

CS112: Introduction to Computer Programming

(Spring 2024)

Sections 002 and 003

1 Course Basics

Instructors

Professor	Email	Office	Section
Radu Negulescu	rnegules	RSCH 364	002 (M/W 12 PM – 1:15 PM) & 003 (M/W 1:30 – 2:45 PM)

Course Outcomes:

- An ability to use procedural programming language concepts including expressions, decision statements, simple data types, Boolean logic, input/output, loop constructs, and procedures.
- An ability to combine programming techniques to solve problems of varying degrees of difficulty.
- An ability to refine computer programs through testing and debugging to ensure proper operation.
- An ability to read, understand, and evaluate a program specification to independently implement the desired behavior.
- An ability to understand issues and ethics related to obtaining and using code from unknown, unreliable, or unethical sources, as a precursor to best professional practices.

Mason Core IT Learning Outcomes:

- Students will understand the principles of information storage, exchange, security, and privacy and be aware of related ethical issues.
- Students will become critical consumers of digital information; they will be capable of selecting and evaluating appropriate, relevant, and trustworthy sources of information.
- Students can use appropriate information and computing technologies to organize and analyze information and use it to guide decision-making.
- Students will be able to choose and apply appropriate algorithmic methods to solve a problem.

Prerequisite

C or better in MATH 104, 105, or 113 (or sufficient score on the math placement test).

1.1 Textbook

Required - zyBooks Online Textbook

- Sign in or create an account at **learn.zybooks.com**
- Enter zyBook code: **GMUCS112Spring2024**
- Subscribe using any credit card. A subscription is \$58. (The price at GMU Bookstore is higher.)
- Students who **retake the course** contact **support@zybooks.com** to have the book added to your library for **free**
- **Students may begin subscribing on Jan 02, 2024. The cutoff to subscribe is Apr 17, 2024**

Quite Optional – For students who would like extra reading and exercises:

The Practice of Computing Using Python, 3rd edition. William Punch and Richard Enbody

A solid well-rounded book with many examples

Python Crash Course, 3rd edition. Eric Matthes

A highly relatable book with clear explanations

The Python Workbook: A Brief Introduction with Exercises and Solutions, 2nd ed. Ben Stephenson

Some 200 lab-like exercises

1.2 Piazza

- Announcements, Discussions, Frequently Asked Questions.
- All correspondence will go through Piazza. You can send private messages to the instructors (visible to all professors, GTAs, and UTAs) as well as post public questions visible to all students, collaborate on responses, and tag everything by topic.
- Unless you have a confidential matter to discuss directly with an individual professor/TA, please do not email us directly -- use a private piazza post. *Programming Assignment help questions sent via email are of extremely low priority, as they were sent to the wrong place and will most likely be responded to with "please post on Piazza".*
- **The discussion board on Piazza is required reading for all programming assignments.** You **MUST** read the discussion board when you start coding your assignment and one business day before the due deadline, to check for updates. In particular, look for FAQ notes for the respective PAs that contain summaries of important answers to other students.

1.3 Blackboard

- Course schedule, course syllabus, description of assignments, lab and lecture slides and/or lecture videos will be posted on Blackboard.
- All programming assignments will be submitted (per published deadlines) via Blackboard.
- All grades will be posted to Blackboard.
- GTA/UTA contacts and office hours will be on Blackboard.
- **Announcements will be sent via Blackboard. The most important and time-critical announcements will be emailed out from Blackboard, and are to be read within 24 hours. Other Blackboard announcements are required reading before each lecture.**

2 Grading

Category	Total Weight	Notes
Quizzes	3%	In-class quizzes or other activities as indicated Drop the 2 lowest quizzes
Reading	2%	Make sure you are logged in to zyBooks to get credit for reading completion Both practice and challenge activities are required Drop 2 lowest-completion assignment chapter sections (not chapters!)
Labs	10%	Drop 2 lowest, average other labs evenly
Programming Assignments	40%	6 PAs, equally weighted All PAs are required; none of them will be dropped from the course mark
Midterm	20%	See section 2.4 on Exams
Final Exam	25%	The exams average must be a passing grade to pass the class. See section 2.4 on Exams

- **Grade cutoff levels:** A+ 98 A 92 A- 90 B+ 88 B 82 B- 80 C+ 78 C 72 C- 70 D 60
- **Extra credit:** 1% for the first student who reports a previously unknown issue impacting the class. The issue needs to be reported in Piazza if possible, or by email to the professor, and acknowledged by reply email. There is a limit of 3% total maximum per student
- **There will be no make-up assignments at the end of the semester.**

2.1 Individual Programming Assignments

Programming assignments are a significant portion of your grade. You should not expect to be able to finish them in one sitting. Start early and test frequently, both offline and by submitting multiple times to Gradescope. However, if it looks like you'd be spending more than 10 hours to get a satisfactory mark on an assignment, see a TA during their office hours to work on your coding skills (not on the PA itself).

- **Blackboard and Gradescope Submission**

Activities and assignments in this course will regularly use the Blackboard learning system, available at <https://mymason.gmu.edu>. Students are required to have regular, reliable access to a computer with an updated operating system and a stable broadband Internet connection.

- All assignments are to be submitted to Gradescope/Blackboard. You can submit your work an unlimited number of times to Gradescope/Blackboard prior to the assignment deadline, and by default only the last version will be graded.
- Turning in the wrong files will likely result in a zero. You can and should download your submitted attempts to verify that you turned in a working copy.
- Blackboard being unavailable, catastrophic computer failure, or the Internet disappearing are not excuses for turning in a late assignment. It is important to start early and submit frequently your partial solutions to each PA.

All course materials posted to Blackboard or other course sites are private to this class; by federal law, any materials that identify specific students (via their name, voice, or image) must not be shared with anyone not enrolled in this class.

- **Deadlines**

- Each programming assignment has a posted deadline.
- The latest you can turn in a programming assignment is 24 hours after the posted deadline, no exceptions (unless you have ODS accommodations). Assignments turned in within 24 hours late will acquire a grade penalty of **20%**. So, in this case: $\text{recorded_grade} = \min(\text{raw_score}, 80)$.
- You should turn in work within 24 hours of the original deadline! Assignments turned in more than 24 hours late will not be accepted.
- Turning in 1 minute late and turning in 23 hours and 59 minutes late are treated the same (and therefore there are no "partial late penalties").

- **Broken Code == Bad Scores**

- After the first two programming assignments, any code turned in that does not run (immediately crashes due to errors), specifically on Python 3.11 or above, will receive at most 50%. **No exceptions.** At this point, if the grader can quickly fix your code, you might get some points back. If the grader cannot immediately spot and fix the issue, you might not get any points at all.
- Turning in code that runs is a big deal!

- **Honor Code: Special Notes for Programming Assignments**

- Programming assignments are considered individual efforts, therefore no sharing of code and/or discussion of problem solutions are allowed with anyone except the TAs or the professors. Student submissions will be manually and automatically assessed for cheating. **You may not look at or otherwise view or discuss any other individual's code, pseudocode, or algorithms.**
- You may not use any Internet resources to create code or algorithms, besides the textbooks, the slides, and Piazza, unless otherwise specified. However, you are free to look up the syntax errors you encounter online, to gain an understanding of what the syntax error means. **The assignments of this semester can be directly solved using Python syntax discussed in class, and no outside material is needed unless otherwise noted.**
- **It is your responsibility** to lock your computers with a password, to not post your code to websites like Pastebin that are publicly accessible, to guard your USB drives and computers, to not upload your files to someone else's computer, etc. **You are liable for any access gained to your code.**
- See [Honor code](#) section below for more details.

2.2 Labs

- All lab assignment grades will be averaged together. Lab assignments will be tasks completed during the scheduled time.
- Lab tasks require attendance at your *designated* lab time to get the credit.
- **Any missed lab assignment is simply missed.** Two of the lowest lab grades will be dropped to cover the very rare cases of understandable missed labs.

- If you choose to miss a lab early on for no reason, and later, must miss one for some understandable reason, you would have used up your drop unnecessarily. Try to save the drop so you can throw out a bad grade, and not just hide a lazy zero. Pretending you don't have these available drops is your best approach.

2.3 e-book Readings

- zyBook readings are graded based on the completion percentage of activities **before the designated deadline** of each chapter.
- See the schedule page on Blackboard for reading assignment due dates.
- Make sure you're logged in to get credit for reading completion.
- Optional subsections are not considered for zyBook reading.

2.4 Exams

- Exams are closed book/notes unless specified otherwise by instructor.
- **If you perform better on the final exam than your midterm exam, we will replace the midterm grade with the final grade.**
- No midterm exam make-ups/reschedules are permitted. Missing the midterm exam is a 0 on the midterm exam until you take the final exam to replace the 0.
- If you know in advance that you are unable to take the final exam at the scheduled time for a valid and unavoidable reason (such as a scheduled surgery, etc.), you must notify the professor at least one week before the scheduled exam date to make arrangements for a make-up.
- If you miss the final exam deadline due to a university-accepted excused absence (such as an illness or car accident the day and time of the exam), you must notify your professor within 24 hours of your absence to make arrangements for a makeup. Failure to follow either of these policies will result in a zero on the final exam.
- Per departmental policy, you must pass a significant exam threshold to receive a passing grade in this class, regardless of your performance on other assignments. Failing the final exam (<60.0%), will result in a failing grade (F) for the entire course unless you have achieved an average exam score $\geq 60\%$. This average score is calculated as a **weighted** average of your exam scores, the midterm is worth 20%, the final exam is worth 25%, the total weight is 45%. In short, in 99/100 cases, **you must pass the final exam to pass the course.**

2.5 Contested Grades

- If you feel points have been incorrectly deducted, contact the grader. For all programming assignments and lab work, that is your GTA. For exams, that is your professor. Contesting of grades on any/all submissions must be requested **within one week** of receiving the grade (on Blackboard or Gradescope (regrade request)). No grade changes will be considered after that deadline.

3 Office Hours and Discussion Board

There is substantial support available to you outside of lecture time in the form of office hours and the online discussion board (Piazza). If you are having difficulty on a programming assignment or lab, we encourage you to reach out **as early as possible**. That said, to ensure fairness and facilitate learning, we have some basic rules for seeking help outlined below. Please note that Piazza is a

discussion forum for you, the students, to discuss the course and the course material. There will be UTAs assigned to check on this forum regularly and try to moderate the discussion, but this is NOT a replacement for office hours, lecture with your professor, or labs.

3.1 Rules for Emails/Office Hours

- Students must use their Mason email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class.
- We will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address. Please indicate your name and what course you are referring to in your email.
- Please give 48 hours (usually 24 hours or less) for faculty to respond to email on weekdays.
- Emails sent on the weekend will be responded to on the following Monday.
- For students seeking help with programming assignments during office hours, students must identify the line number, through debug print statements, where they believe an error to be before seeing the TA or instructor. **This implies that you must have at least one test case that fails to bring to office hours before the TAs or instructor can help you.**
- For more general programming assignment questions, students must bring their own pseudocode to office hours before the TA or professor can help you.
- **Under no circumstances will the professor or GTA reveal any code for an assignment during office hours.**
- Students must make significant individual effort on all programming assignments before coming to see a GTA/professor.
- Office hours are often crowded - do not rely on them for last-minute help, as we cannot guarantee that we will be able to spend significant time with every student.

3.2 Rules for the Discussion Board (Piazza)

- Students are encouraged to use the discussion board, Piazza, to ask and answer questions about assignments, labs, course material, etc.
- No sharing answers or code solutions to assignments on the discussion board. See [Honor code](#) section below for more details.
- Students can post questions and code privately, although **the instructor reserves the right to make any post public, so that other students can see the responses.**
- For students wishing to post their code privately to Piazza, the same rules apply as when coming to office hours; if you have code written, you must produce at least one failing test case where you have identified what line number is giving you problems.
- UTAs will be assigned to moderate the student discussion, help review student answers, answer private questions, and address questions which have not received a student answer. Therefore, responses to questions can be expected **within 24 hours**, though often much sooner.
- Statements made on the discussion boards, even by TAs and especially by other students, should **NOT** be considered the definitive word on the subject unless it is verified by your professor (in the assignment description, in class, posted on Piazza, etc.). The UTAs can tag professors if/when clarifications are needed.
- If you have any questions about what you are/aren't permitted to do on a programming assignment or exam, ask your professor on Piazza.

4 Honor Code

- The honor code at George Mason is an important part of our academic culture. A degree from this institution should be a direct measure of your own progress and abilities, and as such, at all times we must ensure that all work that should be your own is your own.
- All students are expected to abide by the [GMU Honor Code](#). This policy is rigorously enforced.
- The computer science department has an [CS Honor Code Policies](#) to understand better what constitutes cheating in the CS setting. It clarifies some scenarios that are unique to our sort of assignments. Note that the CS department doesn't have any "extra" policy for the honor code on top of the university's, this document merely helps you to understand how the honor code applies to programming and CS, but it doesn't restrict it at all.
- We take the honor code quite seriously. Any attempts at copying or sharing code, algorithms, or other violations of the honor code simply will not be tolerated. Cheating will be prosecuted and result in a notification of the Honor Committee as outlined in the GMU Honor Code. **Sharing, collaboration, or looking at any code or algorithm related to programming assignments that is not your own is considered cheating. This includes using code found on the internet.**
- As seductively simple as it may seem to just copy and paste work from a friend, or even to just work on the assignment on your own machines next to each other, remember that it is just as easy to compare your work automatically and electronically, and discover the similarities in text and structure. We use automated software to flag suspicious cases, and then review them to find the cases that must be submitted to the Office of Academic Integrity.
- **Confirmed cases of cheating result in a final grade of an F in the course.**
- Please read [Understanding the Honor Code](#) - Dr. Snyder's thoughts about the purpose of the honor code in a computer science course.
- Sharing of instructor-created materials, particularly materials relevant to assignments or exams, to public online "study" sites is considered a violation of Mason's Honor Code. For more information, see the Office of Academic Integrity's [summary of information about online study sites](#).
- There are opportunities to study, work, and learn together throughout this course - zyBook questions, lab exercises, and more. Mostly you will need to work independently for any sort of "test" and for programming assignments.

5 University Policies

- There is a limit of two graded attempts for this course. A W does not count as a graded attempt. Please see the University Catalog and consult with your academic advisor if you have any questions.
- Gender Identity and Pronoun Use: if you wish, please share your name and gender pronouns with us and how best to address you in class and via email. You can update your chosen name and pronouns [here](#).
- Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. It is your responsibility to email your accommodation letter to your professor. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email:ods@gmu.edu | Phone: (703) 993-2474.
- George Mason University, an intentionally [inclusive community](#), promotes and maintains an equitable and just work and learning environment. We welcome and value individuals and their differences including race, economic status, gender expression and identity, sex, sexual

orientation, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age, and disability. As a member of the George Mason University community, the Computer Science department plays an integral role in building an educational environment that is committed to anti-racism and inclusive excellence. For more information on how to continuously cultivate the practice of anti-racism, see this guide from the National Museum of African American History and Culture on how to be anti-racist: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/being-antiracist>.

- Title IX: As a faculty member and designated “Responsible Employee,” I am required to report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s [Title IX Coordinator](#) per [university policy 1412](#). If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact the [Student Support and Advocacy Center](#) (703-380-1434) or [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (703-993-2380). You may also seek assistance from [Mason’s Title IX Coordinator](#) (703-993-8730; titleix@gmu.edu).
- Student Support Resources on Campus: <https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/knowning-mason-students/student-support-resources-on-campus/>.
- Incomplete Grades: <https://chssundergrad.gmu.edu/other-forms/incompletes>.
- Campus Closure due to Weather: If the campus closes or class is canceled due to weather or other concern, students should check Blackboard/Piazza for updates on how to continue learning and information about any changes to events or assignments.

Safe Return to Campus Statement: *All students taking courses with a face-to-face component are required to follow the university’s public health and safety precautions and procedures outlined on the university Safe Return to Campus webpage (<https://www2.gmu.edu/safe-return-campus>).*

6 Mental Health

- What is listed on the syllabus are our/Mason’s usual course policies. We fully understand that each of us may face new obstacles, or old obstacles in novel ways, during this time. Please communicate with us if such things are getting in your way in this class. **Our goal is to facilitate your growth and success;** we can only do that if you tell us what is happening.
- If you are experiencing feelings of anxiety, panic, depression, sadness during the semester, Student Health Services and Counseling and Psychological Services Offices (703-993-2380) provides a range of resources to assist and support you.
- Students can call (703-993-2831) or walk-in during open hours to schedule an appointment to talk with a health care provider. If you or someone you know experiences a mental health crisis or emergency, seek help immediately. Call 911 for local emergency services, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255), or text the Crisis Text Line (741-741) anytime.
- We believe we learn best when we can show up as whole and healthy people. To learn effectively we need to have basic security: a roof over our head, a safe place to sleep, a stable place to live, and enough food to eat. If you are struggling to meet any of these basic needs, visit our campus food pantry (<https://ssac.gmu.edu/patriot-pantry/>), or reach out to other Mason resources <https://learningservices.gmu.edu/campus-resources/>. Remember, asking for assistance and advocating for yourself is an important part of your collegiate experience. **YOU** are not alone.