

PAI 721: Introduction to Statistics

Course Syllabus

F2025

Course Information

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Overview

This course introduces students to data management, wrangling, and visualization as well as the technical tools necessary to do such analysis in an open and reproducible fashion.

Description

Data preprocessing, wrangling, and management often consumes a large fraction of the time spent doing quantitative data analysis in public administration, public policy, and the broader social sciences. This class introduces students to the technical tools necessary to do these tasks in an open and reproducible fashion suitable for modern computational data workflows. Throughout the course of the semester, students will learn the principles and practice of conducting reproducible quantitative research, including readable programming and coding, version control, methods of documentation, data storage, workflow management, and exploratory data visualization. A variety of relevant open technical software tools will be introduced and used, including but not limited to R (and RStudio), git (and github), markdown, LaTeX, and a variety of helper programs to tie things together.

Prerequisites

No formal pre-requisites. It is assumed you have either previously taken or are currently enrolled in an “Introduction to Statistics” or “Quantitative Methods” class (ie, PAI 721 or MAX 201).

Materials

Books

- Required:
 - Weidmann, Nils. *Data Management for Social Scientists*. Open access: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108990424>
 - Healy, Kieran. *Data Visualization: A Practical Introduction*. Open access: <https://socviz.co>
- Recommended:
 - Braun & Murdoch, *A First Course in Statistical Programming*, 3rd Edition

Computing

You will need access to a personal computer for this class. It will need to run a full operating system, where you have the ability to install local applications outside of app stores and have access to the command line. MacOS, Windows, and Linux are all fine. Tablet or web-book OSes - like Chromebooks or iPads - won't be sufficient. Aside from the computer, all significant software we use will be free/open-source, and we'll cover usage and installation in class.

Online Course Resources

Blackboard is our internet-based course platform <http://blackboard.syr.edu>. In it, you will find course announcements, a submission portal for (some) of your assignments, and a link to this course webpage, where you can find the course syllabus, problem sets, and links to readings. In addition, during the semester, solutions to the problem sets and lecture slides will be posted. Please note, however, that class attendance is the primary source of course-related announcements and material.

Course Requirements

Overview

Satisfactory completion of the course requires completion of the following:

- Regular course participation and attendance (10%)
- Weekly Assignments (30%)
- Core Exam (30%)
- Final Project (30%)

Attendance

One of the guiding principles of my class is that you are adults, and thus, capable of managing your own time. I have little interest in policing your lives. Attendance is kept for each day of class, but you will lose no points on attendance if you happen to miss a couple days: everyone has things that occasionally come up in life that need to be dealt with, and I fully realize that some of those things are things you - very understandably - may not want to discuss with your professor. That's OK!

That said, attendance in class is an important element to doing well in the course. If you must miss more than a couple days, it's a good idea to check in with me so that I don't mark you off for chronic absenteeism. The easiest way to do this is just email me with a brief reason when something comes up and you have to miss class (which will also allow me to tell you if you're missing anything particularly important).

If you must miss class, the way to make up what you've missed is straightforward: make sure to look over the posted slides, do the reading for the day, get notes from a friend, and still complete the assignment if you are able (or, if it is a day we are going over the assignment, make sure to look over the assignment solutions). If you do these things and still feel like you're missing something, please feel free to come into my office hours and we can talk it through.

Participation

There is no formal grade for "participation". However, I reserve the right to dock a couple points here if you do ridiculous/unprofessional things in class (like answering your cell phone loudly, always coming in late and regularly distracting others, spontaneously breaking out into ribald song in the middle of class, etc).

Assignments

There is an assignment each week in class, **due Thursday by class time**.

Assignments will vary in nature: some will be one-off problem sets, some may build on problem sets from a prior week. All material needed for an assignment will be covered by the Tuesday before the assignment is due (usually much earlier), and the assignment itself will be given a week ahead of time. **No assignment work is accepted after class**, as we will go over answers for assignments in class.

Core Exam

The core exam will have in-class and out-of-class components. More information will be given as the exam gets closer.

Final Project

A project utilizing data of your own choice. Graduate students will have higher expectations than undergraduate students.

Course Expectations & Guidelines

Etiquette & Decorum

A university course is fundamentally a learning community. Be courteous to fellow students and the professor. Don't let yourself be distracted by your cell phone in class, and don't let what is on your computer screen distract fellow students in the class, either.

Office & Consultation Hours, Appointments

I encourage you to chat with me at any point if you have questions about the course. You can schedule a meeting with me by going to my website here: <http://jackkreilly.github.io> and sign up for time at your convenience. You can also always just drop in during my regularly scheduled drop-in office hours without appointment.

E-mail

Email is the best way to contact me. I’m usually pretty responsive, but as a baseline, I always aim to get back to you in a modified 24-hour fashion: by the end of the business day the day after you email. So if you email me at 2 PM Tuesday, I’ll get back to you by 6 PM Wednesday; if 10 PM Thursday, by 6 PM Friday; if you email me at 3 PM on Friday, by 6 PM Monday, etc.¹

Note

If your email requires a long response, expect me to encourage you to schedule an appointment with me so that we can more effectively discuss the matter.

Artificial Intelligence, LLMs, etc

You can find the formal AI policy for this course in the “Policies” section of the syllabus/website. Because of the nature of this course, however, a deeper discussion of AI is warranted.

Artificial intelligence – in particular, large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT – are incredibly useful tools. However, in the very beginning phases of learning how to write code and conduct data analysis, using them can hamper your ability to understand fundamental elements of programming. Accordingly, I **strongly encourage** you to **avoid** using generative-AI tools in this course (except where I introduce them in the content of the class).

Tip

LLMs are, in a formal sense, **bullshit** of the first order. And yes: “**bullshit**” here is a technical term, meaning “language produced without regard for truth.”² An LLM, at its core, is a probabilistic model whose primary function is to produce the next token – usually a word – that is most likely to make sense, based upon some prompt. It **does not care if this token represents truth, reality, or a functional line of code** – it only cares if the next token *seems* to make sense. Frequently, what it produces will incidentally be true, functional code, or accurate representation. That is what makes it useful! But this *incidental* relationship with truth is also what makes it dangerous. You can’t reliably evaluate AI outputs until you already know enough about the subject.

My job, goal, and interest in this class is to help **you, a human, learn how to code, wrangle, and visualize data**. My interest is not in correcting AI slop; nor does my interest lie

¹Again: usually I’m much faster! But if you don’t hear from me by this baseline, feel free to bump a reminder.

²Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (2005); Hicks, Humphries, and Slater, *ChatGPT is Bullshit* (2024).

in trying to figure out if you are attempting to pass AI slop off as your own work.³ Accordingly, I will not spend time trying to guess if your assignments are AI generated.⁴ As always, you are responsible for your own learning and work - as your professor, I simply ask that you not try to outsource the important process of your own learning with a literal philosophical bullshit machine.

Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Tools	Reading
1	Structuring Your Data Life	Scripts; R and RStudio; filesystems	
2	Reproducible Data Analyses	Markup; Version Control; Git	
3	Data Structure & Wrangling	Data Formats	
4	Tidy Data	Tidyverse	
5	Flow Control	Loops	
6	Data Visualization I	Grammar of Graphics; ggplot2	
7	Data Visualization II	ggplot2	
8	Midterm Exam (Thursday, October 16)		
9	Social Networks & Network Data	iGraph; statnet	
10	Census Data	tidycensus	
11	Maps & GIS I	sf; tigris	
12	Maps & GIS II	mapgl; mapbox; osm	
13	Accessing & Using Databases	SQL	
14	Project Work		
15	Project Presentations		
F	Finals Week (Project Due)		

Advanced Topics (if we have time)

Week	Topic	Tools	Reading
16	Text Data & Data Scraping		
17	Web Apps & Visualization		

³AIs have their own reinforcement learning processes, with humans employed to correct their foibles and mistakes – an unfortunately unending and unenviable task, like Sisyphus with his rock.

⁴The technical tools that try to do this are imperfect, anyways, resulting in a lot of uncertainty and false positives. Furthermore, experience has taught me that typically, unedited-AI produced content will earn poor marks, regardless, and often do so with some pretty clear “tells”.

Week	Topic	Tools	Reading
18	AI Pair Programming & “Vibe Coding”		
19	Local LLMs		

Campus Academic Resources & Policies

The following reflects the approved campus-wide academic policies of Syracuse University. For more information and detail, please consult the full documentation of University policies [here](#).

Academic Drop Deadline

As part of our efforts to track satisfactory academic progress, the Academic Drop Deadline and the Financial Drop deadline will both occur on September 15, 2025, for the fall semester and February 2, 2026, for the spring semester. Students may still withdraw from courses after these deadlines; this would place a ‘WD’ grade on their transcripts. Students enrolled in “flex” classes (Flexibly formatted classes) have different deadlines and will need to check MySlice for the Academic and Financial Drop deadlines that pertains to their class.

Academic Integrity

As a pre-eminent and inclusive student-focused research institution, Syracuse University considers academic integrity at the forefront of learning, serving as a core value and guiding pillar of education. Syracuse University’s Academic Integrity Policy provides students with the necessary guidelines to complete academic work with integrity throughout their studies. Students are required to uphold both course-specific and university-wide academic integrity expectations such as crediting your sources, doing your own work, communicating honestly, and supporting academic integrity. The full [Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy](#) can be viewed by visiting the [Syracuse University Policies](#) website.

Upholding Academic Integrity includes the protection of faculty’s intellectual property. Students should not upload, distribute, or share instructors’ course materials, including presentations, assignments, exams, or other evaluative materials without permission. Using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course material (e.g., Chegg, Course Hero) to obtain exam solutions or assignments completed by others, which are then presented as your own violates academic integrity expectations in this course and may be classified as a Level 3 violation. All academic integrity expectations that apply to in-person assignments, quizzes, and exams also apply online.

Students found in violation of the policy are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered. Students may not drop or withdraw from courses in which they face a suspected violation. Any established violation in this course may result in course failure regardless of violation level.

Artificial Intelligence

Based on the specific learning outcomes and assignments in this course, artificial intelligence is permitted on the following: all weekly assignments. Artificial intelligence is *not* permitted in tests and practicums. See each assignment, quiz, or exam instructions for more information about what artificial intelligence tools are permitted and to what extent, as well as citation requirements. If no instructions are provided for a specific assignment, then no use of any artificial intelligence tool is permitted. Any AI use beyond that which is detailed in course assignments is explicitly prohibited except when documented permission is granted.

Please also see Syracuse University's [general campus AI policies here](#).

Academic Integrity Online

All academic integrity expectations that apply to in-person quizzes and exams also apply to online quizzes and exams. In this course, all work submitted for quizzes and exams must be yours alone. Discussing quiz or exam questions with anyone during the quiz or exam period violates academic integrity expectations for this course.

Using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course material (e.g., Chegg, Course Hero) to obtain exam solutions or assignments completed by others and present the work as your own violates academic integrity expectations in this course and may be classified as a Level 3 violation, resulting in suspension or expulsion from Syracuse University.

Attendance Policy

Attendance in classes is expected in all courses at Syracuse University. It is a federal requirement that faculty promptly notify the university of students who do not attend or cease to attend any class. Faculty will use Early-Semester Progress Reports and Mid-Semester Progress Reports in Orange SUccess to alert the Registrar and Financial Aid Office on non-attendance. For more information visit:

[Faculty: Information for Faculty: Non-attendance or Stopped Attending Students: Information for Students: Non-attendance or Stopped Attending](#)

If a student is unable to participate in-person or virtually for an extended period of time (48 hours or more), the student may request an absence notification from their home school/college

Dean's Office or through Student Outreach and Support office. Instructors will be notified via the "Absence Notification" flag in Orange SSuccess.

Barnes Center at the Arch (Health, Counseling, etc.) staff will not provide medical excuse notes for students. When Barnes Center staff determine it is medically necessary to remove a student from classes, they will coordinate with Student Outreach and Support case management staff to provide appropriate notification to faculty through Orange Success. For absences lasting less than 48 hours, students are encouraged to discuss academic arrangements directly with their faculty.

Additional information may be found at [Student Outreach and Support: Absence Notifications](#).

Blackboard

This class will use the Blackboard Learning Management to house the syllabus, course content, links to external course materials, assignments, quizzes, exams, feedback, and grades. Due dates and times in Blackboard are stored in Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) and displayed for each user based on the time zone setting of their computer and data from their internet browser. The system will always display the time zone being used. If an instructor sets a due date of 11pm Eastern time, a student in the Pacific time zone will see a due date of 8pm."

Information about Blackboard is available on [Answers Blackboard](#); alternatively, you can contact Information Technology Services by sending an email to help@syrr.edu, calling 315.443.2677, or in-person at the ITS Service Center, located at 1-227 CST in the Life Sciences Complex. Business hours for the Service Center can be found on the [ITS website](#).

Discrimination and Harassment

The University does not discriminate and prohibits harassment or discrimination related to any protected category including creed, ethnicity, citizenship, sexual orientation, national origin, sex, gender, pregnancy, reproductive health decisions, disability, marital status, political or social affiliation, age, race, color, veteran status, military status, religion, sexual orientation, domestic violence status, genetic information, gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender.

Any complaint of discrimination or harassment related to any of these protected bases should be reported to Sheila Johnson-Willis, the University's Chief Equal Opportunity & Title IX Officer for Faculty and Staff. She is responsible for coordinating compliance efforts under the various laws including Titles VI, VII, IX and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. She can be contacted at Equal Opportunity, Inclusion, and Resolution Services, 621 Skytop Road, Suite 1001, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244-1120; or by email: equalopp@syrr.edu; or by telephone: 315-443-4018.

Diversity

It is the intent of this course for students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives to be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. It is also critical to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let your instructor know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups.

Inclusion

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to contact me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the **Center for Disability Resources (CDR)** in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability accommodations or register with CDR, please visit the Center for Disability Resources. Call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more information.

The CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible.

Faith and Religious Accommodations

[Syracuse University's Religious Observances Policy](#) recognizes the diversity of faiths represented in the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their traditions. Under the policy, students are given an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors no later than the academic drop deadline. For observances occurring before the drop deadline, notification is required at least two academic days in advance. Students may enter their observances in MySlice under Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances/Add a Notification.

Health and Wellness

Well-being and mental health are significant predictors of academic success. It is critical to take care of yourself physically and emotionally and to effectively navigate stress, anxiety, and depression. Please familiarize yourself with the range of resources the Barnes Center provides <https://esc.syr.edu/bewell/> and seek out support for mental health concerns as needed. Counseling services are available 24/7, 365 days, at 315-443-8000.