CS 3214 Syllabus

Overview

CS 3214 provides an introduction to computer systems as they are relevant to application programmers today, with an emphasis on operating systems principles. Topics covered include: operating systems design and architectures; processes, threads, synchronization techniques, deadlock; CPU scheduling; system call interfaces, system level I/O and file management; shell programming; separate compilation, loading and linking; inter-process communication (IPC); virtual and physical memory management and garbage collection; network protocols and programming; virtualization. The topics will be accompanied by a series of exercises and programming projects that will give you hands-on experience in interacting with systems at different levels. Some projects will be done in a group, which gives you the added benefit of learning how to work in a team.

Staff Information and Meeting Times

Instructor: William D McQuain
Office hours: Available on class website
Class website: http://courses.cs.vt.edu/~cs3214/fall2015

TAs: Available on class website
TA office hours will be held in the Systems Lab (McB 124) and/or the lounge (McB 106) at the TA’s discretion. Additional office hours will be announced in the forum when projects are due.

The TAs are also available by appointment.

Email: To contact teaching staff, use cs3214-staff@cs.vt.edu
Forum: We’ll be using forum.cs.vt.edu this semester.

Class Meeting Times:

Section 1: Goodwin 145 14:30 – 15:45 MW
Section 2: McBryde 129 09:30 – 10:45 TR

Regular class attendance is not enforced, but is strongly recommended. Subjects taught in class closely correspond to the concurrently run exercises and projects.

Prerequisites

The formal prerequisites for this class consist of a C or better in CS 2506 Introduction to Computer Organization II and CS 2114 Software Design and Data Structures. Prerequisite checking is done per the departmental procedures.
Objectives

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to
1. Explain the major components of an operating system and their respective functionality and interaction, including runtime libraries and systems programs
2. Use an operating system's command line interface to run shell scripts and perform productivity tasks
3. Describe the theories underlying CPU scheduling and their impact on applications
4. Describe proper synchronization techniques, deadlock prevention and avoidance
5. Describe the principles underlying virtual memory and their impact on applications
6. Design, implement, test, and debug:
   a. programs that interact directly with an operating system using its system call application programming interface (API)
   b. multi-process applications that use inter-process communication
   c. multi-threaded applications
   d. custom user-level memory allocators
   e. simple network applications
7. Describe the principles underlying virtualization

Textbook

The required textbook is:


The 2nd edition is required for this class; the 3rd edition has migrated to discussions of 64-bit architectures and is not currently suitable.

I will post lecture notes relating to each lecture on the class website. Although I may not be able to discuss all slides during lecture, I consider them material you should know. As you work over the lecture when you study, be sure to ask questions if necessary. In addition, the class website will link to other external resources.

Course Format

The course work consists of a mix of lectures, exams, exercises, and programming projects.

Midterm: There will be one in-class midterm. The midterm will cover material from the lectures and textbook. The midterm will also include questions related to the programming projects.
Final: There will be a final exam. The final exam will be comprehensive and include material from the lectures, textbook, and programming projects.

Exercises: Exercises are done individually. They consist of small tasks that reinforce necessary skills. Exercises run in parallel with projects, generally have a short deadline, and late submissions are not accepted.

Projects: There will be 4 medium-size projects. Projects are done in groups of at most 2 students.

Projects and exercises will be submitted electronically and grades will be posted electronically. Instructions will be posted on the class website.

Late Policy

Exercises are intended to ensure that you remain continuously engaged in the class and do not fall behind. Therefore, they must be submitted on time. Exercises received late will not be graded.

I am generally hesitant to grant individual extensions for projects. Instead, each student will have a budget of 4 late days that can be used to submit projects (not exercises!) late without penalty. You decide when you want to use your late days – there is no need to contact the instructor or GTA beforehand. Late days are granted in whole integer multiples of days: if your assignment is 5 minutes late, you will have used up an entire late day. Submissions received after you have used up your late days will be penalized at a rate of 10% per day. However, there will also be a final cutoff date for each project, and submissions received after that will not be graded.

For some assignments, you may work in a group. If you are working in a group, late submissions will count against the budgets of all group members, so make sure that all of you have enough late days left or the group member with an insufficient number of days risks getting a zero.

These late days are intended to account for various minor emergencies, such as network outages, snow or flood days, minor (12 hours or less) lab/cluster downtime, or job interviews.

If you have family or other emergencies that prevent you from submitting assignments on time, please contact the Dean of Students Office (http://www.dos.vt.edu). They will make a determination as to what accommodations should be given, and inform the instructors of the classes in which you are enrolled of their decision. My policy is to provide you with as many additional late days as the note from DoS will say. For reasons of consistency and fairness, I will not make any calls myself about emergency accommodations; I will defer all such calls to them. If you have learning or other disabilities, please also see the section Students With Disabilities below.
Sickness: If you cannot complete an assignment due to sickness, I ask that you provide proof of visit to Shiffert health center or another health care provider (a scanned or photographed copy of the Visit Documentation slip will suffice). You should tell teaching staff how many days you were sick. All deadlines will be moved by this many days without counting against late days. The honor code and the university policy on class attendance apply.

In the case of a prolonged illness – defined as an absence that exceeds 5 days – Shiffert Health Center will provide an absence verification (see www.hokiehandbook.vt.edu/studentlife/).

Incomplete Policy

I will not grant incompletes for this course unless truly extraordinary, unforeseen circumstances outside of your control are to blame. See also Late Policy.

Grading

Based on past offerings, I estimate that the contributions of the different portions to your final grade will be as listed below, but I reserve the right to adjust these weights as necessary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Component</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>Midterm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>Exercises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students who do not appear for an exam at the scheduled time, and do not have an approved excuse, will receive a zero score on the exam. The median final grade for this class typically lies between B and C. In other words, students who consistently perform above the median can expect a B- or better.

In the past, some students have misinterpreted this policy in a way that reasoned that because this class is “curved,” it is not necessary to submit all exercises, answer all exam questions, and to meet the project requirements in full. As in all CS classes, to obtain a B, you are expected to substantially meet all stated requirements and you should not expect an A unless you exceed stated requirements.

Grade Capping Rules

For each of the 4 projects, a clearly defined subset of the overall project requirements is described as “minimum requirements.”
In keeping with the policy adopted in the past few semesters, your grade is capped if you do not meet the minimum requirements for all projects by the end of the semester, according to the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you do not meet minimum requirements for</th>
<th>Then your course grade is capped at</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 project</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 projects</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 projects</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 projects</td>
<td>F</td>
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If needed, I will accept late submissions for projects (beyond the late days discussed in the section Late Policy above) for the purpose of showing that you meet minimum requirements. Such late submissions will not affect your score, however.

These requirements are necessary, but not sufficient conditions. Your actual grade may be lower than the cap, and you may fail the course even if you meet minimum requirements on 2 or more projects.

**Modes of Communication**

*Forum:* I strongly encourage the use of the Piazza class forum to ask questions and discuss class-related topics. When using the forum, treat it like a public forum: ask questions and bring up topics where you have a reasonable belief that others may be interested in them (perhaps because they may be facing the same issue), or may be able to help you. When posting in the forum, please follow up when you receive a reply or have solved your problem; do not waste your classmates’ time with content-free “never mind” posts. See below for the rules regarding honor code violation and the forum.

*Website:* The class website and the forum are the primary means of communication from us to you. We will post announcements there, which are binding. In addition, we will send email to you as needed.

*Email etiquette:* Class-related email should be sent to cs3214-staff@cs.vt.edu, with the exception of project-related questions, which should be posted in the forum. The email alias ensures that it reaches both the instructor and TAs, and ensures that it will be archived separately. I will answer questions posted in the forum before answering questions I receive by email.

Please set your full name in your email client so it shows in the From: line in email you send. I may not respond to email sent from aawuhu24@vt.edu if I don’t recognize the sender as a student. Email sent from certain accounts (e.g., hotmail) may end up in my spam folder and be overlooked. Do not send me attachments unless asked to do so.
Collaboration Policy and Honor Code

On the class website you will find links to the following policies applying to this class: University Policy of Class Attendance, The Virginia Tech Undergraduate Honor System, the ACM and IEEE Code of Ethics, and the Departmental Policy on Koofers.

The tenets of the honor code will be strictly enforced in this course, and all assignments shall be subject to the stipulations of the Undergraduate Honor Code. For more information on the Honor Code, please refer to the Undergraduate Honor System Constitution, location online at http://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/.

If I suspect that an honor code violation has occurred, I generally file complaints directly with the officers of the honor system. I am not required to discuss suspected honor code violations with suspected students before filing charges, and typically will not do so.

The following policies regarding collaboration apply in this class.

All submitted work is expected to be the original work of the individual student unless otherwise directed by the instructor. Note the emphasis on “submitted” work – this includes work that is explicitly graded and work that may not be graded, regardless.

Projects are to be the work of the individual student or team as specified. You may discuss general concepts, such as software libraries, Internet resources, or class and text topics, with others outside your team. However, discussion of project solutions, specific code, or detailed report content is an honor code violation. All source material used in project code and reports must be properly cited.

For the projects, you will team up in groups of 2 students. Even if teaming up is voluntary in some projects, we strongly recommend that you work with a partner. You may switch teams or form new teams, but only between projects. You may work with at most one group on a given project.

Students must contribute equally to the project within a team. It is not acceptable for students to either not contribute to the project or not to let the other group member contribute equally to the project. Please bring any problems in this regard to the instructor’s attention early on; complaining about non-contributing team members the day a project is due is not a reason for an extension.

You are required to read-protect your work on shared file space so students outside of your team will not have access. Failing to do so is an honor code violation.

Borrowing code or hiring someone to perform the work for you is an egregious violation of the honor code. We will use plagiarism detection software such as MOSS to screen out students attempting to do this.
Forum rules: you are not allowed to post code that is part of your solution on the forum. An exception is a single line if it causes a compile-time or runtime error. Posting debugging output, including backtraces, is ok. You may not post detailed descriptions of your design or solution on the forum. You may not post answers to exercise questions on the forum.

Not having read the honor code and its stipulations is no excuse for violating it. If you have any doubt about what is and is not allowed, it is your obligation to ask the instructor beforehand.

Students with Disabilities

If you need adaptations or accommodations because of a disability (learning disability, attention deficit disorder, psychological, or physical), if you have emergency medical information to share with the instructor, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please meet with the instructor as soon as possible.