



PoCS

Principles of
Complex Systems
@pocsvox

What's the Story?

Principles of Complex Systems, Vol. 1

@pocsvox

CSYS/MATH 300; Deliverator: Prof. Peter Sheridan Dodds

To be sorted out in Online

<http://www.uvm.edu/pdodds/teaching/courses/2020-08UVM-300>

Basic stuff:

Instructor: Prof. Peter Sheridan Dodds.

Lecture room: Online

Meeting times: To be sorted out

Office: Innovation, fourth floor.

Office hours: To be emphatically determined through a democratic process.

Course website: <http://www.uvm.edu/pdodds/teaching/courses/2020-08UVM-300>

Course hashtag: #FallPoCS2020

Source material: Journal papers and book excerpts.

E-mail: peter.dodds@uvm.edu

Suggested text: No official textbook.

If instructor's permission is required: Students are asked to please send a short email describing their interests (and their 950 student number) to Prof. Dodds at pdodds@uvm.edu.

Synopsis:

Many of the problems we face in the modern world revolve around comprehending, controlling, and designing multi-scale, interconnected systems. Networked systems, for example, facilitate the diffusion and creation of ideas, the physical transportation of people and goods, and the distribution and redistribution of energy. Complex systems such as the human body and ecological systems are typically highly balanced, flexible, and robust, but are also susceptible to systemic collapse. These complex problems almost always have economic, social, and technological aspects.

So what do we know about complex systems? My basic aim in this introductory, interdisciplinary course is to impart knowledge of a suite of theories and ideas and tools that have been evolved over the last century in the pursuit of understanding complex systems. We'll touch on everything from physics to sociology, from randomness to cities to language. Throughout the course, we'll maintain a focus on (1) real small-scale mechanisms that give rise to observed macro phenomena, (2) scaling phenomena, and (3) complex networks, allowing us to explore how seemingly disparate systems connect

to each other—the phenomenon of universality—and, just as importantly, where tempting analogies break down.

The course is a 3 credit course and is aimed at graduates and advanced undergraduates.

Potential topics:

(Note: this list is undoubtedly incomplete, in no particular order, and subject to change; more detailed treatments of many of the topics that follow will appear in the advanced courses.)

1. Fundamentals
 - (a) Manifesto
 - (b) Emergence
 - (c) Statistical mechanics and universality
 - (d) Path dependence
2. Measures of complexity
 - (a) The poles of randomness and order
 - (b) Basic notions of entropy and information theory
3. Scaling phenomena
 - (a) Zipf's law
 - (b) Non-Gaussian statistics and power law size distributions
 - (c) Sample mechanisms for power law size distributions
 - (d) Scaling for organisms and organizations
 - (e) Scaling of social phenomena: crime, creativity, and consumption.
 - (f) Renormalization techniques
4. Multiscale complex systems
 - (a) Hierarchies and scaling
 - (b) Modularity
 - (c) Form and context in design
5. Complexity in abstract models
 - (a) The game of life
 - (b) Cellular automata
 - (c) Chaos and order—creation and maintenance
6. Integrity of complex systems
 - (a) Generic failure mechanisms
 - (b) Highly optimized tolerance: Robustness and fragility
 - (c) Network robustness
7. Complex networks
 - (a) Random networks
 - (b) Small-world networks
 - (c) Scale-free networks
 - (d) Optimal distribution networks
8. Collective behavior and contagion in social and sociotechnical systems
 - (a) Percolation and phase transitions
 - (b) Disease spreading models
 - (c) Schelling's model of segregation

- (d) Granovetter's model of imitation
 - (e) Contagion on networks
 - (f) Herding phenomena
 - (g) Cooperation
 - (h) Wars and conflicts
9. Large-scale Social patterns
- (a) Movement of individuals
10. Collective decision making
- (a) Theories of social choice
 - (b) The role of randomness and chance
 - (c) Systems of voting
 - (d) Juries
 - (e) Success inequality: superstardom
11. Information
- (a) Search in networked systems (e.g., the internet, social systems)
 - (b) Search on scale-free networks
 - (c) Knowledge trees, metadata and tagging
12. Stories
- (a) Contagious stories
 - (b) Adjacent narratives
 - (c) Conspiracy theories
 - (d) Power of stories
 - (e) How stories are everything
 - (f) The Big Story

Prerequisites: Familiarity with the following would be good but not completely necessary: standard calculus, differential equations, difference equations, linear algebra, and statistical methods.

Computing: Proficiency in coding (e.g., Julia, python, R, Matlab) will be necessary for some assignments and projects.

In general, students are exhorted to develop their unix skills across the board in our Complex Systems and Data Science programs. Good places: Apple's OSX is a Unix system and The VACC runs on Linux. Installing Linux on a Windows machine is the option there.

Textbooks: There is no specific textbook for the class. The course will draw on material from a wide range of sources and will provide students with book excerpts and journal papers as appropriate to supplement lecture notes.

Grading breakdown:

1. **Assignments (75%)**—All assignments will be of equal weight and there will be ten of them. Aside from correctness, clarity in thinking, writing, and presentation will be taken into account in grading.

In general, questions are worth 3 points according to the following scale:

- 3 = correct or very nearly so.
- 2 = acceptable but needs some revisions.
- 1 = needs major revisions.
- 0 = way off.

Assignments will be submitted via Blackboard.

2. **Projects/talks (24%)**—Students will work on semester-long projects. Students will develop a proposal in the first few weeks of the course which will be discussed with the instructor for approval. Projects may take the form of novel research, investigation of an established area of complex systems, or both. Graduate students already pursuing appropriate research topics are welcome to use the class as a venue to present their work.

A list of possible projects will be provided though individuals are encouraged and free to choose their own. Project content may range from novel research to a review of research relevant to the course. The hope here is for some work to percolate up to the level of journal publications. Students will give two brief presentations in the middle of the semester and a longer one at the end (length of talks will depend on class size). Students will also be required to hand in a report on their investigations.

The grade breakdown will be 8% for the first talk, 8% for the final talk, and 8% for the written project.

3. **General attendance/Class participation (1%)**—it is highly desirable that students attend class and office hours. If the course is online, then the equivalent will be taking in videos/slides and attending online office hours through Microsoft Teams. Class presence/involvement will be taken into account if a grade is borderline.

Schedule:**To be updated:**

| Week # (dates) | Tuesday | Thursday |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| 1 (9/01 and 9/03) | Overview; Fundamentals: The Complexity Manifesto | Scaling |
| 2 (9/08 and 9/10) | Power-law size distributions | Zipf's law; Fundamentals: Data, Emergence, Limits to Understanding |
| 3 (9/15 and 9/17) | Projects; Power-law mechanisms: Randomness | Power-law mechanisms: Variable Transformation |
| 4 (9/22 and 9/24) | Power-law mechanisms: The Rich-Get-Richer | Power-law mechanisms: Optimization |
| 5 (9/29 and 10/01) | Robustness and Fragility | Robustness and Fragility |
| 6 (10/06 and 10/08) | Optimal distribution networks | Fundamentals: Statistical Mechanics |
| 7 (10/13 and 10/15) | Complex networks: Introduction Basics and Examples | Complex networks: Key Properties Generalized random |
| 8 (10/20 and 10/22) | Complex networks: Small-world networks | Complex networks: Small-world networks |
| 9 (10/27 and 10/29) | Complex networks: Scale-free networks | Complex networks: Scale-free networks |
| 10 (11/03 and 11/05) | Contagion: Introduction | Contagion |
| 11 (11/10 and 11/12) | Contagion | Biological Contagion |
| 12 (11/17 and 11/19) | Social Contagion | Voting, Success, Fame |
| 13 (11/24 and 11/26) | Stories | Thanksgiving |
| 14 (12/01 and 12/03) | Stories | The Big Story |

Final project presentations will likely be given in the final exam period which takes place on TBD.

Times may be adjusted based on class size.

Important dates:

1. Classes run from Monday, August 31 to Friday, December 4.
2. Add/Drop, Audit, Pass/No Pass deadline—Monday, September 14.
3. Last day to withdraw—Thursday, October 29 (Sadness!).
4. Reading and Exam period—Monday, December 7 to Friday, December 11.

Do check the course Twitter account, @pocsvox, for updates regarding the course.

Academic assistance: Anyone who requires assistance in any way (as per the ACCESS program or due to athletic endeavors), please see or contact me as soon as possible.

Being good people: In class there will be no unnecessary electronic gadgetry, no cell phones, no beeping, no text messaging, etc. You really just need your brain, some paper, and a writing implement. I encourage you to email me questions, ideas, comments, etc., about the class but request that you please do so in a respectful fashion. Moreover, all interactions with classmates during lectures and office hours or in any way related to being part of PoCS should be respectful. As in all UVM classes, **Academic honesty** will be expected and departures will be dealt with appropriately. We will follow UVM's community standards and guidelines: See <http://www.uvm.edu/cses/http://www.uvm.edu/cses/>.

Late policy: Unless in the case of an emergency (a real one) or if an absence has been predeclared and a make-up version sorted out, assignments that are not turned in on time or tests that are not attended will be given 0%.

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|----|--------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|
| Grades: | A+ | 97–100 | B+ | 87–89 | C+ | 77–79 | D+ | 67–69 |
| | A | 93–96 | B | 83–86 | C | 73–76 | D | 63–66 |
| | A- | 90–92 | B- | 80–82 | C- | 70–72 | D- | 60–62 |