training they need to go to at the beginning of the summer. This way, students will feel like they will be tested on what they are learning in their projects and may not be quite so distracted during the trainings.

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

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

Yes!

Stephanie was a phenomenal mentor. I enjoyed talking to her quite a bit. I definitely feel more centered about what is coming next for me after talking with her this summer.

Q13 - How can the mentoring process be improved?

How can the mentoring process be improved?

At our first meeting, Gizem and I outlined specific summer goals for me at the lab. I found this to be an extremely helpful exercise because it helped Gizem place me on projects that suited those goals, and helped me focus on/prioritize things that were important to me. It also felt extremely rewarding to realize that I actually met all of the goals by the end of the summer.

This may already be considered, but I found that working with my mentor on projects really helped the relationship to grow.

I think, that there should be some kind of guidelines for the mentors, so that all of the students are getting some kind of similar experience. I definitely got lucky, but not every student felt that way.

Q21 - Was having a fellow on your projects helpful? Why?

Was having a fellow on your projects helpful? Why?

N/A

It was nice to have someone who kept the projects organized and could bring a lot of knowledge about the field and share even more experiences with the students.

Q23 - What did the fellows do well?

What did the fellows do well?

They worked relentlessly. I was never here before or after at least one of the fellows.

Working with Zarni was fantastic. He definitely welcomed me into the group and let me take some ownership over the project. Claire was always very organized and definitely knew what was going on.

Q22 - What could the fellows have done better?

What could the fellows have done better?

They could have shared more of their work load with undergrads. I don't have much feedback to offer because I hardly interacted with them at all aside from polite conversations. They were not well-integrated into the rest of the group and often seemed inaccessible - not only because of the physical barrier, but I felt bad distracting them from all of their work to ask questions or strike up conversation.

What I have loved about the DSPG experience the past few years was how much you got to do as an undergraduate. I definitely feel like this year the undergraduates were definitely just doing tasks and not challenged as much to really think about the research themselves. I know, that is a very challenging thing to encourage people to do, and I struggled in getting the students to do this as well. It is definitely easier to sometimes just do it yourself. Maybe there needs to be a training separate for the fellows and alumni to go over educating not just assigning since this is supposed to be a learning experience. Also, I sometimes felt uncomfortable with the fellows as they did not really know where the alumni stood. So, again, making this role more clear would be very helpful in avoiding stepping on anyone's toes.

Q24 - How did the undergraduates perform on your projects?

How did the undergraduates perform on your projects?
The undergrads I worked with were Ben, Chanida, Hannah, Simmu, and Sean. They were all very hardworking and did a great job. Overall, I would have preferred them to be a bit more independent with their work. They often needed explicit instructions to follow, and when they did work alone, I had a hard time trusting the output (i.e. the 911 characterizing communities problem).
I think there was a mix. Some were very into it and really worked hard to learn and grow. Others, got out of it what they put into it. Definitely blown away by some and less than impressed by others.

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...

I think that the diversity in skill sets and maturity was nice, but I would have preferred the less-skilled and less-mature students to be the exceptions. It's realistic to offer more help to one or two less experienced students, but when half the group is struggling, it becomes easier just to do the work yourself than to spend time teaching the students and not be confident about the outcome.

I think it was somewhere in the middle. I think, if undergraduates were more empowered to share some of their skills with others (maybe they get assigned to teach brownbags) or something like that then it would have been more useful. When they are all trying to learn R and do the same thing for projects then they aren't really getting to use their diverse skills.

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

Any suggestions for improving student engagement in the program?

The students bonded over social events (breakfast before midterm presentations, BBQ at Aaron's). Having dedicated time to connect at the beginning of the summer would be great. Maybe a group lunch that's intended to be social (not a brown bag!) on the first day or something like that. I heard a lot of nice things about groups getting lunch together after off-campus meetings as well.

Give them true ownership on less projects. Its hard to see how much you have done when you are spread so thin. Also, engage in more out of office activities. Its difficult with so many people, but I always enjoyed just going to the Arlington Courthouse or when we went to Senate hearing in DC. Just get the whole group together to explore the community they are doing so much work for, even if they are not all doing those exact projects.

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

What skills do you wish you had come with?

I definitely learned a lot this summer, but I don't regret the position I began at this summer. Due to my experience with SDAL over the past year, I came with all of the skills that were absolutely necessary to be productive.

I guess more coding skills

Q7 - What skills did you learn or improve on?

What skills did you learn or improve on?

I learned a ton about R 'under the hood' and the structure of R objects. I also improved my skills cleaning and merging data, presenting, and interpreting/writing linear models.

I definitely improved my coding, especially when it came to taking on new tasks with confidence and not limiting myself to what I know already.

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

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

Aaron showed me some different techniques for making maps in R that I wasn't aware of before. I'd like to get better at that moving forward.

Q17 - Did the DSPG program meet your expectations?

Did the DSPG program meet your expectations?
Yes
yes

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

Would you consider working in the public sector after graduation? Why?
Yes, because the public sector has so much underutilized data to capitalize on. This program has pushed me toward research and academia more than public sector work, though.
Yes, I hope to build a career that benefits others. I will go where I need to go, but I would love to work in the public sector for a time

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

What was your favorite part of the DSPG program?

Working with the faculty. I love learning from them! Because I have aspirations for grad school and academia, it's invaluable to hear their perspectives and advice about school, work, and everything else. The connections I've made here are by far my favorite part.

Working with a diverse set of people who all care about doing good

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

Provide suggestions on how we can improve the DSPG program.

The program definitely shouldn't get any bigger.

Maybe number of projects should correlate to level of experience. For example, a rising senior with coding experience can probably handle 3 projects, but a rising sophomore in a non-technical major should have no more than 2. If teaching responsibility does not fall on fellows, they can probably manage 4 projects. But if they're charged with helping undergrads extensively with work, even 3 projects may be too much.

Integrate fellows into the larger group. I liked how the projects felt very collaborative in summer 2016. Even though Sam was much more skilled than any of the undergrads, all of our work still felt valuable. I felt like I was working with her, not under her. This made me more comfortable asking questions; I definitely felt encouraged to learn. The top-down management with the fellows this year bothered me. It felt inefficient sometimes because they'd often just be the middle-man, communicating the faculty's vision or instructions for the project. Because they took on most of the work themselves, I didn't feel particularly encouraged to ask questions. I didn't get the impression that they had time to be patient with undergrads, taking the extra time to teach. And if I felt that way as an alumni, I'd imagine the other students felt that way even more so.

Give more opportunities for people to share what they have learned from their background

Q25 - What would you change about the program?

What would you change about the program?

- I wish the program was more accessible to students whose families do not live in the area. The REU set up made the program more accessible, more competitive, and attracted more experienced students. Students were also more interested in sharing experiences outside of work because they were all new to the area, and interested in seeing DC.
- I don't think offering credit will continue to attract many experienced students. By the time a student is a rising junior or senior, they don't need these types of elective credits anymore. The most experienced students will also be able to find paying internships elsewhere.
- The housing issue needs to be resolved, if not by the university than by SDAL offering a few scholarships to help ease costs of participating in this program.
- Slow it down a touch, especially if it is going to be a learning experience and let people really engage and be creative with their projects

Q26 - What did you think about the DSPG Symposium?

What did you think about the DSPG Symposium?

The symposium went great! I loved the speakers and thought the schedule flowed nicely.

I thought it went great this eyar. The speakers were very engaging