

Math 241 Fall 2021 (3 credits)

Course Syllabus

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Course Homepage	https://github.com/kapelner/QC_Math_241_Fall_2021
Slack Homepage	https://QCMath241Fall2021.slack.com/
Contact	Write to @kapelner on slack
Lecture Time and Loc	Tues and Thurs 1:40 – 2:55PM / on zoom
Instructor Office Hours and Loc	see course homepage

Course Overview

MATH 241 is an introduction to the basic concepts and techniques of probability and statistics with an emphasis on applications. Topics to be covered are below (not in order of coverage):

- Basic Set Theory
- Counting Methods — permutations and combinations
- Basic Probability Theory — axioms, conditional probability, in/dependence
- Modeling with Discrete Random Variables: Bernoulli, Hypergeometric, Binomial, Poisson, Geometric, Negative Binomial, Uniform Discrete, Rademacher and others
- Expectation, Variance, Covariance, Moments
- Modeling with Continuous Random Variables: Exponential, Uniform and Normal
- Moment Generating Functions
- Law of Large Numbers and the Central Limit Theorem
- Confidence Intervals and Hypothesis Testing for one-sample proportions (possibly p -values and statistical significance as well)

Students taking this course may not receive credit for MATH 114, except by permission of the chair. Pre/corequisites include MATH 132 or 143 or 152. **This is not your typical mathematics course.** This course develops ideas and concepts for helping to make decisions based on randomness and we will do lots of modeling of real-world situations. The course does not dwell on theory nor details of computation but will make use of computation especially using the R statistical language.

Course Materials

Textbook: A First Course in Probability by Sheldon Ross. I prefer the 7th edition which you can buy this used on Amazon for cheap. You can buy *any edition* though if you find it cheaper. There is no excuse not to have this book. It is *required*. However, I will not be teaching “from the book” and most of the material in the class comes from the lecture notes. The textbook is a way to get “another take” on the material.

Computer Software: We will also be using R which is a free, open source statistical programming language and console. You can download it from: <http://cran.mirrors.hoobly.com/>. I do not expect you to do *any* programming. I will be giving you R code to run and expect you to interpret the results based on concepts explained during the course.

Calculator: You can use a TI-84, 85, 89 or any calculator which you wish. I strongly suggest you use Wolfram Alpha and its smartphone app.

Announcements

Course announcements will be made via slack in the #general channel (not on email). I am known to send a few slack messages per week on important issues. **If you are not on slack, you will miss all class announcements!!!** Slack notifies you when there are messages. You may wish to mute all channels except for #general. See this article for how to do that.

The Use of Slack as a Learning Management System

As the course homepage is updated (e.g. a new homework assignment is posted), you will hear about it in slack. You will also find the video recordings of lectures there. (If there are multiple sections of the class, only one section’s lectures will be recorded). Each assignment will have its own channel. You can feel free to discuss things with your fellow students there. If you are asking me a question, you must do so in the #discussions channel for a general questions or the assignment-specific channel (e.g. #HW03) so other students can see the question and benefit from the answer. If you pm me, I will just ask

you to move it to the public channel. Do not be afraid to ask questions. There are many people who will have your same question!

Slack is a wildly successful company that recently got bought by Salesforce because businesses *really* use it. Pretend you are working at one of these businesses: **no posting about random stuff; keep things professional!**

Class Meetings

There are 28 scheduled meetings. Of these, 23 will be lectures, 2 will be midterm exams which are in class and 3 will be review periods (the meeting before the exams). The exam schedule is given on page 6. The last class of the semester (Dec 9) will be rescheduled to be a review period that is conveniently before the final. We will discuss later in the semester.

Reschedule of Two Class Meetings

Due to the Jewish holidays, I cannot be here to teach Tuesday, September 21 and Tuesday, September 28. Because my policy is to give an entire lecture period as review before exams, we will reschedule those periods to be night periods before the exams.

Zoom Policies

- Use your real name as the display name. This is important for my own auditing of attendance.
- Your video must always be on and your sound should always be on (except in cases of background noise)
- You can use an appropriate background but it must be a static image.
- No snap camera or similar nonsense. No chatting on zoom.
- No texting, slacking or verbal chatting with other students (no talking in class!)

Homework

There will be 6–9 theory homework assignments. Homeworks will be assigned and placed on the course homepage and will usually be due a week later in class. Homework will be **graded** out of 100 with extra credit getting scores possibly > 100 . I will be doing the grading and will grade an *arbitrary subset of the assignment* which is determined after the homework is handed in.

During this pandemic, homework must be handed in by emailing it to me as a PDF. You must do one of two things:

- Print out the homework and handwrite your answers in the allotted space for each question. Then scan your homework as a PDF. There are a ton of good photo-PDF apps for both iPhone and droid.
- Open the PDF on your device and use a PDF-editing program to electronically handwrite your answers and save the PDF.

I will NOT accept homework that is not atop the original rendered homework PDF file. Remember to write your name. There are no regrades during this pandemic semester. Homework must be at maximum **5MB**.

You are encouraged to seek help from me if you have questions. After class and office hours are good times. You are highly recommended to work with each other and help each other. You must, however, submit your own solutions, *with your own write-up and in your own words*. There can be no collaboration on the actual writing. Failure to comply will result in severe penalties. The university honor code is something I take seriously and I send people to the Dean every semester for violations.

Philosophy of Homework

Homework is the *most* important part of this course.¹ Success in Statistics and Mathematics courses comes from experience in working with and thinking about the concepts. It's kind of like weightlifting; you have to lift weights to build muscles. My job as an instructor is to provide assistance through your zone of proximal development. With me, you can grow more than you can alone. To this effect, homework problems are color coded green for easy, yellow for harder, red for challenging and purple for extra credit. You need to know how to do all the greens by yourself. If you've been to class and took notes, they are a joke. Yellows and reds: feel free to work with others. Only do extra credits if you have already finished the assignment. The "[Optional]" problems are for extra practice — highly recommended for exam study.

Time Spent on Homework

This is a three credit course. Thus, the amount of work outside of the 4hr in-class time per week is 6-9 hours. I will aim for 7.5hr of homework per week on average. However, doing the homework well is your sole responsibility since I will make sure that by doing the homework you will study and understand the concepts in the lectures and you won't have all that much to do when the exams roll around.

Late Homework Policy

Late homework will be penalized 10 points per business day (Monday-Friday save holidays) for a maximum of five days. *Do not ask for extensions*; just hand in the homework late. After five days, **you can hand it in whenever you want** until Dec 15 at noon.

¹In one student's observation, I give a "mind-blowing homework" every week.

As far as I know, this is one of the most lenient and flexible homework policies in college. I realize things come up. Do not abuse this policy; you will fall far, far behind.

L^AT_EX Homework Bonus Points

Part of good mathematics is its beautiful presentation. Thus, **there will be a 1–5 point bonus** added to your theory homework grade for typing up your homework using the L^AT_EX typesetting system based on the elegance of your presentation. The bonus is arbitrarily determined by me.

I recommend using overleaf to write up your homeworks (make sure you upload both the hw#.tex and the preamble.tex file). This has the advantage of (a) not having to install anything on your computer and thus not having to maintain your L^AT_EX installation (b) allowing easy collaboration with others (c) always having a backup of your work since it's always on the cloud. If you insist to have L^AT_EX running on your computer, you can download it for Windows [here](#) and for MAC [here](#). For editing and producing PDF's, I recommend T_EXworks which can be downloaded [here](#). Please use the L^AT_EX code provided on the course homepage for each homework assignment.

If you are handing in homework this way, read the comments in the code; there are two lines to comment out and you should replace my name with yours and write your section. The easiest way to use overleaf is to copy the raw text from hwxx.tex and preamble.tex into two new overleaf tex files with the same name. If you are asked to make drawings, you can take a picture of your handwritten drawing and insert them as figures or leave space using the “\vspace” command and draw them in after printing or attach them stapled.

Since this is extra credit, do not ask me for help in setting up your computer with L^AT_EX in class or in office hours. Also, **never share your L^AT_EX code with other students** — it is cheating and if you are found I will take it seriously.

Homework Extra Credit

There will be many extra credit questions sprinkled throughout the homeworks. They will be worth a variable number of points arbitrarily assigned based on my perceived difficulty of the exercise. Homework scores in the 140's are not unheard of. They are a good boost to your grade; I once had a student go from a B to an A- based on these bonuses.

Examinations

Examinations are solely based on homeworks (which are rooted in the lectures)! If you can do all the green and yellow problems on the homeworks, the exams should not present any challenge. I will *never* give you exam problems on concepts which you have not seen at home on one of the weekly homework assignments. There will be three exams and the schedule is below.

Exam Schedule

- Midterm examination I will be Thursday, October 7 on zoom during class time with the first review session on the class meeting prior
- Midterm examination II will be Thursday, November 11 on zoom during class time with a review on the class meeting prior.
- The final examination will be TBD but on zoom with a review TBA.

Exam Policies and Materials

I allow you to bring any calculator you wish but it cannot be your phone. The only other items allowed are pencil and eraser. I do not recommend using pen but it is allowed. Food is not allowed during exams but beverages are allowed.

Zoom Exams

Exams will be given on Zoom screen-shared from my computer. In a nutshell, each page of the PDF exam is a “problem scenario” with text and/or illustrations. The questions that follow are enumerated a, b, c, d, etc. and they are all “true or false” questions. You will enter the true question letters into a google form. Each problem scenario page is individually timed. Once the timer expires, you can no longer edit your answers.

I also allow “cheat sheets” on examinations. For both midterms, you are allowed to bring *one* 8.5” × 11” sheet of paper (front and back). Two sheets single sided are not allowed. On this paper you can write anything you would like which you believe will help you on the exam. For the final, you are allowed to bring *three* 8.5” × 11” sheet of paper (front and back). Six sheets single sided are not allowed. I will be handing back the cheat sheets so you can reuse your midterm cheat sheets for the final if you wish.

Cheating on Exams

If I catch you cheating, you can either take a zero on the exam, or you can roll the dice before the University Honor Council who may choose to suspend you. I have extremely elaborate means to detect cheating on my zoom exams. These means have been iterated upon and improved for three semesters. I suggest you don’t try me.

Missing Exams

There are no make-up exams. If you miss the exam, you get a zero. If you are sick, I need documentation of your visit to a hospital or doctor. Expect me to call the doctor or hospital to verify the legitimacy of your note.

Special Services

If you are a student who takes exams at the special services center, I need to see your blue slip or receive email evidence one week before the exam to make proper arrangements with the center.

Class Participation

This portion of your grade is assessed based on your level of interaction during the course lectures e.g. asking and answering questions. Participation on slack also counts towards this total.

Grading and Grading Policy

Your course grade will be calculated based on the percentages as follows:

Homework	20%
Midterm Examination I	20%
Midterm Examination II	20%
Final Examination	35%
Class participation	5%

The semester is split into three periods :

- (a) From the beginning until midterm I. Midterm I covers material during this time..
- (b) From midterm I to midterm II. Midterm II covers material in this period only.
- (c) From midterm II until the final. The final is cumulative and covers all course material.

Each of the periods is assessed evenly. Thus, each period must count the same towards your grade. Since there is 75% of the grade allotted to exams, there is 25% allotted to each period. Thus, the final is upweighted towards the material covered in the third period. In summary, the final will have $5/35$ points $\approx 14\%$ for the first period's material, $5/35$ points $\approx 14\%$ for the second period's material and $25/35$ points $\approx 71\%$ for the last period's material. A good strategy for the final is to just study the material after Midterm II and minimal studying for the previous material.

Previous semesters' grade distributions

Below is a history of previous semesters' grade distributions with approximate cutoffs.

Grade	WU	F	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A	A+
n	6	7	0	0	10	9	7	11	8	4	11	5	1
%ile	—	—	—	—	28.6	41.8	53.1	58.2	65.3	75.5	84.7	92.9	100

(a) Fall, 2017. Total enrollment out of two sections save no-shows was $n = 79$.

Grade	WU	F	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A	A+
n	14	13	0	0	14	11	5	7	10	9	7	8	0
%ile	—	—	—	—	28.6	41.8	53.1	58.2	65.3	75.5	84.7	92.9	—

(b) Fall, 2016. Total enrollment out of three sections save no-shows was $n = 98$.

Grade	F	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A	A+
n	11	0	0	6	6	6	5	5	4	5	6	0
%ile	—	—	—	21	32	46	57	66	75	82	91	—

(c) Fall, 2015. Total enrollment out of three sections save no-shows was $n = 56$.

Grade	F	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A	A+
n	3	3	4	4	6	4	3	6	3	4	3	0
%ile	—	7.1	16.7	23.8	33.3	47.6	57.1	64.3	76.2	81.0	92.9	—

(d) Spring, 2015. Total enrollment out of two sections save no-shows was $n = 42$.

Grade	F	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A	A+
n	6	5	1	5	4	4	4	6	4	2	6	1
%ile	—	14.6	25.0	35.4	43.8	52.1	62.5	75.0	66.6	83.3	87.5	100

(e) Fall, 2014. Total enrollment out of two sections save no-shows was $n = 48$.

Table 1: Grade distributions of previous Math 241 courses.

I am not obligated to mirror these grade distribution and cutoffs this semester. Grade distributions vary from semester-to-semester based on the relative difficulty of exams, student ability and randomness in raw score clustering. The above is meant for informational purposes only. Do not come to me expecting a negotiation of your grade based on a previous semester's cutoff.

The Computer Science C- requirement

This class is a required course for the Computer Science major and requires a minimum of a C- to earn credit for the major. I cannot assign grades based on student need. What I can do is let you know if you are in danger of getting a grade lower than C- after the first exam and after the second exam. The second exam is scheduled on the day of the Withdraw deadline and I will do my best to have them graded well before the deadline.

If you are below the 25%ile and you are a CS major, you are on the border of passing your requirement. If you do not plan on studying hard for the final and improving your grade, you may choose to withdraw, thereby allowing you to focus on other classes only to retake Math 241 in the future (and this time earn a stellar grade).

Checking your grade and class standing

You can always check your grades in real-time using <http://qc.gradesly.com>. You will enter in your QC ID number (or CUNYfirst email address). I will provide you with your password by email after the first assignment is completed.

Auditing

Auditors are welcome. They are encouraged to do all homework assignments. I will even grade them. Note that the university does not allow auditors to take examinations.

Syllabus Quiz

1. Is this a typical math course?
 - (a) Yes — this is just another variation on calculus
 - (b) No — this is an applied math course and we will be discussing philosophy, decision theory and much else
2. Is there a required textbook?
 - (a) Yes — the Sheldon Ross book
 - (b) No — the book is not necessary to read, I can just use the class notes and listen to the lectures online
3. Is there a required calculator?
 - (a) Yes — the TI-83+
 - (b) No — but you have to bring a graphing calculator for exams
 - (c) No — but you need to bring some type of calculator for exams
 - (d) No — we will make no use of calculators in this course even on exams
4. How many new material lectures are there?
 - (a) 27
 - (b) 25
 - (c) 23
5. If I miss class, what do I do?
 - (a) Watch the online videos
 - (b) Listen to online lectures only
 - (c) Listen to online lectures and copy a friend's notes
6. How can I be guaranteed the five points of classroom participation?
 - (a) Come to class every period
 - (b) Scan 13 days of lecture notes as PDFs (less than 2MB)
 - (c) Scan one day of lecture notes as a JPG
7. Can I work together with other students on the homework?
 - (a) Yes and we can collaborate handing in one writeup with all of our names on it

- (b) Yes and we can collaborate handing in separate writeups
 - (c) No
8. How do I earn extra points on the homework?
- (a) Using L^AT_EX and/or doing the extra credit problems. No sharing L^AT_EX code.
 - (b) Only using L^AT_EX. No sharing L^AT_EX code.
 - (c) Only doing the extra credit problems
 - (d) There is no way to earn extra points
9. Can homework be handed in late?
- (a) No. It will be given a zero.
 - (b) Yes. Up to 3 days.
 - (c) Yes. Up until the last lecture day of the semester.
10. What are the exams based on?
- (a) Skills built from doing homework problems
 - (b) Details from lectures
 - (c) Lecture topics that were not assessed in the homework assignments
11. How are the grades computed?
- (a) They are based on raw scores based on the percentages found in the course policy section of this document
 - (b) They are based only on exams
 - (c) They are mostly a reflection of your homework score
 - (d) They are mostly a reflection of your classroom participation
12. Does it matter if the exams are “too hard”?
- (a) Yes, then a lot of students won’t get a high grade
 - (b) No, because most students fail this course regardless of exam grades
 - (c) No, not one bit; since the course is curved, we are graded on performance relative to others so the raw exam scores do not actually matter
13. What happens when the exam is too easy?
- (a) Nothing! We’ll all get high grades!
 - (b) This is good thing: the curve will have more A’s.

- (c) This is a bad thing: too many students ceiling out at 100 and the ones who make careless errors get 92's and may get B's unfairly.
14. Given the answer to question 11, if you were to design an exam for this class, which is curved, what is the *fairest* exam average?
- (a) 20%
 - (b) 60%
 - (c) 90%
15. What can I use during the exams?
- (a) My notes
 - (b) My phone
 - (c) My calculator
 - (d) A cheat sheet and the textbook
16. Missing the final will guarantee you get a ___ for your final grade.
- (a) F
 - (b) C-
 - (c) WU
 - (d) D
17. How many students will get A's or A-'s?
- (a) 5 students only regardless of enrollment
 - (b) The top 10 students only regardless of enrollment
 - (c) The top 50% of students regardless of enrollment
 - (d) The top $\approx 15\text{-}19\%$ of students regardless of enrollment