

COP 4516: Problem Solving Techniques and Team Dynamics Syllabus

Course Website: <http://www.cs.ucf.edu/~dmarino/progcontests/cop4516/spr2024>

Lecturer: Arup Guha

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Class Times/Locations: T 10:30 – 11:20am (BA1-116),

F 9:00 – 11:50am (HEC-103, HEC-117, HEC-202)

Office: HEC – 240

Office Hours: Posted on Webcourses and course web page

Teaching Assistant: Arun Deegutla

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Teaching Assistant OfficeHours: Posted on Webcourses and course web page

I do NOT check my WebCourses email. Please email me at dmarino@ucf.edu to contact me.

This course requires Friday participation from 9 am - 12 pm. Instead of what it says on myUCF, we may also use HEC-202 for the Friday lab. If you don't have a laptop, go to HEC-202, if you do, bring it fully charged and go to HEC-103 or HEC-117. I have some power strips so most students will be able to plug in. We'll even out the rooms as needed.

Course Description: This course covers training similar to that given to UCF's programming team. Lectures will cover classical algorithms, most of which are taught in Computer Science 2, that tend to be useful in solving programming contest problems. Emphasis will be placed on implementation issues. The general topics covered are: number theory, brute force search, greedy algorithms, graph algorithms, dynamic programming algorithms and geometry algorithms.

Note: There is NO course textbook. Rather, course notes and websites will be used as primary sources. If one strongly desires a book, here are a few that would suffice:

Introduction to Algorithms – Cormen, Leiserson, Rivest, Stein (ISBN: 978-0-262-03384-8)

Programming Challenges – Skiena, Revilla (ISBN: 0-387-00163-8)

Algorithms – Dasgupta, Papadimitriou, Vazirani (ISBN: 0-07-352349-2)

The Design and Analysis of Algorithms – Levitin (ISBN: 0-321-35828-7)

Competitive Programming 3 - Halim and Halim (cpbook.net)

Guide to Competitive Programming - Laaksonen (ISBN: 978-3-319-72546-8)

Grading

This course will have five components

Item	Quantity	Total Percentage
Online Contest Participation	2	10
Written Reflections	2	5
Individual Contests	6	30
Team Contests	6	30
Individual Contest Exam	1	15
Team Contest Exam	1	10

UCF Practice/Online Contest Participation (USACO)

There are several online websites that run programming contests. In the past I would allow students to use many websites, but ironically, giving students choice reduced the number of students who completed the assignment. (Students would think they had many options and would delay participation, only to realize a few days before the deadline that no actual contests were offered.) Instead, this semester I am only allowing students to participate in USACO contests. There will be three contests: one in January(26th-29th), one in February(16th-19th) and one in March (15th-18th). **You MUST participate in two of them.**

To earn credit, you must compete for a minimum of 2 hours and MEET WITH ME TO DISCUSS the contest. Before I award the grade to you, you must come to my office hours, screen share the scoreboard from your computer during my office hours. The deadline to share your first contest's results with me is March 29th, 2024. The deadline to share your second contest's results with me is April 19th, 2024. I may choose to move these deadlines back if I miss some office hours, but **please make every effort to meet with me in a timely matter after the contest.** Note that I will only start the meetings AFTER USACO has released the problems so that I can work on them myself. Thus, I'll probably start checking off January's contest on February 5th, February's contest on February 26th and March's contest on March 25th. The credit I assign for this will be based on how you perform in the contest and my impression of your effort level based on our conversation.

(Note: for those of you with past contest experience, I may place the bar a bit higher for you to get full credit based on what I know about your performances in past contests. For students who intentionally underperformed in the past, I gave 60% or 80% for this grade.)

Written Reflections on Contest Performance

We often get better at competitions through self-analysis. After the first six Individual Contests are complete, I'll ask you to write a reflection piece on how you think you performed in those contests (and the extra online contests), focusing on what you did well and what you could improve upon and how you might be able to achieve that improvement. The idea here is to help you prepare for the Individual contest exam, which is a larger portion of the course grade. Then, after the six Team Contests, I'll ask your team to submit a single reflection piece on the team's performance and what improvements/adjustments can be made to maximize performance for the Final Team Contest. Also, each person on the team will submit an individual reflection about their efforts. Both of these will be due over Webcourses.

Individual Contests

For the first 6 weeks of the course, individual contests will be held on Fridays, each with 4 problems. 100% will be given to any question correctly submitted during the contest. 80% will be given to any question correctly submitted after the contest, before the test data is posted. 60% will be given to any question correctly submitted after the test data is posted but before 10 am of the Wednesday after the contest has completed. 0% is awarded otherwise.

Team Contests

For the second half of the course, each Friday competition will be in teams. Based on how students perform in the first half of the class and other factors, **I WILL ASSIGN TEAMS.** Grading will be determined in the same manner as the individual contests and the same grade will be assigned to each team member, regardless of who solves which questions. **Note: It's rarely the case on a good team that team members split up the work equally. Trying too hard to split up the work equally will likely worsen your team's performance and grade.**

Individual Contest Exam

After the first six weeks of the course, a more comprehensive contest will be given for individuals. The only differences are that no submissions will be allowed after the contest is over, that this contest counts towards 15% of the final grade instead of 5% and all of the questions in this contest will be newly created for the contest itself. Details will be discussed in class.

Team Contest Exam

During the final exam period for the course, the teams will compete in a final contest. No submissions will be allowed after the contest has ended. Grading will occur in a similar manner to the Individual Contest Exam.

Method of Awarding Final Grades

Unlike other courses, final grades aren't awarded solely on the basis of the percentage in the course. Since this is a contest class and I have to award grades to individuals, even though a bulk of the grade comes from teamwork, I don't want to award a grade to someone that was largely earned due to the excellence of a teammate. To that end, for each letter grade cut-off, I'll set a minimum number of problems solved **in the seven individual contests** in addition to the usual percentage cut-off. In order to earn a letter grade for the course, a student must meet **BOTH** cut-offs. I won't announce these cut-offs until the end of the semester. In the past, I've changed my cut-offs for individual contests (made them lower) because I've seen some individuals work extremely hard in the team phase of the class. To give you an idea where this cut-off might lie, in the past, it's usually been around 12-15 problems for an A, over the seven individual contests, so an average of close to 2 problems correct per contest should be good enough to earn an A in the course. **Note: Plus/Minus grades will be awarded when deemed appropriate.**

Community Service Option to replace one regular Individual Contest Grade

If you are not happy with one of the **individual contest grades** you have received, then I'll allow you to do five hours of community service with a registered 501(c)(3) organization **BEFORE April 9th** and turn in the required signed form and activity summary (more details on the course web page) by **10:30 am on April 9, 2023**. On the form you will list which grade you would like to replace and that grade will be changed to a 100%. This may be a good option if you are forced to miss class on one of the first six weeks of school. **Please make sure you get the activity approved from me beforehand.**

Policy for Absences from Friday Contests

For individual contests, if you are absent for a significant portion (more than 1 hour) of the contest **without prior approval**, then **NO PARTIAL CREDIT CAN BE EARNED FOR SOLVING PROBLEMS AFTER THE CONTEST**. (Naturally, if you solve all of the problems in the contest early, you are immediately free to go! But, if you show up very late or leave very early and leave problems unsolved, then you can't later earn 80%/60% credit on those questions.)

Since many of you are busy (whether it be lining up interviews for potential jobs or working current jobs), if you know in advance that you'll have to miss on a particular Friday for an individual contest, then **please notify me in advance**. I will let you make up the grade by running a specified online contest in real time. **(I will give you a short selection of options and you must choose one of them.)** This is in addition to the two online contests you'll have to run during the semester. Based on your performance and the code you show me, I'll assign a grade that I feel is appropriate. I need to leave myself full discretion here due to the differences in difficulty of various contests and the limited availability of online contests during short time frames.

If you need to miss a team contest Friday **and tell me in advance**, you have two options: (a) If your team agrees, they can pick up your slack and I'll give you the grade they earn for the week without you. (b) I can assign you an additional individual online contest to run.

Academic Misconduct Policy

Since this is an elective (you don't have to be here, so I assume you are here because you WANT to be), I will be more harsh with academic misconduct than usual. **In particular, if there are any clear violations of the academic misconduct policy, I will make official documentation with the necessary witnesses, record the transgression with UCF and fail you from the course.** The rules for the course are as follows:

1) During any individual contests, individuals may ONLY look at language APIs online, the course webpage and no other electronic materials. **Students may look at any printed materials.** Students **may not** talk to any other students during the individual contests about any items that I might think may be helpful in solving the problems. I reserve my right to use my discretion on whether or not a topic of conversation may be helpful in solving a problem. You are safe in telling someone where the bathroom is or describing where a restaurant is located, for example. You are NOT safe in explaining the steps of any algorithm or pointing out a restriction in a problem, for example.

2) During team contests, you may only talk to your team members (use any means of virtual communication you find useful) about problem related issues and you may ONLY look at language APIs online and no other electronic materials. **You may look at any printed materials.** Communication with non-team members in the course is limited as previously described.

Live Lectures (Tuesdays 10:30 am - 11:20 am)

Each week, I'll lecture on a topic, usually reviewing material from CS1 or CS2. Since students have seen this material before, I won't teach it from the ground up as it is taught in those classes. Instead, I'll just highlight some key points for review and spend more time on implementation details and other tips about how to apply the topic to solving contest problems. During some lectures I'll live code solutions to problems (as a way of modeling how to compete and also to show you that I make lots of mistakes!) and during others I'll go over pre-written code examples to show you a standard way I code a particular algorithm. Most contestants either compete in C++, Java or Python. Currently, my website has Java support code and some C++ support code. These sessions will not be taped.

In addition, the course web page will be used to maintain a great deal of the content:

<http://www.cs.ucf.edu/~dmarino/progcontests/cop4516/spr2024>

Tentative Schedule

Week	Tuesday Class	Friday Class
Jan 8	Java/C++ API, Brute Force	Ind Contest #1
Jan 16	Java/C++ API, Greedy	Ind Contest #2
Jan 22	Java/C++ API, Trees	Ind Contest #3
Jan 29	Tries	Ind Contest #4
Feb 5	Graph – DFS, BFS	Ind Contest #5
Feb 12	Shortest Distance, Top Sort	Ind Contest #6
Feb 19	Cumulative Sums, Mathematics	No Contest!!!
Feb 26	Team Dynamics	Ind Contest Exam
Mar 4	Graph – Network Flow	Team Contest #1
Mar 11	Take it or leave it DPs (Knapsack, LCS, Neighbor)	Team Contest #2
Mar 18	Spring	Break!!!
Mar 25	DP – Edit Distance, MCM, World Series	Team Contest #3
Apr 1	2D Geometry	Team Contest #4
Apr 8	Binary Search Applications	Team Contest #5
Apr 15	Binary Index Trees	Team Contest #6
Apr 22	No Topic	No Contest!!!
Apr 29	Team Contest Exam (10 am – 1 pm), Tuesday April 30th	

I may change this schedule, thus coming to class is very important. This is a general time frame only and is subject to the needs of the class. At the end of each class I will tell you what we will be discussing during the next class period. I may not post formal notes from the lectures, so please take all necessary notes during lectures. Good notes for most of the topics I will cover can be found online. I will make whatever notes to which I have access available online for students.