

Introduction

FIE463: Numerical Methods in Macroeconomics and Finance using Python

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January 9, 2025

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About me

- Undergraduate studies in software engineering (& economics), PhD in Economics
- Research fields: Quantitative Macroeconomics & Household Finance
- 20+ years of programming experience:
 - Previously (and mostly forgotten): C/C++, Visual Basic, Java, Java Script, PHP, Perl, SQL, Matlab, R
 - These days: Python, Fortran, Unix shell scripts, Stata

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INTRODUCTION TO PYTHON

Why Python? ... and why not?

Why Python?

- Free and open source
- Easy to learn, yet powerful and flexible syntax
- General-purpose language that can be used to solve many different problems
- Huge ecosystem of libraries and tools
- By now the most popular language overall
 - Most popular in machine learning
 - One of the two most popular in data science (together with R)
- May not be the fastest, but offers easy way to accelerate things (Cython, Numba, JAX, ML libraries)

What can you do with Python?

- Everything. The question is whether you should be using Python ...

Why not Python?

- You already know another language that solves your problem well
- You want to use an estimator/algorithm that is implemented somewhere else (Stata, R), but not in Python

Python popularity (1)

Since its creation in the 1990s, Python has climbed to the top of almost any programming language ranking.



Figure 1: Source: [IEEE The Top Programming Languages 2024](#)

Python popularity (2)

“Which programming, scripting, and markup languages have you done extensive development work in over the past year?”

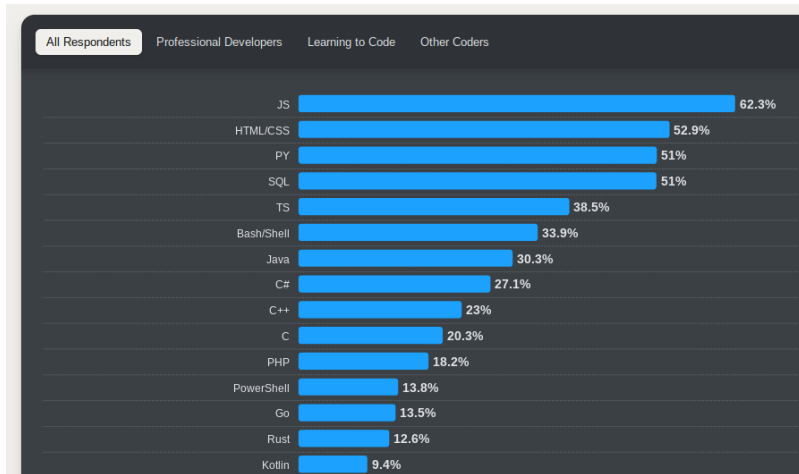


Figure 2: Source: [StackOverflow Developer Survey 2024](#)

Python popularity (3)

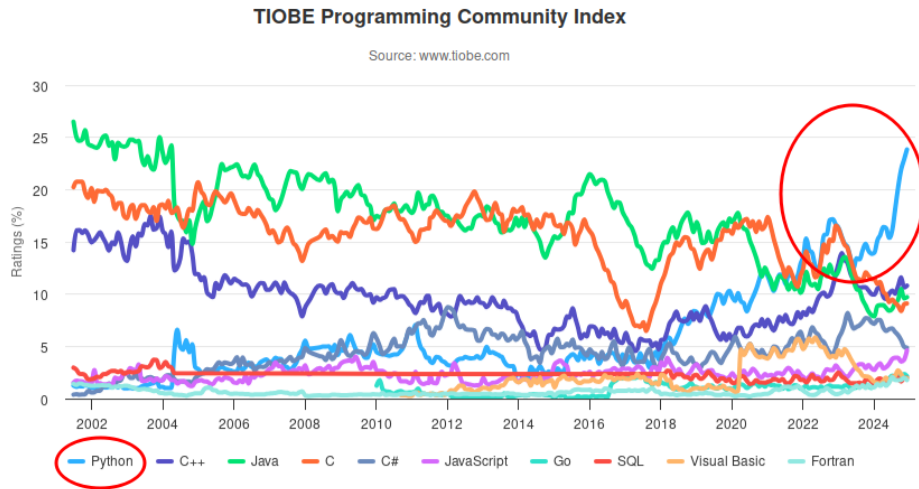


Figure 3: Source: TIOBE Index for December 2024

Python popularity (4)

GitHub: “AI leads Python to top language as the number of global developers surges”



Figure 4: Source: [GitHub Blog](#), October 2024

Examples of Python in economics & finance

Solving dynamic programming problems with Python + Numba

- Olsson (2025): Solves Aiyagari model + extensive margin labour supply choice for single and couple households
- Foltyn (2024): Household finance model with portfolio choice and learning from experience

Econometrics (custom estimators with Python + Numba or JAX)

- Foltyn and Olsson (2024): Custom Maximum Likelihood Estimator (MLE)
- Foltyn (2024): Custom MLE, uses JAX to run it on GPUs

Dynamic economic models solved with Python + ML

- Maliar, Maliar, and Winant (2021): Solve dynamic problems with TensorFlow; [\[code\]](#)
- Duarte, Duarte, and Silva (2024): Continuous-time finance models with TensorFlow
- Duarte et al. (2021): Solve HH portfolio choice problem with 22 states using JAX

Python vs. other languages (1)

Matlab

- Proprietary, quite expensive
- Shipped as complete software package from one vendor (plus optional toolboxes)
- (Legacy) industry standard, widely used
- Substantially less powerful syntax
- Pure Matlab is somewhat faster than pure Python, but Python is easier to accelerate

Julia

- Free, open source
- Focused on numerical computation, less on general-purpose computing
- Substantially faster than Python, but Python can be accelerated to similar speed (using Numba)
- Popular among younger academics doing quantitative work
- Smaller ecosystem & less mature
- Not widely used or supported by Big Tech

Python vs. other languages (2)

R language

- Free, open source
- Focus on statistics, less on general-purpose computing
- Large ecosystem of packages for statistics, econometric modelling, and machine learning

Stata

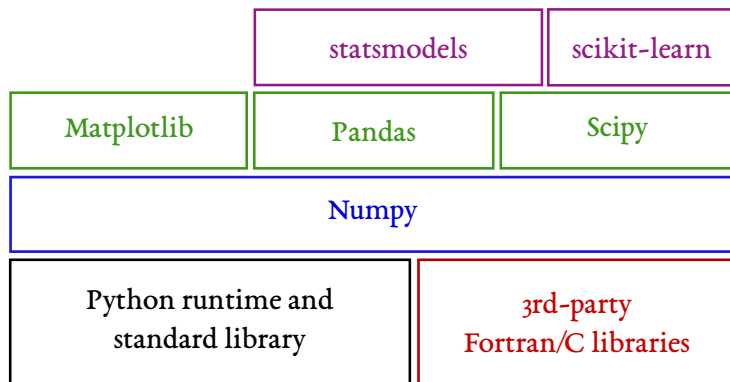
- Proprietary, quite expensive
- Focus on econometrics, in particular econometrics using large micro data sets
- Syntax was designed to run built-in commands, very inflexible for anything else
- If what you need is implemented, great! If not, it's very tedious to do it yourself (Mata is not great either).

PYTHON ECOSYSTEM

Python software stack

How things fit together

- “Python” is the language & standard library supported by the [Python Software Foundation](#)
- For numerical applications, we need additional 3rd-party packages such as [NumPy](#), [SciPy](#), etc.



Python software stack (used in this course)

Core libraries for quantitative work

- **Python** language, runtime and standard libraries (“Python”)
- **NumPy**: implements n -dimensional arrays, linear algebra routines, random number generators
- **Matplotlib**: High-level plotting routines for visualization
- **Pandas**: Containers to handle heterogeneous data & routines for data analysis
- **SciPy**: Optimization routines, sparse matrices, integration, interpolation, linear algebra, statistics
- **scikit-learn**: routines used for machine learning (Ridge regression, Lasso, elastic net, etc.)

Python software stack (**not** covered in this course)

Econometrics & Machine learning

- [statsmodels](#): routines for estimating (linear) models
- [TensorFlow](#): ML library maintained by Google with Python API
- [JAX](#): Low-level API for automatic differentiation and accelerated linear algebra used to build ML models, developed by Google
- [PyTorch](#): Python interface to ML libraries originally developed by Facebook

Frameworks to speed things up

- [Numba](#): compiles Python code to machine code using LLVM
- [Cython](#): converts pseudo-Python to C code (advanced, don't use this)

Jupyter notebooks vs. Python files

This course often uses Jupyter notebooks, not “regular” Python scripts.

Jupyter notebooks

- File extension: `.ipynb`
- Interactive, dynamic notebooks
- Good for exploratory work
- Easy to share work with others, in particular if they are *not* data analysts or programmers
- Can be exported to other formats, e.g., PDFs, \LaTeX

Python scripts

- File extension: `.py`
- Interactive only in debugger
- For “serious” programming
- For libraries, reusable code
- Not useful to share with others who don’t know Python

Jupyter notebooks vs. Python files

Explosive growth of Jupyter notebooks on GitHub which are used for data science, data visualization and AI.

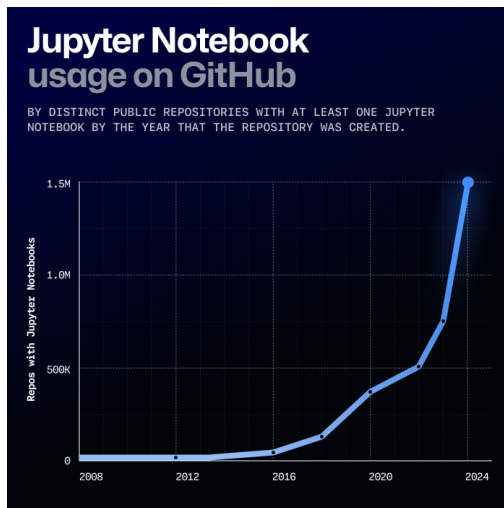


Figure 5: Source: [GitHub Blog](#), October 2024

COURSE OUTLINE & ASSESSMENT

Teaching approach

- 1 Lectures: introduce new concepts [Tuesday, 12:15–14:00]
- 2 Workshops: practice concepts from previous lecture [Thursday, 8:15–10:00]

Prerequisites

- No Python knowledge required
- Previous exposure to other programming languages (R, Julia, Matlab) is helpful

Course material

- Available on GitHub: <https://github.com/richardfoltyn/FIE463-V25>

Course outline (preliminary!)

Part 1: Introduction to Python [\approx 4 weeks]

- Setting up a working environment
- Working with Visual Studio Code, Jupyter notebooks, git (optional)
- Basic programming concepts (syntax, data types, NumPy arrays)
- Control flow (conditional execution, loops)
- Functions and modules
- Random number generation
- Plotting with matplotlib
- Applications:
 - Maximization using grid search
 - Portfolio choice
 - Consumption-savings problems (partial equilibrium)

Part 2: Applications to models in macroeconomics & finance [\approx 4 weeks]

- Advanced NumPy and SciPy
- Maximization and root-finding using standard algorithms
- Applications:
 - Labor supply & consumption-savings problems (including general equilibrium)
 - Portfolio choice
 - Overlapping-generations models (OLG)
 - Stochastic processes and simulation
 - Solving models with uncertainty (income risk)
 - Simple asset pricing models

Part 3: Working with financial data [\approx 4 weeks]

- Introduction to pandas
- Processing data from various sources
- Introduction to unsupervised and supervised learning with scikit-learn
- Applications:
 - Obtaining macroeconomic & financial data from the internet
 - Predicting house prices, stock prices, or similar

Courses using Python at NHH

- 1 [FOR14](#): Algorithms and Computer Programming with Python
 - 2 [BAN401](#): Applied Programming and Data Analysis for Business
 - 3 [BAN436](#): Introduction to Python (1 week)
 - 4 [BAN438](#): Application Development in Python
 - 5 [BAN442](#): From data to value: Machine Learning with Python (1 week)
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- FIE463 overlaps with these in the first few weeks (intro to Python)
 - Parts 2 and 3 focus on applications in macroeconomics & finance, unlike the courses above

Course approval

- Individual programming assignment
- Grading: Pass/Fail — Pass required to receive a grade in this course
- Hand-out date: Thursday, February 6

Assessment

- 1 Group project #1 (“term paper”) [40%]
Hand-out date: Thursday, March 6 (preliminary)
- 2 Individual peer review of another group’s project #1 [5%]
- 3 Group project #2 (“term paper”) [50%]
Hand-out date: Thursday, April 3 (preliminary)
- 4 Individual peer review of another group’s project #2 [5%]

The peer reviews are intended to give you additional feedback on code style, structure and efficiency in a respectful, constructive manner.

TOOLS:
GIT, GITHUB, AND VS CODE

Goal: learn to use industry-standard tools for programming in Python

- Python distribution: Anaconda
- Version control: git
- Code hosting: GitHub
- Editor: Visual Studio Code

Why git? (and GitHub)

- Because everyone uses it: almost completely replaced all other version control systems over the last 19 years

Examples:

- Python: <https://github.com/python/cpython>
- NumPy: <https://github.com/numpy/numpy>
- SciPy: <https://github.com/scipy/scipy>
- Pandas: <https://github.com/pandas-dev/pandas>
- Matplotlib: <https://github.com/matplotlib/matplotlib>
- PyTorch (Meta's ML library): <https://github.com/pytorch/pytorch>
- TensorFlow (Google's ML library): <https://github.com/tensorflow/tensorflow>
- Keeps history of **your** code changes (and can restore previous versions)
- Keeps history of **other's** code changes
- Allows for decentralized coding in teams
- Allows synchronizing of code across devices

Why GitHub?

- Everyone uses it!
- Alternatives (less popular):
 - [GitLab](#)
 - [BitBucket](#)
- Offers many other services besides version control (issue tracking, Wiki, etc.)
- Register for free at <https://github.com/signup>

Why Visual Studio Code?

- Has become the most widely used editor for most languages (see [StackOverflow Developer Survey 2024](#))
- Free & open source
- Good support for almost any programming language and file format (e.g., Jupyter Notebooks) via extensions
- Natively supports git & GitHub (unlike older editors)
- Alternative: PyCharm by JetBrains (free community edition is available, free professional edition for students)
- Note: [Visual Studio Code](#) completely independent of [Visual Studio](#), a commercial IDE from Microsoft for Windows development

VS Code is the most popular editor

“Which development environments did you use regularly over the past year?”

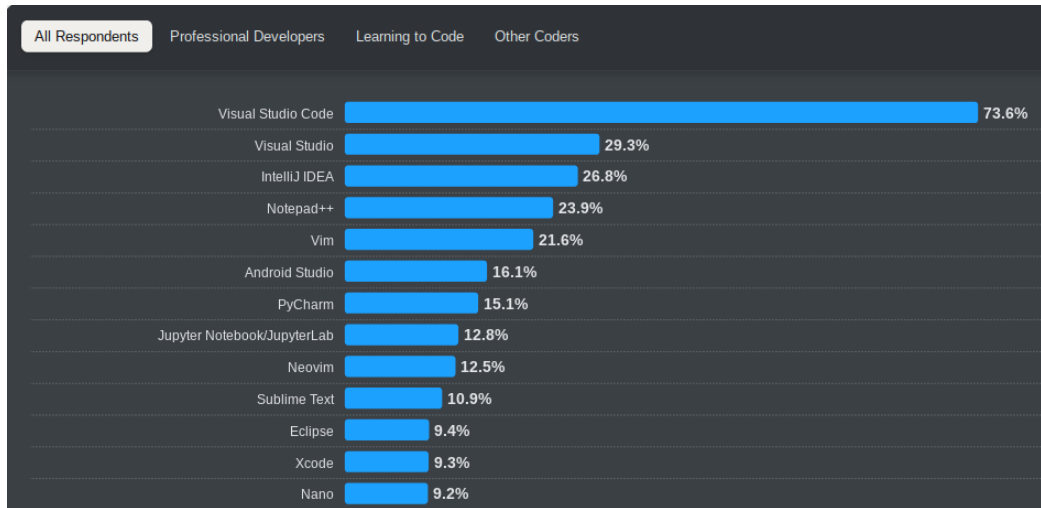


Figure 6: Source: [StackOverflow Developer Survey 2024](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Additional resources — Books

Books

- [Think Python](#) by Allen B. Downey
General intro to Python, chapters are available as Jupyter notebooks.
- [Python for Everybody](#) by Charles R. Severance
General intro to Python with a focus on data analysis, available as PDF.

Online courses

- [QuantEcon lectures](#)
Python programming for economics & finance
- [Introduction to Programming and Numerical Analysis](#)
Python course at the University of Copenhagen, focusing on applications in macroeconomics

Additional resources

User guides and documentation

- [Numpy quick start tutorial](#)
- [Numpy tutorial for Matlab users](#)
- [scikit-learn user guide](#)

Code

- [QuantEcon library](#)
Collection of routines and tools for economics
- [QuantEcon repository](#)
Contributed code for solving economic problems in Python

Additional resources — Videos

Introduction to the command line / terminal:

- Absolute BEGINNER Guide to the **Mac OS** Terminal [17 min]
<https://youtu.be/aKRYQsKR46I>
- Git Bash - Simplest command line program for **Windows** [7 min]
<https://youtu.be/yoZ910JQzrg>

Introduction to using git

- Git for dummies [20 min] <https://youtu.be/mJ-qvsxPHpY>
- Git and GitHub Tutorial for Beginners [46 min] <https://youtu.be/tRZGeaHPoaw>
- Git Essentials in VS Code [30 min] <https://youtu.be/twsYxYaQikI>
Focuses on interacting with git and GitHub through VS Code

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- Maliar, Lilia, Serguei Maliar, and Pablo Winant. 2021. Deep learning for solving dynamic economic models. **Journal of Monetary Economics** 122:76–101.
- Olsson, Jonna. 2025. Singles, couples, and their labor supply: long-run trends and short-run fluctuations. **American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics** 17 (1): 1–34.