

# Individual Instructor /Course Report for 202101-X9-Crosslisted(202101-CS253A-14716-QR:Reinforcement Learning,202101-CS253YYA-15824-QR:Reinforcement Learning,202101-CSYS395D-16262-QR: Reinforcement Learning) (Emma Tosch)

Project Title: **2021 Spring Course Evaluation**

Course Audience: **23**  
Responses Received: **14**  
Response Ratio: **60.87%**

---

## Report Comments

### Introduction

This report contains the results gathered during the online course-instructor evaluations. Students were invited to share their feedback on the teaching and the course material, ultimately to help improve the overall quality of education at our institution. It is now our collective duty to turn this insight into action.

As part of this mission, all instructors receive an Individual Report for developmental purposes: to identify strengths and areas for improvement in regard to their teaching methods. Content includes graphs, tables, frequencies, and statistics, as well as the full output of student comments for open-ended questions.

We urge every faculty member to diligently examine all the analysis, to seek to understand it, to take note of patterns, to draw logical conclusions and to take it upon yourself to act on the valuable feedback your students have taken the time to provide.

### Guidelines

To aid in interpreting the results, please consider the three (3) following recommendations:

1. These evaluations stem from student perception, which implies that the validity increases proportionally with the number of occurrences. Your improvement plan should be based on the most representative results and less on outlying responses.
2. Upon getting a general sense of direction as to what requires improvement, it is important to drill down to the related questions and consider them as distinct items. They were evaluated as such by students and will indicate tangible steps/actions to incorporate into your developmental process.
3. In general high scores (4+) can be interpreted as a student consensus indicating a strength. On the other hand, low scores (2-) should be considered as an area that requires immediate developmental focus according to student feedback.

### Values and legends

Values are represented on a 1 – 5 scale where 1 is the lowest value and 5 is the highest value. The language provided by students for this scale is not indicated for each chart and graph below to preserve space and formatting. If you would like to view the full course evaluation questions with scale, please contact your department administrator for a copy.

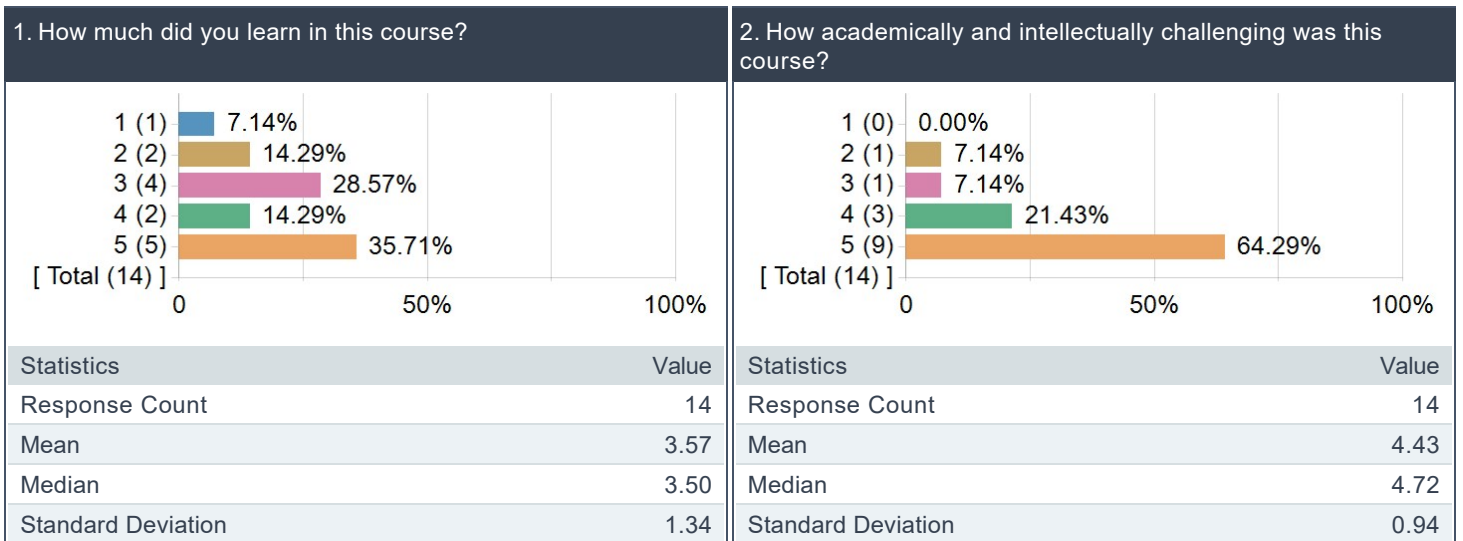
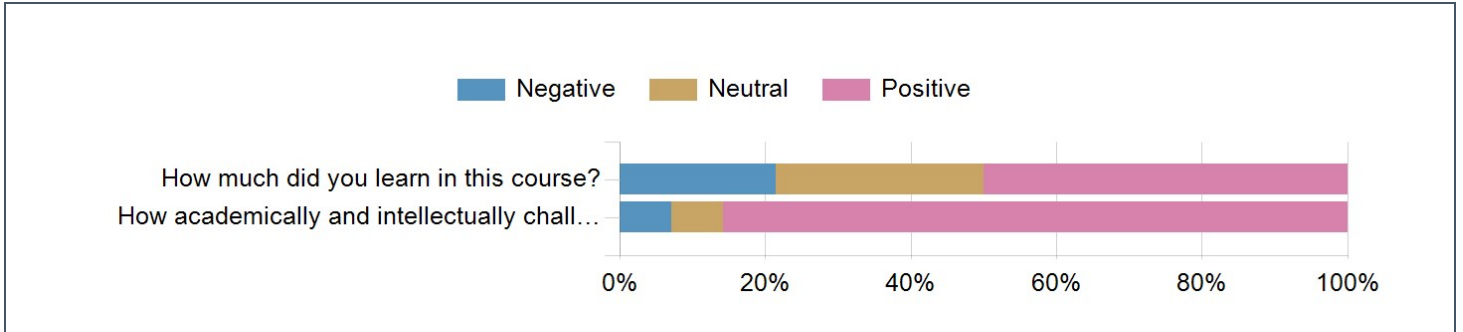
Where “Median” is noted as a statistic, the value is the Interpolated Median. (See <http://www.weekscomputing.com/webhelp/hs520.htm> for definition of Interpolated Median.)

\*\*\* Please consider the environment before printing this report. \*\*\*

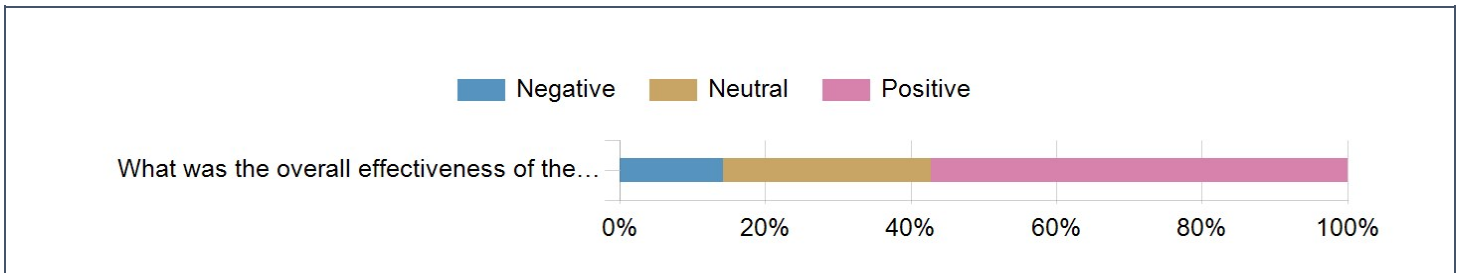
---

Creation Date: **Friday, August 20, 2021**

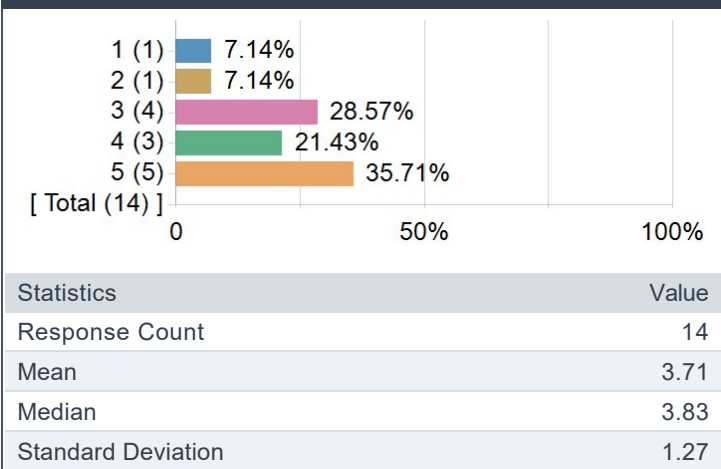
## Course Questions



## Instructor Questions



What was the overall effectiveness of the instructor?



### Open-Ended Feedback

Please comment on the value of the laboratory experience here and/or suggestions for improvement (e.g., facilities, organization, handouts, integration with lecture topics, etc.).

Comments
Quizzes worked well to serve as checkpoints. Difficult material but presented nicely.
Having regularly scheduled class times with lectures would be nice, no structure in an already unstructured semester was pretty awful. Having all communications via Microsoft Teams made it difficult to know what files were where, and knowing who was being addressed by the messages. Blackboard is a platform we're already familiar with using that for more than simply submissions would be really helpful.
The frequency of office hours was very useful and appreciated
The class was framed well as an online class as everything is due at the end of the semester and quizzes/videos can be completed in our own time.
I guess this means the assignments? – I think they were hit or miss. The first and last were the most straightforward. The second one was just a slog, and seemed to be a problem for many different students from talking with others. I think the assignments may need a little refinement as the course is improved with each iteration. Possibly more smaller ones that focus on specific topics that are necessary to put together an entire agent at the end or something.
Blackboard should be used more. Instead of sending out notifications on Teams, they should be sent out on Blackboard. Students receive an email from Blackboard when an announcement is made and I think more students would be up to date in the class if you used this method of communication.
N/A

Please comment on the effectiveness of the teaching assistant support here and/or suggestions for improvement (e.g., accessibility, quality of help, etc.).

Comments
Responsive, helpful and accessible
Meeting times conflicted with my schedule
I did not visit TA office hours
I think for the mathematical concepts the TA was very well suited to assist, however for specific code related assistance it wasn't as effective as could be. I think that is largely that until you've gone through this class and material and done it yourself, its hard to advise on coding something like this which is so unique and outside the norm. I believe this will get better as the class is taught more often in the coming years.
Helpful

**Please elaborate on any aspects of the instructor or course that work well or need improvement (e.g., organization, preparation, content, textbook, delivery, homework, quizzes/exams, assessment, responsiveness to student level, ability to answer questions, bias, etc.).**

Comments
I enjoyed this class and the structure it followed. The professor did a nice job with the material, as it is not easy to teach, which was appreciated. She was very compassionate and answered any questions.
I will start by saying that Mrs. Tosch is new both to her job as an instructor and to UVM, and that because she is doing this all during covid times, that she deserves a lot of credit and slack. Emma's good intentions are clear. She is very much set on helping and assisting her students, and she is very adamant to ensure that her students understand the material and have the tools to succeed in the classroom.
However, at the moment her intentions only go so far, as much of her execution during this course was subpar.
The first thing that struck me was the lack of live lectures. The replacement of video lectures with what were basically study halls honestly felt like a bad excuse to not teach us anything about the material as we would in any other course.
The overall structure of the course was confusing, with items being scattered between Blackboard and Microsoft Teams, leading me to never know where certain assignments or documents were located at times. Furthermore (and I give leeway because she is new and I know teaching is hard, and also I am being honest because I know she can do better), the way she explains things can be very confusing, and she often talks for way too long about the same thing, or go off on multiple tangents that honestly just end up being confusing.
Requiring a total 100% on the quizzes sent a message of "You need to be perfect or you are nothing". I get where she was coming from with the "Fill in the gaps in your knowledge" approach, however the way this idea was executed ended up making me feel like I needed to uphold myself to some particular perfectionist standard of knowledge, which I did not enjoy.
Overall, Emma Tosch is a new instructor trying to find her way as a UMass graduate at the lax pothead school that is UVM. She wasn't as good as I would have liked her to be, though I am very much understanding that she is a new instructor getting her start during COVID-19 of all times. I'm very much sure that Emma Tosch will get better with time, and in a year or two will be a fantastic instructor that UVM students will love.
Homework was verbose with unclear instructions.
I think the flexibility in due dates is very helpful. The workshopping/networking sessions are not very useful in the beginning of the semester; as a student who had just been introduced to RL, I wasn't qualified or able to give anyone useful feedback on project ideas, nor should I have been expected to.
The videos move very fast and can be difficult to follow as a result. However, since they're videos and so can be paused/rewatched, this is not a big issue.
Open-ended course structure puts a lot of the initiative on the student, positives and negatives to this. Overall great course.
Overwhelmingly impressed with her availability and level of expertise. Especially during this atypical semester with all the additional challenges of COVID my only regret is that I was unable to take other classes with Prof. Tosch during my 4 years at UVM. Probably my favorite CS professor, despite never meeting in-person.
I think Emma is great and this class will be a great addition to the UVM course offerings. As it was the first time, there were of courses bumps along the way. However, I learned a ton, even if I felt overwhelmed. I will highly recommend the course as I know once the flow is perfected its going to be an essential course for CS students in the next 5 years.
Programming assignments needed to be a little easier, or the assignments need to come with a lot more instruction. You could release a document describing what needs to happen in each section of the programming assignment, or release a quick lecture video saying what you would do in each section. Also, I thought the final projects needed to be smaller. I spent a ton of time on the first section of my project and was not able to get anywhere close to finishing my project. Emma did a great job being available for students. She had a ton of office hour time. She also was quick to respond on email/Teams. On top of that, she was very understanding of the difficulties that students were going through this semester. She did a great job for her first time teaching.
This class was extremely challenging, yet very enjoyable and fun. I learned a whole lot. I have never been so into reading for a course before. I do think that potentially dropping the homework assignments, or changing the final project so more information is known before selecting a project topic may help a lot, as I found myself getting overwhelmed with the project mostly because of a lack of knowledge on my end.
Class is run more like a graduate class which is fine, some very challenging material.
Maybe introduce the algorithms in smaller chunks + programming assignments?