

**SSCI 581 (35691), Concepts for Spatial Thinking**

**Syllabus**

**Units:** 4

**Term — Day — Time:** Summer 2020; Tues. and Thurs.  
10-11:50 a.m. PT and asynchronous

**Location:** Online (See course Blackboard for meeting link)

**Co-Instructor:** Laura C. Loyola, PhD

**Contact Info:** [loyola@usc.edu](mailto:loyola@usc.edu), 323-457-3504 (remote office)

**Office:** (See course Blackboard for office links)

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays, 1-2 pm PT and Wednesdays 4-5 pm  
PT

**Co-Instructor:** Elisabeth Sedano, PhD

**Contact Info:** [sedano@usc.edu](mailto:sedano@usc.edu)

**Office:** (See course Blackboard for office links)

**Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. PT

Please contact Instructors via email in advance of attending office hours. Instructors are also available by appointment.

**Library Help:** Andy Rutkowski

**Office:** VKC 36B

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. PT and  
Thursdays 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. PT

**Contact Info:** [arutkows@usc.edu](mailto:arutkows@usc.edu), 213-740-6390,  
<http://bit.ly/andyhangout>

**IT Help:** Richard Tsung

**Office:** AHF 146

**Office Hours:** By appointment

**Contact Info:** [ctsung@usc.edu](mailto:ctsung@usc.edu), 213-821-4415 (office)

## Course Scope and Purpose

SSCI 581: *Concepts for Spatial Thinking*, is an introduction to geographic information science and spatial reasoning. Spatial is an enabling discipline. Thus, the course domain is inherently comprehensive, multi-disciplinary, and collaborative, pertinent to problem solving in a wide range of academic and professional fields.

The course is designed to serve many audiences within the Spatial Sciences Institute and across the USC campus. It is the foundational spatial science course for five distance-learning programs<sup>1</sup> and three residential programs<sup>2</sup>. To serve a range of academic objectives, students are provided with a variety of options in course topics and assignments so they can align with their own academic and professional goals.

The course is also designed for any student who wishes to improve their GIS skills and understand the concepts underlying GIS analysis. Students will leave the course understanding the theoretical underpinnings of the field of spatial science.

*Fundamentals of GIS* – The course provides a core foundation in the evolving field of geographic information science. The course explores geographic information science and its applicability to a variety of fields, such as transportation, human security, geospatial intelligence, spatial data science, public health, economics, land use planning, geodesign, environmental science and management, spatial science, archaeology, and the humanities.

*The ArcGIS Ecosystem* – Esri's ArcGIS is powerful, industry-standard software that can be used to analyze spatial questions and visualize the outcomes. All students in this course learn how to independently use ArcGIS to solve real-world spatial questions.

*Spatial Data*– The ability to understand and analyze data sets is an essential component of spatial thinking, reasoning, and application. Students will investigate fundamental geospatial datasets such as the U.S. Census and attain the knowledge and skills necessary for processing, interpreting, and analyzing GIS data. Students will also learn how to find, clean, and merge data sets and vet them for quality.

*Spatial Thinking* – Location is critically important in contemporary society and a spatial perspective can be applied to nearly every topic area. The course will use readings, discussions, and a variety of case studies to demonstrate the importance of spatial thinking in describing, analyzing, modeling, and visualizing the world, and how one can cultivate the habit of thinking spatially.

*Geodesy* – Geodesy is the branch of science concerned with the size and shape of the Earth and determining precise locations on its surface. This includes geodetic datums, geoids, coordinate systems, and map projections. Understanding what geodesy is and how it underlies the

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<sup>1</sup>The M.S. in Geographic Information Science & Technology (GIST), the M.S. in Human Security and Geospatial Intelligence, the GIST and Geospatial Intelligence Graduate Certificates, and the GeoHealth track in the Keck School of Medicine's Master of Public Health program

<sup>2</sup>The M.S. in Spatial Data Science, the M.S. in Spatial Economics and Data Analysis, and the M.S. in Transportation Systems Management

successful deployment and use of spatial technologies separates a novice GIS practitioner with one who is more advanced.

*Maps* – Maps communicate the findings of spatial analysis, and have been employed throughout history to make sense of geographic concepts. The course will review past, present, and future map use, and explore how maps depict and transmit geographic knowledge in the digital age. Students will gain expertise in designing clear, communicative maps that meet professional standards.

At the graduate level, students are responsible for their own learning. The instructor's role is as a guide on the path of academic exploration, and students will be rewarded through active engagement with both the material and with their fellow classmates. The challenge for the instructor is to provide a robust, challenging, and stimulating academic experience within the broader milieu of the digital era.

All course materials will be organized through the Blackboard Course Management System. Core theoretical concepts will be presented via lectures, videos, and assigned readings. Written assignments will give students the opportunity to analyze and apply the concepts and theories learned from the readings. Projects will primarily use Esri's ArcGIS Pro.

### ***Learning Outcomes***

On completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Summarize, interpret, and utilize fundamental spatial concepts such as orientation, projections and transformations, interpolation, dispersion, and pattern.
- Examine how maps have been used throughout history to organize and empower different groups of people and anticipate the evolution of maps in the future.
- Illustrate the role and importance of geodetic datums, geoids, coordinate systems, and map projections for identifying the position and the location of places, people, and features on the Earth's surface when conducting spatial analysis.
- Describe the spatial analysis, modeling, and visualization tools included in geographic information systems and how other geospatial technologies can advance knowledge creation and communication across a variety of academic disciplines and professional fields.
- Examine, analyze, and manipulate core geospatial datasets from a wide range of fields to answer original questions for real-world decision support.
- Apply appropriate academic protocol with respect to research and writing.
- Apply spatial thinking and cartographic principles in the mapping and visualization of spatial data.

Students may vary in their competency levels on these abilities. You can expect to acquire these abilities only if you honor all course policies, attend classes regularly, complete all assigned work in good faith and on time, and meet all other course expectations of you as a student.

**Prerequisite(s):** None

**Co-Requisite(s):** None

**Recommended Preparation:** None

## **Technological and Communication Requirements**

ArcGIS Pro is provided online via the SSI Server; hence, students not need to install it on their own computer. Instead, every student must have the following technology requirements:

- A computer with a fast Internet connection
- A functional webcam and a microphone for use whenever a presentation or meeting is scheduled
- An up-to-date-web browser to access the SSI server

If a student does not have access to any of these, please speak with the instructor at the start of the semester.

*SSI Server and Tech Support* – This course utilizes the SSI Server, which is a virtual desktop that allows access to different types of professional software. If students are unable to connect to the server or experience technical issues, they should send an email (via their USC account) to SSI Tech Support at [spatial\\_support@usc.edu](mailto:spatial_support@usc.edu), making sure to copy (cc) the instructor on the email.

*Communications* – All materials will be provided via Blackboard. This allows you to engage in reading and class preparation assignments both ahead of synchronous sessions or asynchronously. All assignments will be submitted via Blackboard. In addition to email about time-sensitive topics, announcements will be posted on the Blackboard Announcement page. It is each student's responsibility to stay informed as to course activities and updates. All students are in charge of ensuring that email sent from the USC Blackboard account is not directed to junk mail.

The instructors are regularly online and will respond to student emails quickly. The instructors will endeavor to respond to email within 24 hours of receipt, aiming for no more than a 72-hour delay. An announcement will be posted in the rare instance when an instructor is offline for 72 hours or more.

## **Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

The required textbooks for this course are:

- Bolstad, Paul. 2016. *GIS Fundamentals: A First Text on Geographic Information Systems*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Acton, MA: XanEdu. This text is available as a hardbound copy or e-book for purchase at: [www.xanedu.com](http://www.xanedu.com).
- Law, Michael, and Amy Collins. 2019. *Getting to Know ArcGIS Pro*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Redlands, CA: Esri Press.

Supplementary readings will be assigned from various sources including but not limited to:

- Harder, Christian, and Clint Brown. 2017. *The ArcGIS Book: 10 Big Ideas About Applying The Science of Where*. Redlands, CA: Esri Press. <https://learn.arcgis.com/en/arcgis-book/>.

- Kimerling, A. Jon, Aileen Buckley, Phillip C. Muehrcke, and Juliana O. Muehrcke. 2016. *Map Use: Reading, Analysis, Interpretation*. 8th ed. Redlands, CA: Esri Press.
- Mitchell, Andy. 2012. *The Esri Guide to GIS Analysis: Volume 3, Modeling Suitability, Movement, and Interaction*. Redlands, CA: Esri Press.

## Description and Assessment of Assignments

There are several different types of assignments, which are described in detail in the “Weekly Assignments” folders on Blackboard. You will note that these are partitioned into 2-week units, each of which has a specific theme. Each theme includes a homework packet consisting of labs and quizzes, readings, and sometimes a discussion.

*Resume Assignments – 2 worth a total of 5 points.* All students are required to post and maintain a public resume, biography, and headshot on the SSI Student Community Blackboard site. Unless a student opts out, their resume will be included in the Spatial Sciences Institute Graduate Programs Resume Book, which is used to promote the program and highlight student skills, experiences, and professional aspirations. An updated resume will be submitted at the end of the course of study.

*Projects – 5 worth a total of 45 points.* The projects will be the major tool used to evaluate your learning in this course. The projects will be linked to course Modules. In support of these projects, students will complete some ArcGIS tutorials so that they are familiarized with the analytical capabilities of ArcGIS Pro and apply their proficiencies to problem-solving scenarios. Students will gain GIS skills from completing portions of the Law and Collins’ *Getting to Know ArcGIS Pro* workbook and Esri web courses. In this, they will solve basic research questions, while reading, thinking, and writing about GIS projects.

*Reading and Research Discussions - 5 worth a total of 20 points.* These assignments call on students to critically analyze required readings, identify relevant case studies employing the methodologies and concepts we cover in class, and to discuss them with the instructor and their classmates during synchronous meetings and/or online discussion forums via Blackboard. Critical thinking questions provide students an opportunity to apply their competencies to exploratory, open-ended scenarios and support spatial thinking problem solving.

*Mid-Term Exam – 1 worth of a total of 10 points.* The mid-term will cover material learned in the first half of the term. It may be mixed format and may consist of multiple choice, short answer, and simple problem questions.

*Final Exam – 1 worth a total of 20 points.* The final exam will cover material learned over the duration of the term. It may be mixed format and may consist of multiple choice, short answer, and simple problem questions.

## Grading Breakdown

Careful planning and a serious, consistent commitment will be required for students to successfully navigate the deliverables in this and other SSCI courses. The table below summarizes the SSCI 581 course assignments and their point distribution:

Assessment	Number	Points Each	Total Points
Resume Assignment 1	1	2	2
Project 1	1	5	5
Projects 2-5	4	10	40
Reading and Research Discussions	5	4	20
Resume Assignment 2	1	3	3
Mid-Term	1	10	10
Final	1	20	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>100</b>

## Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments must be submitted via Blackboard by the due dates specified in the Course Schedule. Attention to on-time assignment submission is essential. The instructors will aim to return feedback before the next assignment is due.

Strict penalties apply for late assignments as follows:

- All assignments will be penalized 2 points up to four days late. No points will be given for submissions more than four days late. Note that all assignments worth 2 points will receive 0 points if submitted late.
- Additionally, no written work will be accepted for grading after 5 p.m. PT on the last day of classes.

*Workload* – This is a four credit, one semester course. Students should expect to spend 10-15 hours per week completing the work in this course.

## Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Assignments	Deliverables/Due Dates
<b>Module 1: Introduction to Spatial Thinking</b>			
<b>Week 1</b> 5/21	<b>Introduction to GIS and Spatial Thinking</b> Introduction to class; Use of geographic information systems to support spatial reasoning	Resume Assignment 1 Project 1	
<b>Week 2*</b> 5/26	<b>Spatial Data Models</b> An introduction to vector, raster and other data models plus data and file structures		Resume Assignment 1 – Tuesday, 5/26
5/28  *Monday, 5/25 is a university holiday	<b>What's Special About Spatial?</b> The differences between spatial and non-spatial information, including spatial autocorrelation and spatial heterogeneity		

Week	Topic	Assignments	Deliverables/Due Dates
<b>Week 3</b> 6/2	<b>The Power of Maps and Critical GIS</b> The roles that maps have played throughout human history and the characteristics and uses of maps today	Reading and Research Discussion (RRD) 1	
<b>Module 2: The Spatial Value Proposition</b>			
6/4	<b>Environmental Data and the NWM</b> An introduction to key environmental data sets and their use in the National Water Model (NWM)		
<b>Week 4</b> 6/9	<b>Transportation</b> The spatial data used to support mobility, logistics, access, and related applications		RRD 1 (synchronously, in class; asynchronously, before and after class session)
6/11	<b>Land Use and Population</b> The spatial information used to support urban planning and social, governmental, and related applications		
<b>Module 3: Spatial Data Handling</b>			
<b>Week 5</b> 6/16	<b>Geodesy, Datums, and Geographic Coordinate Systems</b> Role of geodesy and datums in studying and communicating our three-dimensional world	Project 2	Project 1 – Monday, 6/15
6/18	<b>Map Projections and Projected Coordinate Systems</b> An introduction to the effects of project the three-dimensional world to a plane and benefits of doing so		
<b>Week 6</b> 6/23	<b>Aerial and Satellite Imagery</b> Introduction to passive and active remote sensing systems and the data they produce	RRD2	
6/25	<b>Global Navigation Satellite Systems</b> Introduction to geolocation systems and uses		

Week	Topic	Assignments	Deliverables/Due Dates
<b>Week 7*</b> 6/30  7/2  *Friday, 7/3 is a university holiday	<b>Attribute Tables</b> The importance of attribute information associated with coordinates and methods for converting text to coordinates  <b>Spatial Data Quality and Metadata</b> Methods for assessing the quality and utility of spatial data and the importance of metadata	Project 3	Project 2 – Monday, 6/29 RRD 2 (synchronously, in class; asynchronously, before and after class session)
<b>Week 8</b> 7/7	<b>Volunteered and Crowdsourced Geographic Information</b> Introduction to methods for collecting spatial data from non-professionals and the benefits and drawbacks of doing so	RRD 3	
<b>Module 4: Turning Spatial Data into Actionable Information</b>			
7/9	<b>Cartography</b> Best practices for creating finished mapping products		
<b>Week 9</b> 7/14  7/16	<b>Modern Mapmaking</b> Methods for visualizing spatial data online  <b>Basic Spatial Analysis 1</b> Selection, classification, dissolve and buffer functions	Project 4	Project 3 – Monday, 7/6 7/13 RRD 3 (synchronously, in class; asynchronously, before and after class session)
<b>Week 10</b> 7/21  7/23	<b>Basic Spatial Analysis 2</b> Overlay and network analysis functions  <b>Terrain and Raster Analysis</b> Land surface parameters and their uses; Map algebra and raster functions	RRD4	
<b>Week 11</b> 7/28  7/30	<b>Geospatial Intelligence</b> Incorporation of location-based analytics, terrain, and other data to implement actionable intelligence in support of human security  <b>Spatial Estimation and Interpolation</b> Introduction to sampling and spatial interpolation methods	RRD5 Project 5	RRD 4 (synchronously, in class; asynchronously, before and after class session)



Week	Topic	Assignments	Deliverables/Due Dates
<b>Week 12</b> 8/4	<b>Spatial Models and Modeling</b> Introduction to the variety of models that are used to understand and predict spatial phenomena	Resume Assignment 2 RRD4	Project 4 – Monday, 8/3 RRD5
8/6	<b>GIS Customization and Cloud Services</b> Introduction to GIS in the cloud and to programming languages and platforms for modeling and automating spatial processes		
<b>Module 5: Future of GI Science, Systems and Services</b>			
<b>Week 13</b> 8/11	<b>Looking Forward for GIS</b> The changing character and impact of GI science, systems, and services		Project 5 – Friday, 8/14 Resume Assignment 2 – Friday, 8/14 RRD 4 (synchronously, in class; asynchronously, before and after class session)
8/13	<b>Looking Forward for GIS Careers</b> Opportunities to acquire additional spatial skills		

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### **Academic Conduct:**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

### **Support Systems:**

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call*  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298*  
[equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*  
[usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report](http://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*  
[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.