

Syllabus for CSC196 Great ideas in Computing

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My web page: <http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~bor>

My email for the course is csc196-2026-09@cs.toronto.edu.

Course web page: <http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~bor/196f26>

Teaching Assistant: Elise Shen

All the 1st year foundations courses could ambitiously be called "Introduction to critical thinking". The goal of this specific 1st year foundations seminar course is to try to identify some of the past great ideas that have significantly influenced the field of computing and to consider some current ideas that could very well be great ideas. We will concentrate on mathematical, algorithmic and software ideas with the understanding that the importance and usefulness of these ideas depends upon (and often parallels) the remarkable ideas and progress in computing and communications hardware. We may also venture into some of the more sensitive and controversial issues relating to different applications of these ideas. Our discussions will depend to some degree on the background and interests of the class. On the course web page "<http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~bor/196f26/>" you can find the slides for each week of the Fall 2025 CSC196 course. This is a first approximation to the topics we will be discussing this term. The course web page for this term is "<http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~bor/196f26/>"

The course timetable provides for 3 contact hours/week (M,W,F 3-4). I will usually conduct the class on Mondays and Wednesdays and Elise Shen will conduct the tutorials on Fridays. We meet in the following rooms: Mondays (UC65), Wednesdays (SU 440) and Fridays (BA 025)

The grading scheme will be based on 4 assignments (12.5% each), two term tests (15% each), and class participation (20%). Students are expected to attend all classes regularly and participate actively and that is the basis for the participation part of the grade. The term tests will be closely related to the assignments. There is no final exam.

All assignments must be submitted on Markus. We will post the link for Markus at the start of the term. Assignments not submitted by the due date will incur a penalty of 5

Students may request that questions on an assignment or test be regraded. Regrading requests are accepted within one week of the assignment/test being returned to the student.

Relevant Calendar Dates and Due Dates:

- A0 September 16. 2:30 PM

This is part of the participation grade and worth 2%. This will allow me to know something about you and will give you an opportunity to submit an assignment on Markus.

- A1 September 30 at 2:30 PM
- Monday, October 12 Thanksgiving No Classes.
- A2 October 21 at 2:30 PM

- T1 October 23 To be held in the tutorial room
- October 26-30 Reading Week No classes
- A3 November 11 at 2:30 PM
- A4 December 2 at 2:30 PM
- T2 December 4 To be held in the tutorial room
- Fall classes end December 7 for most courses with December 8 as a possible makeup date for the missed class on Thanksgiving.

The course email address is `csc196-2026-09@cs.toronto.edu`

Email Policy: I try to read emails regularly but I do NOT promise to reply to emails. For general discussions, I suggest using piazza. In particular, some student questions raise interesting issues and/or require a more technical answer and I will often respond to such questions in class so that everyone can benefit. **I welcome questions and comments at all times and especially in class. If you are confused, there is a good chance others are also confused.**

Office hours: To be announced. My office is Sandford Fleming (SF) 2305A. Thnake on the door is Toniann Pitassi but I am temporarily (for this academic ear) or more permanently moving into this office. Beyond any posted office hours, students are always welcome to make appointments (i.e., email me to set up a personal meeting which can be in person or by zoom). Moreover, when I am in my office, if the door is open and I am not already meeting with someone, come in and I usually have some time to talk.

Advice regarding assignments: Do NOT spend an excessive amount of time on any questions and especially not on (if any) bonus questions. If you wish to spend “free time” thinking about any questions that is fine but you should not sacrifice time needed for other courses.

Policy on use of Generative AI (LLMs).

I assume that if you have access to a reasonable version of some LLM like Claude or ChatGPT, you will want to use it. As a general rule, you are always supposed to provide a reference for any external source you are using. If you are mainly copying something from another source and presenting that as your own work, that is **plagiarism**. The objective of any course is to develop your own understanding of concepts and results. The grading scheme in this course is meant to encourage you to use the assignments to guide your understanding of the concepts and results we will be discussing. The term tests will be closely related to the assignments. It is hard but not impossible to fail this course. Your working (and not just extracting material) on assignments and participation will determine whether you will just do OK in this course, or you will enjoy the course, do some critical thinking, and get a great grade.