

Introduction to Computational Physics

PHYS 250 (Autumn 2018) – Lecture 1

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September 27, 2018

Outline

1 *Introduction*

2 *Computational approaches generally*

3 *Software*

4 *Resources*

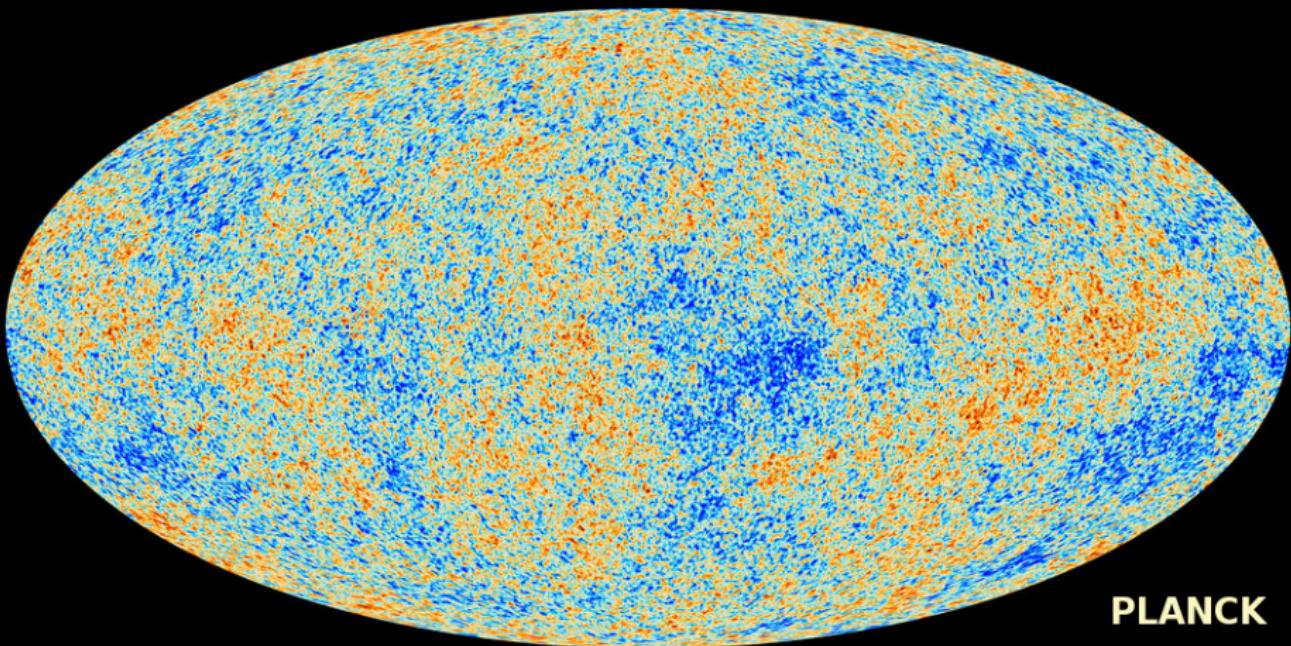
5 *Conclusions*

Computational Physics (PHYS 250)

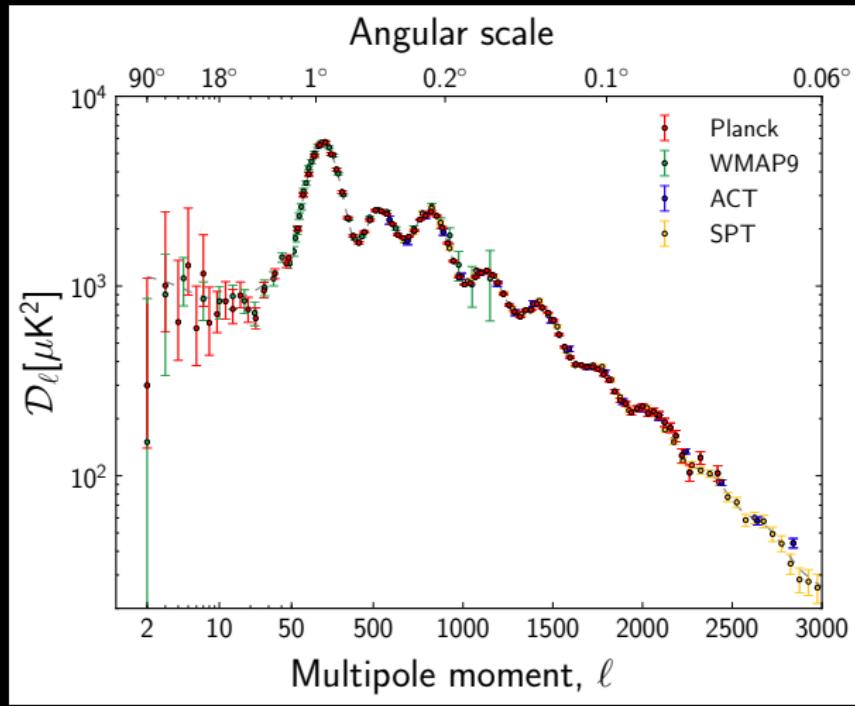
Course Description PHYS 250 ([link to Course Catalog](#))

This course introduces the use of computers in the physical sciences. After an introduction to programming basics, we cover numerical solutions to fundamental types of problems, including cellular automata, artificial neural networks, computer simulations of complex systems, and finite element analysis. Additional topics may include an introduction to graphical programming, with applications to data acquisition and device control.

There are an infinite number of paths that we might follow and still not deviate from this description. I therefore would like to lay out some of the principles that will guide me, and us, in how we navigate through those many possibilities.



The Nature of Science: Science is all about models. We look at something in real life and try to make a model of it. We can use this model to predict future (or new) events in real life. If the model doesn't agree with real data, we change the model. Repeat forever. [From Wired]



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Theory and Practice (or... Theory and Experiment)

We often divide the world of science (and perhaps even moreso, Physics) into two deeply related and intertwined but often distinct categories of activities and research:

- **Theoretical:** building models
- **Experimental:** testing models

We use computers to do *both* of these crucial activities!

In doing so, we often blur the distinction between the two, as well.

Overarching Learning Goals for this Quarter

- **Identify models** that benefit from or require **computational/numerical approaches** and tools to either develop and understand or to evaluate.
- Develop an **algorithmic approach** to addressing those problems computationally.
- Familiarity with **common computational models and algorithms** and numerical approaches to typical problems.
- Use **modern, high-level programming languages** to implement the computational algorithms.
- Use modern software tools for **developing, preserving, disseminating, and expanding** on those solutions.
- **Apply computational tools** to contemporary physics questions.

The role of the physicist

“The computer is incredibly fast, accurate, and stupid. Man is incredibly slow, inaccurate, and brilliant. The marriage of the two is a force beyond calculation.”

→ Maybe this is a quote from Albert Einstein, maybe it is from [Leo Cherne](#)...I'm not sure, but it's certainly true.



Some of the specific problems that we will tackle

There are literally hundreds of texts, and even more webpages and software repos, for computational physics, methods, numerical recipes.

→ **I have chosen a subset of ubiquitous problems and which are the “bread and butter” of nearly all domains in physics and beyond.**

- Programming basics and Software design concepts
- Basic visualization
- Random numbers, errors
- Ising model, Metropolis algo
- Minimization
- Monte Carlo method
- Ordinary differential equations
- Partial differential equations
- Fourier transforms
- Data analysis techniques
- Neural networks

I hope you walk out of this class able to effectively engage with most of the computational physics issues and tools in a modern research group.

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Algorithmic and process-based thinking

You probably already learned in your first year courses that certain approaches to problem solving in physics are important to efficiently identifying solutions and paths through a particular problem.

Before we get into any code, let's discuss the thought process behind developing a computational model or approach to problem solving.

Thinking like a machine

From the Kinder & Nelson text

Human-readable (high level) instructions to start a car

Put the key **in** the ignition

Turn the key until the engine starts,
then let go

Push the button on the shifter **and** move it
to REVERSE

...

Bug!!!

Press down the left pedal # *Needed for some cars*

Machine-readable (low level) instructions

Grab the wide end of the key

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Logical vs. algorithmic instructions

Let's say you want to write an algorithm to calculate the area of a circle.

- ① Write “pseudocode” or the **logical instructions** for the algorithm
- ② Extend pseudocode with **parameters and input/output**
- ③ Specify algorithm **explicitly**

Pseudocode algorithm for area calculation

```
calculate area of circle # Do this computer!
```

Better algorithm for area calculation

```
read radius           # Input
calculate area of circle # Numeric
print area           # Output
```

Actual algorithm for area calculation

```
radius = input("Specify radius") # Input
pi     = 3.141593               # Set constant
area   = pi * radius^2          # Algorithm
print("Area = " + area)         # Output
```

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Translate algorithmic thinking into a development process

We can adapt to the need for algorithmic thinking by adopting a process for developing algorithms, computational approaches, and software generally.

Step 1: write the algorithm down on paper

Step 2: think

If: you don't understand everything

Then: goto Step 1

Else: continue

Step 3: write pseudocode

Step 4: think

If: you don't understand everything

Then: goto Step 3

Else: continue

Step 5: write actual code

Step 6: test code with unit tests

If: code does not unit checks

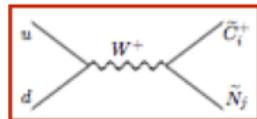
Then: goto Step 5

Else: continue

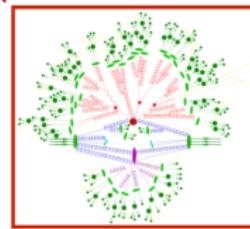
Step 7: publish!

Alas, sometimes, it's a bit more complicated than that...

Simulation of hard-scatter for signal + SM background



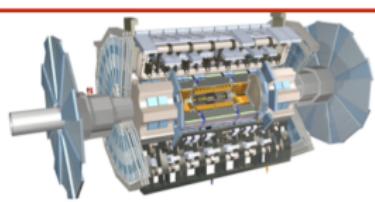
Simulation of “soft physics”
(shower + hadronization)



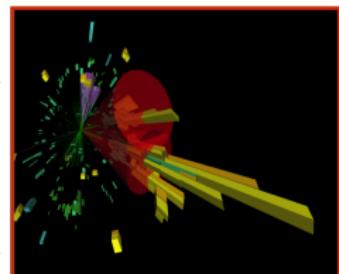
LHC real data



Detector simulation

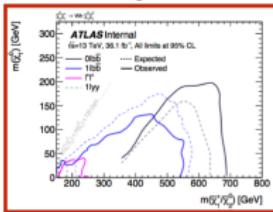


Reconstruction of physical observables

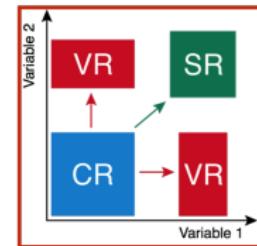
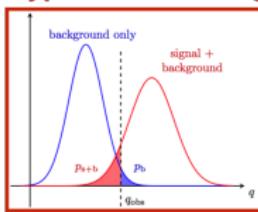


Event selection and background estimation

Discovery or exclusion



Hypothesis testing



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Version control

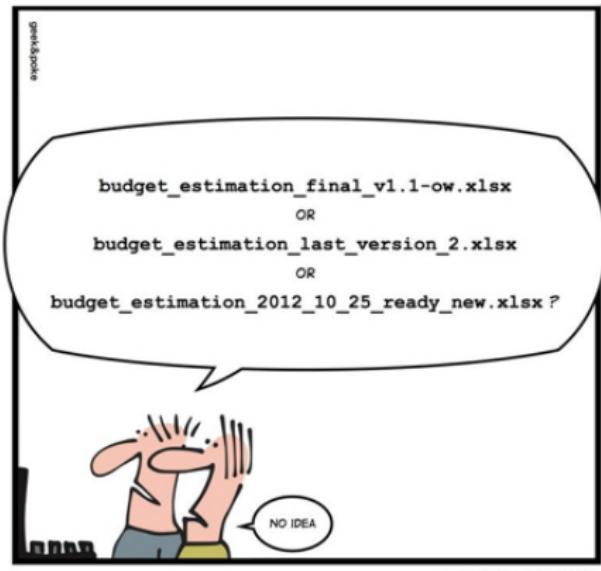
- The most important message of this slide is simple...**Use a software version control system for all of your code**
 - And that means now...not tomorrow or next week
 - Because if you wait until you need it, it will be too late

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SIMPLY EXPLAINED



VERSION CONTROL

A brief history of version control

- **The first version control systems were designed to be used on large systems where everyone logged into the same machine**
 - They tracked code on the same filesystem where it lived (e.g., in a subdirectory)
 - SCCS and RCS are examples
- **Then client-server systems were developed, so that developers could work on their own machines**
 - Checking code into a central server to share and collaborate
 - CVS and SVN are examples
- **More recently distributed version control systems have arisen**
 - These are decentralised, so everyone has a complete copy of the repository
 - Gives a lot of freedom to developers to share and merge as they like, so liked very much by the open source community
 - git, mercurial and bit keeper are examples

git, GitHub, & GitLab

<https://git-scm.com>, <https://github.com>, <https://about.gitlab.com>

- **git is the most popular open source version control system**
 - can host huge projects (Linux Kernel, LHC experiment software, etc)
 - scales very well and it's extremely fast and powerful
 - very flexible (= complex)
- **Distributed version control systems (`git`) are great, but they're made even better by using a social coding site (`GitHub` or `GitLab`)**
- **These sites allow developers:**
 - browse code easily
 - compare different versions
 - take copies (a.k.a. fork)
 - offer patches back to upstream repositories
 - And discuss and review these patches before acceptance
 - even build websites
- **The best known social coding site is GitHub, but there are others, e.g. BitBucket and GitLab**
 - Familiarity with `git/GitHub/GitLab` will serve you well, trust me

ATLAS Experiment analysis software package on GitHub

ATLAS Run II analysis framework for AnalysisTop and AnalysisBase for proton-smashing physics <https://ucatlas.github.io/xAODAnaHelp...>

physics-analysis high-energy-physics analysis-framework

1,911 commits	16 branches	130 releases	40 contributors
Branch: master ▾	New pull request	Create new file	Upload files
Create new file	Upload files	Find file	Clone or download ▾
kratsg Custom jvt cuts need to use detector-eta (#1250)		Latest commit ec9c86b 17 hours ago	
Root	Custom jvt cuts need to use detector-eta (#1250)	17 hours ago	
ci	deploy to multiple repos instead (#1126)	9 months ago	
cmake	Add bash command line completion for xAH_run.py in CMake (#1038)	a year ago	
data	A few more changes to autoconfigure PRW (#1223)	3 months ago	
docs	Add TauJet track matching (#1242)	18 days ago	
python	remove is_release20. resolves #1243 (#1246)	4 days ago	
scripts	remove is_release20. resolves #1243 (#1246)	4 days ago	
xAODAnaHelpers	Keep OR of triggers together for extra chains (#1186)	17 days ago	
.gitignore	large-R area info (#736)	2 years ago	
.travis.yml	Fixing compilation warning for deprecated jet jvt efficiency tool hea... (2 months ago	
CMakeLists.txt	Fixing compilation warning for deprecated jet jvt efficiency tool hea... (2 months ago	
CONTRIBUTING.md	Add analysis top (#1125)	9 months ago	
README.md	Remove RootCore functionality (#1124)	9 months ago	

GitHub & GitLab resources

GitHub is a free resource as long as your code remains public (you can pay for private repositories). The Physical Sciences Division (PSD) at UChicago hosts a **private GitLab** repository.

- <https://psdcomputing.uchicago.edu/page/psd-repo>



PSD Repo



PSD Repo is a software source code repository managed by the PSD Computing office

UC LDAP	Standard
UC LDAP Username	
<input type="text" value="johndoe"/>	
Password	
<input type="password" value="*****"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Remember me	
Sign in	

PHYS 250 GitHub

<https://github.com/UChicagoPhysics/PHYS250>

Course materials are hosted in the **GitHub** UChicagoPhysics repository

The screenshot shows the GitHub repository page for 'UChicagoPhysics / PHYS250'. At the top, there are buttons for 'Watch' (0), 'Star' (0), and 'Fork' (0). Below that is a navigation bar with links for 'Code', 'Issues 0', 'Pull requests 0', 'Projects 0', 'Wiki', 'Insights', and 'Settings'. The main content area is titled 'University of Chicago PHYS 250 Computational Physics software repository' and includes a 'Manage topics' link and an 'Edit' button. Below this, it displays statistics: '15 commits', '1 branch', '0 releases', and '1 contributor'. A 'Branch: master' dropdown and a 'New pull request' button are also present. The commit history table lists the following changes:

File	Description	Time
fizist	Update example	Latest commit efe9be5 25 minutes ago
Examples	Update example	25 minutes ago
LearningGoals	UPdate Learning Goals	22 hours ago
Slides	Update Lecture 1 Slides	an hour ago
Syllabus	Updates to syllabus	22 hours ago
.gitignore	Update slides for day 1	3 days ago
README.md	Update README.md	3 days ago

- Slides (e.g. *these!*), syllabi, learning goals, and code examples
- Stable versions will be cross-posted to **Canvas** as well.
- Homework submission will be done via **GitHub** (*instructions to come*)

Python as our programming language

From www.python.org

Python is a dynamic object-oriented programming language that can be used for many kinds of software development. It offers strong support for integration with other languages and tools, comes with extensive standard libraries, and can be learned in a few days.

And in my own words:

- It is **ubiquitous, flexible, useful, and relatively easy**

From IEEE Spectrum rankings (July 2018):



Hello world!

Interactive in the python interpreter

```
python  
>>> print "hello world"  
hello  
>>> CTRL-d # to exit python
```

From a script (containing the above print line):

```
python helloworld.py
```

Self-running script:

```
#!/usr/bin/env python  
# This script prints hello to the screen  
print "hello world"
```

```
chmod +x helloworld.py  
.helloworld.py  
hello world
```

Hello Gaussian!

Code example

```
import numpy as np
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt

def p(x):
    return np.exp(-x**2)

#let's plot it
x = np.linspace(-3,3,100)
y = p(x)
plt.plot(x,y)
plt.show()
```

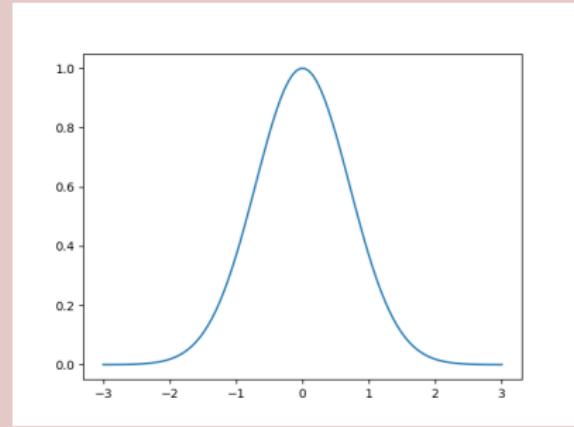
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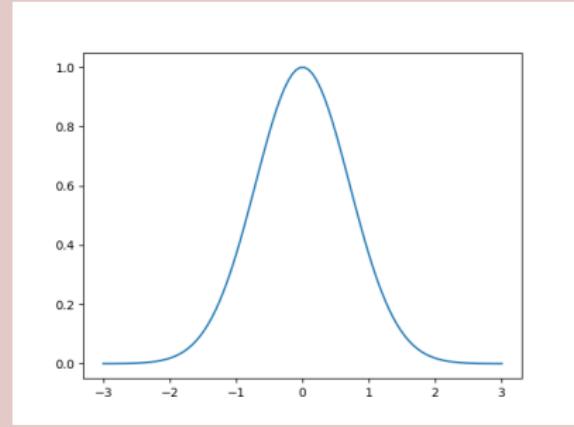
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```



But what about that `linspace` thingy? Google it! ([numpy docs](#))

```
numpy.linspace(start, stop, num=50, endpoint=True,  
retstep=False, dtype=None)
```

“Returns num evenly spaced samples, calculated over the interval [start, stop].”

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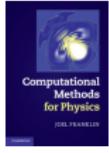
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Textbooks that I suggest

Author	Textbook	Comments
	Kinder & Nelson A Student's Guide to Python for Physical Modeling	Very good for python examples, not great for physics principles
	Franklin Computational Methods for Physics	Amazing for physical principles, no python
	Landau, Paez, Bordeianu Computational Physics, Problem Solving with Python	Great for both physics and python
	Halterman Fundamentals of C++ Programming	Great for physical principles, no python

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Conclusions

- Something