

Welcome to CPSC 320!

September 4, 2024

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What's this course about?

- Problem solving!
 - Learning general algorithm design techniques, how to use them, and how to identify them
 - Recognizing similarities between new and familiar problems
 - Identifying promising data structures and computational techniques for a problem
 - Reasoning about the correctness and efficiency of your approach
- ...This is the stuff you want to do **before** you code

Course philosophy

- You learn best by **practicing**
 - Lectures largely involve problem-solving (with help from instructor and TAs)
 - BUT: we understand that traditional lectures also help
- You learn best by solving problems **independently or with your peers** (as opposed to with direct help from your instructor/TA)
 - Opportunities for group work in lecture, tutorial, assignments
 - We will leave space for student contributions to learning (e.g., on Piazza)
 - BUT: your course staff **is** here to help!

Administrivia

Grading scheme*:

Assignments (5)	30%
Midterm exams (2)	30%
Final exam	35%
Clicker questions	5%

You must obtain at least a 45% weighted average of midterm and final exam components to pass the course.

(*) A small number of students may additionally be rewarded up to 1% bonus for engagement and high quality contributions on Piazza.

Administrivia

Important dates:

- Add/drop deadline: September 16
- Midterm exams: Wednesday October 9 and Wednesday November 6, in class
- Final exam: TBD, between December 10 and 21

Assignments

- There will be 5 assignments, due every 2-3 weeks
- You can submit in groups of 2-3 (but can also work individually)
- We drop the lowest assignment grade
- **CAVEAT on the previous two points: the assignments are your best tools for learning (and exam preparation!!).** Therefore...
 - All group members should work on all questions
 - Skipping or “phoning in” any assignments is a bad idea

Midterms

- Midterms will be in class on October 9 and November 6. **You must write the midterm exams with your registered lecture section.**
- Measures to promote fairness between sections:
 - Each section will receive a different exam.
 - We will scale the grades of the exams in the section with the lower median grade so that both sections will have the same median exam grade.
 - On the days of the exams, Piazza will be locked, office hours and tutorials will be canceled, and course staff will not answer any questions about course content until everyone has written their exam.

Missed midterm policy

- If you miss **one** midterm: let us know why ASAP (and no more than 24 hours after the missed exam), and we will shift the weight of the missed midterm to the final exam. We do not require a doctor's note.
- If you miss **both** midterms: we will shift the weight of the first midterm to the final exam and award a grade of zero for the second midterm.

Tutorials

- Beginning next week. Do not attend your tutorial this week!
- Most tutorials include group problem-solving, with help from TA's. We will focus on problems that will help you with the next assignment.
- Tutorials during assignment deadline weeks will be open office hours. You and your groupmates can attend any tutorial sections you like and work on your assignment with help from TA's.
 - (Some minor weirdness around reading week, statutory holidays, etc. See Tutorials section in the syllabus on Canvas for a detailed schedule!)

Clicker questions

- We will ask clicker questions via **iClicker Cloud**, beginning next class. These are graded for completion (rather than correctness), and if you answer at least 70% of the questions you will earn full marks for that component.
- You can earn credit for clicker questions by attending either lecture section (no requirement to attend your registered section).
- If you can't easily do iClicker Cloud (e.g., no suitable device to bring to class), email the course coordinator by the end of next week to opt out of clicker questions, and the weight of that component will be shifted to the assignments.

Platforms and communication

- Lectures and tutorials are in-person; no recordings except under unusual circumstances (university cancels in-person learning, etc.)
- Course materials will be on Canvas (<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/153809>)
- Q & A and course announcements will be on Piazza (link on Canvas)
- We will use Gradescope for grading and assignment submission. Invitations will be emailed to you in the coming weeks.
- For logistical concerns (e.g., need to miss an exam): post privately on Piazza or email cpssc320-admin@cs.ubc.ca

Sick policy

- If you have a mild illness (e.g., a cold) but no fever or other serious symptoms and feel well enough to attend class: consider wearing a mask and limiting close contact with other students.
- If you need to miss lecture: worksheets, worksheet solutions, and slides (if we have them) will be posted to Canvas after class. The best way to make up for missing class is to **do the in-class worksheets on your own**, and then look over the solutions.
- If you need to miss the midterm exam due to illness, contact the course coordinator ASAP; the likely accommodation is we will transfer the weight to the final exam. (No doctor's note required.)

Sick/Away (instructor) policy

- Fun Fact 1: Susanne has a toddler and a preschooler.
- Fun Fact 2: Toddlers and preschoolers get 8-12 illnesses per year, on average.
- If one of us can't teach at all (e.g., norovirus, lost voice, travel): the other instructor will cover (subject to availability), or if absolutely necessary we will cancel class.
- If one of us is pretty sick but able to teach, or sick with something potentially serious (e.g., COVID positive): the other one will cover or we'll run the class online
 - Announcements for canceled/online class will be on Piazza
- If we're mildly sick with something non-serious (e.g., a cold): we will teach in person but wear mask for close contact and won't circulate the room to answer questions during worksheet time

Piazza guidelines

- Piazza sign-up will be open until the end of the month. Register using your first and last name as shown in the UBC registration system.
- To encourage independent problem solving and leave space for peer responses, we will wait at least **4 hours** before responding to any Piazza question related to course content.
- We will endorse good responses and add anything that's missing so that all questions get a satisfactory answer. We will aim to resolve all questions within one business day.
 - Questions may not receive instructor responses at night, or on weekends and holidays.

Piazza guidelines

- Post content-related questions publicly whenever possible
 - Note: we will not grade answers in advance
- Use private posts for matters that do not concern the rest of the class (e.g., need to miss a midterm, “I don’t understand why the TA gave this feedback on my assignment”)
- Aim to keep questions clear and concise
- Trolling, personal attacks, etc., are cause for removal from the course Piazza
- If you wish to express an opinion (e.g., about challenges in the class, an exam, or issues with students/instructors), communicate it to us face to face, via email, or via private post.