

CSC-324 Software Design and Development - Syllabus, Spring 2026

Instructor [Fernanda Elliott](#), PhD (she/her/hers)

[ELBICA lab](#) (Enhancing Lives with Bio-inspired Computational Approaches)

[AI Aura](#) (an experimental space that applies a liberal arts ethos for reflecting on the impacts of Generative Artificial Intelligence)

Welcome to CSC324! If you are used to developing software for self-use, you are likely to experience a shift in perspective: you will learn tools to inform your practices and detach from your own mental models and embrace various mental models, contexts, and perspectives. This course combines software development theory with hands-on practice for architecting and developing computational artifacts to solve a complex problem.

You will be pushed to apply a **systems-thinking approach to problem-solving** and encouraged to evaluate **architectural design practices**. The course splits into two very distinct settings:

1. **In the first half** of the course, we will focus on software engineering theory and career readiness.
 - You will strengthen your software engineering skills through programming labs, an individual programming project, a professional background journal, ethics reflections, and career readiness activities.
 - Although it is *not* our main focus, *we will use* AI (Artificial Intelligence) as a theme to motivate aspects of the curriculum.
2. **In the second half**, we will apply agile practices as you collaborate with your team to build a solution to a complex (and many times abstract) problem. The problem requires sophisticated and well-thought-out approaches to architecting and developing a solution.
 - You will acquire and strengthen your skill set through weekly demonstrations, milestones, and deliverables, which conclude with a final demonstration and a series of written documentation.

Note: This course covers a wide range of topics and activities; therefore, it is essential to stay updated with the labs, readings, and assignments, and to participate and collaborate with your peers actively. During the second half of the course, lab time is allocated for team meetings and collaborative work. Finally, we will mostly use Java programming language.

Course Outcomes

Develop technical, analytical, presentation, and communication skills, a background in software engineering that applies systems-thinking mindsets, ethical awareness, career readiness, and collaborative practices. And, finally, make a substantial addition to a professional portfolio.

1.1 Learning Goals

1. Acquire sound knowledge of software development, focusing on software architectural design and requirements to architect a new solution.
2. Produce software appropriate for inclusion in a portfolio via implementing the source code of new solutions or adding functionality to an existing one.
3. Learn to break down complex problems into manageable components and understand how systems interact (problem decomposition and systems thinking).
4. Acquire experience with developing software solutions to meet a client's needs. (The "client" can either be a technical or a non-technical stakeholder.)

5. Gain familiarity with Agile methodologies and apply Agile software development practices and tools to develop software solutions to meet a client's needs.
6. Make deep use of a collaborative version control system and work as a team to develop software solutions for a client.
7. Acquire a background in software engineering.
8. Deepen analytical skills in testing and debugging source code.
9. Create technical documents to contextualize and explain developed solutions, translating business needs into technical specifications.
10. Learn and apply tools from industry to be more effective and show an understanding of business context and requirements (e.g., project scope, product requirements, vision to values).
11. Develop career awareness (e.g., prepare for technical interviews).
12. Explain the practical and ethical problems associated with a real-world software project. Students can embrace different mental models, realities, and perspectives as they design, develop, and inspect software solutions.
13. Demonstrate the ability to employ active listening and team communication skills in the collaborative software development process.

2. Course Info (link to [course page here](#))

- **Attendance is required to successfully conclude this course (of course, you must arrive on time).** The instructor will submit an alert if they notice anything likely to impact your learning.
- You are expected to productively participate and engage with the materials, instructor, course mentor, and peers.
- Getting feedback from your peers on your individual and group projects play an important part in this course. Therefore, you are expected to listen and PAY ATTENTION to your peers' presentations to provide productive and helpful feedback (in addition to being ready to receive feedback).
- The course schedule will show *To Do items*. Those must be completed *prior* to the corresponding class session. Eventually, there will be optional items, which, although not required, are highly recommended.

2.1 Grade Setup (unless stated otherwise, deliverables are equally weighted within a category)

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • 10% Attendance (see the FAQ below). | • 10% Professional Background Journal |
| • 5% Career Readiness Practices | • 25% Individual Project. |
| • 10% Ethics Reflections. | • 25% Group Project. |
| • 15% Labs. | |

Letter Grades

A	95 – 100%	C+	77 – 80%
A-	90 – 95%	C	70 – 77%
B+	87 – 90%	D	60 – 70%
B	83 – 87%	F	0 – 60%
B-	80 – 83%		

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. **Can I fail this class by lack of attendance, even if I have high grades?** Yes.
2. **How can I know if I am about to fail the course due to lack of attendance?** Your instructor will submit academic alerts to connect you with resources. Failure by attendance may occur starting from the third academic alert (explicitly triggered by a lack of attendance).
3. **What should I do if I receive an academic alert?** In that case, you are highly encouraged to speak with your instructor, seek support from the academic advising office, and keep your academic advisor informed.
4. **Do you submit academic honesty reports?** Yes, if I have a concern, I will submit an academic honesty report.

2.2 Resources – Additional Readings will be provided during the semester

1. [The Essence of Software: Why Concepts Matter for Great Design](#). Daniel Jackson
2. [Software Development, Design and Coding: With Patterns, Debugging, Unit Testing, and Refactoring](#) 2nd ed. John F. Dooley.
3. [Fundamentals of Software Architecture: An Engineering Approach](#). Richards, Mark (W. Mark).
4. [Core Java, Volume I](#), newest Edition, Cay S. Horstmann, Gary Cornell.

3. Deliverables – Overview

Here is an overview of the course's deliverables and workload. Note that changes may happen during the semester; thus, make sure to check the course's webpage for weekly updates.

First Half of The Course

1) Labs

- There will be three programming labs (each splits into parts A and B).
 - Labs 4-n are work time. You will use in-class time to advance your individual project.

2) Individual Project.

- There are two pathways for you to choose from:
 1. Freely choose a project topic to then *individually* design, develop, and test a computational artifact (no GenAI use in the development process), or
 2. Search for different approaches already implemented to solve a specific problem (possibly using GenAI tools), and build an approach based on the references (of course, citing all of them).

- The individual project splits into five deliverables: 1. Elevator pitch, 2. project scope, 3. software testing activity, 4. demo video, and 5. Final report.
- 3) Professional Background Journal**
- Focuses on acquiring a software engineering background in addition to learning from other key topics. It requires considerable reading, reflection, and answering questions to help you reflect on and retain the content. The journal covers about 7 umbrella topics.
- 4) Career Readiness Practices**
- Those are different activities to support career readiness, reflection, and promptness. Examples include reading articles and answering related questions, examining portfolios, investigating career-related resources, and updating your CV with the [CLS team](#). There are 3-5 deliverables.
- 5) Ethics Reflections**
- You will facilitate discussions, reflect, and write about in-class activities, e.g., student-led discussions. There will be between 1-3 activities. Reflections can either occur in the first or second half of the course.
- 6) Second Half of The Course - Group Project**
- It covers five weekly demonstrations of teamwork and development. Each demonstration culminates from a set of milestones. After a demo, there is a submission of the presented slides and a report on the milestones for that week. The final week's project wrap-up corresponds to five deliverables: 1. Thank you notes and online presence, 2. Software documentation, 3. Product documentation, 4. Raw writing sample, 5. Final Individual Contributions Log Report and peer evaluations.

4. Course Instructions

- **Schedule.** Please find a detailed daily schedule on the course page and check it regularly for weekly updates.
- **Deliverables.** Kindly check Gradescope for due dates and extensions and upload your deliverables on Gradescope.
- **Feedback.** I want to encourage your interest in reviewing all feedback provided on Gradescope: this is a critical resource to help you reflect on ways to improve.
- **Reading and reflection.** This course covers a considerable amount of reading to help you build a background in software engineering and other key topics. Therefore, you must approach the Professional Background Journal as a tool/opportunity for growth – NOT as a “copy and paste” kind of document.
- **Dev Journal.** You will make use of a dev journal. Why? [You should keep a developer's journal](#). Thus, as part of your career readiness approach, you will

document your learning and thinking process, collect resources and materials to help and inform your professional decision-making strategies and endeavors.

- **Group work.** Submit a single report *per* group.
- **Coding Policy.** You are expected to follow our [course's](#) and deliverables' policies. To accommodate a range of activities, GenAI policies will vary according to the deliverable. Therefore, make sure to read each deliverable's policies carefully.
 - A note on using Grammar Checker tools such as Grammarly to answer reflection/ textual questions: It is fine to use those as long as you DO NOT make use of generative AI features.
- **Community.** I would love to see and chat with you in my lab for our [AI Coffee Chat](#) (Optional).
- **Attendance.** If you need to miss a class, you are still responsible for the material covered on that day, and I expect you to email me in advance so that I can check on you and provide assistance in every way possible. Please note that attendance, in addition to impacting your grade, *is required* to succeed in this course. **Finally, arriving 10 or more minutes late counts as an absence.**
- **Writing, Reading, and Speaking Center.** The center supports students working on papers, projects, and presentations, as well as applications for internships, fellowships, and graduate school. Schedule an appointment here: <http://mywco.com/grinnell>.
- **Library Research Help.** Gina Schlesselman-Tarango is our science librarian. Please don't hesitate to reach out to her if you need help finding, accessing, or managing sources for research projects. You can stop by her office in the Kistle Library, email [schlesselman], or [use this link](#) to book an appointment. You can also access resources and tips for this and other classes in relevant library guides, which can be found at <https://grinnell.libguides.com/>

5. Policy – Course Culture and Interactions

- **Team Spirit.** Collaborate, respect, be friendly, and learn from your peers. Disagreements may happen, and those play an essential role in your self-development: see those as an opportunity for developing your soft skills.
- **Ideas.** Acknowledge and welcome other people's ideas, contributions and thoughts.
- **Active Listening.** Practice multiple ways of listening to others and be mindful of their voices and perspectives.
- **Integrity.** We appreciate privacy, honorable conduct, and team spirit. Kindly read and follow Grinnell College's Academic Honesty and the CS [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

- **Coding and Professional Policy.** You are expected to follow CSC324's coding policy (make sure to read each deliverable's specific policy) and the [professional conduct policy](#).

Life Events

Circumstances may change. If you experience anything that impacts your learning and/or promptness to submit the deliverables, **let me know, and let me help you.** The most important message here is communication.

Accessibility and Inclusion

- I am here to help you advance and be successful in your academic journey! We all learn and get inspired differently, and accommodations help us to achieve our goals.
- If any aspect of the course prevents you from learning or excludes you, please let me know as soon as possible! I am happy to chat and looking forward to finding, together with you, strategies that fulfill both: your needs and the course requirements.
- Grinnell College has a robust and supportive network of people and services ready to support you; for example: [the Accessibility and Disability Services](#); [Writing, Reading, & Speaking Center](#); [Academic Advising](#); [Student Affairs, including International Student Affairs \(OISA\)](#); [the Center for Religion, Spirituality and Social Justice \(CRSSJ\)](#); or [Student Health and Wellness](#); finally, confidential support is available through [the Office of the Ombuds](#).
- Grinnell College provides accommodation for students with documented disabilities. Students with disabilities partner with the Office of Disability Resources to make academic accommodation letters available to faculty via the accommodation portal. To help ensure that your access needs are met, I encourage individual students to approach me so we can discuss your distinctive learning needs and accommodations within the context of this course. If you have not already worked with the Office of Disability Resources and believe you may require academic accommodations for this course, Disability Resources staff can be reached via email at access@grinnell.edu, or by stopping by their offices on the first floor of Steiner Hall.

Academic Support

If you have any other needs not addressed here, please let me know soon so that we can work together to create the best possible learning environment. In some cases, I will recommend consulting with the Academic Success Center (ASC): <https://www.grinnell.edu/about/leadership/offices-services/academic-success-center>. They are an excellent resource for developing strategies for your learning, and they can connect you with other resources. If I notice that you are encountering difficulty, and I have reached out to you and not received a response, or if you have missed multiple class sessions or are not meeting our class objectives repeatedly, I will submit an academic

alert via the ASC's SAL portal. A message notifying you of my concern will get sent to you, along with the Academic Success Center staff and your adviser(s), so that they can reach out to you with additional offers of support.

If I notice that you are encountering difficulty, and I have reached out to you and not received a response, or if you have missed multiple class sessions or are not meeting our class objectives repeatedly, **I will submit an academic alert** via Academic Advising's SAL portal. This notifies you of my concern, along with the Academic Advising team and your advisor(s), so that they can reach out to you with additional offers of support.

Religious Observances

Grinnell College offers alternative options to complete academic work for students who observe religious holy days. Kindly contact me if you want to chat about alternative options to complete academic work due to religious holy days.

Title IX and Pregnancy Related Conditions

Grinnell College is committed to compliance with Title IX and to supporting the academic success of pregnant and parenting students and students with pregnancy related conditions. If you are a pregnant student, have pregnancy related conditions, or are a parenting student (child under one-year needs documented medical care) who wishes to request reasonable related supportive measures from the College under Title IX, please email the Title IX Coordinator at titleix@grinnell.edu. The Title IX Coordinator will work with Disability Resources and your professors to provide reasonable supportive measures in support of your education while pregnant or as a parent under Title IX.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to applaud our alumni mentors: thank you so very much for your support!

Also, I would like to appreciate Drs. Cynthia Hansen, Barbara Johnson, Peter-Michael Osera, Samuel Rebelsky (sorted by last name) for the discussions and valuable feedback about the redesign of this course years ago.

I am excited to thank Dr. Barbara Johnson for her generosity and mentorship, and prior iterations of this course as well, all led by Drs. Barbara Johnson, Priscilla Jiménez, Samuel Rebelsky, Anya Vostinar, and Janet Davis. Finally, I would like to thank the CS department, and all the many Grinnell offices involved in making CSC324/CS326 happen! (I am excited to keep an [acknowledgments page](#).)