JHU - Krieger School of Arts & Sciences / Whiting School of Engineering
ASEN.2014.Fall

Course: EN.600.437.01.FA14 : Distributed Systems : EN.600.437.01.FA14

Instructor: Yair Amir *

1 - The overall quality of this course is:

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	(1)	0	0%
Weak	(2)	0	0%
Satisfactory	(3)	0	0%
Good	(4)	3	15%
Excellent	(5)	17	85%
N/A	(0)	0	0%

Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median	School Level	Mean	STD	Median	Department Level	Mean	STD	Median
20/24 (83.33%)	4.85	0.37	5.00	8,237	4.04	0.93	4.00	1,215	3.97	0.96	4.00

Means: Question 4.85, School Level 4.04, Department Level 3.97

2 - The instructor's teaching effectiveness is:
Yair Amir

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	(1)	0	0%
Weak	(2)	0	0%
Satisfactory	(3)	0	0%
Good	(4)	5	25%
Excellent	(5)	15	75%
N/A	(0)	0	0%

Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median	School Level	Mean	STD	Median	Department Level	Mean	STD	Median
20/24 (83.33%)	4.75	0.44	5.00	9,069	4.01	1.01	4.00	1,279	3.86	1.08	4.00

Means: Question 4.75, School Level 4.01, Department Level 3.86

3 - The intellectual challenge of this course is:

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	(1)	0	0%
Weak	(2)	0	0%
Satisfactory	(3)	0	0%
Good	(4)	5	25%
Excellent	(5)	15	75%
N/A	(0)	0	0%

Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median	School Level	Mean	STD	Median	Department Level	Mean	STD	Median
20/24 (83.33%)	4.75	0.44	5.00	8,154	4.09	0.91	4.00	1,198	4.18	0.88	4.00

Means: Question 4.75, School Level 4.09, Department Level 4.18

4 - The teaching assistant for this course is:

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	(1)	0	0%
Weak	(2)	0	0%
Satisfactory	(3)	0	0%
Good	(4)	4	20%
Excellent	(5)	15	75%
N/A	(0)	1	5%

Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median	School Level	Mean	STD	Median	Department Level	Mean	STD	Median
20/24 (83.33%)	4.79	0.42	5.00	8,171	4.10	1.01	4.00	1,205	4.11	1.01	4.00

Means: Question 4.79, School Level 4.10, Department Level 4.11

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Instructor: Yair Amir *

5 - Please enter the name of the TA you evaluated in question 4:

Return Rate	18/24 (75%)

- All

- Jeff

- Jeff

- Jeff

- Jeff Dallatezza

- Jeff DallaTezza

- Jeff DallaTezza (also, Amy Babay, Tom Tantillo, and Daniel Obenshain)

- Jeff DellaTezza

- Jeff, Amy, DanO, Tom

- Jeff, Amy, Harry, Tom

- Jeff, Tom, Dano, Amy

- Jeffery Dalla Tezza

- Jeffrey Dallatazza

- Jeffrey DallaTezza

- Jeffrey DallaTezza

- Jeffrey DallaTezza

- Jeffrey DallaTezza

- Jeffrey DallaTezza

6 - Feedback on my work for this course is useful:

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
Disagree strongly	(1)	0	0%
Disagree somewhat	(2)	0	0%
Neither agree nor disagree	(3)	0	0%
Agree somewhat	(4)	6	30%
Agree strongly	(5)	14	70%
N/A	(0)	0	0%

Percent Responses

Means: 4.70 (Question), 3.79 (School Level), 3.72 (Department Level)

Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median	School Level	Mean	STD	Median	Department Level	Mean	STD	Median
20/24 (83.33%)	4.70	0.47	5.00	8,150	3.79	1.08	4.00	1,202	3.72	1.13	4.00

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Instructor: Yair Amir *

7 - Compared to other Hopkins courses at this level, the workload for this course is:

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
Much lighter	(1)	0	0%
Somewhat lighter	(2)	0	0%
Typical	(3)	1	5%
Somewhat heavier	(4)	5	25%
Much heavier	(5)	13	65%
N/A	(0)	1	5%

Means: Question 4.63 | School Level 3.30 | Department Level 3.56

	Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median	School Level	Mean	STD	Median	Department Level	Mean	STD	Median
	20/24 (83.33%)	4.63	0.60	5.00	8,165	3.30	1.04	3.00	1,206	3.56	1.10	4.00

8 - What are the best aspects of this course?

Return Rate	18/24 (75%)

- 1. Hands on application of protocols studied in class.
2. Ability to develop applications that closely mimic real-world applications.

- challenging projects, not like anything else

- Dr.Amir and his whole team is very enthusiasitic and extremely prompt in responding to all our queries. No questions go unasnwered and they're willing to repeat a concept as many times as it takes everyone to get it

- Extremely challenging, engaging, and relevant.

- Intellectual Challenge

- Interesting material
Yair is very passionate about this course; he wants students to succeed
Projects are rewarding when/if done correctly
Theory assignments are a nice balance to the heavier projects
The new lessons this year on recent developments were good
TAs are readily available and very helpful

- It is an excellent course for connecting theory to practice. The projects are deeply rooted in theory for distributed systems. This course also gives you the appreciation for correctness of programs.

- Programming projects, feedback from course staff (particularly Yair).

- Protocals

- The assignments are interesting and generally rewarding. The final project especially was somewhat enjoyable although immensely challenging.

- The best aspects of this course were the challenging applied assignments and the material covered. This semester, the course was re-worked, so about 1/3 of the material was new, and it was all interesting and seemed applicable to real-world problems given the ubiquitous presence of the internet in our daily lives. It was great that each of the students studying under Yair in his lab were given a chance to give a lecture on the material they know best. Yair himself is a great lecturer as well. Also, Yair and all of the students in his lab were always available to help anyone with questions, which was super helpful given the challenging material.

- The content of this course is interesting and stimulating without being overly complex. There is a good mix of theoretical and practical exercises.

- The final project and the effort put in by the prof as well as all the TAs

- The programming projects (in C) really challenge you. The TAs (official and unofficial) are extremely helpful. The theoretical assignments challenge your ability to understand an algorithm and improve upon it.

- Very great course, hands on practical exercises and extreme useful and cutting-edge update in the area.

- Wonderful teacher -- inspiring and passionate. Great assistants too. The course is very well structured in that it not only teaches the subject matter but also attempts to sculpt a person's thought process.

- Yair and his TAs and his lab put in large amounts of efforts to make the course worthwhile, and in general succeed. Doing the assignments will help you understand the material in much greater depth than otherwise required.

- You learn a lot, and Yair is a really good professor -- the TA's are also really awesome and helpful when you go see them

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Instructor: Yair Amir *

9 - What are the worst aspects of this course?
Return Rate | 16/24 (66.67%)

- 1. Degree of difficulty of theoretical assignments.
2. The amount of code necessary to complete the class. Nearly 20,000 lines in total.

- C is a difficult language and we are done a disservice with the requirement to use it or a friend of it. Yair has a notion that understanding every level of what's going on is useful and the only way to learn. I think that this is incorrect and crippling - implementing our own funamental data structures is a waste of our time - there are other courses from that and this distracts from our actual work.

I suspect that Yair would see an increase in the quality of the assignments if we were encouraged to use outside libraries to create and manage data structures instead of having to manage them on our own.

- Coding too much

- group projects complicate things

- Heavy workload.
Don't select this course if you are not good at C programming.

- I personally did not find the first two assignments to be that interesting, and felt that they might belong better in a networks course. I personally took this course to work on challenging distributed systems problems, and we only got to systems with more than one controller 2/3rds of the way in, and only did fault tolerance for the final project.

- Instructor's accent.

- It's a ton of work, and all the projects are paired assignments. If you don't work well with a partner, or your partner slacks off, you're going to be in a bit of trouble on Project 2 and the final.

- Lack of available course staff for the number of students, workload.

- None really.

- The final project was rather brutal, and a bit more allotted time probably would have been appropriate. Fortunately, an extension was given after the project was initially due. The theory assignments, while useful as brain exercises, could perhaps be improved upon.

- The workload is heavy, projects take a significant amount of time to complete

- There is a lot of work and sometimes it is hard to get set up with the new tools that are provided for various exercises.

- This year's class was very large, which made it difficult for the Professor and TA to give everyone enough attention. There also wasn't a lot of time to work on the final project, mostly because of the week long thanksgiving break.

- Very time consuming.

- You must budget your time well in the course. The projects are time intensive (specifically project 2 and the final project).

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10 - What would most improve this class?

Return Rate	16/24 (66.67%)

- 1. Spending more time on clarifying the theory assignments.

- A better room. The room used this semester was too claustrophobic.

- An example proof would have been nice before the 1st theoretical. Every professor expects proofs to be done in different ways, and it would have been useful to see what a proof for the theoreticals was supposed to look like before we had to submit one for a grade.

- I think the course material is great and adequate. Maybe one more theory assignment would be better.

- It's hard to say, because most of the course was really excellent. Maybe the first theory exercise could be reworked a bit so that the requirements are a bit clearer.

- More time on the final project would have saved a lot of stress towards the end.

- More time on the final project, less on the third project. Maybe another theoretical assignment.

- More time with course staff, again particularly Yair. The TAs and grad students all try and help, but the most productive project meetings were with Yair directly.

- no group projects

- None.

- Not much, maybe adjusting the assignment date of the final project slightly earlier to allow more time to work on it.

- Only provide limited deadline extensions (if any) as students should learn time management. That being said, we spent only a few hours on the 3rd project and considerably more on the final project.

- Probably could offer choice that allows 2 options on complete the course, with/without partner.

- Schedule for exercises

- See #9

- We could be given less time for the third practical assignment and more for the final project.

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Instructor: Yair Amir *

11 - What should prospective students know about this course before enrolling? (You may comment on any aspect of this course such as assumed background, readings, grading systems, and so on.)

Return Rate	17/24 (70.83%)

- 1. Be well versed in C or C++.
2. Understand how to write efficient data structures in C and perform design for a large project.
3. Be a deep thinker.

- Be prepared to spend a lot of time on projects
Projects are done in pairs, having a good partner is essential
You should be comfortable with C
Choosing several prime numbers is not good RNG (for the randomized protocol demonstration in class)

- C

- C programming!!!

- I recommend a strong background in the C programming language and good understanding of data structures. Programming with linked lists in C is essential. Grading is very fair in the course, but be prepared to work hard! Having a grasp in theory and proof writing is also helpful for the theory assignments. Although the workload is high, you will be much better at programming in C by the end of the course. I highly recommend all computer scientists take the course. Yair Amir is the most passionate instructor I've ever had, and puts a lot of effort into making this course relevant and worthwhile.

- I think they should be comfortable coding in C. Everything else is in the course.

- It helps to be comfortable with programming in C (Basic file and network IO, select, etc).
Also, for the theoretical exercises, students should know how to construct a formal proof.

- It's a lot of work, but one the best courses you'll ever take.

- It's a tough course, but rewarding. If you're a systems guy it's definitely useful. And you really can't go wrong with Yair, so take it when you have room in your schedule, spend time on the assignments and enjoy it.

- Programming Language C is necessary.

- Start your work early. Stay awake in class.

- strong background in programming is definitely necessary

- That this course need a LOT of work but is totally worth it.

- The class is a ton of work, expect to spend 60+ hours on each project. Projects 1 and 3 are much easier than 2 and the final.

- There is a lot of work, but the course strikes a nice balance between theory and practical exercises, and you will learn a lot.

- While proofs are not extremely formal, know how to write them for the theoretical assignments. Also, if you don't remember C, review it.

- You should know C pretty well before taking this class. It might be good to review a bit if you haven't programmed in C for a while. Try to find someone you know and trust to partner up with early on. Expect a pretty heavy workload for some of the projects, and above all else, ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS. Yair and the students in his lab are incredibly helpful. My partner and I came to them to ask a billion questions and they always spent time to help us out.

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Instructor: Yair Amir *

1 - The overall quality of this course is:

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	(1)	0	0%
Weak	(2)	0	0%
Satisfactory	(3)	2	8.7%
Good	(4)	7	30.43%
Excellent	(5)	14	60.87%
N/A	(0)	0	0%

Means: Question 4.52, School Level 4.04, Department Level 3.97

Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median	School Level	Mean	STD	Median	Department Level	Mean	STD	Median
23/25 (92%)	4.52	0.67	5.00	8,237	4.04	0.93	4.00	1,215	3.97	0.96	4.00

2 - The instructor's teaching effectiveness is:
Yair Amir

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	(1)	0	0%
Weak	(2)	0	0%
Satisfactory	(3)	2	8.7%
Good	(4)	9	39.13%
Excellent	(5)	12	52.17%
N/A	(0)	0	0%

Means: Question 4.43, School Level 4.01, Department Level 3.86

Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median	School Level	Mean	STD	Median	Department Level	Mean	STD	Median
23/25 (92%)	4.43	0.66	5.00	9,069	4.01	1.01	4.00	1,279	3.86	1.08	4.00

3 - The intellectual challenge of this course is:

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	(1)	0	0%
Weak	(2)	0	0%
Satisfactory	(3)	1	4.76%
Good	(4)	3	14.29%
Excellent	(5)	17	80.95%
N/A	(0)	0	0%

Means: Question 4.76, School Level 4.09, Department Level 4.18

Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median	School Level	Mean	STD	Median	Department Level	Mean	STD	Median
21/25 (84%)	4.76	0.54	5.00	8,154	4.09	0.91	4.00	1,198	4.18	0.88	4.00

4 - The teaching assistant for this course is:

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	(1)	0	0%
Weak	(2)	0	0%
Satisfactory	(3)	0	0%
Good	(4)	6	26.09%
Excellent	(5)	16	69.57%
N/A	(0)	1	4.35%

Means: Question 4.73, School Level 4.10, Department Level 4.11

Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median	School Level	Mean	STD	Median	Department Level	Mean	STD	Median
23/25 (92%)	4.73	0.46	5.00	8,171	4.10	1.01	4.00	1,205	4.11	1.01	4.00

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Instructor: Yair Amir *

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5 - Please enter the name of the TA you evaluated in question 4:

Return Rate	17/25 (68%)

- All of the people in the DSN lab, every single one of them was amazing

- Dano, Jeff and Amy. Didn't really interact with Tom though.

- jeff

- Jeff

- Jeff

- Jeff

- Jeff

- Jeff

- Jeff

- Jeff DallaTezza

- Jeff DallaTezza

- Jeff DallaTezza

- Jeff Del Tezza

- Jeff DellaTezza

- Jeffery DallaTezza

- Jeffrey Dalla Tezza

- Jeffrey DallaTazza, Amy Babay, etc

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6 - Feedback on my work for this course is useful:

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
Disagree strongly	(1)	0	0%
Disagree somewhat	(2)	0	0%
Neither agree nor disagree	(3)	1	4.35%
Agree somewhat	(4)	4	17.39%
Agree strongly	(5)	18	78.26%
N/A	(0)	0	0%

Means: Question 4.74, School Level 3.79, Department Level 3.72

Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median	School Level	Mean	STD	Median	Department Level	Mean	STD	Median
23/25 (92%)	4.74	0.54	5.00	8,150	3.79	1.08	4.00	1,202	3.72	1.13	4.00

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7 - Compared to other Hopkins courses at this level, the workload for this course is:

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
Much lighter	(1)	0	0%
Somewhat lighter	(2)	0	0%
Typical	(3)	2	8.7%
Somewhat heavier	(4)	7	30.43%
Much heavier	(5)	14	60.87%
N/A	(0)	0	0%

Means: Question 4.52, School Level 3.30, Department Level 3.56

Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median	School Level	Mean	STD	Median	Department Level	Mean	STD	Median
23/25 (92%)	4.52	0.67	5.00	8,165	3.30	1.04	3.00	1,206	3.56	1.10	4.00

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Instructor: Yair Amir *

8 - What are the best aspects of this course?

Return Rate	18/25 (72%)

- awesome professor, really cares about the students and making sure they understand the material and get the most out of the class. All the TAs and unofficial TAs are readily available to help with homework/projects and easy to find

- Great course. Great professor.

- Interesting lecture topics, also learn a lot through thinking through theoretical assignments as well as working on the programming assignments.

- Interesting useful content

- Really interesting stuff

- Really interesting subject matter, projects, and high-quality, passionate instructors.

- The care and effort put in by professor and co.

- The lectures are good, I like how the class had the first two projects too. Although they weren't as relevant as the last, they get you in the distributed way of thinking. Also, Extensions

- The material is relevant to the current state of computing, and also includes cutting edge material in the field. Also, the staff for the course is excellent.

- The professor and TAs

- The professor really cares about students and makes sure everyone learns the material.

- The projects are really more than just programming assignments. The theoretical assignments were my favorite challenges. Meeting one-on-one with Jeff helped us develop our designs significantly. I feel like we came out of the course both feeling more comfortable with programming in C in general and with state-oriented design as well as having more confidence in our abilities to do theoretical assignments like the ones assigned to us.

- This course is fantastic. It will do a great job teaching you about Distributed Systems and protocols and all those things, but I think the projects are where the class really shines. The projects force you to think in terms of multiple machines and how those machines interact with one another, which is the heart of a distributed system. In this way I think the projects push you as a programmer to think in ways you probably haven't before.

Additionally the people in the Distributed Systems and Networks lab are all very helpful. They have several meetings with your group throughout the course of a project to help you and make sure you're on track. But going beyond that whenever I had a question I always felt free to show up and there would almost always be someone there who could walk through my issue with me and help me to find a solution. I think they all really went above and beyond to help out everyone in the class, even when it meanth being interrupted in whatever they were working on.

- Very high quality course.

- Very interesting course material, instructor is very enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the subject, a lot of real world application

- Very interesting material, passionate lecturer, clearly loves the material and is deeply invested in his students' success. The professor and ta's are always available for help and return emails promptly.

- Yair and the whole DSN lab staff are amazing teachers. They really go the extra mile in every single lecture to make sure that the students are actually learning and getting the best out of what is being taught.

- Yair teaching it

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Instructor: Yair Amir *

9 - What are the worst aspects of this course?
Return Rate	17/25 (68%)

 - Debugging the programs is very tough, but that's the nature of these things. Also, because we learned so much more material than we were able to ever code with, I feel like there's a lot of stuff I didn't get to know as well as I'd wanted.

- Heavy coursework

- I have trouble following Yair's lectures, but the guest lecturers are good.

- I think an assignment of some sort regarding Marcos' lecture and Tom and Dano's lecture would have been interesting, but I'm not sure where the time would come from.

- It can be a heavy workload at times. Also some lectures are interesting, but irrelevant to the projects for the class.

- Me procrastinating!

- n/a

- STOP MAKING PEOPLE PROGRAM IN C. It puts an unnecessary challenge into assignments that doesn't need to be there. Perhaps consider reworking the assignments in python or something. Many people spent lots of time on stupid c things instead of being able to really get into the distributed things. PYTHON.

- The work came in spurts.

- Theory assignments I think were graded a bit harshly.

- This course can be very very difficult. Some of the projects are very complex and, for me at least, this was my first time working across multiple machines, which took some time to fully understand.

- This course is an incredible time investment. This course has to become your life. If you aren't prepared to spend every second of free time you have on this, you will not do well.

- This is literally the hardest class I have ever taken. Its like pledging the CS department.

- too much work

- Very few grades, very challenging assignments, lecture slides available but not very detailed

- Very steep learning curve in the beginning in terms of learning exactly how the code works for sending messages and the general structure of code for these kinds of programs, i.e. state machines, for those with no programming experience in this area.

- Work comes in bursts

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Instructor: Yair Amir *

10 - What would most improve this class?	
Return Rate	17/25 (68%)

- Also, I personally found the programming exercises to be more helpful than the theoretical exercises. Possibly, also having a meeting after the second project to go over the solution for 20 minutes or so, and talk about possible alterations. That and possibly a quick spread refresher closer to when the final is being coded in addition to the lecture just before assignment 3.

- Better spread out the workload

- Design meetings were very helpful in getting the ball rolling for projects. If there could be more design based thing like that earlier, students would feel like they have more time on the assignments

- Give more time for the final project and have more time to discuss it in class. Maybe get rid of the 3rd project and just assign the final project earlier. Also being able to use STL and not having to write our own data structures would be helpful as it would put more emphasis on the distributed part of projects.

- I feel like with the theory assignments, a larger proportion of points were taken off for things than perhaps should have been. I feel like there were times when I missed a small concept and missed half the points on a whole question when I in essence was mostly right.

- I know it was suggested that the time for project 3 be shortened and the final project extended, but I don't think that will really help decrease the difficulty of the final. With Thanksgiving break being where it is its always going to rough to get the final done. I think instead it might be more helpful if the difficulty of project 3 was increased, perhaps if project 3 had to handle machine crashes.

As it stands right now project 3 teaches you how to join a single Spread group and then how to receive messages from that group, whereas the final requires you to join multiple groups, receive and filter messages from all of them, parse membership messages, parse network messages, etc. None of these is particularly difficult but just the time it takes to figure out the Spread side of everything reduces the time you have to work out the harder problems. I think if some of these things was shifted to project 3, so that coming in to the final we had a better understanding of Spread it would make the final much easier.

- I think it would be nice to see some good example code of the first assignment after its turned in. It is good to have our own ideas and try out what we think without any influence, but as someone without any experience in sending and receiving messages, I had little idea where to start with structuring code and would help to a few examples of some effective code.

- Less time on the third project and more time on the final project (about a weekend) would have made a very significant difference in the final project performance. I would have liked another small theory challenge like the final optional one at some point.

- less work

- More comments on example code!

- More detailed slides to review with, more time to work on final project

- More time for the final project

Pre-written data structure for final project or allowing us to use data structures from the standard library - there is literally no reason for us to waste time on something we know how to do. Like not a single reason.

More on distributed key-value stores since they are very important in the CS industry

A section on sharding

- n/a

- n/a

- None.

- PYTHON. AND NOT C. It scarred me.

- Redistributing due dates to give less time on project 3 and more time on project 4.

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Instructor: Yair Amir *

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11 - What should prospective students know about this course before enrolling? (You may comment on any aspect of this course such as assumed background, readings, grading systems, and so on.)

Return Rate	17/25 (68%)

 - Assignments take a lot of time, both theoretical and programming. Be sure to start as early as possible and to work throughout the allotted time instead of waiting until the end.

- Be prepared to spend a lot of time working on assignments

- Great course. Highly recommend it.

- hard work

- It is a ton of work, but very great class!

- Only take this course if you're willing to put in the time it demands of you. Don't take it on a heavy schedule.

- Pretty sweet stuff, really interesting material.

- Projects require a lot of work and long hours. Being a good programmer helps a lot too.

- Put a good amount of focus into your designs before starting to implement!

- really good course, definitely utilize the TAs as they're really helpful

- The assignments take so long. omg.

- There seems to be a lot of time to work on projects, but they are very long so don't procrastinate

- This course is an incredible time investment. This course has to become your life. If you aren't prepared to spend every second of free time you have on this, you will not do well.

- This is a hard course, but you will learn a lot, and staff teaching the course are excellent. They genuinely care about your success in the course, and will do everything they can to help you succeed.

- This is a serious amount of work, especially in the front half of the course.

- This is the hardest CS class you will ever take. Start on the projects VERY early.

You MUST have a VERY strong C background if you take this class.

- This isn't a course just to take for the sake of taking another CS course. Be ready to put in some work to advance your knowledge. It's not a horrible workload if that's what you heard; just be prepared to work closely with a partner you work well and efficiently with.