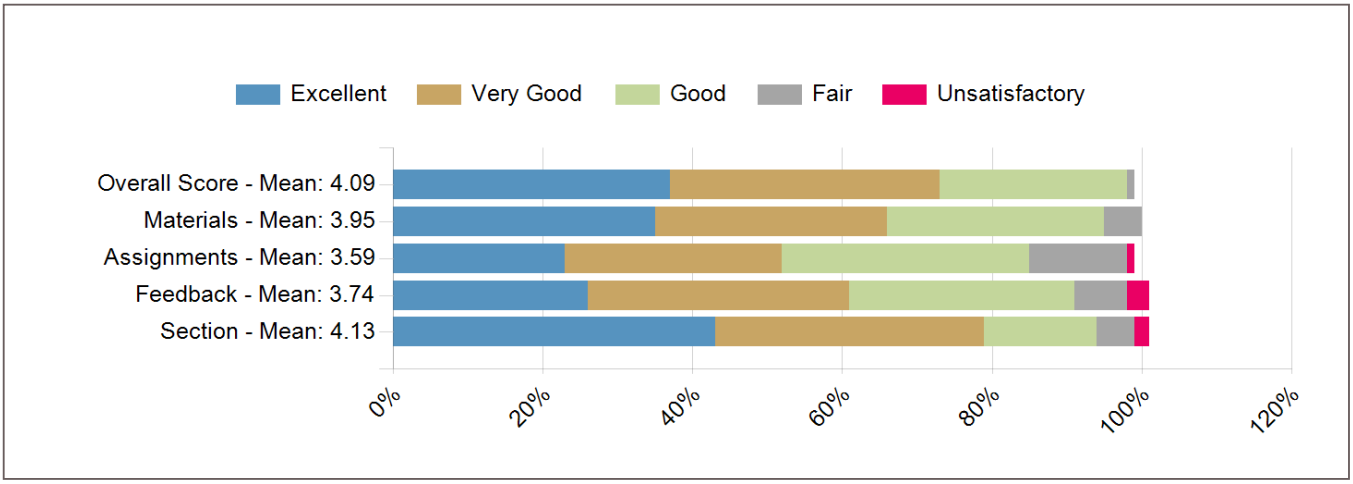
Course Response Rate

Raters	Students
Responded	81
Invited	89
Response Ratio	91%

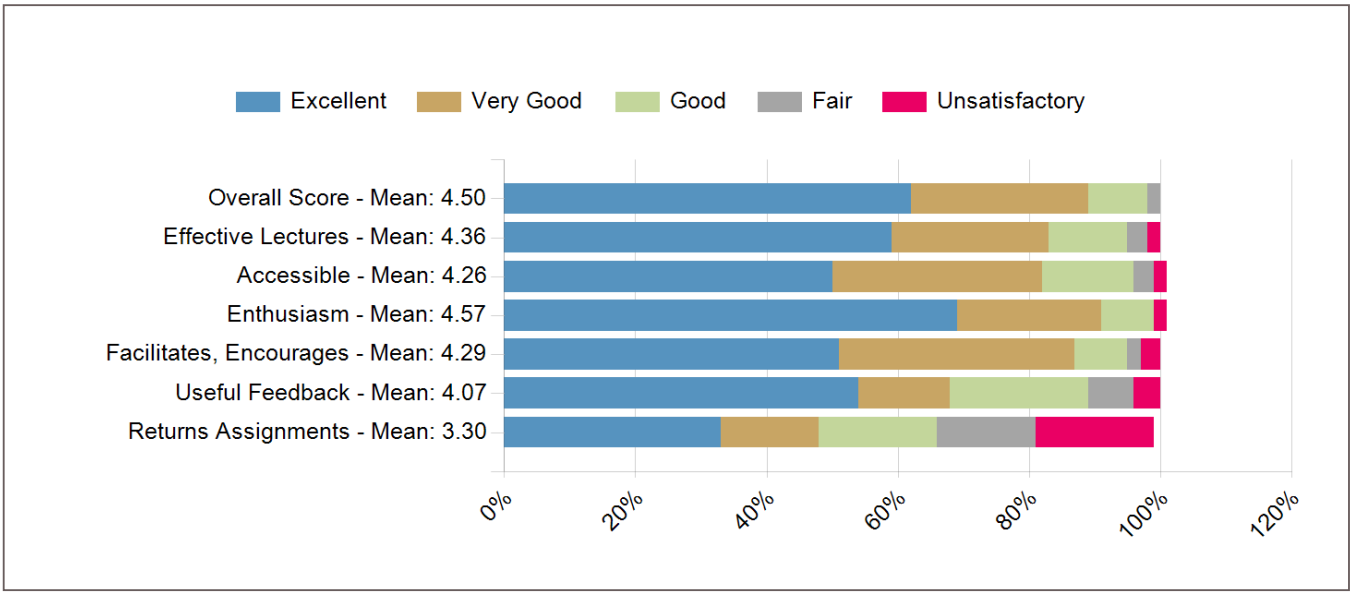
Course Feedback for COMPSCI 120



Course General Questions

	Count	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Unsatisfactory	Course Mean	FAS Mean
Evaluate the course overall.	75	37%	36%	25%	1%	0%	4.09	4.17
Course materials (readings, audio-visual materials, textbooks, lab manuals, website, etc.)	75	35%	31%	29%	5%	0%	3.95	4.16
Assignments (exams, essays, problem sets, language homework, etc.)	75	23%	29%	33%	13%	1%	3.59	4.02
Feedback you received on work you produced in this course	74	26%	35%	30%	7%	3%	3.74	4.03
Section component of the course	61	43%	36%	15%	5%	2%	4.13	4.17

Instructor Feedback for Salil Vadhan



General Instructor Questions

	Count	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Unsatisfactory	Instructor Mean	FAS Mean
Evaluate your Instructor overall.	66	62%	27%	9%	2%	0%	4.50	4.47
Gives effective lectures or presentations, if applicable	66	59%	24%	12%	3%	2%	4.36	4.37
Is accessible outside of class (including after class, office hours, e-mail, etc.)	66	50%	32%	14%	3%	2%	4.26	4.41
Generates enthusiasm for the subject matter	65	69%	22%	8%	0%	2%	4.57	4.53
Facilitates discussion and encourages participation	59	51%	36%	8%	2%	3%	4.29	4.44
Gives useful feedback on assignments	28	54%	14%	21%	7%	4%	4.07	4.39
Returns assignments in a timely fashion	33	33%	15%	18%	15%	18%	3.30	4.36

On average, how many hours per week did you spend on coursework outside of class? Enter a whole number between 0 and 168.

Frequency chart and mean excludes students who answered 31 or more hours.

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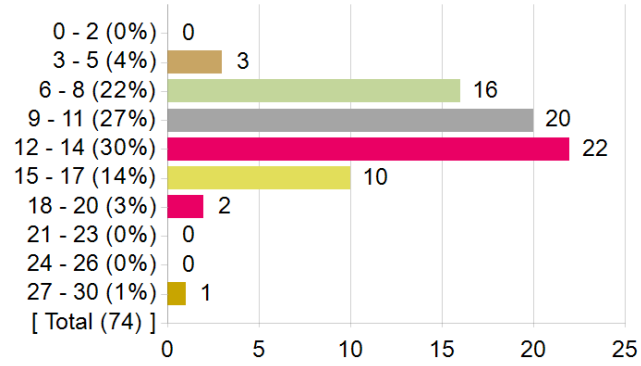

Statistics	Value
Response Count	74
Response Ratio	83%
Mean	11.24
Median	10.00
Mode	10
Standard Deviation	3.85

How strongly would you recommend this course to your peers?

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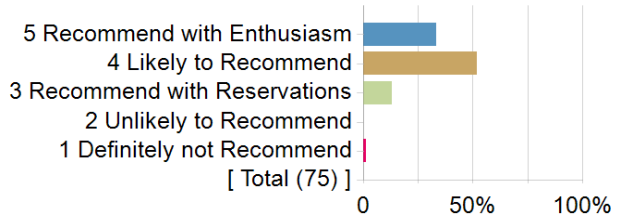

Options	Score	Count	Percentage
Recommend with Enthusiasm	5	25	33%
Likely to Recommend	4	39	52%
Recommend with Reservations	3	10	13%
Unlikely to Recommend	2	0	0%
Definitely not Recommend	1	1	1%

Statistics	Value
Response Ratio	84%
Mean	4.16
Median	4.00
Standard Deviation	0.75

What was/were your reason(s) for enrolling in this course? (Please check all that apply)

Options	Count
Elective	3
Concentration or Department Requirement	71
Secondary Field or Language Citation Requirement	4
Undergraduate General Education Requirement	0
Expository Writing Requirement	0
Foreign Language Requirement	0
Pre-Med Requirement	0
Divisional Distribution Requirement	0
Quantitative Reasoning with Data Requirement	0

Comments from students

What would you like to tell future students about this class?

Comments
Decent course for what it is. Definitely easier than 124 or 121, covers helpful and relevant material for those starting with theoretical CS. You should have a background in proofs and some programming in Python, at the bare minimum.
This course did a good job at bridging the gap between discrete math and really theoretical CS. It was still pretty difficult, and problem sets took a lot of time. But, they were usually instructive and manageable through a combination of collaboration and office hours. The course materials are of extremely high quality, with very detailed and understandable lecture and section notes every week. The grading system also made things more chill and didn't have me worrying so much about minor points each week. Overall, a great way to start learning more formally about algorithms and satisfying a CS theory requirement!
The class is probably a better choice than CS 121, but be ready that the class will still not be an easy one. One needs to be constantly on their feet trying to stay caught up with everything in the class, especially in the second half of the semester when things speed up considerably and a lot of difficult concepts are introduced sometimes without fully clear explanations.
I believe this class is a wonderful preparation for advanced topics like those discussed in CS124.
Be ready to set aside a serious amount of time for this class, but also to learn a lot and have fun. The grading structure is perhaps the smartest from a pedagogy POV I have seen, and really allowed me to focus on learning concepts instead of all the usual pressure that comes with classes. A bit too many PSETs, but perhaps that may be changed. Exams are very very fair, and everyone in the course was very kind so it made learning fun.
Start psets early! Getting to know Salil would also be beneficial – overall the class was structured very well despite being a new course, I'm sure it will be even better next year. I was skeptical about the grading system, but it was actually super helpful.
A good alternative to CS121 with a larger focus on programming. Wish they used a more popular model instead of the RAM model (very little info about it available outside of lectures). The problem sets need to be developed a bit more because they are often unnecessarily confusing and don't target the core of the concepts we learn in lecture. Course staff were very receptive to feedback and remained encouraging. Grades are not emphasized in the class, which I really appreciated and there are plenty of opportunities for revisions.
Easy intro to theoretical CS, as compared to something like 121 or 124. Weird participation requirements, but lenient grading system and good learning curve.
This is a challenging but rewarding class. In terms of lectures and sections, Salil's a fantastic lecturer and lecture/section notes are always really thorough; selected topics were also really interesting. If you do not have much experience with proofs and theoretical CS topics, you can expect there to be a steep learning curve first few weeks of the course. So, if you have only taken CS20/M22AB (ie proofy experience but not CS121/124), you will learn a lot both in terms of gaining intuition with DSA/TCS ideas and proof writing and math intuition.
This is an awesome course. You won't regret taking it. You'll learn so much about algorithmic thinking, and there will be less kinks now that it's no longer brand new.
CS120 is a great course that benefits from a super motivated teaching staff, a fascinating and applicable mix of topics, and a great course culture. Highly recommend!
First couple psets were pretty hard as they were still calibrating as it is a new class, but overall really enjoyed the first half of the course as well as the programming exercises in python. Second half of the course didn't feel as exciting as the first half, but it all came together around the final. Great class, happy I did this instead of the 121–124 track
This class is very interesting and helpful but can be hard. Make sure you have the time to invest in the class, some of the topics are challenging and take time to fully grasp.
I would recommend this class if you want to dip your toes into theoretical CS (and fulfill that requirement). This class has a strong class community, quality lectures, and challenging but do–able psets. Rather than scare me away from CS, I found that this class makes you more interested and wanting to learn more.
Take this class since its likely easier than 121 or 124. PSETS can be revised in this iteration (pun intended). You will need OH to do psets. Everyone skips the active learning if they’re a sender so you might as well not stress and read the solutions after if youre a receiver.
May god be with you. Jk, this class isn't too bad.
Salil is great, psets are difficult, still has bumps as a new course. Graded on Learning/ready to move on was supposed to reduce stress. Also has participation portfolios worth a pset each
Take it! It's such a great introduction to the fascinating world of algorithms and preps you well for both the CS 121 or CS 124 path.
Take this class! The course staff is still figuring out the logistics of everything (how to make psets more consistent and not a huuuuuuge time suck), but once those are finalized it is fundamentally a very good class. I enjoyed taking this because I studied math and wanted some python experience before 124.
I would highly recommend taking CS120 as your introductory course on theoretical computer science. There are not that many programming components in the course so you definitely should have a solid background in proofs. The teaching team is fantastic and does a great job of responding to student feedback.
– definitely pay attention to the teaching staff next year! matters a lot for this class – Salil is great – lots of engagement required in the class, but rewarding – be prepared for some rough bumps in psets and exams as the staff tries to recalibrate
Take this class as a nice alternative to CS121. Less time commitment, more forgiving, enables more schedule flexibility.

Comments
Even though this course is most likely easier and better than CS121, the material is still really similar in concept, so if you don't like the material of 121, you're not going to like this course either. I will say that the teaching staff clearly cared a lot about the students actually learning, the grading system was very forgiving, and the midterm was surprisingly easy. They really listened to feedback and adapted the course as we asked them to, which is great. If you go into this course expecting something similar to 121, you won't bee surprised. So expect dry material, and actually go to section, and you'l be fine. I am overall super happy they introduced this course! Also heads up – the problem sets are a combination of proof AND programming.
Office hours and go to them early
Take this and 124. Don't take 121.
This was the first year CS120 was offered, so take my feedback with a grain of salt. Overall, this course does what it advertises. Provides a pretty solid understanding of DS&A and theoretical computer science to students that may lack the mathematical maturity to delve right into these topics. I definitely left this class having understood a lot more, and if you're picking between 120/121, I can guarantee the workload in this class will be significantly less. Salil is a great professor. He really cares about students and makes himself accessible. However, there were certainly a number of issues with this course because it was its first iteration. First, this course does N/L/R/R* scale grading. Sure, this is great because you don't stress about letter grades too much, but if a 70% on the PSET maps to an R, are you really going to go through the PSET and study all your mistakes? I'd guess probably not. Second, the psets were waaaaaay too difficult at the beginning of the year. PS0 might've been the hardest pset of them all (LOL). The course staff definitely adjusted as a result. Take this course. There may be some bugs and issues, but it is worth it and the class is not too difficult. Exams are reasonable so long as you study.
This course is a pretty good intro. It is not too difficult, and it definitely teaches important concepts. If you are looking for a rigorous intro, this isn't it. But it is not too hard, and the course staff is pretty good.
CS120 is a fantastic class for those wanting to ground CS theory in practice and gain confidence with theoretical proofs.
For a new class, CS 120 was pretty ok. There were a lot of growing pains (i.e. problem sets having errors/being hard to understand, not a lot of existing architecture) but the course staff was super helpful, kind, and knowledgeable. Don't be scared to take this class—it sets up a great foundation for future classes and the grading scheme really comes in clutch. You won't do poorly if you put in some effort.
It's a good class to take as an alternative to CS121! Definitely not super easy and requires a significant amount of work, but probably helpful for 124 as well. Requires proof background and Python coding, overall a solid class
I would certainly recommend CS120 to future students. I would say that attending sections and office hours is helpful, not just if you're falling behind, but in general for gaining a better and more complete grasp on the course material.
This class is a great introduction to theoretical CS and was much more approachable than CS 121 seems. Because it was the first year being taught, there were some rough aspects: vague or wrong pset questions, inconsistent standards, large variance in pset times. The worst part was not having a practice final with solutions or a review document until 48 hours before the final. Even when we did get "sketch" answers to the final practice, many of them were wrong. However, not all was bad. There were many cool connections to real–world problems and the programming problems were sometimes very effective. I felt really bad for everyone involved (teacher, TFs, students) because we were all collectively struggling to keep our respective sides afloat. Overall still seemed much better than CS121 though lol
Take this course!
I really, really loved this course. I can't praise it highly enough. Much of the success of the course was due to the incredible professor and teaching staff. It was clear how much they all cared about our learning, emotional wellbeing, and success – more than any other class I've taken at Harvard. The resources for getting help are outstanding. I really appreciate how the staff recalibrated when things weren't working. For example, the first few problem sets were much too hard. When the teaching staff collected feedback and realized this, they promptly adjusted the difficulty level and offered more resources. The lectures were really engaging and were an accessible introduction to theoretical CS, helpfully grounded in really coding to motivate the problems. I was really scared to take this course in the beginning but am now emerging wanting to do CS research. The grading system of the course maximizes fairness while minimizing stress. I love the problem sets and office hours set up. Salil is one of the kindest profs I've ever had. Whenever you ask a question in class, he'll say, "ah, yes! good!" which makes every question feel valuable and no question feel dumb. He also stays after class to answer questions. He is so easy to form a relationship with and made me feel comfortable being confused and asking for clarity. I love how the participation portfolios encourage engagement but value a wide variety of ways to participate, even for shyer students. The active learning exercises are an awesome way to break up the format and practice important skills. This is really such an amazing class and I'm so grateful that it exists. The problem sets were where most of my learning took place. I loved the balance of programming and theory assignments. I now feel comfortable with proofs in a way I never had before.
Great intro course overall, grading was a little ambiguous but the rest was really well done
Good class to take for an introduction to theoretical computer science. I took it in it’s first year, so I expect many things to change. In lecture, differentiating between what’s important to know and what’s extra information can be challenging, but understanding the useful info is made easy with sections and lecture notes. However, lectures can be hard to follow with all the extra info. Psets are challenging, so work with groups. Also, I don’t CS20 helped me that much besides having a knowledge of some symbols and induction. Overall, really good class and would recommend taking this class
If you are looking for a more manageable version of CS121 this is it!! The course staff really focus on helping students and you still end up learning a lot about CS theory.

Comments
This is a great introductory class to algorithms and limitations that is challenging but not too difficult/too much work compared to CS 121 and 124. Would highly recommend taking it!
If you're deciding between 121 and 120, I would definitely recommend 120! Content is relevant and interesting, Salil is an amazing lecturer, course staff cares so much and is always there to help. It's difficult but manageable (exams are very reasonable) – would definitely recommend going to section and office hours, reading Salil's completed lecture notes, and starting PSets early. Depending on your comfort level with theoretical CS, would recommend budgeting around 8–12 hours a week to work on PSets!
TAKE IT. I wish I could take it again. This is the best class I've taken so far: very useful, applicable, and fun. Salil and the course staff are great and EXTREMELY helpful. The course also distributes lecture notes after the lecture that are fully comprehensive of the lecture material (and believe me, this is a game–changer when you're working on psets or studying for the exams). You will become a better programmer after taking this class, and you will develop a skillset that will change the way you approach and solve problems. This is a brand new class, and the staff kept continuously improving it throughout the semster, taking in feedback and acting on it almost immediately. I hope this course stays great and doesn't deteriorate over time like other courses (my message to the course staff: keep acting on student feedback).
When I took this class, it was the first semester but I didn't end up sinking a ton of time into it. I think it provided a good intro into theoretical CS — one that didn't seem to be as annoying as CS121, and I would recommend it!
PSETS are still hard and the grading system does relieve a lot of stress. I think the content is way more interesting than 121. I would say 120 > 121. The only thing is we still have no idea what are final grades are going to be.
Good class that is definitely easier to stomach compared to CS121 and 124. Would have definitely helped me prepare for those courses.
I highly recommend taking this class! It's one of the only CS classes where I felt like I knew what I didn't know and if I put some time in clarifying the concepts then I was able to successfully complete all the problems. It's beautiful how the topics build on each other and all you do is relevant.
This class is conducted extremely well even as a new course, and can only get smoother with future iterations. Lectures and the content are really fascinating, and the learning environment is awesome.
Highly highly recommend this class as an intro to theoretical CS! Salil is an incredible lecturer, and makes complex ideas easy to understand. He has put so much effort into adapting this course to the best needs of the students, and is super accessible in OHs and on Ed too. The content is pretty interesting and surveys a good number of big ideas, but I would say this class is more than just its lectures. Active learnings, a L/R grading scale, and great TFs have all made this class into a supportive learning community. It can be a bit of work at times, so I would definitely flag OHs in your schedule. I would probably say this is even more useful than the other theory courses because it incorporates some programming in psets, but with that I would make sure you have a foundation in Python too. A great first run of the class so I'm sure it'll be even better in years to come.
Great alternative to 121 and 124 – not a walk in the park, but taught with a lot of clarity and passion!
Great class! I think it could benefit from more teaching staff (it's a LOT for the TF's and office hours were often overrun with students) but the material is fascinating and well–taught.
It is so easy to fall behind in this class so definitely go to section if you can every week to get a condensed over view of the material.
CS120 is a fantastic course. I feel like I truly learned a ton throughout the semester and am definitely going to take away a lot of the algorithm and data structure knowledge and bring it for other CS classes and technical interviews/jobs. Salil is a great lecturer and really cares about his students. The rest of the course staff also cares about the students and will get to know you personally!
This class was definitely rocky, but I'll give it some slack since it was the first time it was taught. The first few psets were truly disgusting and every person I spoke to said they spent 20+ hours on them. However, Salil and the course staff really did listen to our feedback and psets became a lot more manageable. The topics themselves are interesting, but could be a bit confusing if you've learnt about them before, as the way Salil teaches is unconventional at times. The grading is a bit annoying, since you don't really know what you got letter wise since it's all R/R*/L/N. With that being said, the pset/midterm revisions are really helpful and very much appreciated. Overall, I see a lot of potential for this class and it's definitely better than CS121 so take it and good luck!
This class is extremely in–depth in discrete mathematics and be prepared for some crazy assignments
Definitely try to find a pset group wary because none of the psets can be done alone which is a pro and a con of the class