

# Serendipitous Exploration of the Carleton Curriculum

Cathy Duan, Willow Gu, Markus Gunadi, Zoey La, Charlie Ney, and Kai Weiner

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# What is serendipity?

The fact of finding interesting or valuable things by chance

## Why serendipity?

At Carleton College, we believe wholeheartedly in the power of a liberal arts education to transform the lives of students and prepare them for a rapidly changing world.

### Imagine it. Do it.

Carleton's liberal arts focus gives you the freedom to explore deeply and broadly, in and out of the classroom.

*What sets Carleton apart?*

**54**  
majors & minors

*Just a few of our 1,000 courses:*

Theater 238  
**Costume Design**  
for Theater

Mathematics 333  
**Combinatorial**  
Theory

Biology 368  
**Developmental**  
Neurobiology

Unmatched teaching in a close-knit community where  
intellectual curiosity leads to a lifetime of exploration.



RESEARCH-ARTICLE

X in 🐾 f 📧

## The bohemian bookshelf: supporting serendipitous book discoveries through information visualization

Authors:  Alice Thudt,  Uta Hinrichs,  Sheelagh Carpendale | [Authors Info & Claims](#)

Serendipity:

- I. an important but neglected factor in information seeking, research, and ideation
- II. can be promoted through visualization
- III. some people have more serendipitous qualities than others

## The bohemian bookshelf: supporting serendipitous book discoveries through information visualization

Authors:  Alice Thudt,  Uta Hinrichs,  Sheelagh Carpendale | [Authors Info & Claims](#)

### Design Principles:

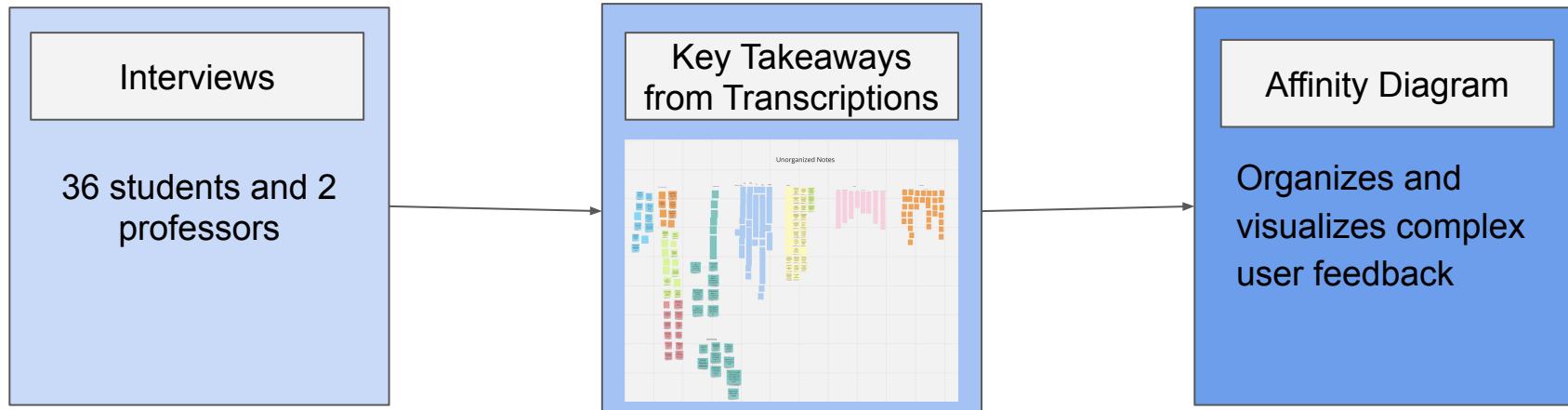
- I. multiple visual access points
- II. show adjacencies between documents
- III. provide flexible visual pathways for exploring
- IV. enticing curiosity through abstract, metaphorical, and visually distinct representations of documents
- V. enabling a playful approach to information exploration

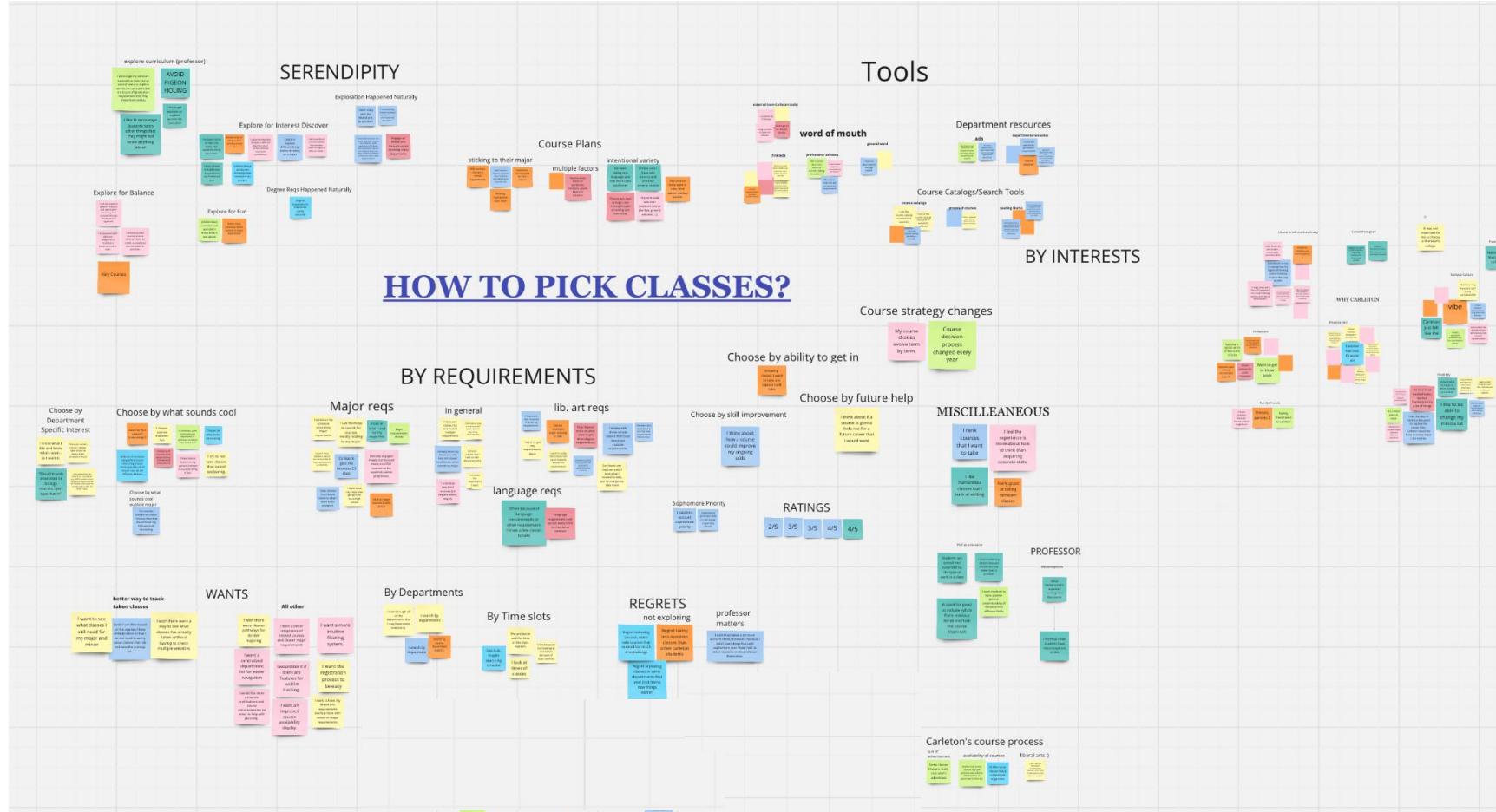
# Design

# Gathering User Data - Stakeholder Interviews

## Goals - What are the gaps?

- I. Understand what the liberal arts means to people and how they engage with it
- II. What their course exploration process looks like





# Affinity Diagram Takeaways

“Looking through classes feels like looking through data rather than understanding the actual class”

People like calendars

“Regret not trying new things earlier”

Some students ‘stumbled into the liberal arts experience’

# Our Vision

**What we DO want:** Engaging, playful, and interactive

- Help discover courses
- A ‘discovery’ tool
- Emphasizes the liberal arts experience

**What we DON’T want:**

- X Registration
- X Administrative

Bohemian bookshelf's design principle: **multiple** visual access points

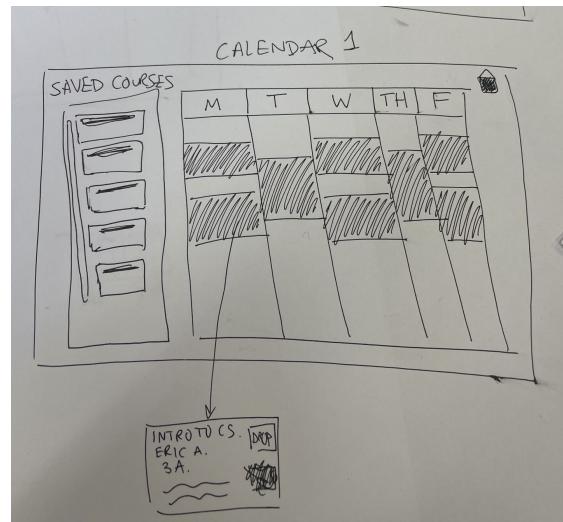
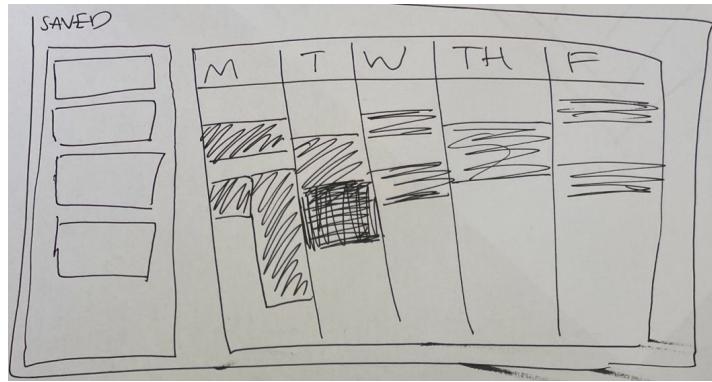
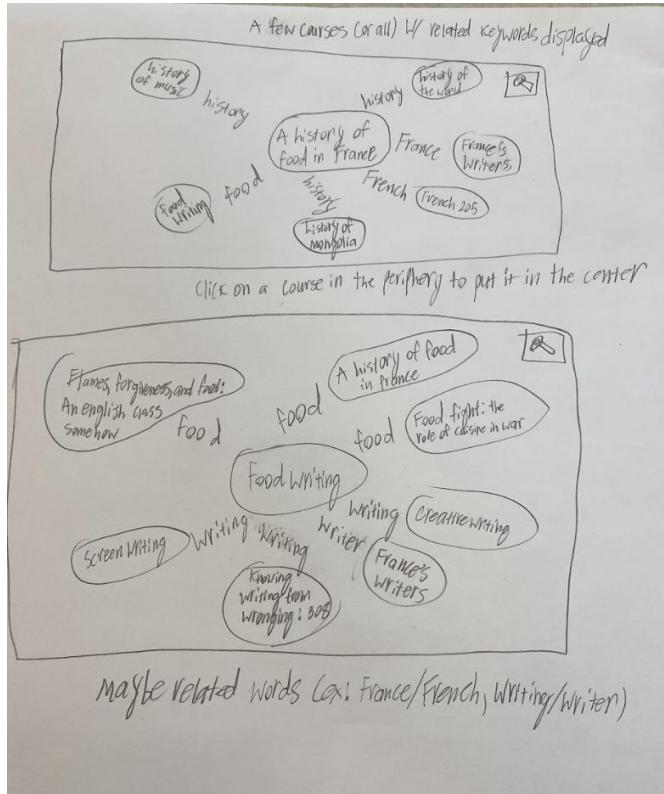


Thus multiple features:

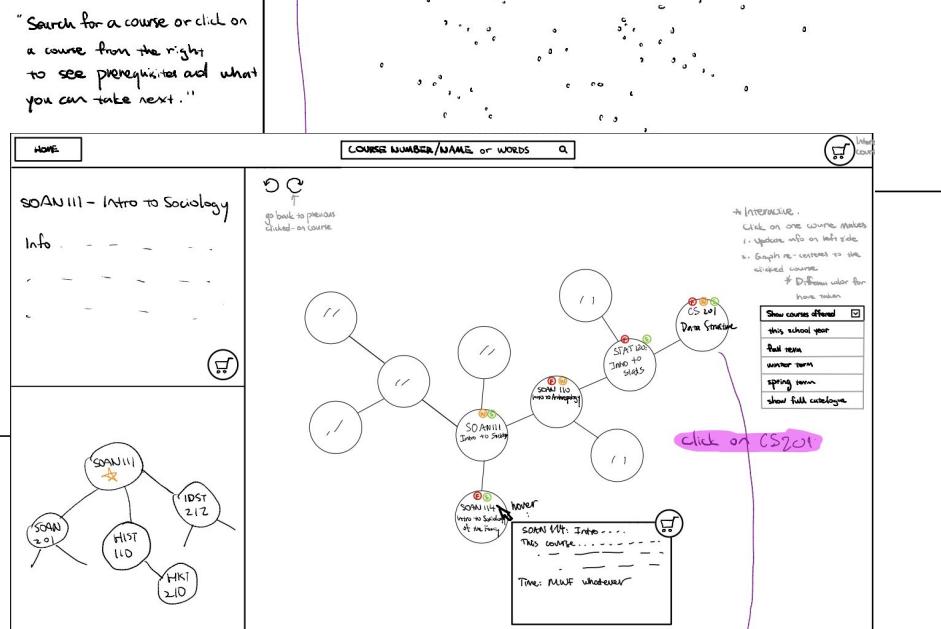
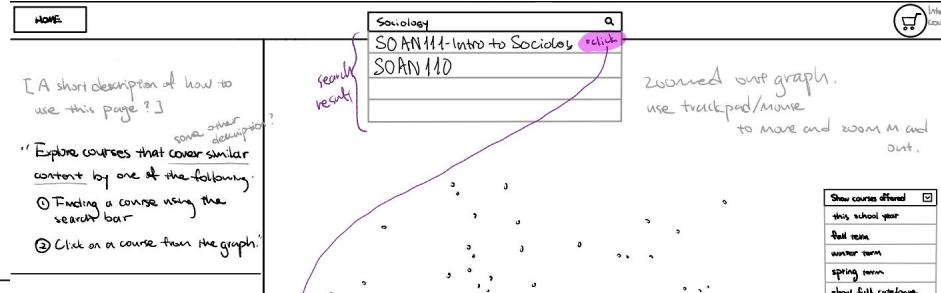
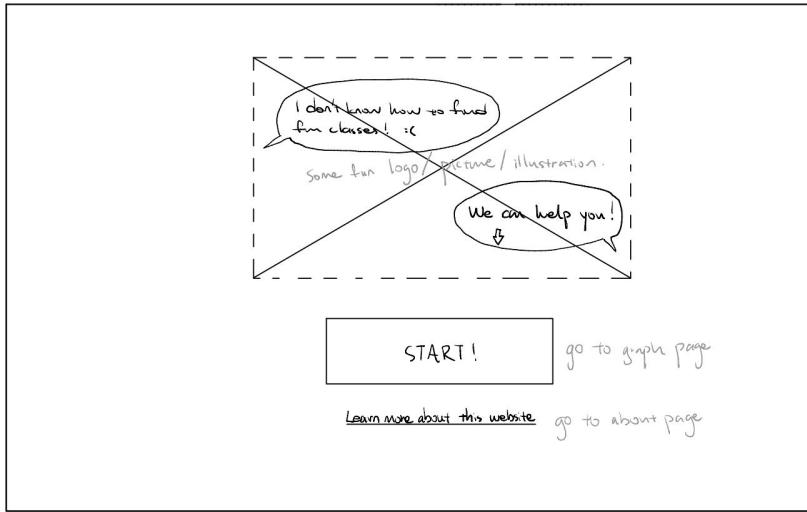
- Interactive graph
  - Calendar
  - Slot machine
  - Quiz

# Prototypes

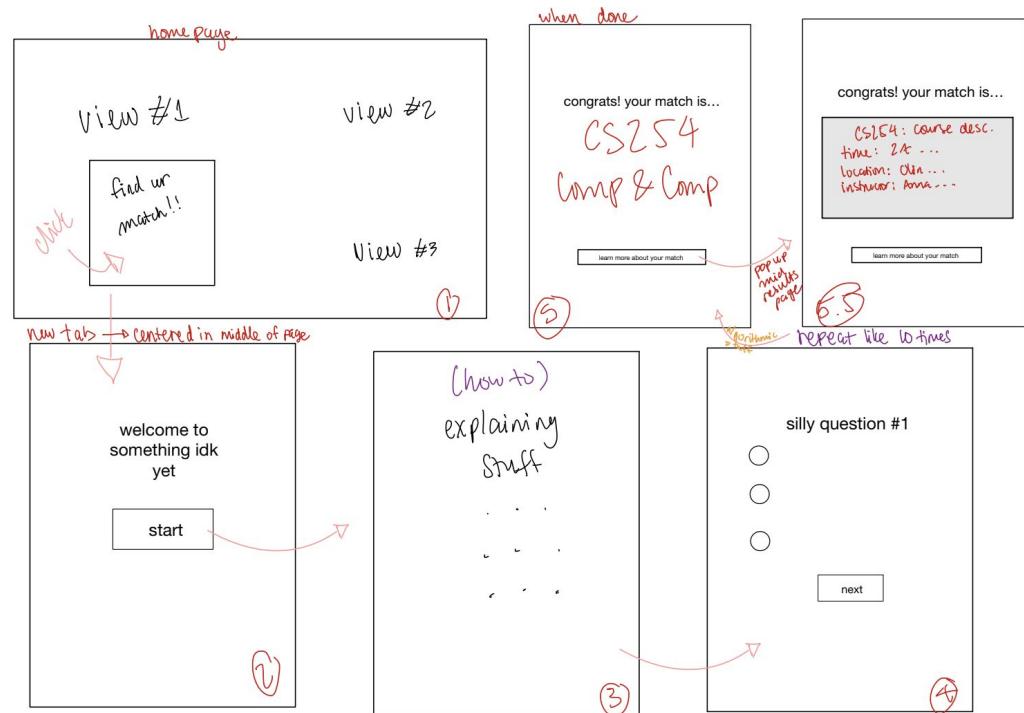
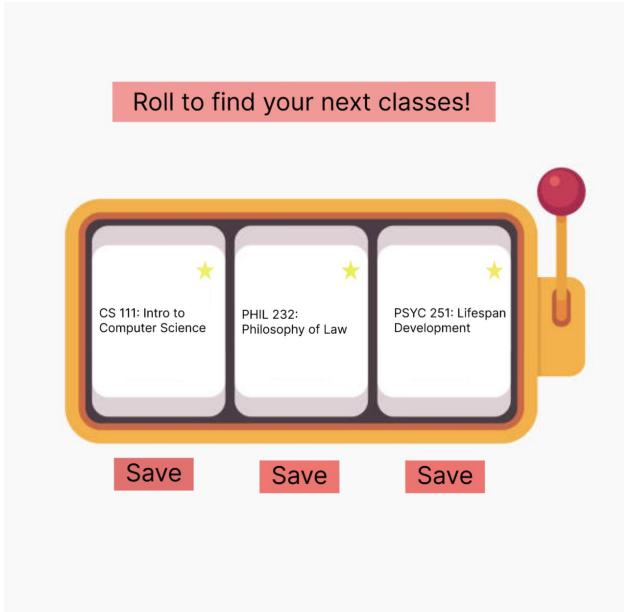
# Our earlier prototypes



# .... a little later on

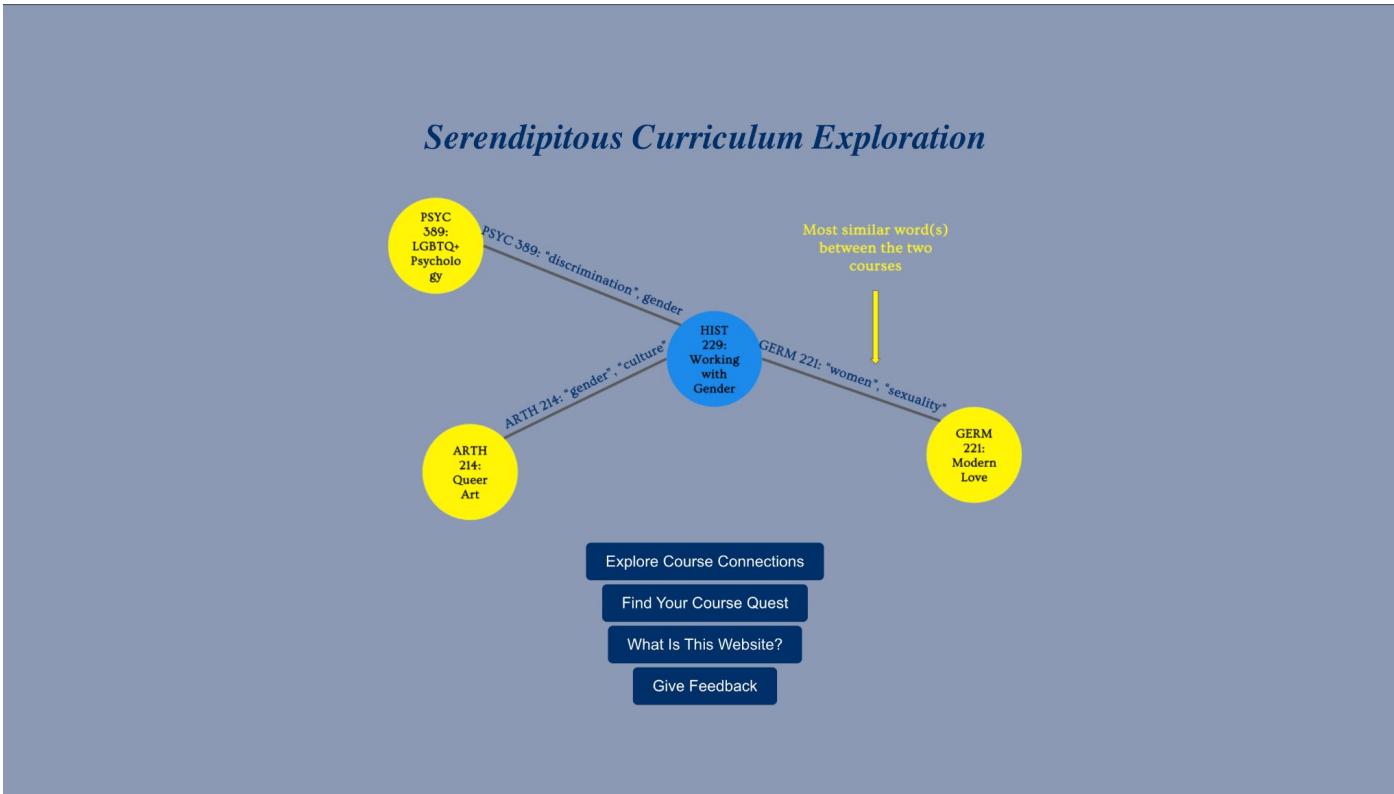


# The Slot Machine & the Quiz



# Final Product

# Home Page



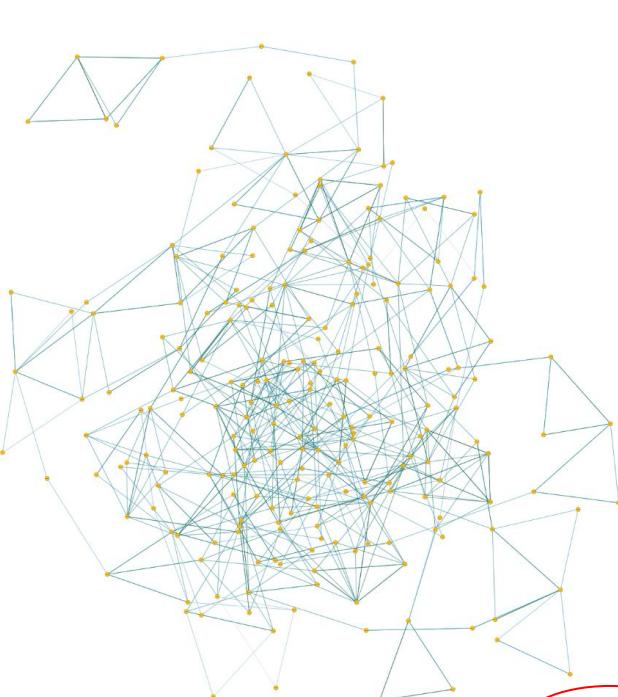
# Graph

## Serendipitous Exploration



Course name, description, or number

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>AFST 213:</b> Race, Racism, and the Beloved Community in the US                   | + |
| <b>AFST 289:</b> Global Blackness and Social Movements                               | + |
| <b>AFST 300:</b> Race, Racism, and the Beloved Community in the US                   | + |
| <b>AMST 115:</b> Intro to American Studies   | + |
| <b>AMST 269:</b> Woodstock Nation  | + |
| <b>AMST 321:</b> Indigenous Chicago: Indigenous Histories and Futures in Zhegagoynak | + |
| <b>AMST 396:</b> Junior Research Seminar (Producing Latinidad)                       | + |
| <b>ARBC 103:</b> Elementary Arabic   | + |
| <b>ARBC 206:</b> Arabic in Cultural Context  | + |
| <b>ARBC 222:</b> Music in the Middle East  | + |



## Similarity Between Course

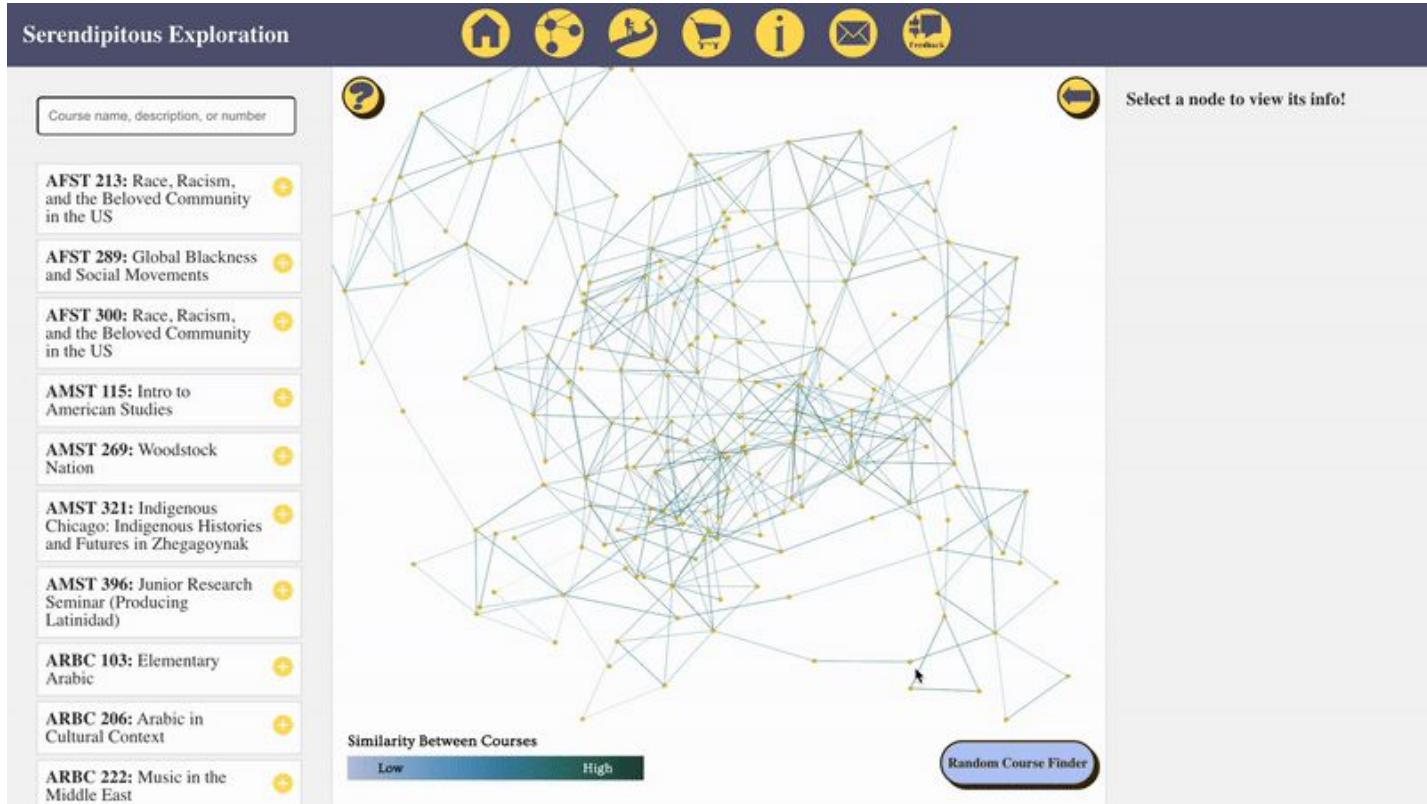
Low

Hig

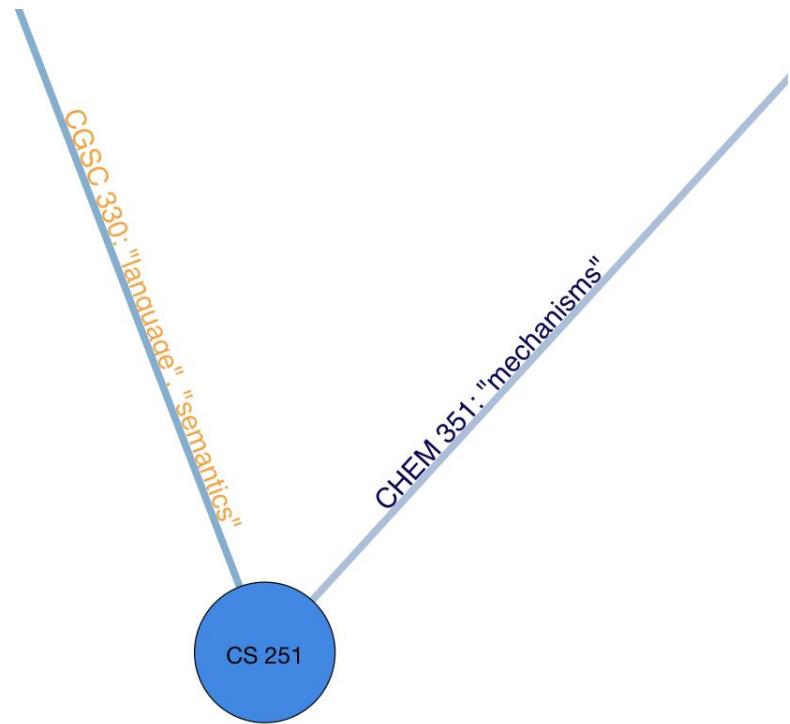
 Random Course Finder

Select a node to view its info!

# A closer look of our graph...



# Nodes and lines!



# Calendar



multiple ways to save courses:

- the search sidebar
- the information sidebar
- the quiz results page

# Exporting Saved Courses to Email

## Save your saved courses!

Done using our webapp for the day but don't want to remember the courses you've saved to your cart? No problem! You can send a code to your email corresponding to your saved courses. You can then enter this code to the encoding box to automatically add your saved courses to your cart!

### **Export saved courses code:**

Name:

Email:

## **Import saved courses code**



New message from Inbox x

**Serendipitous Exploration Team** <serendipity.exploration.carleton@gmail.com>  
to me. ▾

Hello Zoey La,

Here is your data from the Serendipitous Exploration Tool:

Your saved courses were: MATH 134-00 - Linear Algebra with Applications, CS 304-00 - Social Computing, . Input this phrase to add them back to your cart: 142,661

Best wishes,  
Serendipitous Exploration Team

Email sent via [EmailJS.com](#)

# The Quiz

Serendipitous Exploration

Find Your Quest!

Obtain a Spring 2025 Carleton course based on your past experience and personal preferences

01 / 03

In which department do you already have experience? Choose one!

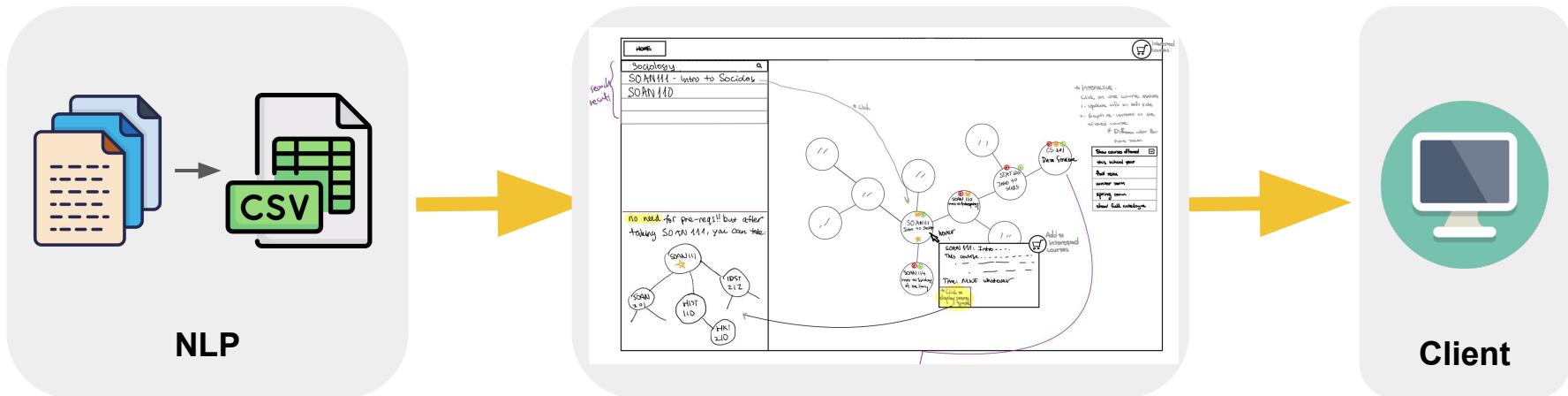
Select a department... ▾

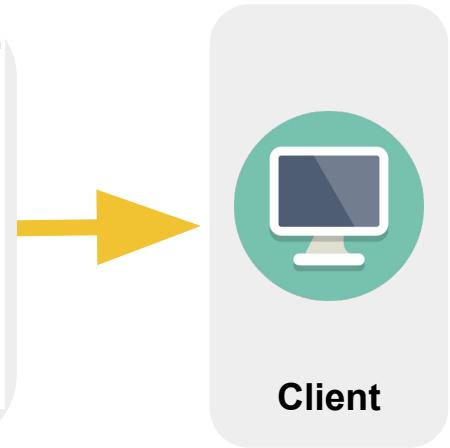
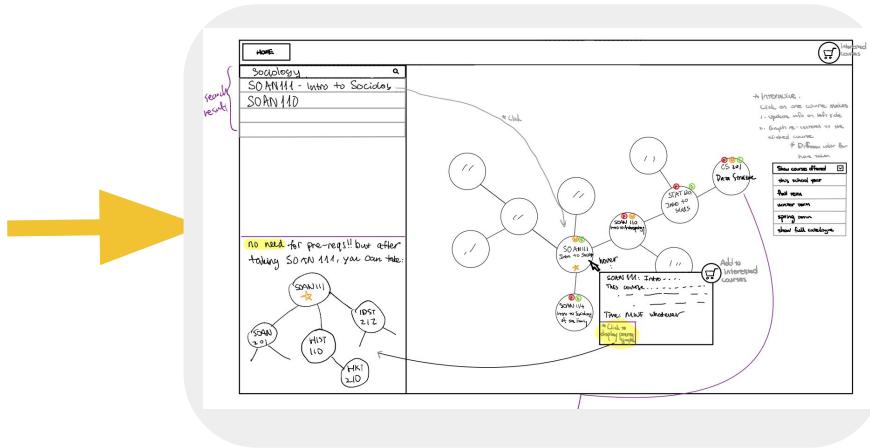
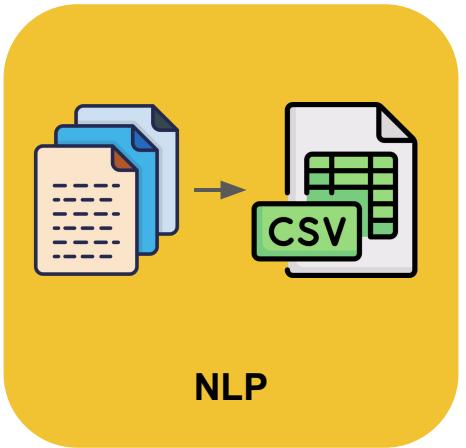
Next

This screenshot shows a user interface for a quiz titled "Find Your Quest!". At the top, there is a dark blue header bar with the text "Serendipitous Exploration" on the left and seven yellow circular icons representing different categories: a house, a network, a person, a shopping cart, an info sign, an envelope, and a feedback icon. Below the header is a white rectangular form. In the center of the form is the title "Find Your Quest!" in bold purple text. Below the title is a subtitle in smaller gray text: "Obtain a Spring 2025 Carleton course based on your past experience and personal preferences". Underneath the subtitle is a progress indicator showing "01 / 03". The main question asks, "In which department do you already have experience? Choose one!", followed by a dropdown menu labeled "Select a department...". At the bottom of the form is a "Next" button. A cursor arrow is visible at the bottom center of the screen, pointing towards the "Next" button.

# Implementation

How Did We Get Here?





# What is NLP (Natural Language Processing)?



What tools can we use to understand our unique problem?



NLP

CS 111 Introduction to Computer Science 6 credits

This course will introduce you to computer programming and the design of algorithms. By writing programs to solve problems in areas such as image processing, user interface processing, and simple games, you will learn about recursive and iterative programs, complex data structures, data representation, software engineering, and object-oriented design. No previous programming experience is necessary.

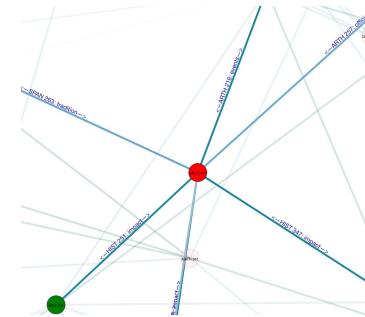
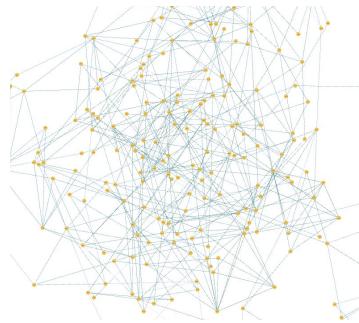
Offered: Fall 2024, Winter 2025, Spring 2025

Liberal Arts Requirements:

- FSR, Formal or Statistical Reasoning
- GRE, Quantitative Reasoning
- FSR, Formal or Statistical Reasoning
- GRE, Quantitative Reasoning
- FSR, Formal or Statistical Reasoning
- GRE, Quantitative Reasoning
- FSR, Formal or Statistical Reasoning
- GRE, Quantitative Reasoning

Prerequisites: NOT open to students who have completed any of the following course(s): CS 201 or greater with a grade of C- or better.

Tags: CS/CSC Core CS Required for Major DS/AI Skill Building STAT Supporting PHYS Field Recommended CL 100 level No Prerequisites



Spring 2025  
Data

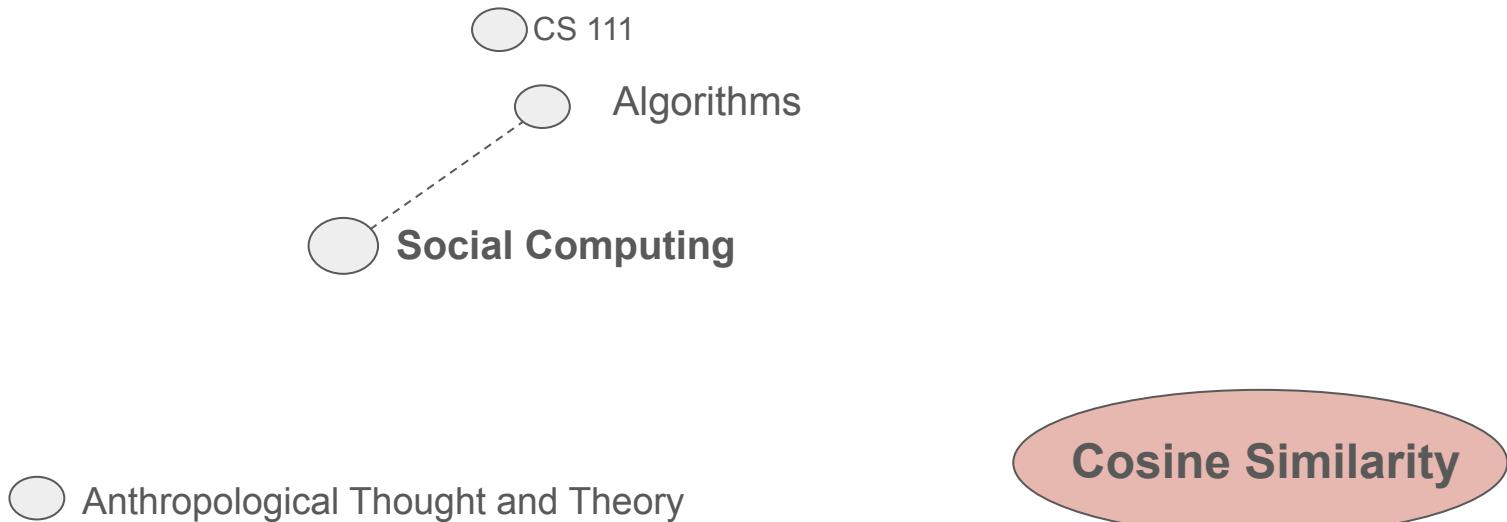


Word2Vec  
+  
Topic Modeling

Web App



# Documents as **Vectors**

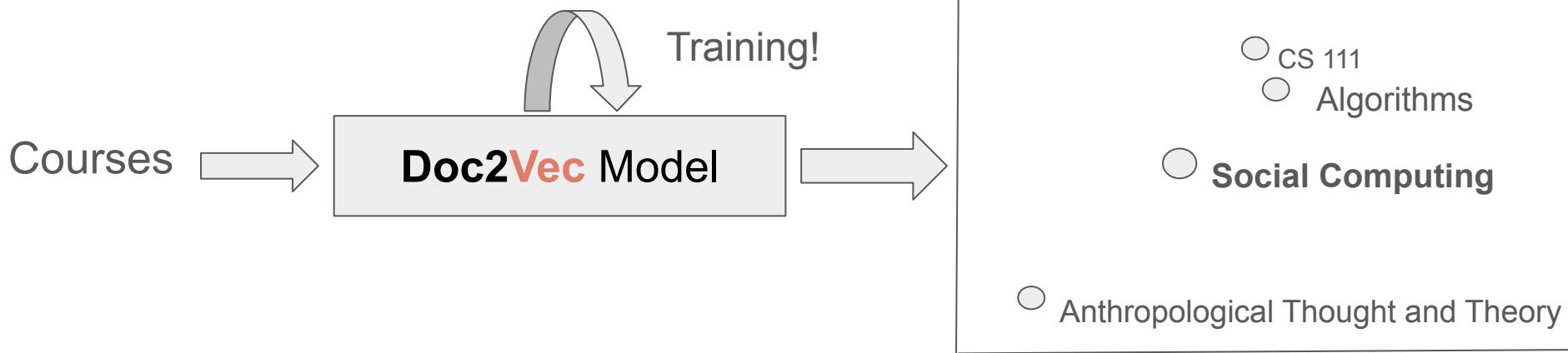




# Doc2Vec

## What Doc2Vec Captures

- Word order
- Document length
- Context





Output Layer

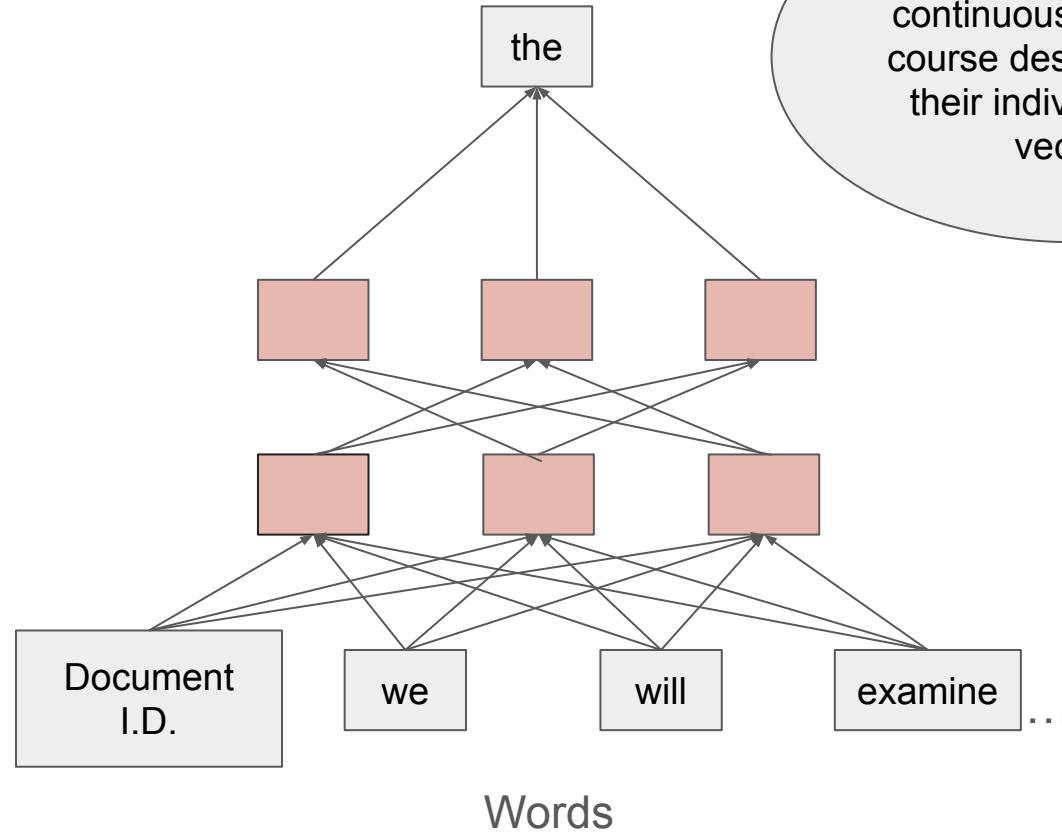
# How?

Main Idea:

continuously tweaking  
course description and  
their individual word  
vectors

Projection Layer

Input Layer





# Evaluation

1. Benchmark Dataset
  - **200** human labeled courses
2. Evaluation Script
  - Compared model to human labels
3. Iterate!
  - Training time
  - Dimensions



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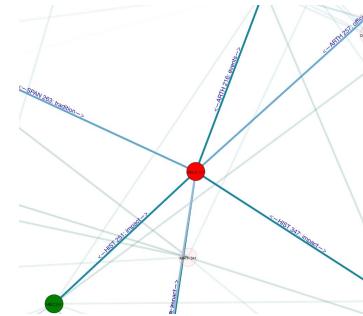
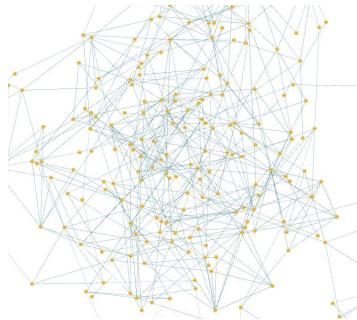
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**Spring 2025**  
**Data**



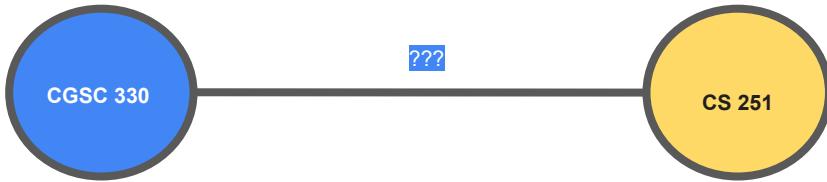
**Doc2Vec**



**Word2Vec  
+  
Topic Modeling**



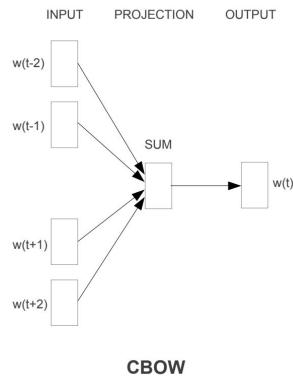
**Web App**



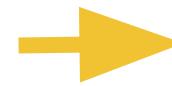
2

The [ wide road shimmered in the ] hot sun.

shimmered, wide  
shimmered, road  
shimmered, in  
shimmered, the



Google News



**Word2Vec  
Model**



## CGSC 330: Embodied Cognition



### Description:

This seminar will consider recent work in philosophy, cognitive science and linguistics critical of views of human cognition as "disembodied" and Cartesian. Philosophical sources of the early critiques of symbolic AI and "cartesianism" will be considered (Merleau-Ponty, Dewey), as will the enactive (Cuffari, Di Paolo, and De Jaegher) and ecological (Chemero, Cowley, Steffensen) critiques of language, and current work on embodied cognition by Eleanor Rosch, Hubert Dreyfus, John Haugeland, Andy Clark and Evan Thompson. The seminar will include materials relevant to students in philosophy, linguistics, psychology and cognitive science.

**Liberal Arts Requirements:**  
Humanistic Inquiry (HI)

**Meeting Day:** TTH

**Time:** TTH: 1:15 PM - 3:00 PM

## Preprocess text

## Model.similarity (AI, CS word)

## Find Highest Similarity Scored Word

## CS 251: Programming Languages: Design and Implementation



### Description:

What makes a programming language like "Python" or like "Java"? This course will look past superficial properties (like indentation) and into the soul of programming languages. We will explore a variety of topics in programming language construction and design: syntax and semantics, mechanisms for parameter passing, typing, scoping, and control structures. Students will expand their programming experience to include other programming paradigms, including functional languages like Scheme and ML.

**Liberal Arts Requirements:**  
Formal or Statistical Reasoning (FSR)

**Meeting Day:** MW, F

**Time:** MW: 9:50 AM - 11:00 AM & F: 9:40 AM - 10:40 AM



calc

**ARTS 230:** Ceramics: Throwing

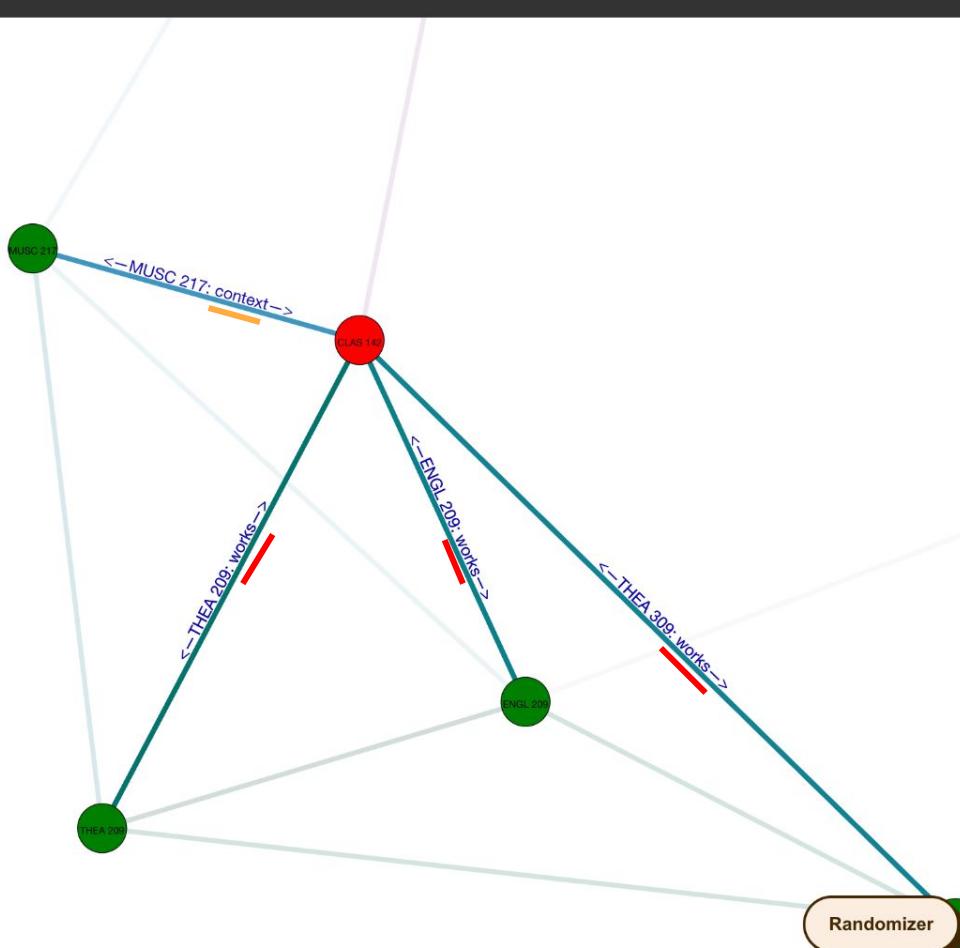
**BIOL 352:** Population Ecology

**MATH 111:** Introduction to Calculus

**MATH 120:** Calculus 2

**MATH 210:** Calculus 3

**MATH 232:** Linear Algebra



## CLAS 142: Being an Heir

**Description:** The bond between fathers and sons is prominent in cinematic sagas, from Star Wars to The Lion King. But is it only a modern concern? What can Greek literature teach us about this relationship in today's societies? This course explores the literary representations of ancient heroic families and traces their portrayals through the works of Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes. We will discuss the context and aims of Greek epic, tragedies and comedies, and investigate the representation of familial legacy, examining how sons can shape their own identity and emerge from their parents' shadows, both then and now.

### Liberal Arts Requirements:

Literary/Artistic Analysis (LA)





Spring 2025  
Data



Topic  
Modeling



### Topic 1

Galaxies (0.85)  
Physical (0.71)  
Phenomena (0.62)  
Structure (0.43)  
Dynamics (0.25)

### Topic 2

Language (0.85)  
Poetry (0.71)  
Word (0.62)  
Poetic (0.43)  
Prose (0.25)



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## Preprocess text

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(AI, CS word)**

**model.similarity  
(AI, CS Topic Keyword)**

**Find Highest Similarity Scored Word**

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Computer Education Machine Algorithm Programming"

**Meeting Day:** MW, F

**Time:** MW: 9:50 AM - 11:00 AM & F: 9:40 AM - 10:40 AM



## CGSC 330: Embodied Cognition



### Description:

This seminar will consider recent work in philosophy, cognitive science and linguistics critical of views of human cognition as "disembodied" and Cartesian. Philosophical sources of the early critiques of symbolic AI and "cartesianism" will be considered (Merleau-Ponty, Dewey), as will the enactive (Cuffari, Di Paolo, and De Jaegher) and ecological (Chemero, Cowley, Steffensen) critiques of language, and current work on embodied cognition by Eleanor Rosch, Hubert Dreyfus, John Haugeland, Andy Clark and Evan Thompson. The seminar will include materials relevant to students in philosophy, linguistics, psychology and cognitive science.

Field, Current, Science,  
Charge, Logic  
Meeting Day: TTH

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Scored Word**

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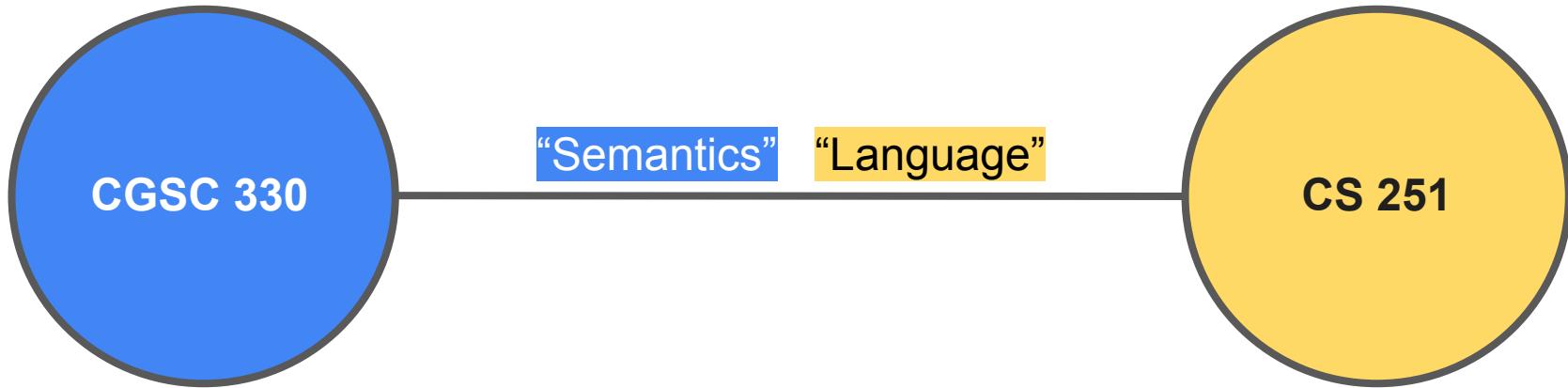
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NLP

CS 111 Introduction to Computer Science 6 credits

9

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Offered: Fall 2024, Winter 2025, Spring 2025

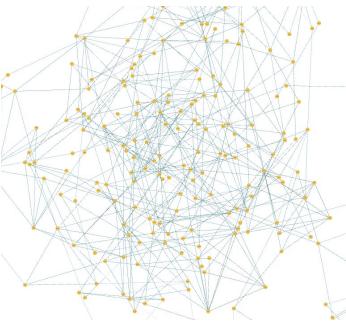
<b>Liberal Arts Requirements:</b>	<b>FSR, Formal or Statistical Reasoning</b>	<b>GRE, Quantitative Reasoning</b>
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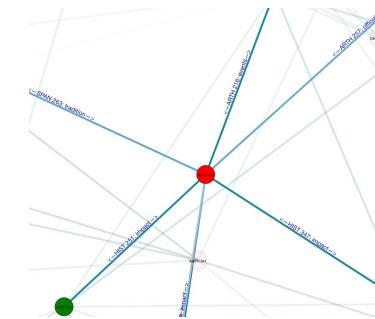
<b>Tags:</b>	<a href="#">CGSC Core</a>	<a href="#">CS Required for Major</a>	<a href="#">DGAH Skill Building</a>	<a href="#">STAT Supporting</a>
	<a href="#">PHYS Add'l Recommended</a>	<a href="#">CL - 500 Level</a>	<a href="#">No Prerequisites</a>	

# Spring 2025

## Data

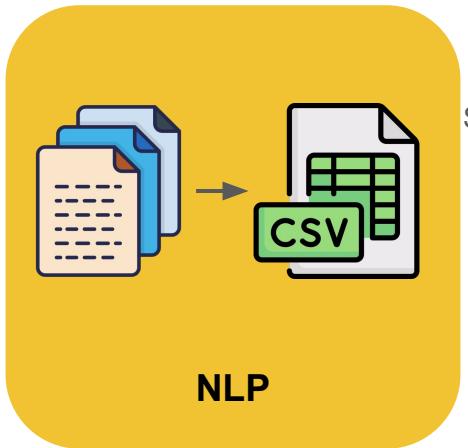


# Doc2Vec

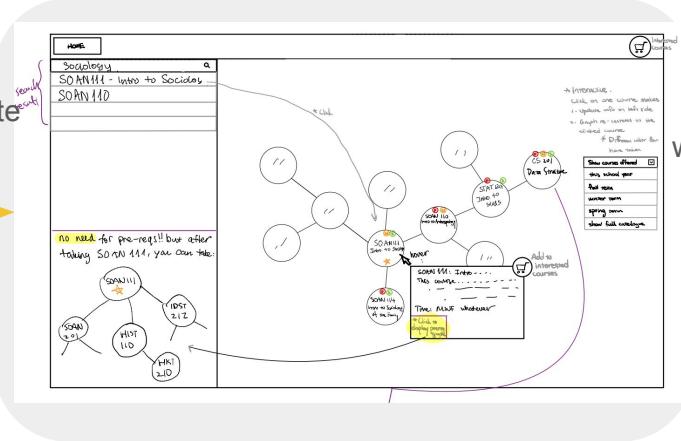


# Word2Vec + Topic Modeling

# Web App

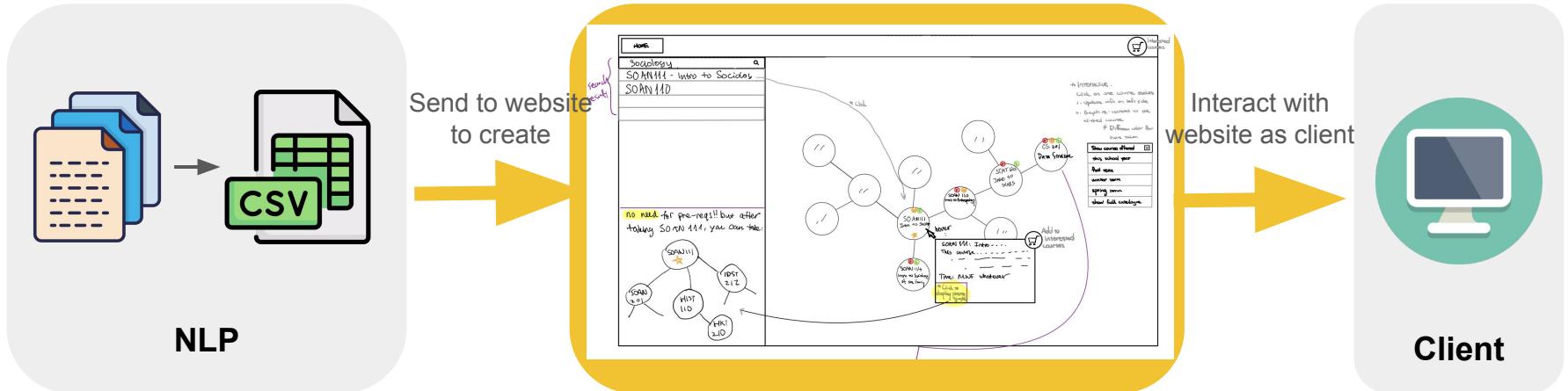


Send to website  
to create

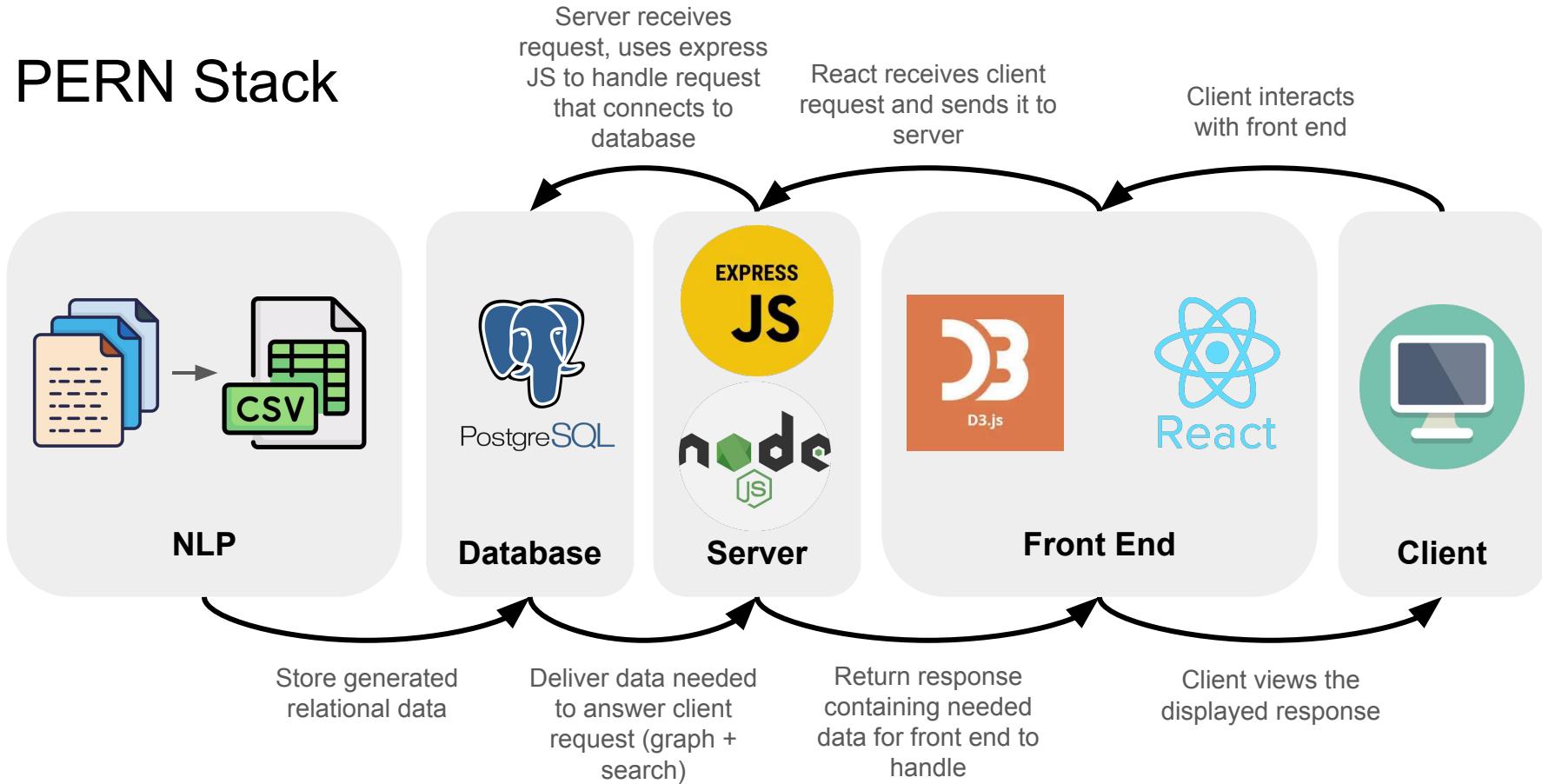


Interact with  
website as client

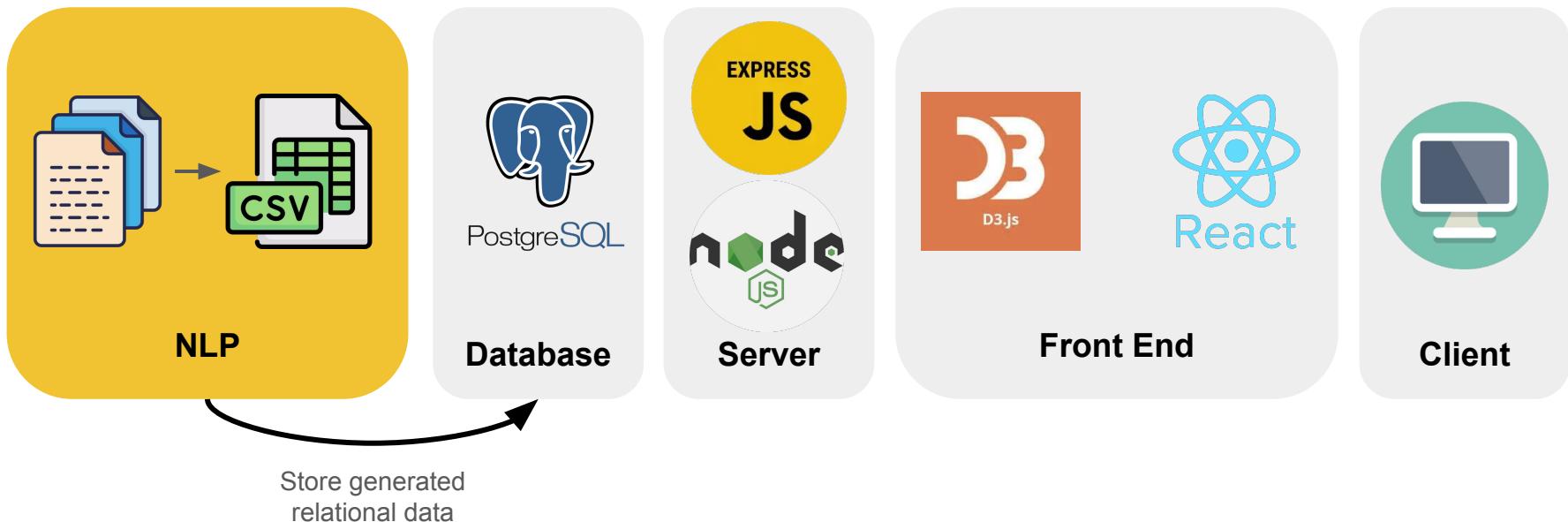




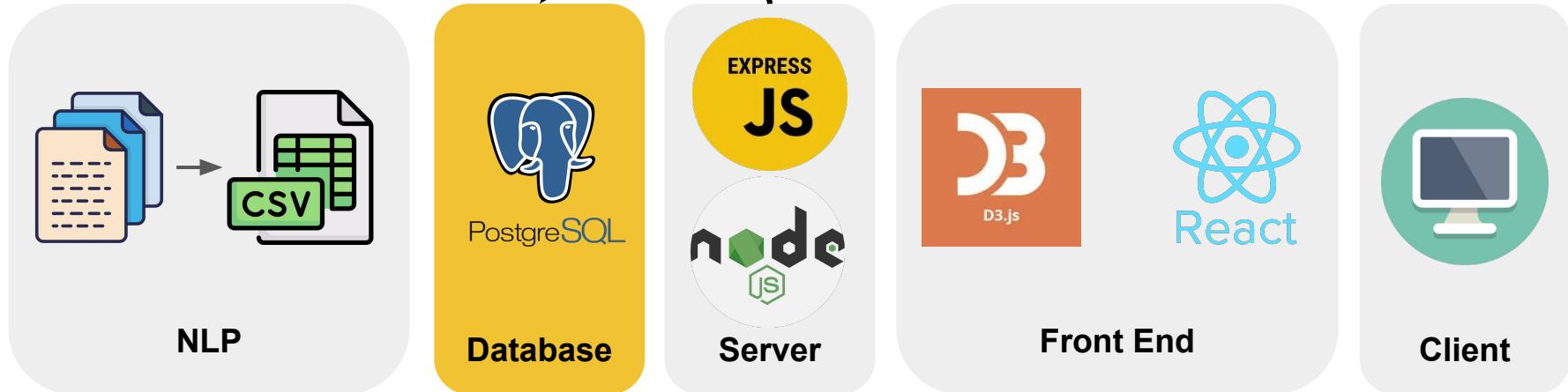
# PERN Stack



# PERN Stack



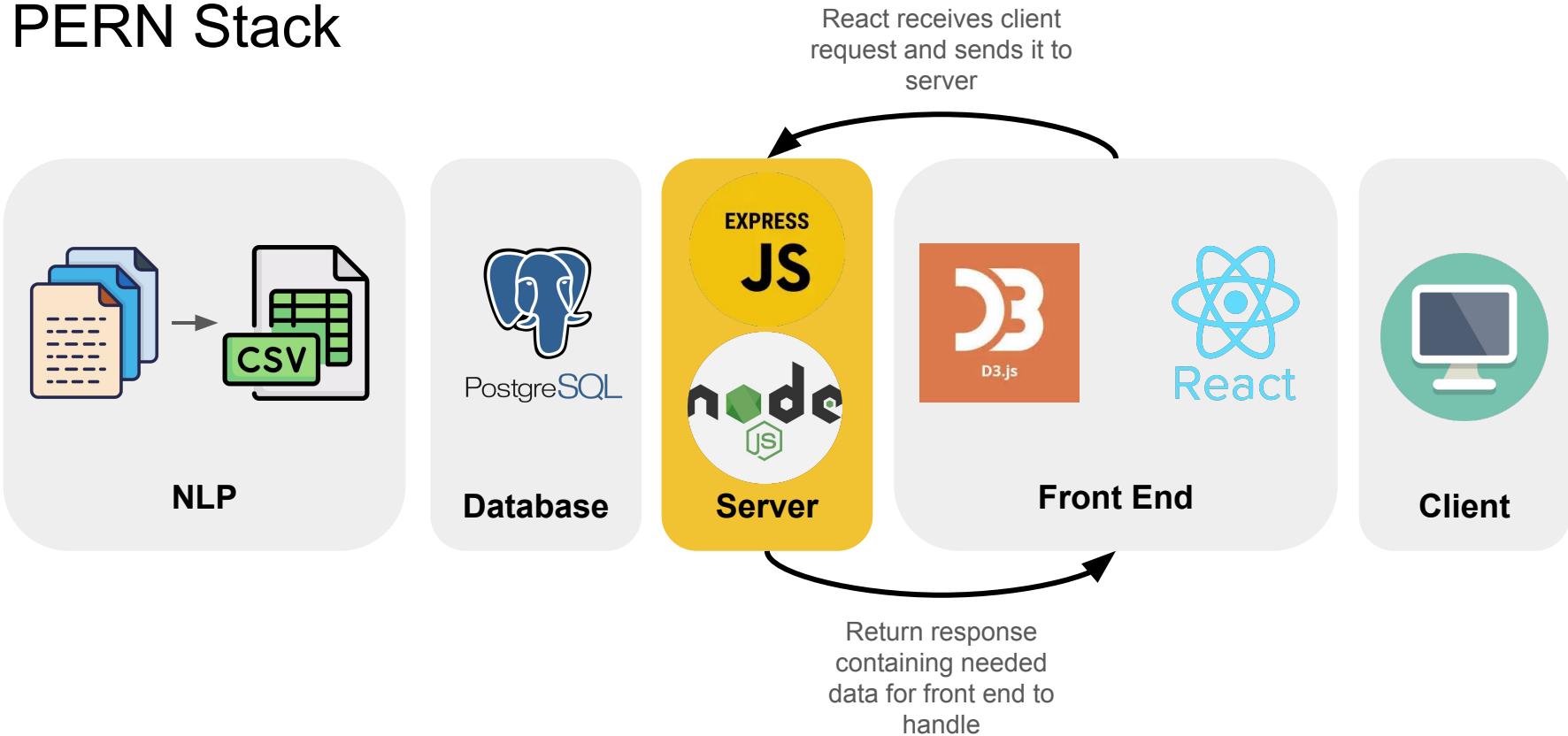
# PERN Stack



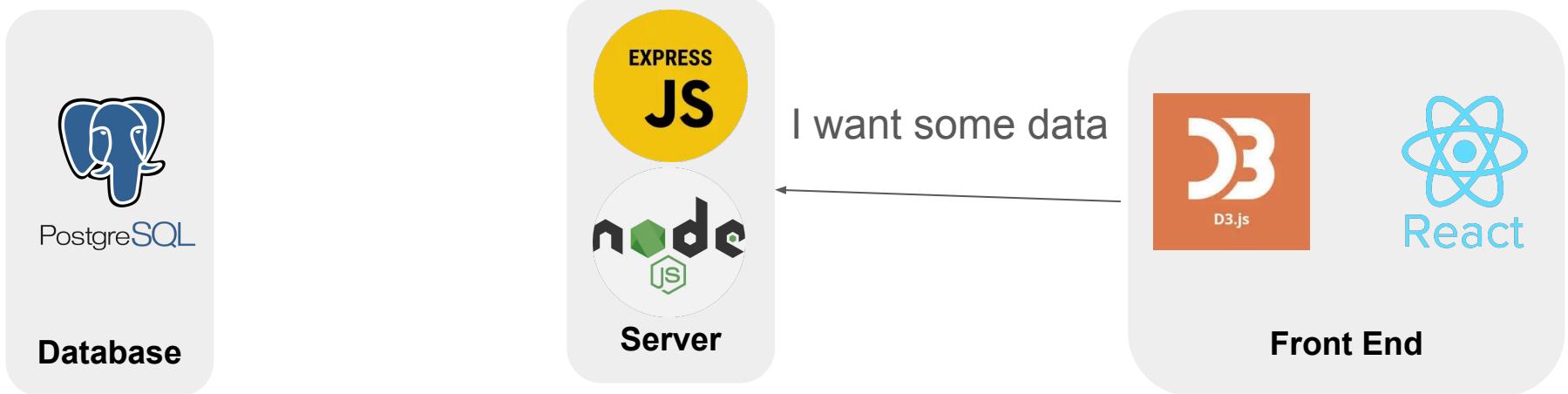
Server receives  
request, uses express  
JS to handle request  
that connects to  
database

Deliver data needed  
to answer client  
request (graph +  
search)

# PERN Stack



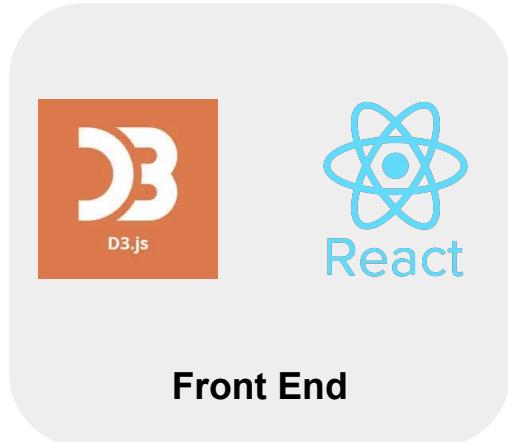
Ok! Let me translate that request



Ok!



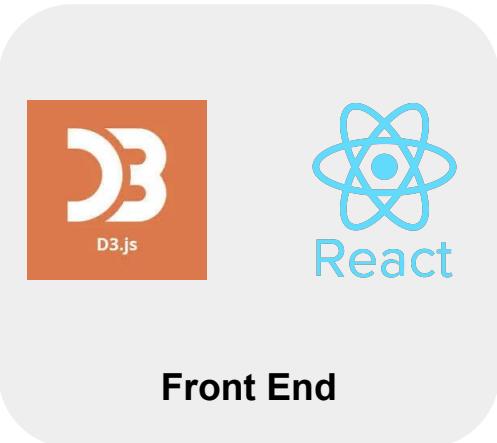
We want some data



Nice! Let me  
convert that

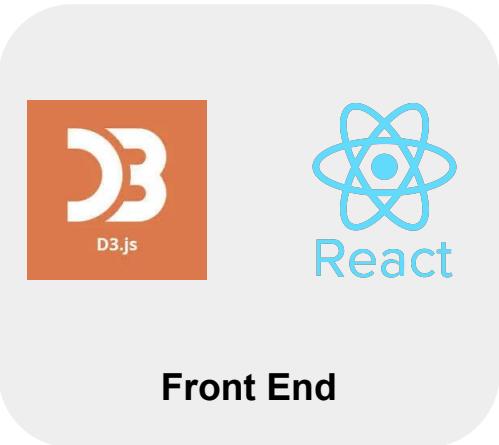


Here's your data



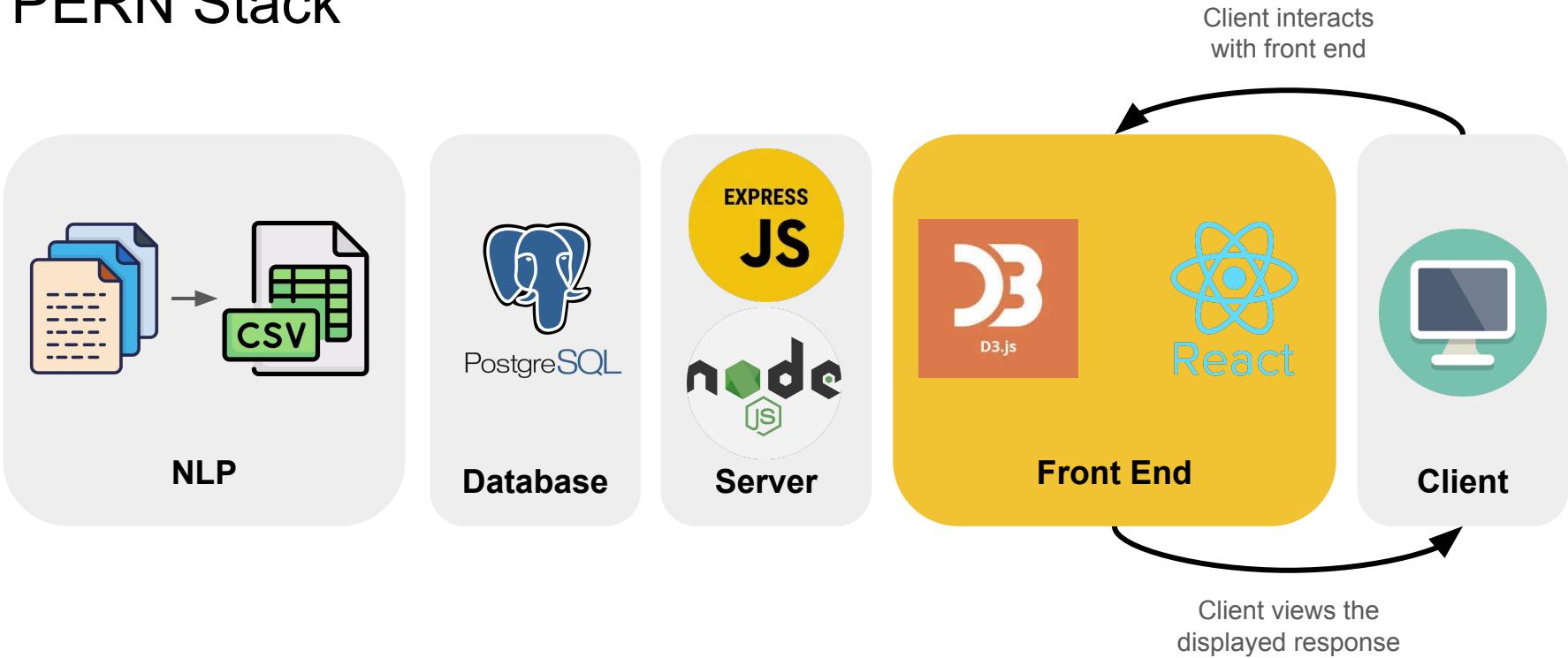


Here's your data



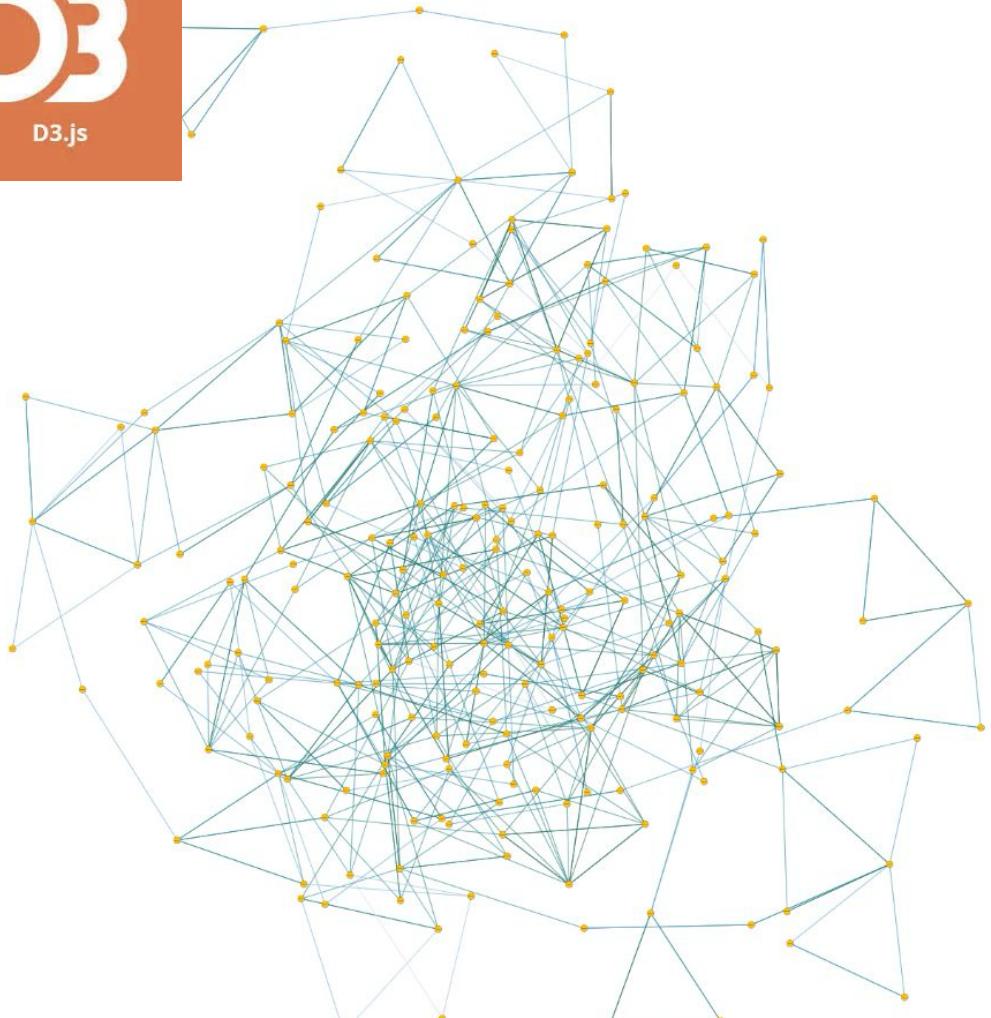
Yay! I'm gonna  
do things now

# PERN Stack

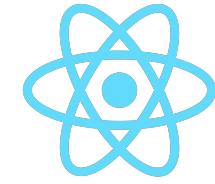




D3.js



- Existing Elements
- Link Data to Elements
- Position
- Color
- Opacity
- Size
- Etc.



xploration



Select a node to view its info!

React

AFST 215: Race, Racism,  
and the Beloved Community  
in the US



AFST 289: Global Blackness  
and Social Movements



AFST 300: Race, Racism,  
and the Beloved Community  
in the US



AMST 115: Intro to  
American Studies



AMST 269: Woodstock  
Nation



AMST 321: Indigenous  
Chicago: Indigenous Histories  
and Futures in Zhegagoynak



AMST 396: Junior Research  
Seminar (Producing  
Latinidad)



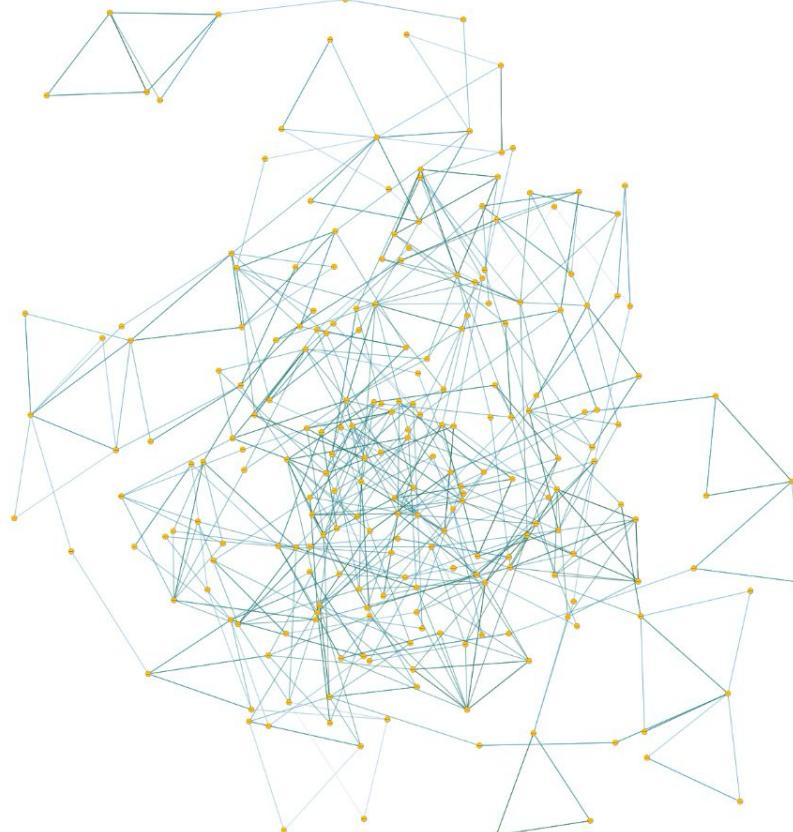
ARBC 103: Elementary  
Arabic



ARBC 206: Arabic in  
Cultural Context



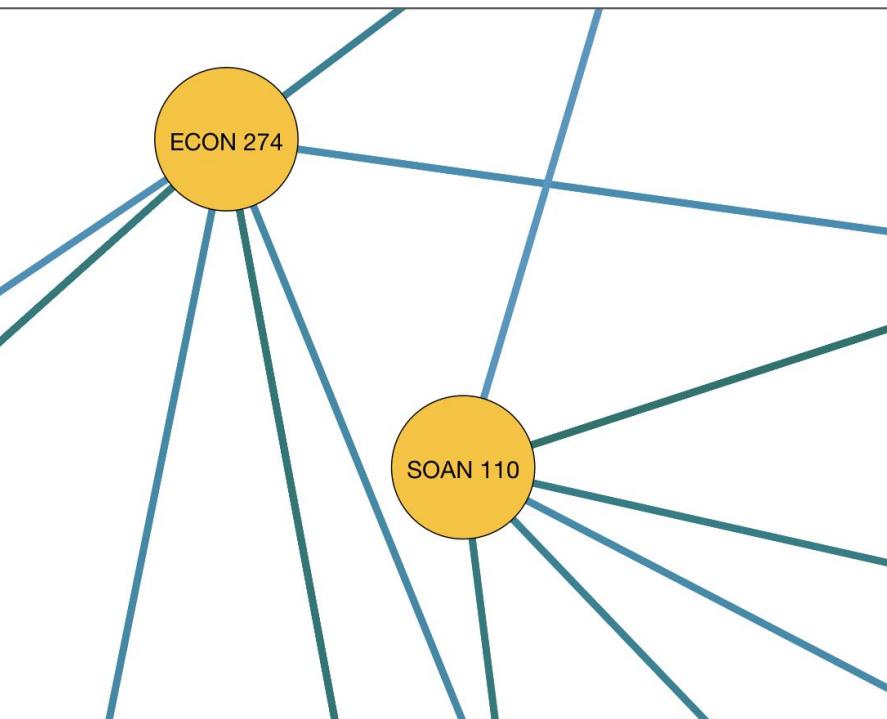
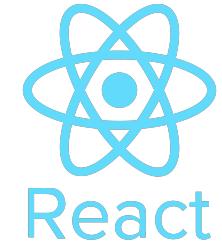
ARBC 222: Music in the  
Middle East



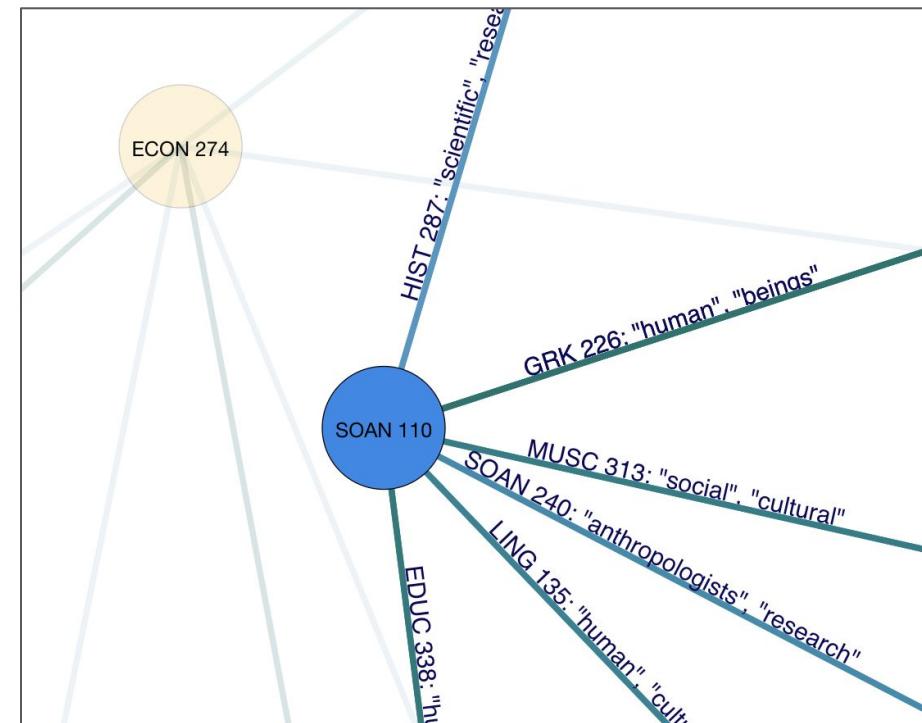
Low

High

Random Course Finder



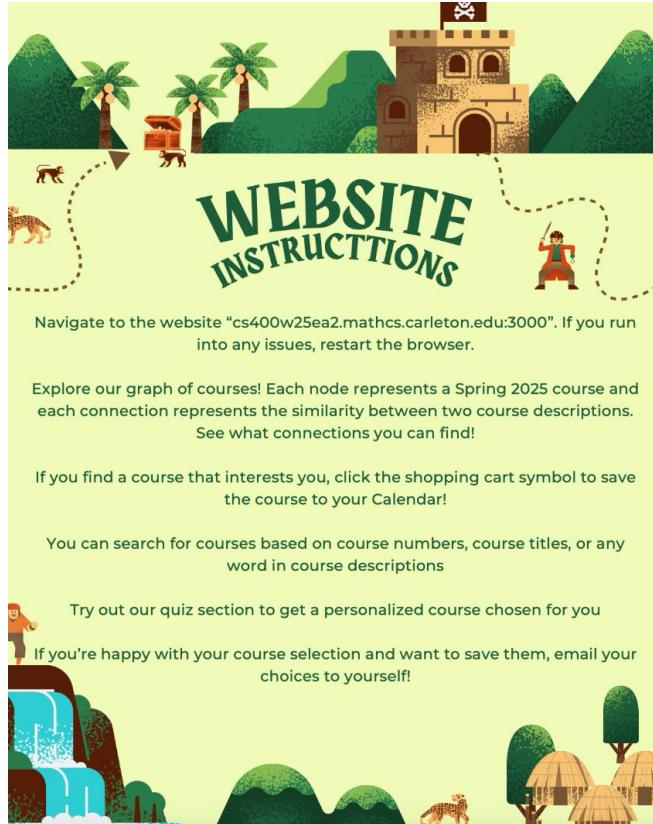
State: Nothing selected



State: SOAN 110 selected

# User Testing

# Installation in Gould Library



## COMPS Installation Evaluation

Please submit feedback based on our prototype website:  
<http://cs400w25ea2.mathcs.carleton.edu:3000/>

\* Indicates required question

# Some Positive Feedback



“Super cool visualization.”

“Super interactive.”

“It was clean, fluid, fun to use on an exploratory level.”

“I liked all the info that came up about each class.”

“The team did a great job at making finding classes easier”

# But Also...

## Graph

- “How are the connections between courses generated?”
- “What are the words on the line?”

# But Also...

## Graph

- “How are the connections between courses generated?”
- “What are the words on the line?”

## Quiz

- “What was the quiz man.”
- “How does the quiz work?”

### Choose your adventurer

Quiz 1 description

01 / 03

DEPARTMENT CHOICE MARKUS EDIT?

✓ AFST  
AMST  
ARBC  
ARCN  
ARTH

Next

# But Also...

## Graph

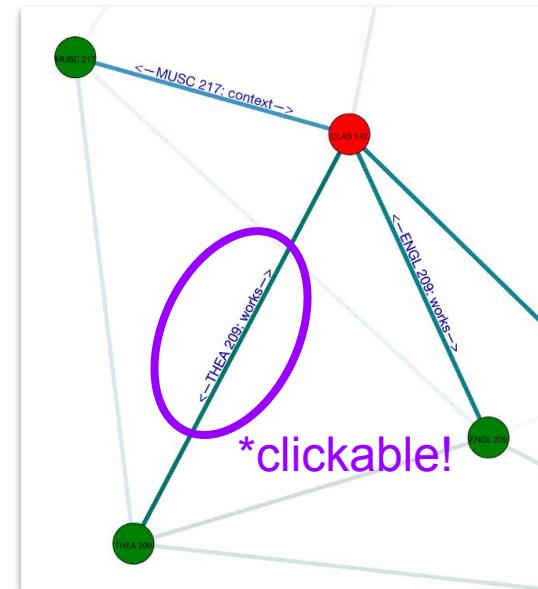
- “How are the connections between courses generated?”
- “What are the words on the line?”

## Quiz

- “What was the quiz man.”
- “How does the quiz work?”

## Website navigation

- Not everyone explored/discovered all of our features
- Interactions: what are the things I can do here?
- Overwhelmed



# Theme

## Graph

Us ..... ? ..... Users

- “How are the connections between courses generated?”
- “What are the words on the line?”

## Quiz

- “What was the quiz man.”
- “How does the quiz work?”

## Website navigation

- Not everyone explored/discovered all of our features
- Interactions: what are the things I can do here?
- Overwhelmed

**Us**

**?**

**Users**

What we are doing

How

**Us** ..... ? ..... ➔ **Users**

What we are doing  
How

**What users can do here**

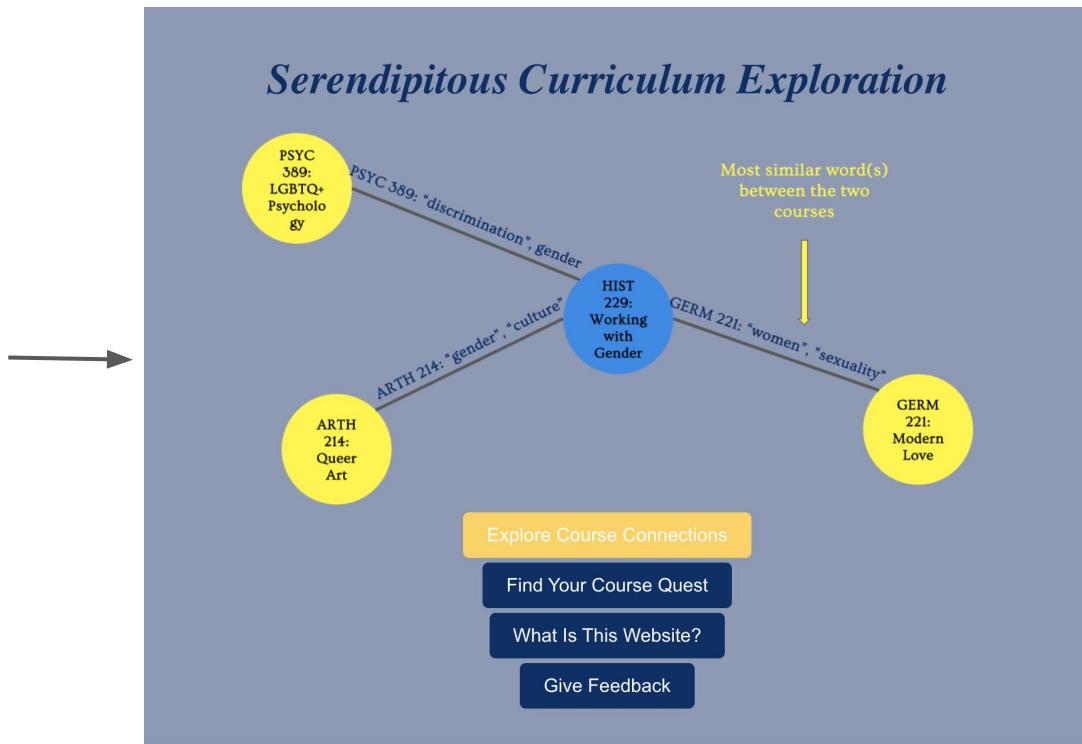
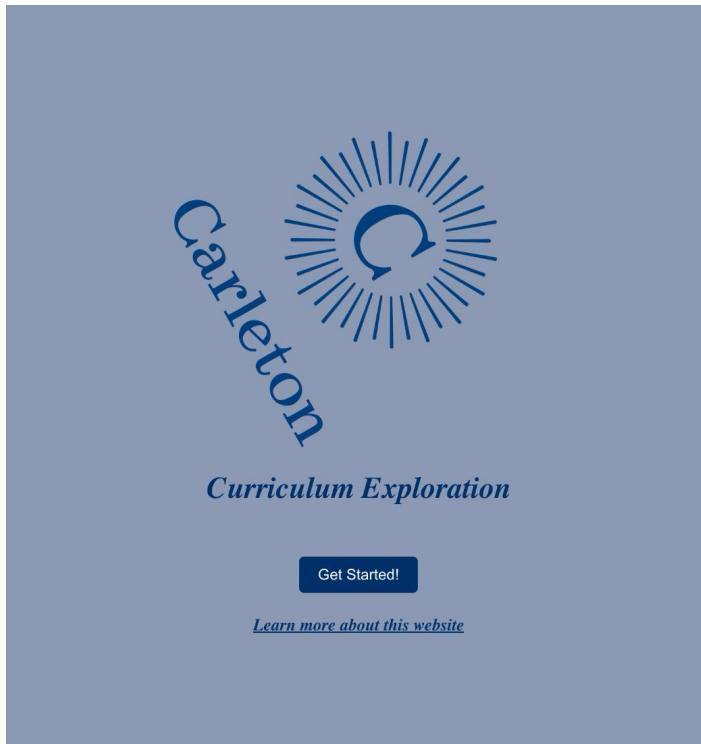
**Us** ..... ? ..... ➔ **Users**

What we are doing  
How

What users can do here

Web App 2.0  
**Intuitive!!!**

# Homepage



# Serendipitous Exploration

Course name, description, or num

**AFST 213:** Race,  
Racism, and the Beloved  
Community in the US +

**AFST 289:** Global  
Blackness and Social  
Movements +

**AFST 300:** Race,  
Racism, and the Beloved  
Community in the US +

**AMST 115:** Intro to  
American Studies +

**AMST 269:** Woodstock  
Nation +

**AMST 321:** Indigenous  
Chicago: Indigenous  
Histories and Futures in  
Zhegagoynak +

**AMST 396:** Junior  
Research Seminar  
(Producing Latinidad)  
+

cs400w25ea2.mathcs.carleton.edu:3000 says

Welcome!

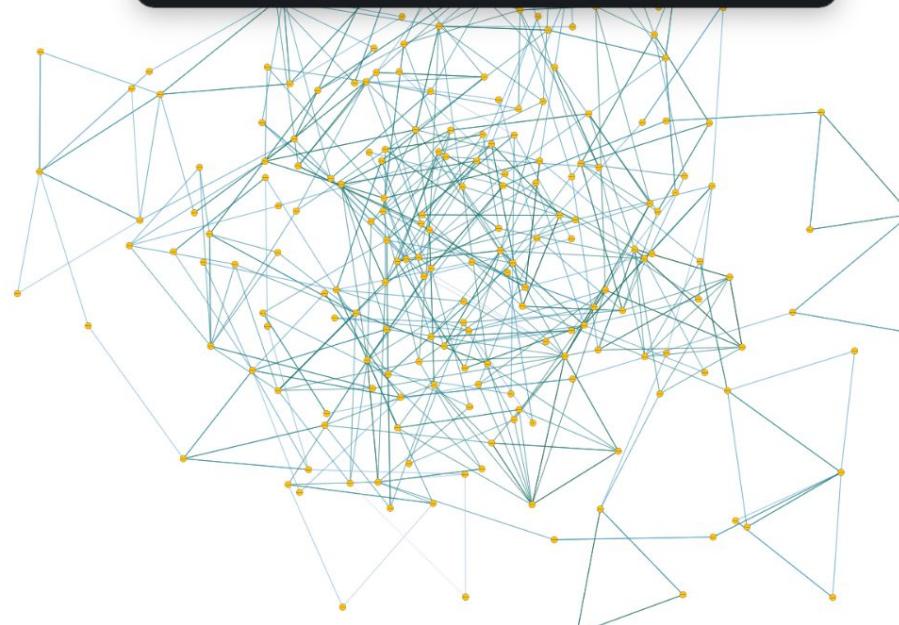
To get started, either:

- Look up a course using the search bar; or
- Click on a node

OK



Select a node to view its info!



Low

High

Random Course Finder

# Serendipitous Exploration

Course name, description, or num



cs400w25ea2.mathcs.carleton.edu:3000 says

Welcome!

To get started, either:

- Look up a course using the search bar; or
- Click on a node

OK



Select a node to view its info!

What can you search for?

This website currently only shows Spring 2025 courses that are:

- 6-credits
- Lab courses

\*Only one section is displayed for courses with multiple sections  
(e.g., 100.01, 100.02)

What's not included:

- PE
- Private music lessons

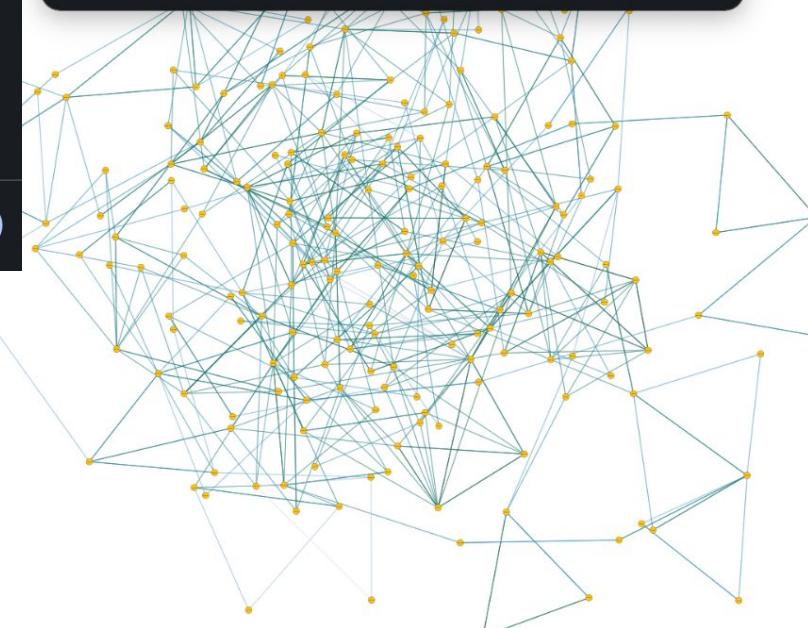
OK

**AMST 115:** Intro to American Studies

**AMST 269:** Woodstock Nation

**AMST 321:** Indigenous Chicago: Indigenous Histories and Futures in Zhegagoynak

**AMST 396:** Junior Research Seminar (Producing Latinidad)



Similarity Between Courses

Low

High

Random Course Finder

Course name, description, or numt



## What can you search for?

This website currently only shows Spring 2025 courses that are:

- 6-credits
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## What's not included:

- PE
- Private music lessons

OK

**AMST 115:** Intro to American Studies 

**AMST 269:** Woodstock Nation 

**AMST 321:** Indigenous Chicago: Indigenous Histories and Futures in Zhegagoynak 

**AMST 396:** Junior Research Seminar (Producing Latinidad) 

**ARBC 103:** Elementary

ARTS 322

## Similarity Between Courses

Low

High

Random Course Finder

**AFST 213: Race, Racism, and the Beloved Community in the US** 

## Description:

Race and racism played a significant role in the construction of the United States of America. But so did the quest for freedom and

You are viewing details about a course!

## What is being shown here?

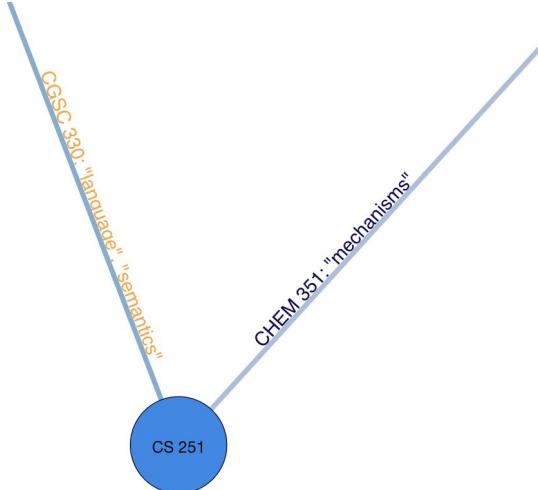
- Similar courses are connected by a line.
- Word(s) on the line explain why they are similar.
- Mouse over to see the word(s) highlighted in the description.
- Click to view the course on the other end of the line.

\*What does "similar" mean? Read our info page to learn more!

OK

shall analyze how their quest for liberation brought America closer to its foundational ideal that all humans are created equal and are endowed with unalienable rights. Offered at both the 200 and 300 levels; coursework will be adjusted accordingly. Students who have previously taken any





### Description:

What makes a programming **language** like "Python" or like "Java"? This course will look past superficial properties (like indentation) and into the soul of programming languages. We will explore a variety of topics in programming **language** construction and design: syntax and **semantics**, mechanisms for parameter passing, typing, scoping, and control structures. Students will expand their programming experience to include other programming paradigms, including functional languages like Scheme and ML.

# Serendipitous Exploration



Course name, description, or numt



**AFST 213:** Race,  
Racism, and the Beloved  
Community in the US



**AFST 289:** Global  
Blackness and Social  
Movements



**AFST 300:** Race,  
Racism, and the Beloved  
Community in the US



**AMST 115:** Intro to  
American Studies



**AMST 269:** Woodstock  
Nation



**AMST 321:** Indigenous  
Chicago: Indigenous  
Histories and Futures in  
Zhegagoynak



**AMST 396:** Junior  
Research Seminar  
(Producing Latinidad)



**ARBC 103:** Elementary

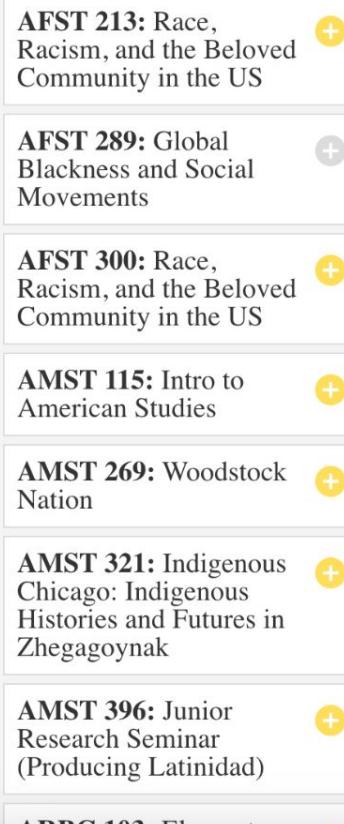


Similarity Between Courses

Low

High

Random Course Finder



**AFST 213: Race, Racism,  
and the Beloved  
Community in the US**



## Description:

Race and racism played a significant role in the construction of the United States of America. But so did the quest for a more perfect union and the beloved community. This course introduces students to the complexity of racial ideology and the ways it privileges one group of people while placing others at a disadvantage. We shall examine the experiences of all racialized groups (Blacks, Asians, American Indians, Latinos) and how they resisted the injustice against them. Most importantly, we shall analyze how their quest for liberation brought America closer to its foundational ideal that all humans are created equal and are endowed with unalienable rights. Offered at both the 200 and 300 levels; coursework will be adjusted accordingly. Students who have previously taken any

# Quiz

**Choose your adventurer**

Quiz 1 description

01 / 03

DEPARTMENT CHOICE MARKUS EDIT?

- ✓ AFST
- AMST
- ARBC
- ARCN
- ARTH

Next

## Find Your Quest!

Obtain a Spring 2025 Carleton course based on your past experience and personal preferences

01 / 03

In which department do you already have experience? Choose one!

Select a department... ▾

Next

\* More descriptions +  
better visuals  
**Quiz**

**Choose your adventurer**

Quiz 1 description

01 / 03

DEPARTMENT CHOICE MARKUS EDIT?

- ✓ AFST
- AMST
- ARBC
- ARCN
- ARTH

Next

## Find Your Quest!

Obtain a Spring 2025 Carleton course based on your past experience and personal preferences

01 / 03

In which department do you already have experience? Choose one!

Select a department... ▾

Next

# Where We Are Now + Next Steps

- Collecting feedback on 2.0
  - \*Please go to our website and leave feedback!
- Make improvements accordingly after code thaw

# Acknowledgements

Special thanks to our Comps adviser, Eric Alexander

And thank you to:

Mike Tie and Lazuli, *for helping us with the server*

The Library staff, *for helping us with the installation*

The Registrar Office staff, *for helping us getting data for the project*

Everybody we interviewed and those who gave feedback on our website

The CS Department, *for setting up the CS Gala*

All of you who joined us today!

# Any Questions?

Check out our Website!

<http://cs400w25ea2.mathcs.carleton.edu:3000/>

(Chrome, computer, eduroam)