

Western University  
Faculty of Engineering  
*Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering*

**CEE 9730 – Data science for civil engineers (with CEE 4420A)**

COURSE OUTLINE 2024-2025

---

**DESCRIPTION**

The objective of the course is for students to develop a hands-on understanding of the field of data science, with a focus on opportunities and more importantly limitations pertaining to applications in geotechnical engineering. Students will work in groups on two projects over the course of the term, which will be scoped with guidance from the course instructor. The projects will be peer-assessed by other groups, who will grade each other on a) legibility and quality of code and dataset as well as corresponding documentation; b) a presentation on the construction of the dataset and performance of the algorithm. Topics include introduction to Python programming and the Numpy, scikit-learn, and PyTorch package, definitions, learning algorithms, unsupervised algorithms, feature engineering, various flavours of deep learning, and generative adversarial networks. Each topic will be introduced alongside recent research in the field of geotechnical engineering where possible.

**ENROLLMENT RESTRICTIONS**

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in Civil and Environmental Engineering, as well as any student that has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student's home program.

**INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION**

Course instructor: Bing Li  
Email address: [bing.li@uwo.ca](mailto:bing.li@uwo.ca)  
Office: SEB 3010C  
Office hours: After tutorials

**COURSE FORMAT**

In-person Powerpoint presentations. Grading comes from 2 course projects.

## TOPICS

| Topic #   | Description   | Learning Activities   | Tentative timeline |
|---|---|---|--------------------|
| 1: Introduction   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction to Python and data science</li> <li>- Supervised, unsupervised, semi-supervised learning</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powerpoint lectures</li> <li>• Tutorial 1: “hello world” in Python</li> <li>• Zoom office hours</li> <li>• Assignment 1</li> </ul>               | Week 1             |
| 2: Definitions  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Notation</li> <li>- Baye’s rule</li> <li>- Hyperparameters</li> <li>- Classification vs regression</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powerpoint lectures</li> <li>• Tutorial 2: Numpy, Scikit-learn, Pytorch packages</li> <li>• Zoom office hours</li> <li>• Assignment 1</li> </ul> | Week 2             |
| 3: “Classical” learning algorithms                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Logistic regression</li> <li>- Decision trees</li> <li>- Support vector machines</li> <li>- Nearest neighbours</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powerpoint lectures</li> <li>• Zoom office hours</li> <li>• Assignment 2</li> </ul>  | Week 3             |
| 4: “Learning” algorithms                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gradient descent</li> <li>- Loss function</li> <li>- Overfitting vs underfitting</li> <li>- Training vs testing vs validation</li> <li>- Missing features</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powerpoint lectures</li> <li>• Zoom office hours</li> <li>• Assignment 2</li> </ul>  | Week 4             |
| 5: Feature engineering                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Normalization</li> <li>- Binning</li> <li>- One-hot encoding</li> <li>- Performance metrics</li> <li>- Validation</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powerpoint lectures</li> <li>• Zoom office hours</li> <li>• Assignment 3</li> </ul>  | Week 5             |
| Fall reading week – no class                            |   |   |                    |
| 6: Deep learning  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Neural networks</li> <li>- Back propagation</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powerpoint lectures</li> <li>• Zoom office hours</li> <li>• Assignment 3</li> </ul>  | Week 6             |
| 7: Flavours of deep learning                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Convolutional neural networks</li> <li>- Recurrent neural networks</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powerpoint lectures</li> <li>• Zoom office hours</li> <li>• Assignment 4</li> </ul>  | Week 7             |
| 8: Generational adversarial networks                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discriminative vs. Generative Modeling</li> <li>- Conditional GANs</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powerpoint lectures</li> <li>• Zoom office hours</li> <li>• Assignment 4</li> </ul>  | Week 9             |
| 9: Unsupervised learning                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- K-means</li> <li>- PCA</li> <li>- ICA</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powerpoint lectures</li> <li>• Zoom office hours</li> <li>• Term project</li> </ul>  | Week 10            |
| End of lectures to allow students more time for project |   |   |                    |
| Presentation and reports due for project at end of term |   |   |                    |

## POTENTIAL PROJECT TOPICS

The following are possible project ideas, but students are also encouraged to develop their own ideas following their interests.

### Project option 1:

Time series prediction with MLRA data (series of pore pressure sensors). The students will attempt to predict the pore pressure in these sensors using air temperature, rainfall, and air pressure. Could be done using decision tree or RNN.

### Project option 2:

Image classification of cracked vs uncracked rocks. Likely requires CNN, data will come from MIT rock mechanics research group high-speed data. The students will be provided with high-speed video images of a rock undergoing fracturing from uniaxial loading, students will develop a classifier for whether there is a crack on the rock. Students will additionally attempt to label the regions corresponding to cracked rock.

### Project option 3:

Image segmentation of city-scapes into people, cars, buildings, etc and their outlines using CNNs or transformers.

## SPECIFIC LEARNING OUTCOMES

| Degree Level Expectation                | Weight | Assessment Tools  | Outcomes  |
|---|--------|---|---|
| <b>Depth and breadth of knowledge</b>   | 30%    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projects</li> <li>Assignments</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding of advanced concepts and theories</li> <li>Awareness of important current problems in the field of study</li> <li>Understanding of computational and/or empirical methodologies to solve related problems</li> </ul>           |
| <b>Research &amp; scholarship</b>       | 10%    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project</li> <li>Assignments</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to conduct critical evaluation of current advancements in the field of specialization</li> <li>Ability to conduct coherent and thorough analyses of complex problems using established techniques/principles and judgment</li> </ul> |
| <b>Application of knowledge</b>         | 30%    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projects</li> <li>Assignments</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to apply knowledge in a rational way to analyze a particular problem</li> <li>Ability to use coherent approach to design a particular engineering system using existing design tools</li> </ul>                                      |
| <b>Professional capacity / autonomy</b> | 5%     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project</li> <li>Assignments</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness of academic integrity</li> <li>Ability to implement established procedures and practices in the coursework</li> <li>Defends own ideas and conclusions</li> <li>Integrates reflection into his/her learning process</li> </ul>      |
| <b>Communication skills</b>             | 15%    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project</li> <li>Assignments</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to communicate (oral and/or written) ideas, issues, results and conclusions clearly and effectively</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Awareness of limits of knowledge</b> | 10%    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project</li> <li>Assignments</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness of the need of assumptions in complex scientific analyses and their consequences</li> <li>Understanding of the difference between theoretical and empirical approaches</li> </ul>  |

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to acknowledge analytical limitation due to complexity of practical problems</li> </ul> |
|--|--|--|--|

## ASSESSMENTS

| Assessment                                      | Tentative Due Date        | Weight |
|---|---------------------------|--------|
| Assignment 1                                    | 6 <sup>th</sup> October   | 5%     |
| Assignment 2                                    | 20 <sup>th</sup> October  | 15%    |
| Assignment 3                                    | 10 <sup>th</sup> November | 15%    |
| Assignment 4                                    | 24 <sup>th</sup> November | 15%    |
| Final project documentation of code and dataset | 8 <sup>th</sup> December  | 25%    |
| Final project presentation                      | 8 <sup>th</sup> December  | 25%    |

### **Activities in which collaboration is permitted:**

- Students are encouraged to work on projects in groups of three

### **Activities in which students must work alone (collaboration is not permitted):**

- Assignments 1-4: students are encouraged to discuss ideas, but assignments must be submitted individually

## REQUIRED TEXTBOOK

N/A

## OPTIONAL COURSE READINGS

*Neural Networks and Deep Learning* by Michael Nielsen

*The Hundred-Page Machine Learning Book* by Andriy Burkov

<https://towardsdatascience.com> is an excellent general resource

The International Society for Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering maintains an excellent archive of active research in this area ([http://140.112.12.21/issmge/ml\\_ref.htm](http://140.112.12.21/issmge/ml_ref.htm))

## CHEATING, PLAGIARISM/ACADEMIC OFFENCES

Academic integrity is an essential component of learning activities. Students must have a clear understanding of the course activities in which they are expected to work alone (and what working alone implies) and the activities in which they can collaborate or seek help; see information above and ask instructor for clarification if needed. Any unauthorized forms of help-seeking or collaboration will be considered an academic offense. University policy states that cheating is an academic offence. If you are caught cheating, there will be no second warning. Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence. Academic offences are taken seriously and attended by academic penalties which may include expulsion from the program. Students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence at the following website: [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

## **CONDUCT**

Students are expected to follow proper etiquette to maintain an appropriate and respectful academic environment. Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is not appropriately participating in course activities and/or is not following the rules and responsibilities associated with the course activities, will be reported to the Associate Dean (Graduate) (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Associate Dean (Graduate), the student could be debarred from completing the assessment activities in the course as appropriate.

## **HEALTH/WELLNESS SERVICES**

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several health and wellness related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>.

Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Faculty of Engineering has a Student Wellness Counsellor. Information on how to schedule an appointment with the councilor is available at: <https://www.eng.uwo.ca/undergraduate/academic-support-and-accommodations/Student-Wellness-Counselling.html>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

## **SICKNESS**

Students should immediately consult with the Instructor (for a particular course) or Associate Chair (Graduate) (for a range of courses) if they have problems that could affect their performance. The student should seek advice from the Instructor or Associate Chair (Graduate) regarding how best to deal with the problem. Failure to notify the Instructor or the Associate Chair (Graduate) immediately (or as soon as possible thereafter) will have a negative effect on any appeal. Obtaining appropriate documentation (e.g., a note from the doctor) is valuable when asking for accommodation due to illness.

Students who are not able to meet certain academic responsibilities due to medical, compassionate or other legitimate reason(s), could request for academic consideration. The Graduate Academic Accommodation Policy and Procedure details are available at: <https://www.eng.uwo.ca/graduate/current-students/academic-support-and-accommodations/index.html>

## **ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION WESTERN (AEW)**

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW): [http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible\\_education/index.html](http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html)

AEW is a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.