

Syllabus

CMSC 112: CS Scholars Seminar II

Spring 2026

Meets: Friday noon, Rotunda 356
Websites: <https://cs.longwood.edu/courses/cmsc112>
<https://longwood.instructure.com/courses/1323886>

This course is designed to continue preparation for active scholarship by developing the skills needed for academic success in computer science. Students will participate in community-building activities, practice reading academic papers, and practice reviewing and presenting what they have read. Open to CS Scholars only. 1 credit.

Professor: Don Blaheta
Office: Rotunda 334
Phone: x2191
Email: blahetadp@longwood.edu
100% office hours: Mondays 3–4pm; Tuesdays 1–2pm;
Wednesdays 10–11am; Thursdays 11am–noon

Overview

This is an activity-driven course intended to prepare students for college success and introduce them to academic scholarship in Computer Science.

Course learning outcomes

At the end of this course, the successful student will be able to:

1. Describe academic and career opportunities in computer science
2. Read a scholarly computer science article for comprehension
3. Present academic research in a manner appropriate for audience and context

Textbook and resources

There is no textbook for this course.

I'll ask you to join the Slack channel for this course. Slack is a communication system similar to IRC or Discord, widely used in the professional tech community to manage

team communications, and seems like a better way to ask and answer questions than a Canvas discussion board. You'll get an invite in your Longwood email, but if you prefer to connect from another email address that's fine too (just tell me so I can send the invite).

In the hopefully unlikely event that you need to go into quarantine or isolation (for Covid-19 or for some other reason), but are otherwise well enough to continue working, I'll expect that you have a device (your computer, or a phone or tablet) that is capable of connecting to a live meeting via Zoom, and reasonable bandwidth to accommodate that. (See also the "Covid-19 notes" section at the end of this document.)

AI Policy

My general feeling about AI is this: AI is a tool. Use it when it's helpful, don't use it when you could do it better or faster yourself.

That said, there are certain skills that programmers and computer scientists will need to develop and execute without the help of AI, slightly because AI might not *always* be available but mostly because you'll need to be able to evaluate and debug the code that the AI (or other programmers) have given you. Thus for assignments that are about *developing* your programming skills (labs, homeworks, projects), I'm going to discourage use of AI until you've given a few solid attempts without. For assignments that are *assessing* your skills (exams) I'll have specific instructions on whether you are or are not allowed to use generative AI to assist. *In general* tasks that you're doing on your own time will permit use of AI, but please attend to specific instructions on each assignment.

I will expect that when you *do* use generative AI, you will document it: say which AI system you used and what help it gave you. **In a comment or embedded link, you should include the "share" URL that lets others view your prompts along with the AI's responses.** Some assignments will have additional instructions how to document this.

(Note that although Longwood's Honor Code does not inherently ban the use of AI, some other professors seem to think it does, so for your safety you should check with each professor before using it in their class.)

Content

Graded work

I figure that I have on average about 3 hours of your time every week, including class time as well as reading and preparation for future classes. If you find you're regularly spending substantially more time than this, please do come discuss it with me, so that

we can ensure you're making the most effective use of your time.

It's a pass/fail class; to pass you need to get a grade of at least 60%.

The work you do for this course will be evaluated as follows:

Engagement. You need to be actively engaged in this class. Engagement comes in many forms, but I expect that you will be interacting with your classmates, and with me, both in class and in the Slack channel. General engagement will be evaluated in two-week blocks—so you don't need to artificially say a thing every day—and it's ok if you lean more towards in-class participation or more towards Slack conversations but aim for at least a little of both. In addition, there may be occasional required specific interactions via Canvas or Slack that will be considered part of the engagement grade, and when I (occasionally) do reading quizzes they'll be part of this too. Engagement makes up 10% of the course grade.

Homework. In the first weeks of the class there will be homework to get you ready for the next week's class discussion. I'll be primarily checking these for completion (so don't skip them!!) and together they make up 20% of the course grade.

Presentations. Once we start reading academic papers, you'll read and present one of them for the class, in a roughly 15 minute presentation. Each presentation will be worth 25% of the grade.

Final response/evaluation. The third paper you read, you will respond to in writing (rather than with a presentation); your written evaluation of the paper will be the final submission of the course, and is worth 20% of the grade.

Calendar (tentative)

Wk	F
January	
1	16 Introduction Welcome to the CS Scholars Community
2	23 Academic and career opportunities in CS
3	30 Major branches of CS
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	February
4	6 Service and policy opportunities in CS
5	13 Reading an academic paper: pedagogy
6	20 Presentations
7	27 Presentations
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	March
8	6 Presentations

* **22 January:** Deadline to add/drop classes (5pm)

Wk	F
March	
9	20 Formal academic writing
10	27 Reading an academic paper: cybersecurity
11	April 3 Feedback and presentation work
12	10 Presentations
13	17 Presentations
14	24 Presentations
15	May 1 Reading an academic paper: computer architecture

Eval document due: Tue 5 May, 2pm

* **1 April:** Deadline to withdraw from classes or declare P/F (5pm)

Policies

You can find several university-wide course policies at <http://www.longwood.edu/academicaffairs/syllabus-statements/> .

“Office hours”

If I’m in my office and my door is open, that means I’m available for you to drop in and ask questions, and I’m happy to turn on my “office hours” zoom link so you can join me that way instead. At least four hours a week I’ve designated as 100% hours, i.e. there’s a nearly 100% chance I’m available at those times.

But I’m in my office a lot and I’d like to effectively communicate to you when you’re most likely to catch me, so if you look at my office schedule on my website or linked from Canvas, you’ll also see many hours listed with other percentages like 60% or 40 or 10, as informal estimates of the probability I’ll have office hours in that block for drop-in questions. (If you want more certainty, you can always give me advance notice and be extra sure I’ll be there at whatever time!)

If you can’t catch me in my office, email or Slack is probably your best bet.

Accommodations

If you have any special need that I can accommodate, I’m happy to do so; come speak to me early in the term so we can set things up. If you have a documented disability, you should also contact Longwood’s Accessibility Resources Office (Brock Hall, x2391) to discuss some of the support the college can offer you. All such conversations are confidential.

Honor code policy

Above all, I ask and expect that you will conduct yourself with honesty and integrity—and not to ignore the other ten points of the Honor Code, either. Take pride in what you are capable of, and have the humility to give credit where it is due.

The two main forms of academic dishonesty are “cheating” and “plagiarism”. “Cheating” is getting help from someplace you shouldn’t, and “plagiarism” is presenting someone else’s idea as if it’s your own. If you ever find yourself inclined towards either of these, know that there are always other, better options. Persevere! See my website¹ for some discussion and examples of how to steer clear of these problems, and feel free to come talk to me if you need help finding some of those other options (even if it’s for another course).

¹<http://cs.longwood.edu/~dblaheta/collab.html>

Cheating or plagiarism (on any assignment) will normally receive a *minimum* penalty of lowering the *course* grade by a full letter, and may range at my discretion up to an F *in the course*. Cases will also be turned in to the Honor Board. But: I believe in your potential, and I hope that you will, or will grow to, observe this policy not simply to evade punishment but positively as a matter of character.

Attendance and late policy

Attendance is required, and assignments must be turned in on time. That said, if you have a good reason to miss class or hand something in late, I tend to be fairly liberal with extensions if you ask in advance. (Good reasons do include assignments due for other classes.) (And medical and family emergencies are exempted from the “in advance” part, of course. But contact me ASAP.)

Frequent absence will result in a lowered participation grade; habitual absence may in extreme cases result in a failing grade for the class. *Unexcused* late assignments will normally be given a zero.

Inclement weather policy

I don’t plan to cancel class for weather unless the entire college shuts down; and if the campus closes, I’m likely to hold class in some form by zoom instead (check your email). If you are commuting or are otherwise significantly affected by a weather event, use your own best judgement (and remember that zoom is an option); and if you do miss class for this reason (e.g.: power’s out too), contact me as soon as possible to make up missed work.

Early bird policy

Nobody’s perfect, and on occasion an assignment gets written a little unclearly (or, once in a while, with an actual error in it). If you catch one and bring it to my attention early, so that I can issue a clarification or correction to the rest of the class, there’ll be some extra credit in it for you.

The section formerly known as “Covid-19 notes”

I have a few policies that originally evolved in response to the pandemic but I’ve decided they’re just good policy so I kept them. Here’s the gist: It’s really easy to keep zoom open for every class, and it’s not nearly as good as in-person attendance but way better than total absence. So I open Zoom every day and ask you to make good choices.

Attending class. There are two ways you can attend class: in person, or via Zoom

link. Either mode of attendance is sufficient to mark you as “attending” (not necessarily engaging or participating). If you attend via Zoom link,

- you must have a reason, and
- you must say what it is,

but I don’t need any medical detail and if it’s not directly covid-related I’m not going to police that. (Again: be an adult and make good choices.) The Zoom experience is nowhere near equivalent to the in-person experience and is not a replacement for it; but if you are quarantined, or otherwise just can’t attend in person on a particular day, zooming is better than total absence.

Zooming vs masking. Although we’ve moved from “pandemic” to “endemic” on Covid-19, I’d just like to remind everyone that masking is still a tool in our toolkit: if you’re feeling a bit sniffly, you can still wear a mask. We all have masks, we all got really good at wearing them, and it’s a courtesy to your classmates to take this easy step to decrease the likelihood of spreading anything. (Including colds and other stuff! Masks help us not spread *lots* of things.)

What if the professor gets sick? Same as for students: if I’m feeling a little sniffly, I’ll wear a mask, and if I am more seriously sick (but well enough to teach), I’ll zoom myself into the class. If necessary I can teach from a zoom window on the projector screen (and have done so!); I’ll post to the Slack and send an email with instructions as soon as I know I need to do this.

This document was written and prepared without the use of generative AI.