

Teaching Reflections - CIS 201 Introduction to Computer Science

I have taught this course four times in the last two years at SUNY Potsdam. CIS 201 is a 4-credit course with 3 credits of lecture and 1 credit of lab. This is an introductory course and is a prerequisite for all other courses in computer science. The students have to get a minimum of 2.0 to move to the next class in computer science degree program. This is a critical course for both recruiting and retaining computer science students.

The first time I taught this course was in Spring17. I worked with my colleagues to collect their notes and labs to understand the prior offering of the course. For this initial offering, I only slightly modified the course content and was focused on designing a course delivery style that ensured students remained engaged during the entire class, even though it was offered late in the afternoon. For this, I used a combination of conversations with students, pop quizzes during the lecture, and randomly calling up students to the board to write code. I worked to closely integrate the lectures with the lab to reinforce classroom learning with hands-on experience. The lab was also a good way for me to work closely with students, understand where they struggled and the topics that needed more attention from me. Over the next three offerings, I worked to modify the assignments based on my findings of problem areas during homework and exam grading.

As I look ahead, I see further scope for improvement. From my student evaluations, I see that students have rated my course highly, but I have particularly noted that there are some important criticisms that I need to consider. Several students noted that the pace of the course was slightly fast for them. In response to this critical comment, I'm making changes to both content and my delivery style. I intend to be repetitive with respect to lecturing key concepts, incorporate more in-class activities, and adjust lab content to allow more time for student reflection of material. I will also request student feedback during the semester, when possible, to assess if the changes are resulting in a more appropriate pace for the class. Finally, I will assess the effectiveness of my methods from student comments in the course evaluation.