

Randomness and Computation (RC)

Response to student feedback in 2017/18 course survey

I have taken note of the feedback from students in this course survey, and have the following comments in response:

- General comments:
- RC ran in semester 2 of 2017/18 and that meant that the window of teaching weeks overlapped significantly with the UCU strike - this meant that a number of lectures and topics were never taught, also that the submissions for "coursework 1" (a formative coursework which was to give practice) were not marked until the entire course had finished. The strike meant we had organisational problems, on-and-off lectures, delay in shipping coursework (when the striking prevented the specification being completed). I think this affected the quality/enjoyment for students quite a bit. I do not expect this situation to happen again in 2018/19 (I hope!).
- The number of responses to the survey were small, the maximum number of comments to any question being 3. This is low, even with RC having been a low enrollment course (about 20). I do think the survey responses are skewed towards people who didn't enjoy the course; during semester I had a number of direct compliments from students about the lectures (live and recorded) and also the course materials.
- Having written those two general comments, I will aim to be better organised and more polished this year. And fingers crossed for no strike.
- Responses to specific comments:
- 'There's no point having a "formative" coursework if the feedback isn't returned at all.' I agree. This was an effect of the strike last year. During the weeks following the submission of cwk1, we had weeks with only 2 working-days, 1 working-day etc. I was trying to prioritise my most-urgent tasks and things like creating RC coursework 2, writing the RC exam, and many non-RC tasks had to take precedence, I had no choice (note that although I was striking on the strike days, I was doing work on the weekends, so I was doing as much as possible).
- There are some comments about poor tutorials: as it happens I am taking the tutorials myself this year, I hope that will improve things.
- One comment was that 'the tutor shared my opinion about the trivial nature of most of the course.'
I was not happy to read this, as it is inappropriate for a tutor to comment on the level/focus of a course - while RC might not contain the content needed by a graduate student in Algorithms +Complexity, that can't be my benchmark for designing a 4th/MSc level course. Also, I think the majority of the class would disagree with the "trivial" description.
- Another comment was that 'The lecturer spent the first 4 weeks covering year 2 probability material (and some trivial applications of basic probability on algorithms at the very first lecture). The pace was very very slow the first 6 weeks.'
That's not true! At least it's certainly not true that we spent 4 weeks on introductory probability - maybe 2-3 lectures (not weeks) is accurate. I will try to tighten up the background revision this year.

Mary Cryan, January 2019