

CSC 282 – Thinking in C and Unix
Additional Information

a1. Course outline and syllabus: *Sample schedule and syllabus from 2013S attached.*

a2. The role of the course within the department and College's curricula.

Although the linguistics community is divided on Putnam's theory that one's native language guides the ways in which they think, there is strong evidence within the computer science community that the programming languages you know affect the ways you think about problem solving. The CS department addresses this issue, in part, with a multi-language, multi-paradigm, introductory sequence. In that sequence, we address some basic mechanisms for "thinking in C" and "thinking in Unix" in CSC 161, particularly ideas of imperative programming and memory management.

Nonetheless, students' understanding is limited by the amount of exposure in the second course and the need to address broader issues in that course. At the same time, C and Unix provide some deep ways of thinking about problem solving – there's a reason why they have survived relatively unchanged for thirty or more years. However, students in their first C and Unix course cannot grasp many of these approaches and, as noted above, we don't have time for all of them in the course.

The two experimental offerings of this course have proven quite popular. A faculty member sitting in on the first course noted "This course is important, different from other things taught at Grinnell." And in Spring 2014, twenty-one students have enrolled in the course.

b. Staffing

This course, along with the one-credit "Life Beyond Grinnell – Learning from CS Alumni" course, is part of a broader update to the department curriculum, and staffing needs are addressed by the broader proposal. The department has committed to allowing each faculty member to offer a four-credit course in his or her area of specialty or interest in alternate years; Samuel Rebelsky has decided to offer these two one-credit courses annually as his "course".

c. Library holdings

No additional library holdings are necessary.