Thank you for taking the time to evaluate the course. Here is my response to some of the comments.

Assignments

Most students remarked that assignments are difficult. I think this is a good sign. It means you are thinking and learning. You are talented students and I want to challenge you. The homework scores indicate you are up to the challenge.

I am a little concerned about the comment in the third bullet regarding grading of homework. In general my policy is that if the final answer is wrong, even if it is consistent with a simple math mistake earlier in the problem, to mark it wrong. I am careful to give other partial credit, however. This is more of a practical issue than anything. I simply don’t have the time in most cases to recalculate the answer using the values that the student used in order to determine if the final answer was wrong simply because of a math mistake or if there was something else that went wrong. If you ever have questions regarding how I have graded something, please ask and I will work to come to agreement with you on how it should be graded. On the other hand, on exams I do allow the answers resulting from simple math mistakes to be counted as correct since exam scores have a higher impact on your overall grade.

The intent of the current Tuesday–Tuesday format is for you have all the information you need by Thursday, try out the problems over the weekend, and then be able to find me on Monday if necessary to ask questions. In a Thursday–Thursday schedule you wouldn’t have all of the information until Tuesday’s lecture, and then would only have Tuesday night, Wednesday, and Thursday morning to complete the homework. The Tuesday–Tuesday schedule gives you much more time.

I’m available to answer questions regarding the homework via email. I have not received as many of those types of emails this year as I have in the past. Please ask if you have a question.

Here are my thoughts about what is mentioned in the fourteenth bullet, about how graduate students should spend more time on their own research than on homework problems. The European graduate education system (and perhaps other systems with which I am not familiar) emphasizes the research project (i.e. the masters thesis or doctoral dissertation)
more than the American system, from what I know about the two systems. Graduate students in Europe take few if any classes, with the resulting philosophy (or at least implied philosophy) being that time should be spent only things relevant to the research project. Although we as a faculty don’t talk about this explicitly, our system implies that our philosophy is that a broader graduate education is important. In the US the tradition has been to accomplish this through classes. I believe that it is likely that the topics of this course will become useful to you later in your career. More importantly, I believe the skills you are developing by solving these problems will be useful to you both now and in the future. I think that homework problems are the most efficient way of learning this material and acquiring these skills, and that is why I assign them.

In the next bullet, a request was made to spend more time reviewing assignments in class. I have chosen instead to use class time to introduce material and have made the solutions available to you in the homework binder. I am more than happy to go over these solutions with you. On the other hand, I think it is most efficient to make sure you understand the homework before you hand it in, and this can be accomplished by asking questions beforehand. When it is obvious that the majority of the class does not understand the homework (which means it was not communicated well by me) then we will spend time in class reviewing homework, as we did for Ps6.

Lectures

In the fourth bullet, the topic sequence of the lectures is questioned. I am following the topics as they are presented in the textbook. It may not be the way that I would choose to organize the class, but I think it is the best way considering the textbook we are using, and this is the best textbook of which I am aware.

I like the idea of a five–minute break in the middle of class. I’ll try to do this by moving discussion of the IEM feature to the middle of class and hand back homework in the middle in an effort to allow your hand to recover!

In the second to last bullet, one person commented about spending time deriving some topics that seemed tangential to the main goals of the class. I included these derivations, and may include some more, because I want to demonstrate how mathematics can be used to model physical phenomena.

Mid–term Exam

Thank you for the comment in the seventh bullet. As the exam dragged on, I should have made it known to everyone that I was not going to impose the 90–minute time limit. I apologize for not doing that. I hope to write the final exam to be completed in 90 minutes.

Instructor

If you are not taking advantage of office hours, please consider doing so. This material is difficult! It took me some time to figure it out. I want to help with that process. If you are
not available during my office hours, please set up an alternative time with me via email.

Webpage

I’ve made the syllabus available at the following url so you don’t have to access Blackboard to get to it: \url{http://bkh.public.iastate.edu/teaching/505/index_2015.html}. Thank you for that suggestion!

Articles that I reference in the homework will always be available to you. If not on campus, you may have to log into the ISU Library with your ID number and password. If you don’t know how to do this, take some time to learn how, or see me. If there is ever an article you cannot access, please let me know!

I use a syllabus web page because it is easier for me to update than Blackboard. Also it allows me to share the content of this class with others who are not registered for the course and therefore do not have access to our Blackboard course.

The syllabus, per university rules, must have all that extra information there (disability accommodation, etc.) all of the time.

Project

No concerns here.

MATLAB

I disagree with the comment in the ninth bullet. I think it is critical to be able to use some sort of programming environment to learn the material we are addressing in the course. You simply must have the ability to use something like MATLAB in order to analyze real data, and this skill will be valuable for you throughout your career if you work in any discipline that requires analysis of data. I understand your frustration about debugging programs. The great thing about computers is that they do exactly what you tell them to do. The worst thing about computers is that they do exactly what you tell them to do! But this is something we have to live with if we are to take advantage of what computers can do for us. Please come see me when you can’t solve a programming problem, or email me your code and I will look at it.

What I do well.

Thank you for the feedback.

What I need to improve.

In response to the fifth bullet comment about how much time is being spent on this class. A three-credit class means that there are three “contact hours” of classroom/lecture per
week. For each hour of class, it is reasonable to expect to spend two to three hours of time outside of class on the material. So it sounds like the homework load is just about right for this student. I admit, this class takes a considerable amount of time if you want to do well. I am hopeful that this time is worthwhile.

Reviewing old exams: this suggestion has come up before. It is difficult to write good exam questions and therefore I am reluctant to make old exams available because I have to “recycle” some exam questions from time-to-time. I also had a bad experience with this when I was a student. In one of the most difficult classes I ever took (a graduate course on electromagnetic theory) I found out after the first exam that the students who had done well had access to old exams that had been provided to them by former students. As you can guess, I didn’t have access to these old exams! They had not been made available by the instructor. For the next exam, I made sure that I found a way to get copies of these old exams. But then studying for the exam just turned into a contest of how many old exams could you find and study before the exam. I don’t want this to happen. One idea that has come to me as I write this is perhaps I could write a single example exam that I make available to everyone. I will consider this in the future.