Department of Geography and Geoinformation Science
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GGS 210

Introduction to Spatial Computing

1. General Information

Instructor:	Dr. Andreas Züfle
Where:	Exploratory Hall 2312
When:	Tuesday: 10:30am – 1:10pm
Course website:	Blackboard
Credits:	3
Prerequisites:	None
Office Hours:	Tuesday 3-5PM or by appointment

2. Course Description

The transformational potential of Spatial Computing is evident. Using Virtual Globes, such as Google Maps and Microsoft Bing Maps, and using hand-held GPS devices integrated in smart phone, our society has benefitted immensely from spatial technology. Using this technology, we always know, precisely, where we are, where nearby points of interest such as restaurants are, and how to reach these points of interest. Large organizations use Spatial Computing for site-selection, asset tracking, facility management, navigation, and logistics. Scientists use GPS to track endangered species to better understand behavior, and farmers use GPS for precision agriculture to increase crop yields while reducing costs.

This course introduces students to Geo-Spatial Data Analysis using Python. It will expose students to basic techniques for data collection and storage, data processing and data mining using location data. Students will learn to work with geospatial objects, such as points, lines and polygons and will get hands-on experience in processing spatial data. Basic geometric algorithms for point-in-polygon tests and line-segment intersection tests will be presented. Techniques for spatial navigation, such as shortest path algorithm in free space and in spatial networks will be presented. Technical challenges such as storing, reading and parsing geospatial will be discussed and students will be hands-on experience analyzing geo-spatial data in groups.

To analyze data, this course will provide tutorials to programming in Python during most of the first half of the semester. This tutorial will and start from scratch – not requiring or assuming any prior programming experience in Python or any other programming language.

3. Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course each student will be able to:

- Solve simple problems and tasks using imperative programming in Python
- Solve more complex problems in Python using object-oriented programming
- Have a broad knowledge of data analysis techniques for spatial data.
- Understand and apply basic geometric algorithms.
- Have knowledge about data analysis techniques such as clustering and classification.
- utilize existing Python packages for advanced spatial analysis and data science for your future job and research.
- Articulate and effectively communicate concepts and ideas related to spatial computing to experts, non-experts, and other professionals in a work environment.
- Have the ability to appropriately apply the knowledge acquired in the course for real-world data.
- Analyze a given dataset in a team using Python

4. Format

The course will be taught as a combination of lectures and tutorials.

5. Textbooks

None

6. Technology Requirements Hardware

You will need access to a Windows or Macintosh computer with at least 2 GB of RAM and to a fast, reliable broadband Internet connection (e.g., cable, DSL).
For the amount of computer hard disk space required to submit your assignments online, consider and allow for the space needed to save your course assignments.

Software

We will use Python. Python is free to download.

7. Course Outline (tentative)

The first half of the semester we will focus on learning Python. This will include in-class tutorials to make you familiar with the Python programming language. First, you will learn basic (imperative) Python programming. Then, we will move to object-oriented programming to work with spatial objects such as points and polygons. To show your understanding, and exercise beyond the classroom, you will be required to solve programming assignments.
As the course does not expect you to have any programming experience, some of you may already have programming experience. To keep those of you interested, I will make a large collection of additional (ungraded) programming assignments available on wide scale of difficulty levels. The additional assignments won't be graded – but I will give you feedback to help you improve.
The first half of the semester will be wrapped up by a mid-term exam, which will require programming in Python to use solve spatial computing tasks. Most questions on the midterm exam will require programming.

In the second half of the semester, we will use our newly acquired Python programming skills to solve spatial computing programs, including problems in computational geometry (such as the point-in-polygon test), graph problems (such as the shortest path search problem), and data mining problems (such as clustering). The course will be capstoned by your choice of either a final exam or a course project. Course projects can be done in teams, and the level of complexity of the project will depend on the number of team members. Solo projects are also allowed.
Note that a course project usually takes much more time than preparing for an exam but also be more fun. Students that decide to do a course project will be allowed to switch back to the final exam option at any time.

A detailed schedule of the topics covered in this course is given in the following (please note that the topics and their order are subjected to change at the discretion of the instructor, any changes will be announced on Blackboard in time):

Date	Mod. #	Topic	Assignment
08/27	1	Motivation: Spatial Computing, Big Spatial Data and Data Science Intro to Spatial Data: Points, Lines, Polygons. Examples and applications.	Assignment 1: Introduction (no points)
09/03	2	Intro to Programming in Python: Imperative Programming Part 1 (variables, branching, functions)	Assignment 2: Imperative Programming
09/10	3	Intro to Programming in Python: Imperative Programming Part 2 (recursion, iteration)	Assignment 3: Recursion and Iteration
09/17	4	Intro to Programming in Python: Imperative Programming Part 3 (Lists and Data Structures)	Assignment 4: Lists and Data Structures
09/24	5	Intro to Programming in Python: Object Oriented Programming Part 1 (Basics, Points, Lines)	Assignment 5: Object Oriented Programming
10/01	6	Intro to Programming in Python: Object Oriented Programming Part 2 Geometric Algorithms	Assignment 6: Point in Polygon Test
10/08	7	Assignment Discussion and Midterm Q&A	
10/15		Fall Break – No Class (Monday Classes meet on Tuesday 10/15)	
10/22		Midterm Exam	
10/29	9	Network Shortest Path Search: Shortest Path Algorithms	Assignment 7: Shortest Path Search
11/05		Instructor out of town Team Meetings for project ideas	
11/12	10	Path and Motion Planning Algorithms: Collision-free shortest path finding	Assignment 8: Collision-Free Path Search
11/19	11	Introduction to Spatial Data Mining Part 1 Overview and Clustering	Assignment 9: Clustering
11/26	12	Introduction to Spatial Data Mining Part 2 Classification, Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence	Assignment 10: Classification
12/03	13	Project Discussions and Final Exam Q&A	
12/10		Reading Days. No Class.	
12/17		Final Exam and Final Project Presentations	

8. Grades

Each assignment and written exam will be given a numerical grade on a 0-100 scale. Some assignments may include bonus tasks. At the end of the term all the marks will be totaled as a weighted average according to the following weights:

Intermediate assignments	**20%**
Midterm Exam	**40%**
Final Exam (or Project)	**40%**

Final grades at the end of the course will be assigned using **ONLY absolute achievements** not considering relative standing in the class.

9. Exams

The course includes a mandatory written mid-term and final exam. The material covered in the exams will be announced in class.

10. Assignments:

The course will include several written assignments on selected topics from the material covered in class and in the assigned reading.

Assignments should be done **through the Blackboard course website**.

Please note: Assignments should be submitted only through the Assignment submission section of the Blackboard system - DO NOT email assignments directly to the instructor.

11. Late Assignment Submission:

Papers submitted **after the due date will not be accepted**. Exceptions to this policy may be made given serious circumstances at the discretion of the Instructor.

Please note: Deferral of term work is a privilege and not a right; there is no guarantee that a deferral will be granted. Please make sure you notify the instructor as soon as you know a deferral is required.

12. General guidelines for ASSIGNMENT preparation and submission

a. Grades of assignments will be based on:

- **Academic merit** of your answers.
- **Conciseness** and **completeness** of your answers. Please write to the point and explicitly address the question or task. Avoid using unnecessary graphics (figures, tables, graphs etc.) unless they serve a specific purpose. Make sure to use captions and to refer to the graphics you include in your written answer. Graphics without any reference or accompanying explanation will be disregarded.
- **Organization** and **presentation**. Remember that your assignment report is a reflection of your thinking and learning process. Please organize your report in a logical fashion so that your answers could be easily identified. A general format for your presentation should, as a minimum, include the following components: (1) Question number, (2) Your written answer and/or description and discussion of your results, and (3) Visualization of your results, e.g. images, graphs, tables, as necessary.

b. Please remember that your assignment is a **professional document**, and should therefore be formatted and constructed accordingly. All assignments are to be typed. Hand-written assignments will not be accepted.

c. Submission of a hardcopy will be made in class; submission of a softcopy will be made through Blackboard.

d. The electronic submission of your assignment report has to be in **PDF format**.

e. If more than one file is submitted, you may submit a single **ZIP** file containing all the assignment files.
f. Each assignment submission should include a cover page with the following information: assignment title, assignment number, student name, and submission date.
g. Please make sure you have a backup of all the materials you submit.

13. Course website:

The course has a Blackboard website. This website will provide you a single portal through which you may obtain lecture notes, retrieve assignment data and, review links to additional materials, and receive special announcements. You are required to visit the course website **once per day**. Please notify ITU (and, if necessary, the instructor) if you encounter any problems accessing this website.

14. Electronic communication:

All course related email correspondence, including submission of assignments, should be made through the course Blackboard website. Please DO NOT send emails to the instructors' @gmu.edu address.

15. Student Expectations:

- **Academic Integrity:** Students must be responsible for their own work, and students and faculty must take on the responsibility of dealing explicitly with violations. The tenet must be a foundation of our university culture. [See http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/distance].
- **Honor Code:** Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/].
- **MasonLive/Email (GMU Email):** Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
  [See https://masonlivelogin.gmu.edu].
- **Patriot Pass:** Once you sign up for your Patriot Pass, your passwords will be synchronized, and you will use your Patriot Pass username and password to log in to the following systems: Blackboard, University Libraries, MasonLive, myMason, Patriot Web, Virtual Computing Lab, and WEMS. [See https://password.gmu.edu/index.jsp].
- **University Policies:** Students must follow the university policies.
  [See http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu].Responsible Use of Computing - Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing.
  [See http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing].
- **University Calendar:** Details regarding the current Academic Calendar.
  [See http://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/index.html].
- **Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See http://ods.gmu.edu].
- Students are expected to follow courteous Internet etiquette at all times; see http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html for more information regarding these expectations.

2. Student Services:

- **University Libraries:** University Libraries provides resources for distance students.
  [See http://library.gmu.edu/distance and http://infoguides.gmu.edu/distance_students].
- **Writing Center:** The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. [See http://writingcenter.gmu.edu]. You can now sign up for an Online Writing Lab (OWL) session just like you sign up for a face-to-face session in the Writing Center, which means YOU set the date and time of the appointment! Learn more about the Online Writing Lab (OWL).

- **Counseling and Psychological Services:** The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See http://caps.gmu.edu].
- **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):** The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), also known as the "Buckley Amendment," is a federal law that gives protection to student educational records and provides students with certain rights. [See http://registrar.gmu.edu/privacy].

Disclaimer: Any typographical errors in this Course Outline are subject to change and will be announced in class. The date of the final examination is set by the Registrar and takes precedence over the final examination date reported by the instructor.

Note: Recording is permitted only with the prior written consent of the professor or if recording is part of an approved accommodation plan.