

FIN 418: Quantitative Finance with Python  
Course Syllabus – Summer 2021

Instructor:

Professor Alan Moreira , alan.moreira@simon.rochester.edu  
Associate Professor of Finance

Course Logistics:

- Tuesday (Room S404 AND Zoom (see blackboard for link))
- Thursdays 8:30 - 10:00, (S404 and zoom) and Thursday 13:30-14:30 (Zoom)
- Lab, Friday 8:30-9:30, Zoom

Tuesday and Thursday classes are mandatory. Lab is optional.

Office hours:

- See Blackboard and Campuswire for information

Instructor and TAs available for questions on CampusWire.

Teaching Assistants:

- Yuchi Yao
- Yushan Zhuang (Lab leader)

Important dates, Assignments, and Exams

- **Final Exam: 12/18 9 a.m**
- **Problem set: due Thursday Midnight (Eastern Time), first due 6/3!**
- **Final Project: Due 7/17 Midnight**

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Course Information

1. Course Description and Learning Objectives

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This is a data driven course where we will apply the key finance concepts studied in Fin 402 and Fin 411 to real financial market data. While analyzing data, we will learn Python, one of the most popular programming languages. Among many things, we will use Python to: characterize movements in security prices, evaluate investments in mutual funds, test asset pricing models, construct and evaluate portfolios, understand high-frequency data, and relate asset price movements with firm fundamentals. The core goal is to teach you to be a skilled empirical analyst with ability to analyze large data sets.

You do not need to know Python to take this class, but knowledge of programming in some language will make your life a lot easier. It will be very hard for you to succeed in this class without learning Python as most problem sets will be submitted in Jupyter Notebook format.

Previous exposure to Finance is a must. You should have taken or be simultaneously enrolled in Fin 411. If you haven't studied finance before or is studying currently, you will find this class very challenging. The focus of this class is on the "investment" side of finance rather than the corporate side.

## 2. Communication and Office Hours

Neither me or the TAs will answer questions by email.

We're using CAMPUSWIRE for class discussion. Rather than emailing your questions, post on CAMPUSWIRE publicly. Personal/delicate questions can be posted privately to me or the TA's in the CAMPUSWIRE platform.

Please answer your classmate's questions; it's a huge help to us, and even if you're wrong everyone learns (we check the answers and clear up confusion).

Also, we encourage you to take credit for your questions and answers (rather than posting anonymously)! You will earn participation points for questions that you ask and, specially, questions from your colleagues that you answer.

First thing that you have to do is go to course blackboard site <https://learn.rochester.edu/>. and sign up for CAMPUSWIRE from there. You be asked to set a password of your choosing and after that you will be able to go to CAMPUSWIRE directly though the class page.

## 3. Required Material

You should bring a computer to every class with

- Software installed as described in class website

These books are very useful but are not mandatory

- "Asset Management: A systematic approach to factor investing", Andrew Ang
- "Investments", Bodie-Kane-Marcus
- "Python for Data Analysis: Data Wrangling with Pandas, NumPy, and IPython", Wes McKinney (Pandas book)

Problem sets will be due most weeks and are to be done in groups of 5 people. The problem sets will consist mostly of data analysis and replication of studies with some extensions of the data analysis in those studies and some conceptual questions concerning the interpretation of the analysis. The goal is to generate a set of quantitative tools and programs throughout the course that are applied in practice. The problem sets cumulatively develop these tools by adding on to previous analysis so that extensive models are developed by the end of the course and similar routines are applied to multiple contexts. Problem set to be submitted in blackboard

## 1. Evaluation and grading

The course grade is based on the following:

6 Problem sets (individual and group)	30
Final Project (group)	15
Final Exam (individual)	50
Professionalism* , Readings and Class Participation	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Final grade</b>	<b>Min(100,Total)</b>

### Letter Grade:

These are unprecedented time so both the school and I adjusted grading somewhat to reflect this reality. The school adjusted the grading cap to 3.6 (from 3.5). I adjusted mu curving and I will try very hard to avoid giving E's, C's and even B-.So, I typically spread the grades between B- and A to get to something slightly below the 3.6 average.

NOTE: Everyone is curved so don't freak out if you don't think you are doing great. This is a hard class and I define success as learning 60% of the content we present in class. Learning means being confuse first. DO NOT FREAK OUT. PUT THE TIME AND YOU WILL BE FINE.

What do I expect from you in terms of participation?

- Engagement asking and answering questions on Campuswire
- Engagement in class
- You can do both, but you don't need to. It is fine to be more engaged in one of them. For Zoom people Campuswire might be a more practical option
- You should do you assigned readings on Perusall. Write comments. Engage with colleagues about the content.

What should you expect in terms of feedback?

- The best way to get feedback is by asking specific questions on Campuswire
- The Problem sets will be graded by the TA's. The grading will be very coarse and the feed back there will also be limited. However we will make the solutions available and the TA will make a video discussing the solution.
- For the final project I will focus on positive feedback. That is, for the top groups of the class I will discuss what I thought it as great about what they did.

## 2. Class Specifics

**Re-grade Requests for Exam:** Verbal appeals of grades will not be accepted. A request for a re-grade must be made in writing and should be submitted directly to me. It should clearly and succinctly state the unambiguous error in grading, which you believe has occurred. Request for a re-grade must be made within a week of the work being returned. The entire exam should be resubmitted and will be reviewed; there is no guarantee that grades will rise as, statistically, positive and negative errors in grading are equally likely.

**Makeup Policy for Exams:** Exams are administered during the pre-determined exam date known to students at registration. Students should not make travel plans during these periods. Students must provide a written notice of a health emergency or illness in order to request a makeup exam. There will be no accommodations with respect to other matters.

## 3. Accommodations

If you would like to request an academic accommodation based on having a qualifying disability, please contact both your instructor and Anna Rogers, the access coordinator for Simon, during the first two weeks of the course. [Brad Rosenbaum](#) can be reached in the Office of Student Engagement at [Brad.rosenbaum@simon.rochester.edu](mailto:Brad.rosenbaum@simon.rochester.edu) or 585-275-2798.

## 4. Academic Integrity

Simon's Code of Academic Integrity (see Section 2 of the [Student Handbook](#)) states: *"Every Simon student is expected to be completely honest in all academic matters. Simon students will not in any way misrepresent their academic work or attempt to advance their academic position through fraudulent or unauthorized means. No Simon student will be involved knowingly with another student's violation of this standard of honest behavior."*

In addition to refraining from obvious forms of cheating and plagiarism:

- On assignments, do not copy or paraphrase work from each other, from students who have taken the class previously, from materials of mine distributed in a previous class, or from outside sources. Any written work should be entirely your own (or your team's, as applicable).
- Do not obtain advice, notes, solutions, or other material from students who took the class previously in ways that would give you an unfair advantage or would undermine the learning experience for you and the class (such as, notes from past case discussions). Similarly, do not use others' case analyses posted on-line.
- Use quotation marks when quoting any text directly. Changing a few words of a sentence or longer section does not make the work your own. Independently written texts rarely have even five consecutive words in common.

Most forms of disallowed shortcuts are easy to detect and will be referred to the school's Academic Integrity Committee. If something is going on in your professional or personal life that prevents you from finishing assigned work in a timely manner, get in touch with me before the deadline (and get in touch with Student Services as appropriate). Finally, to help prevent other students from violating academic integrity, do not pass on notes or give advice on assignments to any students who are taking the course in a later quarter or are taking it at the same time in a different section. Please refer to the Student Handbook for any questions regarding the Code of Academic Integrity

## 5. My expectation of students

Treat class sessions like business meetings. Unprofessional behavior has a negative impact on your participation grade. Specifically,

- Please zoom in if you are feeling under the weather:

***"Sore throat? Go remote!  
Dry cough? Take the day off!  
Went to a rave? Stay in your cave!"***

- Make every effort to attend each class
- It would be great if you could display your name in a class card so I can get to know you better.
- You are expected to be in your "seat" and ready for class at the beginning of each class. Should extenuating circumstances require you to leave early, please let the professor know before the start of class and sit in back so you can leave with as little disruption as possible. This hold even for zoom!
- You are allowed to use laptops and tablets during lecture, but they should only be used for coursework related activities and not for email, social media, or other activities not directly related to the course. Cell phones must be turned off or silenced during class. No photography of any kind is allowed.
- Students should budget a minimum of 9 to 12 hours per week to spend on this course between reading and class participation.
- All students are expected to do well in the course and the instructor will strive to help them achieve. The instructor also expects the students to be autonomous and "active" learners.
- Students should also help each other as best they can in a collegial manner. The instructor expects everyone to be kind and courteous to each other and to ask questions, not only to the instructor, but also to fellow classmates. This class will lend itself to student collaboration and "co-construction" of knowledge. The instructor expects that students will take advantage of that. In addition, the instructor expects the work students submit in this course to be their own. This is consistent with the University of Rochester policy on Academic Honesty.
- For online discussions, you will need to post comments that are scholarly and substantive. Substantive comments, for our purposes, are those that add insight, probe more deeply, challenge (intellectually), and generally help us learn. It is also helpful to post comments that are "social" in nature. So, while, "I agree" is not a substantive comment, it is a useful response in that it helps us know that we are being "heard". But you will need to post substantive comments to "get credit" for discussions. I also encourage you to edit before you post. This course is a graduate course, it is expected that you will carefully read and edit your work prior to sending it. It can be helpful to compose using a word processor to prevent cosmetic errors; this way you can concentrate on demonstrating your highest quality writing.

#### 4. Zoom Behavior

- Keep the camera on at all times
- Keep mic off unless talking
- To ask a question: use the raise your hand function. Wait for me to tell you to go ahead and ask your question. We will experiment with this.
- Do not use the chat to communicate with me during live classes.
- Dress professionally
- Be ready to be called to answer questions (if you have particular circumstances in that day that makes unmuting and talking complicated simply send me a private chat telling me that this was a not good time, but this should be rare. I expect most of you most of the time be ready to engage)

#### 5. What can you expect from me and the TAs

- TAs will try to grade the problem sets within a week
  - Weekends are very challenging for me, but I will try to answer quick questions in CampusWire. Things that I can do from my phone.
  - I will never answer an email from you, but you should expect prompt answers in CampusWire. I will try to check at least three times per day.
  - The best opportunity to have a chat with me is during the office hours. If you want to schedule some private one-on-one time during the office hours, there will be three slots for it per week. See blackboard.
  - I will not answer IT questions. "Like my python doesn't work". The TAs will try to help with this
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- I welcome “confused” questions, i.e., when you are not even sure what you don’t get it. But try to formulate a question. It will help us both
- Do not try to talk with me during the class break or after class. We can chat at the start from class as long you are in your seat. I used to talk a lot during the break and after class, but the pandemic make this an unsafe practice.
- I will never give “inside info”. So if your goal is to communicate privately to get some edge, please forget about it. I will always communicate publicly on things.
- I will be very understanding of the difficult situation that some of you are in and will do my best to keep the pace of course appropriate, but you have to help me as well.

#### 6. Relation with other Courses at Simon Business School

- Finance 462 (or 462) and 411 are a prerequisite. (should be at least taking 411 at the same time)
- Finance 433 (cases in finance).

#### 7. Groups

- Students will work with their core team assignments as discussed during orientation.
- If you do have an assigned group on blackboard please let me know in Campuswire
- Students should have their groups by June 10

**TO DO BEFORE THE FIRST CLASS**

**See class blackboard website for to do list before class (including reading material, help with software installation, and videos)**

**Readings, Problem sets, and Final Project**

**See the class website for a schedule of assignments and reading material.**

**Assignments will be done individually unless otherwise stated.**

**Final project (and group assignments) to be done with group assigned at orientation.**

**See blackboard/campuswire for instructions.**

**Class Material**

All Class material is available through blackboard

It includes 4 types of material

- Jupyter notebooks (<https://amoreira2.github.io/quantitativeinvesting/chapters/intro.html>)
- Reading material in Persusall
- Assignments in Blackboard
- Data (in Github : <https://github.com/amoreira2/Lectures/tree/main/assets/data>)

I will post material in these folders as needed

**Note:** The files in Notebooks and Homeworks folders are Jupyter notebook files (\*.ipynb). You must make sure this extension is preserved when you save. Easy way to make this happen is by (i) (left) clicking on the file you want, (left) clicking in download, and then (left) clicking direct download.

## Course Outline

**Week 1: Python Essentials**

**Week 2: Python Scientific Computing and Working with Data**

**Week 3: Asset Returns**

**Week 4: Portfolio Math and Capital Allocation**

**Week 5: Mean Variance Efficiency and Estimation Uncertainty**

**Week 6: Constructing a trading strategy**

**Week 7: Strategy Evaluation**