

Introduction

CSE 220: Systems Programming

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Welcome to CSE 220

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Syllabus and slides are on [UBLearns](#), OH info is on Piazza.

Welcome to CSE 220

My name is Jesse Hartloff

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12:00–13:00

Syllabus and slides are on [UBLearns](#), OH info is on Piazza.

Systems Programming

This course is concerned with **systems programming**.

You will learn:

- More about the properties of **computer systems**
- How **architecture** affects **programs**
- How to effectively write **efficient** and **correct** programs
- Some interactions at the **Linux command line**
- The **C programming language** and **POSIX API**

Our goals are to:

- **Improve your intuitions** about how computers work
- Practice solving **real problems** with programming

Programming in Context

Programming doesn't occur in a vacuum.

Computer systems **have greatly influenced** our:

- Programming languages
- Development tools
- Preferred algorithms

This course will help you **understand that context**.

Course Difficulty

This course is **NOT** a “weed-out” course!

It is, however, **quite difficult**.

It is difficult because:

- The material is precise and unforgiving.
- 2xx courses provide **less guidance** than 1xx courses.
- Success requires careful time management.

You will get out of this course **what you put into it**.

Expectations

For this course, we expect that you:

- Will be **respectful** to course staff and classmates
- Attend **every lecture** and **every lab**
- **Adhere strictly** to the academic integrity policy
- Will seek assistance **early** if necessary
- Meet prereqs; among other things:
 - Have some experience programming
 - Understand linked lists and object references

Most of all, **behave as adults** and strive to **maximize** your and your classmates' **learning experience** in this course.

Expectations

For this course, you can expect that all course staff:

- Will be **respectful** to you, your classmates, and course staff
- Will maintain a welcoming and productive learning environment
- Will support your learning of the course content
- Will help you become an independent learner; this means
 - not giving direct or complete answers to some questions
 - asking you questions to show you how to problem-solve
 - referring you to existing resources which address your problems

Most of all, we will **behave as adults** and strive to **maximize** your and your classmates' **learning experience** in this course.

Attendance

Lecture attendance **is mandatory**.

- We will not repeat lectures.
- Labs will not repeat lectures.
- You are **expected to catch up on your own** if you skip.

Lab attendance **is mandatory**.

- Lab attendance **will be tracked**.
- You will **practice** what you learn in class.
- You will be **frequently tested** on your understanding.

Attendance is **monitored** and **required** to pass this course.

Succeeding in CSE 220

Students who fail or resign CSE 220 often:

- Miss lectures or labs
- Start assignments at the last minute
- Don't visit office hours (early enough)
- Don't ask their questions on Piazza
- Don't commit to git
- Don't submit to Autograder early
- Don't learn the Linux environment
- Cheat

Please address any problems **early**!

Readings

Most lectures will have both **required** and **optional** readings.

Readings will appear at the end of the slides.

You must read the required readings ... **even if we do not mention them in class.**

You may wish to read the optional readings:

- to expand your understanding of related topics
- to help you understand the required material

Assistance

Our primary forum for assistance will be [Piazza](#).

You should have been added to our course Piazza.

Please consult existing postings before asking a question!

- However, if you're not sure your question is answered, ask!
- If you wish to discuss code, solutions, etc, send a private message to the instructors!

We will post important course announcements and materials to Piazza.

Programming Projects

A significant portion of your course grade will be projects.

- These are **individual projects**.
- Projects will be written in C.

Projects must run on `emon.cse.buffalo.edu`.

Teaching **yourself** C¹ is a learning objective in this course!²

¹With our help!

²Remember, you have already learned Python and Java!

Course Time-sharing System

We provide you with a *time-sharing system* to do your development.

This is a **shared computer** that everyone will use.

It provides a **uniform environment** for all students.

Its name is `emon.cse.buffalo.edu`.

You will access it via `ssh`.

Acquiring **some Linux CLI proficiency** is a learning objective of this course!

Project Assistance

Your TAs will be your primary source of help for projects.

To get the most out of your TAs, **do**:

- try the obvious things first,
- create minimal examples to show problems, and
- **consult the documentation.**

To avoid wasting TA time and failing to get help:

- **don't** ask for help before you've tried to understand the problem
- **don't start at the last minute.**

Editors

We don't care what editor you use, but **it must be a programmer's editor**, and be capable of:

- Syntax highlighting
- Automatic indentation
- Brace/parenthesis/*etc.* matching
- Extensibility

Neither instructors nor the TAs will help you if you are not using an appropriate environment when you seek help!

Our personal recommendation and supported option is **Emacs**. Emacs is installed on the time-sharing system.

Today's Assignments

Immediately:

- Read the [Syllabus](#).
- Watch the academic integrity video on Panopto.

Before Wednesday this week:

- Create a [GitHub account](#) if you don't already have one.
- Provide your GitHub username on the UBlearns quiz
- Make sure you can log into the time-sharing system.
- Watch the lab video and read the handout.

By [Friday next week](#):

- Lab 01, PA0 handout quiz, and Academic Integrity quiz due

Lab

Labs begin on Wednesday!

Go to your lab!

Grading

Passing this course requires **five extra conditions**:

- Completion of the AI quiz with perfect score
- Completion of Lab 01 with perfect score
- At least 60% weighted exam average
- At least 60% lab exam average
- At least 60% attendance

Failing **any of these points** means an F in 220.

Your course grade will be calculated according to the Syllabus.

Why C?

There are dozens of programming languages. Why C?

C is “high level”, but not very.

- C provides functions, structured programming, complex data types, and many other powerful abstractions
- ... yet it also exposes many architectural details

Most operating system kernels are written in C.

Many runtimes and virtual machines are written in C.

C influences many other languages.

Effective C

Effective C programming requires that you [master the machine](#).

You must be aware of its [architecture](#) and [details of operation](#).

We will be using C in Linux on x86-64.

The [dialect](#) of C that we will use is [C99](#).¹

The [compiler](#) that we will use is gcc.

¹K&R describes ANSI C (C89), but we will discuss the differences when important.

CSE 220 and C

That said, CSE 220 is not (only) about learning C.

Lecture teaches concepts, and you will implement them in C.

We will not cover all details of C syntax.

We will cover key ideas and particularly important syntax.

Learning C will teach you to learn new languages.

You should consult:

- The C Programming Language (K&R)
- Unix man pages
- Given code

On Precision

This course will attempt to be precise, but must **simplify some things**.

Usually this is because the details:

- are unnecessarily confusing, or
- require knowledge you are not expected to have.

If something here conflicts with the standard or the compiler, **the standard or compiler wins**.

We will try to mark **imprecise statements** with a pilcrow: ¶

The Processor and Memory

The C language exposes a particular machine model.

Data is **stored in memory** at **accessible addresses**. ¶

The **CPU manipulates data** stored in memory.

Program code is executed as a series of instructions:

- Also **stored in memory**
- Though possibly **not accessible** (as data)

A Dedicated Computer

Most modern, multi-tasking OSes provide a particular model.

That model is that **each process has its own dedicated machine**.

Each process **appears to have**:

- A dedicated CPU
- Private, dedicated memory
- Private input and output facilities

That isn't **strictly true**, but it is **approximated by the OS**.

The OS provides mechanisms to **share resources** in this model.

Programs as Instructions

C programs¹ are translated into **machine instructions**.

The computer **executes these instructions in order**. ¶

Instructions are things like:

- Add two numbers together
- Compare a number to zero
- Store a number to a location in memory

As we will see, **it's all bits**.

¹Indeed, all programs!

TopHat

(Some practice TopHat questions, as time permits.)

Developing Hello World

“Hello World” is a classic **first program** when learning a language.

We will develop a Hello World together.

```
#include <stdio.h>
```

```
int main(int argc, char *argv[]) {  
    puts("Hello, world!");  
    return 0;  
}
```

Summary

- C is a **high level language** used in **systems programming**.
- **Architectural details** are important in C.
- The C/POSIX model is:
 - A **dedicated machine** for each program
 - Sequential execution of program instructions
 - Data is stored in accessible, **addressed memory**
- We explored some trivial C programs.

Remember your required readings!

Next Time ...

- More about types
- Variable declaration and usage
- C Strings
- Looping

Bibliography

Required Readings

- [1] Brian W. Kernighan and Dennis M. Ritchie. *The C Programming Language*. Second Edition. Introduction, Chapter 1. Prentice Hall, 1988.
- [2] Ethan Blanton and Jesse Hartloff. [Course Syllabus](#). August 2026.

Optional Readings

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