

CSC 540: FAQs

Course Project

Q: About the system that my team is building for the course project, how will it be assessed?

A: This course project is worth 1600 points, and constitutes 30% of your course grade. $1600 = 520 + 520 + 560$, so there are 520 points for report 1, 520 points for report 2, and 560 points for report 3. Your answers to these reports will be graded on a question by question basis, the project assignment webpage indicates how much each question is worth. There are no extra credit points reserved for doing more than what is required.

Q: What should be the guiding principle, when faced with any decision about whether/how to design/implement something for the course project?

A: Remember that the demo of the system built by your team will take place in a half-hour time slot on the demo-day, during which time, the instructor and TA will use a secret demo scenario (i.e. a series of questions like those in an exam question paper) to test the behavior of your system. Each of the questions in the secret demo-script will be based on the 'Tasks and Operations' given in the Project Narrative webpage. You need to implement everything that your system would need in order to perform any of the operations referenced in 'Tasks and Operations', but you do not need to implement anything other than this. You can use this as your central guiding principle throughout the semester, whenever your team faces any decision about whether/how to design/implement something. The only hands-on testing of your system by the course staff that will occur is during the demo-slot, since the project reports will be graded in hardcopy form. (However, note that your source code and documentation has to be submitted in softcopy as part of report 3, and this will also be graded.)

Q: Can I change some decision about my system in going from one report to the next?

Y: Yes. For example, while submitting report 2 if you think you need to change some decision about your system that you made when you described it in report 1, it is fine to do so if you have a reasonable explanation and you document it in the new report. Such changes should not affect your score if your answers to the questions asked in the project report are reasonable/correct.

Q: Is there a one correct design/implementation that is expected for the course project?

A: The database system that you are building for the course project is not like a homework problem that has a single correct answer. In building it you will use several of the database principles that you will absorb throughout the semester (e.g. avoid joins since they are expensive, try to store each piece of data only once so that there is no redundancy, etc) but none of these are hard and fast rules (i.e. you can often say 'good', 'better', 'bad', etc. about these but you normally cannot label something as 'correct' or 'wrong'), and often there are tradeoffs that are involved. So it is possible for two teams to have two very different designs and yet both can get full points. The course staff can discuss these database principles with you, but your team has to be the one making the

design decision based on these principles. If you make a mistake that causes you to lose some points on some question in report 1 or report 2, you will be given a chance to get back half of those points if you turn in your corrected answers with report 3.

Q: How should I get myself ready before writing out answers to questions in the project reports and what should I use as a template?

A: For questions relating to what format you should use to answer a particular question in a project report, and in general too, it is a good idea to look at the project reports from a previous semester that have been posted on the course homepage under 'Past Assignments'. These have been presented as "exemplary" reports for you to get an overall idea but it is not guaranteed that everything in those reports is 100% right.

Q: What is the easiest way to unnecessarily lose points on the project-part of my course grade?

A: By forgetting to submit the peer evaluation. Please note that the project assignment webpage clearly states "For each project report, if you wish to get a grade for the report, you must submit a peer evaluation of each member of your team." Do not wait until the last minute to get to the submit board for this purpose since you may experience network problems, etc.

Q: Can I make assumptions while interpreting the Narrative?

A: In doing the project, each team will end up making additional assumptions which extend/fill-in-the-details in what is already given in the Narrative. But you cannot make any assumption that contradicts something given in the Narrative.

Q: In what format do I submit the source code that is to be turned-in as part of report 3?

A: Submit all source code as a single .zip file – other formats will not be accepted.

Demo

Q: On what equipment do I run the project during the demo?

A: During your demo slot, you will be given a computer from which you can log into your unity account; alternatively, your team can bring your own laptop(s).

Q: Do I preload any data into my system before coming for the demo?

A: A few days before the demo, you will be given a small amount of demo-data. Whatever be the specific schema of your database, you need to populate your database in such a way that the records you insert have all of the information given in the demo-data (this is because the demo questions may be based on this data). Other than this minimum required data that your database must contain, you can make up the rest of the values for other fields/records in your database.

Q: Will my system be tested on incorrect input data?

A: In your code, you do not need to provide robustness in presence of incorrect input data (except for the part of the code specified by item 3 in assignment for project report 3); in other words, you can assume that all inputs (except for the inputs covered by item 3 in

assignment for project report 3) will be correct. (But of course, if say, you insert two records with identical values for the primary key, your system should not accept such insertions, etc.)

Q: When will I know my score on the demo?

A: Before you leave the demo-room you will be told your score on each question in the demo-script. Questions regarding points earned on the demo will not be addressed after you leave the demo room.

Q: What are some tips for finishing comfortably in time during the demo?

A: Note that at the end of your half-hour demo slot, all questions from the demo script that remain unanswered will receive zero points. So it may be helpful to start first with those questions that you find easy. When you are answering one question it is a good idea for another teammate to utilize the time and simultaneously start thinking about the next question. For the same reason, it is in your interest to ensure that the operations you have implemented are not interdependent. That is, if your implementation requires that operation A always be done before operation B, then even if the demo script is trying to test you only on operation B, you are forced to waste time during the demo in doing A as well (e.g. if you are asked to do an operation which can be performed only by a manager, and if your database currently does not have any employee of type manager, then during the demo you will have to first do the operation to 'create manager', and thus you will end up spending several minutes in performing an operation for which you are not earning any points; another example is when you do have an existing employee of type manager but you have forgotten his employee ID number, so you end up searching for that number during the demo, and this wastes several minutes – in such a case it may be better to write down any relevant information on a sheet of paper that you bring to the demo room, and use it after asking permission from the course staff.) Also note that there will be no time during the demo slot to compile or debug your code. (If your system has not been tested adequately in the preceding weeks, and in the hour or two just before the demo, you may end-up having problems during the demo. And even if you have worked a lot on the project during the rest of the semester, you would have lost the opportunity to showcase your work before the course staff, and would thus lose the points allocated for the demo.) And finally, the points listed above are only common mistakes but no cause for alarm, since the demo script will be designed in such a way that well-prepared teams can finish their demos comfortably in time.

Exams, Homeworks, Grades

Q: Since it is possible to have multiple attempts at Gradiance homeworks, which score is counted?

A: In Gradiance homeworks, your grade is that for your most recent submission for each homework. The number of attempts is unlimited, but you do have to wait at least 15 minutes between successive attempts.

Q: What kind of questions can I expect on the midterm/final exam?

A: Regarding the scope of questions that may be asked on the midterm/final exam, please go according to what is listed in the learning objectives on the course webpage. The questions that you see on the homeworks should give you a fair sampling of the questions that you may expect on the exams. In addition, a final exam from a previous semester has also been posted on the course homepage under 'Past Assignments', so that should give you a good idea. Other than these, the course staff will obviously not be able to reveal very specific information (e.g. information such as could there be a question on the exam that is based on a specific subsection or a specific page number of the text book, etc)

Q: When can I contact the course staff for any questions about my overall letter grade on this course?

A: For any questions about the overall letter grade that you receive on the course, you must see the instructor in the extra office hours after the final exam (during which time you can also see your graded final exam papers) since after that there will be no opportunity to address such questions until the following semester.

Q: Will there be any change in my grade after a graded exam/report/homework/quiz is returned to me?

A: Most likely not. In case you still think you deserve a different grade, please read the Regrade Policy in the syllabus and follow the instructions in it. In this regard, any other requests (e.g. coming in during TA office hours to ask for an on-the-spot change of grade on the basis of verbal persuasions, etc.) cannot be honored.

Q: If a classmate talks to the TA/instructor and comes up with some clarification about a HW, project, etc that affects me too, how will I come to know of it?

A: During any email exchange with some student, or during any one-to-one discussion during the office hours of the TA or instructor, if some new point (e.g. clarification on the wording of a homework problem) comes up, and it is deemed relevant to all students in class, it will be communicated to everyone in class, so that no one particular student gets unfair advantage. Similarly, if you have a question for the TA/instructor and you think that the question does not affect the whole class, then it may be best to ask by email, rather than asking via the message board.

Q: The points that I make during the course of the semester – how will they be communicated to me?

A: HW1, HW2-part2, project reports, quizzes, the midterm, and the final will be returned to you as a graded hardcopy. Your scores on the other homeworks will be visible in Gradiance.