



## Course and Instructor Evaluation Summary Department of Computer Science and Engineering

McAuley, Julian John  
CSE 158 - Recommender Sys&Web Mining (A)  
Fall Quarter 2021

**Number of Students Enrolled: 307**  
**Number of Evaluations Submitted: 91**

### PLEASE COMMENT ON THE FOLLOWING:

1. Your class level is

4 (4.4%):	Freshman
0 (0.0%):	Sophomore
8 (8.8%):	Junior
79 (86.8%):	Senior
0 (0.0%):	Graduate
0 (0.0%):	Extension
0 (0.0%):	Visitor

2. Your reason for taking this class is

67 (75.3%):	Major
2 (2.2%):	Minor
0 (0.0%):	Gen. Ed.
15 (16.9%):	Elective
5 (5.6%):	Interest
2:	[No Response]

3. What grade do you expect in this class?

66 (73.3%):	A
21 (23.3%):	B
1 (1.1%):	C
0 (0.0%):	D
1 (1.1%):	F
1 (1.1%):	P
0 (0.0%):	NP
1:	[No Response]

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

4. I learned a great deal from this course.

1 (1.1%):	Strongly Disagree
4 (4.5%):	Disagree
7 (7.9%):	Neither Agree nor Disagree
32 (36.0%):	Agree
45 (50.6%):	Strongly Agree
0 (0.0%):	Not Applicable
2:	[No Response]

5. How many hours a week do you spend studying outside of class on average?

0 (0.0%):	0-1
2 (2.2%):	2-3
12 (13.3%):	4-5
13 (14.4%):	6-7
25 (27.8%):	8-9
16 (17.8%):	10-11
9 (10.0%):	12-13
5 (5.6%):	14-15
4 (4.4%):	16-17
2 (2.2%):	18-19
2 (2.2%):	20 or more
1:	[No Response]

6. How often do you attend this course?

17 (18.9%):	Very Rarely
23 (25.6%):	Some of the Time
50 (55.6%):	Most of the Time
1:	[No Response]

## COURSE MATERIAL CSE 158

7. The course material is intellectually stimulating.

1 (1.1%):	Strongly Disagree
1 (1.1%):	Disagree
5 (5.7%):	Neither Agree nor Disagree
31 (35.2%):	Agree
50 (56.8%):	Strongly Agree
0 (0.0%):	Not Applicable
3:	[No Response]

8. Assignments promote learning.

2 (2.3%):	Strongly Disagree
3 (3.4%):	Disagree
6 (6.8%):	Neither Agree nor Disagree
35 (39.8%):	Agree
42 (47.7%):	Strongly Agree
0 (0.0%):	Not Applicable
3:	[No Response]

### 9. Required reading is useful.

0 (0.0%): Strongly Disagree  
5 (5.7%): Disagree  
16 (18.2%): Neither Agree nor Disagree  
21 (23.9%): Agree  
18 (20.5%): Strongly Agree  
28 (31.8%): Not Applicable  
3: [No Response]

### 10. This course is difficult relative to others.

0 (0.0%): Strongly Disagree  
6 (6.8%): Disagree  
20 (22.7%): Neither Agree nor Disagree  
36 (40.9%): Agree  
26 (29.5%): Strongly Agree  
0 (0.0%): Not Applicable  
3: [No Response]

### 11. Exams are representative of the course material.

1 (1.1%): Strongly Disagree  
4 (4.5%): Disagree  
7 (7.9%): Neither Agree nor Disagree  
45 (50.6%): Agree  
30 (33.7%): Strongly Agree  
2 (2.2%): Not Applicable  
2: [No Response]

### 12. Do you recommend this course overall?

82 (90.1%): Yes  
9 (9.9%): No

### 13. Course CSE 158:

- It was my first ML class so I didn't really know what to expect. I think I learned more than I feel like I learned if that makes sense.
- Professor McAuley did a good job lecturing and explaining concepts.  
As for the assignments, I thought both were a good way to demonstrate knowledge of the methods we learned. I think, however, that the leaderboard portion in Assignment 1 should definitely be extra credit (maybe for the top 10-20%) rather than part of the grade, in my opinion. I think that grading people who did "good enough" more harshly just because other people might have more time to sink into the project -- or friends who can help them implement a solution, since we didn't actually turn in code -- creates weird incentives and is a confusing target for a lot of people. But overall, the system we had now seems better than what was there last year.
- First CSE class in my life, but learned a lot.  
I don't have strong math background, sometimes can't follow along the math part. For some models, professor always assumed we know stuff, which is not the case.

- Very fun course. It's hard since it's also a graduate course, but I learned a lot from this course! Contents are a bit hard for undergrads though, I feel like a lot of my classmates and I cannot fully grasp every detail of the lectures
- Can change to a smaller classroom so that students and professor feel more connected
- Overall, I really enjoyed this course and it gave me great introduction to ML. Recommender systems are really cool and I definitely thought about it's applications in other areas.
- The course is really fun and not much work but I actually learned a lot from assignments. Professor gives you everything you need to do homework and is very generous when it comes to midterms and assignment grading
- Lectures are good and Mr. McAuley makes an effort to make them entertaining, unlike most lecturers. Assignment instructions, however, are all over the place. There is often information missing, which makes assignment completion way harder than it needs to be. Moreover, students are encouraged to copy-paste code from his lectures instead of writing it on their own.
- Materials are very difficult for people who know nothing about machine learning or recommendation system. Understanding the material need a lot of mathematical reasoning. But the assignments and homework doesn't really need deep understanding of the algorithm
- One of the most interesting courses I've had, but hard to follow. The majority of the course is focused on how various algorithms work, but very rarely goes into how to actually implement them (which is what we were tested on). The course could be much improved by simply going into more detail on how they can be implemented in code.
- The course was exactly what I was looking for. I struggle a lot with proofs, and knowing the bulk of AI classes were proof-heavy, I chose this class because I heard it was much more hands on. After being nearly finished with the class, I can confidently say I gained so much more technical skills from this class than any proof-heavy class would have offered.
- Very difficult course. Can be good to learn about recommender systems, but extremely tough.
- Probably the best ML course to take at UCSD since we actually learn to do useful things, instead of reinventing the wheel.
- The class got me interested in the field of recommender system. The concepts in the class can be difficult but the class encourages creative thinking in approaching problems. There is no right or wrong answer so long as there is a logical reasoning behind the approach taken and this reflects the approach in Machine Learning in the real world.
- A good continuation from DSC 80, but extremely intimidating after summer where most students are not studying as much. If there are any students who haven't learned python going into this course, I believe it would be horrible but that wasn't necessarily the case for me.
- An extremely challenging but rewarding class.
- Great course for intro to predictive analytics and recommender systems. Goes into libraries in depth and teaches how to use them effectively
- can be tough to keep up with, but is very insightful and valuable for learning about a kind of system that is very prolific in the modern age. Learning about recommender systems in this class was really great since I think it has a lot of supplemental information on practicing writing reports, finishing homeworks, and competing in competitions.
- It felt like a lot of hand grenade coding

- It looks like a tradition that 158 and 258 are taught together. Then, for an undergraduate who doesn't have much preparation, the lecture is too complicated (math- and formula-heavy) and the homework is merely understanding professor's code in workbook and copying.

#### 14. Exams/Quizzes/Papers:

- Assignment 1 is so frustrated.  
It's basically 2 in-class Kaggle competitions, one of which for both 158 and 258. At the same time, there are 2\*2 points determined by "your rank relative to your classmates". It's good to compete, but sometimes it's devastating to compete for scores.
- I think the take home midterm could've been both shorter in length and in time given to complete it, so that there won't be as many complaints.
- Midterm is ok, assignment 1 would-cook prediction dataset is kinda silly, didn't expect well-designed model to be beaten by much simpler models. This discourages me a bit.
- Midterm was ok, really wasn't that bad.  
The assignments matched the material which is good.
- The midterm was brutal but graded leniently.
- The midterm required 7 hours. Mr. McAuley probably disputes that, but it took everyone I've talked to that long, and it seems like it was the same situation last year. A lot of the problems went over things already covered in the homeworks, so those could probably just be removed.
- A1 was bad. It was too easy to cheat and too easy to change 3 numbers and beat the baselines. I tried to make my own methods to actually stimulate my own learning and I didn't end up beating either baseline. I have a 3.88 data science GPA and I'm probably going to get a C in this class because I did poorly on A1. Very bad assignment, can't believe that I spent 10+ hours on it and people that cheated or changed 3 numbers got a better grade than me.
- The midterm was a brutal and long trial, which would have taken around 8 hours to finish if I didn't only have 7 to do it. Timing is tough to get right, so I understand why it wasn't perfectly balanced.
- There is no final but there was a midterm. Despite 7 hours given, many in the class felt that the exam was too long and not enough time was provided. The grading, however, was fortunately generous.
- We only had 1 midterm, but it was terribly difficult. Professor gave us 7 hours to finish it and I took the whole 7 hours
- I do think exams and homework were fair game, however I think the grading is too lenient. There should be some definitive answers to some close ended questions.
- Exams are absurdly long and hard, takes more than 5 hours just to complete the midterm.
- Exams are very similar to homework, though it was unfortunate that exams would sometimes be very related to some of the homeworks only since I imagine there's a big difference in grades if you were to have code that was improperly implemented during the homework compared to someone with all of the right code for the homework.
- Exam was fine for me -- I personally didn't feel crunched for time, but I had more than enough time to work on it and I didn't have to start very late. But I think it could have been shorter, with less time allowed as well. Given that an in-class midterm would only be 1.5 hours, a 3-4

hour test seems off. But I understand that time zones and remote classes throw everything off, so I understand why this structure might have been necessary.

- The exam was a little weird, I was shocked that I got such a high score since it's been years since I've gotten a CSE exam grade like this. But, I think the exam was more about how proficient the student was in Python more than how proficient they were in Recommender Systems. Because of this I think things could be tailored a little bit. A lot of students seemed to struggle with making a functioning feature vector, and as important as this part is, I think at least one question should come with a prebuilt feature function, and the goal should be to optimize it by adding/removing things.
- Exam was representative of the material even if it was long - I spent 6-6.5 hours out of the 7 allocated on the midterm. Wasn't difficult, just spent too much time debugging and making sure my models worked as intended, so it was a grind
- Exam was very long. Hard to debug code in short time limit
- Midterm was extremely poorly designed, and imposed undue stress on students, especially those with obligations overlapping the (incredibly short) window.
- Exams were definitely lenient. They were a good assessment and I feel like many other students overreacted in this class.

#### 15. Reading [title(s) and comments]:

- No required reading, but students are encouraged to look up readings posted on the website.
- Professor Julian has a good and free book wrote by himself. I just don't have time to read it.
- The book is really good.
- The readings were helpful but I stopped after the midterm since the bulk of the assignment since have been related to the previously read chapter.

### **INSTRUCTOR Julian McAuley**

#### 16. Instructor displays a proficient command of the material.

0 (0.0%):	Strongly Disagree
0 (0.0%):	Disagree
3 (3.5%):	Neither Agree nor Disagree
18 (20.9%):	Agree
65 (75.6%):	Strongly Agree
0 (0.0%):	Not Applicable
5:	[No Response]

#### 17. Instructor is well prepared for classes.

0 (0.0%):	Strongly Disagree
1 (1.1%):	Disagree
2 (2.3%):	Neither Agree nor Disagree
24 (27.6%):	Agree
60 (69.0%):	Strongly Agree
0 (0.0%):	Not Applicable
4:	[No Response]

18. Instructor's speech is clear and audible.

0 (0.0%): Strongly Disagree  
1 (1.1%): Disagree  
1 (1.1%): Neither Agree nor Disagree  
23 (26.4%): Agree  
62 (71.3%): Strongly Agree  
0 (0.0%): Not Applicable  
4: [No Response]

19. Instructor explains the course material well.

0 (0.0%): Strongly Disagree  
5 (5.7%): Disagree  
8 (9.1%): Neither Agree nor Disagree  
27 (30.7%): Agree  
48 (54.5%): Strongly Agree  
0 (0.0%): Not Applicable  
3: [No Response]

20. Lectures hold your attention.

3 (3.5%): Strongly Disagree  
8 (9.3%): Disagree  
12 (14.0%): Neither Agree nor Disagree  
34 (39.5%): Agree  
28 (32.6%): Strongly Agree  
1 (1.2%): Not Applicable  
5: [No Response]

21. Instructor's lecture style facilitates note-taking.

2 (2.3%): Strongly Disagree  
7 (8.0%): Disagree  
18 (20.7%): Neither Agree nor Disagree  
27 (31.0%): Agree  
28 (32.2%): Strongly Agree  
5 (5.7%): Not Applicable  
4: [No Response]

22. Instructor shows concern for students' learning.

1 (1.1%): Strongly Disagree  
2 (2.3%): Disagree  
7 (8.0%): Neither Agree nor Disagree  
41 (47.1%): Agree  
36 (41.4%): Strongly Agree  
0 (0.0%): Not Applicable  
4: [No Response]

23. Instructor promotes appropriate questions/discussion.

0 (0.0%):	Strongly Disagree
2 (2.3%):	Disagree
8 (9.1%):	Neither Agree nor Disagree
39 (44.3%):	Agree
37 (42.0%):	Strongly Agree
2 (2.3%):	Not Applicable
3:	[No Response]

24. Instructor is accessible outside of class.

0 (0.0%):	Strongly Disagree
1 (1.1%):	Disagree
8 (9.1%):	Neither Agree nor Disagree
30 (34.1%):	Agree
35 (39.8%):	Strongly Agree
14 (15.9%):	Not Applicable
3:	[No Response]

25. Instructor starts and finishes class on time.

0 (0.0%):	Strongly Disagree
1 (1.1%):	Disagree
1 (1.1%):	Neither Agree nor Disagree
32 (36.4%):	Agree
53 (60.2%):	Strongly Agree
1 (1.1%):	Not Applicable
3:	[No Response]

26. Instructor is effective in promoting academic integrity.

1 (1.1%):	Strongly Disagree
2 (2.3%):	Disagree
6 (6.9%):	Neither Agree nor Disagree
32 (36.8%):	Agree
44 (50.6%):	Strongly Agree
2 (2.3%):	Not Applicable
4:	[No Response]

27. The instructor practiced effective teaching strategies that acknowledged and valued differences among students, including differences of race and gender identity.

0 (0.0%):	Strongly Disagree
1 (1.2%):	Disagree
4 (4.7%):	Neither Agree nor Disagree
28 (32.6%):	Agree
44 (51.2%):	Strongly Agree
9 (10.5%):	Not Applicable
5:	[No Response]

## 28. Instructor Julian McAuley:

- I wish that he would explain some of the code in the textbooks more clearly with comments. But otherwise, he effectively communicates the essential components to understanding the tough material.
- love him
- Monotonous hard to focus. Lectures didn't always feel relevant. There seemed to be a gap between theory and practice
- Awesome professor, but super monotone. It can be hard to not lose focus on the lecture when it sounds like the professor is either too tired or too uninterested in the bulk of the slides. But he suddenly perks up when he's coding, and it clearly shows the learning style he likes, which totally lines up with mine. Because of this I think he is a great professor for someone like myself who isn't very interested in proving why things are the way they are, and more interested in applying those concepts.
- Really good professor who knows what they are teaching. But assignments and exams are pretty difficult and extremely time consuming.
- Most chill and funniest professor I have had so far at UCSD. Very knowledgeable about the subject he is teaching and is one of the only CSE profs at UCSD who knows how to teach. Highly recommend.
- As an undergrad I have to say this: I need to constantly stop the video to think about what he just says in the lecture recording. Contents are hard, and he goes over them too quickly (for undergrads).
- Very smart and gentle person!
- I really liked Professor McAuley and his enthusiasm for recommender systems however the assignments were hard.
- The professor is really amazing. He keeps lectures interesting and you can tell he really likes the information he teaches.
- Good prof who teaches well and has a teaching style that I personally like with slides but annotations and he goes over the math, but doesn't require it to do the assignments which is nice
- Did a great job at accommodating for COVID restrictions, especially since the class is so massive. He delayed assignments when students wanted and tried his best to be as accessible as possible.
- Good professor. Explains concepts well. Class is well paced. Wish assignments were graded quicker.
- is extremely kind and knowledgeable. When attending his lectures, his explanations are very nice and give a real connection to the code. I really appreciate how active he is on Piazza and he was generous with some extensions. Overall I would take another class with him.
- Professor McAuley is a great professor in class and a nice person after class. He is not only very knowledgeable in the field he's teaching, but he's also always accessible and patient to his students. I've learnt a lot about machine learning from his lectures and also from the assignments he had given. Professor McAuley responds to students' emails and questions on Piazza super fast. I can't imagine how much time and efforts he has put into this class and us students.

- Professor almost understands the material too well, frequently glancing over large implementation details,
- Cool
- i like his accent.
- Professor McAuley is well versed in the topic of recommendation systems. He likes to talk about the behind the scenes math for the recommender systems but makes it optional so that students who has greater interest can delve in. Overall approachable and funny, he answers questions from students with humor and grace. I personally like his approach to learning as he teaches tools we can use and let us go wild with it.
- Good instructor, but we shouldn't need to log into Twitch in order to ask a question if we showed up in person.  
Just look up from your computer from time to time.
- OMG his voice. It's totally okay to have an Australian accent, but there is almost no tone in his speech. It's like doing a 1h20min lecture with uniform volume and pitch. I admit he is definitely an expert in this area, but the teaching is seriously affected by his voice.  
Another thing is that he didn't explain his formulas (which appear very frequently) enough, or they are just too hard for an average undergraduate to grasp, before he said "LOVELY~" or "GOOD~" and moved on to the next formula.

29. Do you recommend this professor overall?

84 (93.3%): Yes  
 6 (6.7%): No  
 1: [No Response]

### Custom Question 5

30. Please provide examples of the ways the instructor did or did not create a learning environment that welcomed, challenged, and supported all students.

- The prof was super lenient and I felt really bad because dumbass students were still complaining. I think you should just make the midterms doable in a class period. Don't deal with the extra overhead of making it super long time frames. Students will overthink and then as a result overcompensate and that would lead you to do more work grading.
- Midterm seemed almost purposely designed to increase the already high levels of stress within students, and deflected all criticism of its design instead of engaging with it in good faith.
- Like how he entertained us during the day before Thanksgiving.
- One lecture was quite special. The lecture on Wed right before Thanksgiving, he cancelled the lecture and instead hold a music section, playing piano and chatting with students for 2h. That's lovely.
- The Professor taught us the ethics of Recommender Systems in the last week of class to teach us on how recommender systems can be potentially biased on minority if given a biased dataset.
- Assignment should be clear.

Please note that any responses or comments submitted by evaluators do not necessarily reflect the opinions of instructors, Computer Science and Engineering, Academic Affairs, or UC San Diego. Responses and comments are made available without auditing or editing, and they may not be modified or deleted, to ensure that each evaluator has an opportunity to express his or her opinion.