SSCI 684, Spatial Modeling with GIS

**Syllabus**

**Units:** 4

**Term Day Time:** Spring, 2023  
**Seminar:** Thursday, 9:00-11:50 am PT

**Location:** SOS B51

**Instructor:** Laura C Loyola, PhD  
**Office:** AHF B55C  
**Regular Office Hours:** TBD; Also available most days and times by appointment via email.

**Contact Info:** [loyola@usc.edu](mailto:loyola@usc.edu), 213-740-5612

**Library Help:** Andy Rutkowski  
**Office:** LIPA B40-A  
**Office Hours:** Thursdays 10 a.m.-12 p.m. PT or by appointment

**Contact Info:** [arutkows@usc.edu](mailto:arutkows@usc.edu) see contact page on Blackboard for Zoom Room

**IT Help:** Myron Medulla  
**Office:** AHF B56B  
**Office Hours:** By appointment via email  
**Contact Info:** [spatial_support@usc.edu](mailto:spatial_support@usc.edu), 213-821-4415
Course Scope and Purpose

This course explores how geographic information systems and related technologies (global positioning systems, remote sensing, etc.) can be used to promote and support the construction and simulation of dynamic models of coupled human-environment systems. The fundamental feature of such systems involves diffusion over time and space, and individual cases may range from diffusion of pollutants and invasive species across landscapes to the transmission of disease by contact between individuals. The approaches used to model these phenomena may range from the continuous representation of system dynamics to the discrete interactions of individual elements of agent-based models. The measurement and modeling techniques used to describe spatial and temporal processes and patterns affecting human and environmental systems will be introduced with an assortment of weekly readings, discussions, and technical work. The course is aimed at doctoral students and a series of individual and group projects allow class participants to develop and use their own models for more detailed research. Calculus and programming experience may be helpful but are not required. In addition to the textbooks, exercises and readings will be provided from a variety of sources as required.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Describe the fundamental building blocks (data sources, data models, spatial analysis methods, programming tools, etc.) used in geographic information technologies and spatial models.
- Discuss how dynamic spatial models have been implemented to both simulate the functioning of coupled human-environment systems and understand their behavior under altered conditions.
- Explicate the ways in which advances in our knowledge of coupled human-environment systems on the one hand and computer technologies on the other hand have combined to allow more realistic and detailed representations of the spatiotemporal variability of these systems in spatial models.
- Discuss the impact of sampling, resolution, uncertainty, and error on spatial model outcomes and some of the new opportunities afforded by modern instrumentation and measurement techniques.
- Critically evaluate the types of models that will be required in the future to effectively manage land, water, air and biotic resources, assess environmental risks, and promote human health and well-being.

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
Concurrent Enrollment: Students must be enrolled in an existing USC PhD program
Recommended Preparation: Some GIS experience or permission of instructor

Class Conduct

Harassment, sexual misconduct, interpersonal violence, and stalking are not tolerated by the university. All faculty and most staff are considered Responsible Employees by the university and must forward all information they receive about these types of situations to the Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator is responsible for assisting students with supportive accommodations, including academic accommodations, as well as investigating these incidents if the reporting student wants an investigation. The Title IX office is also responsible for coordinating supportive measures for transgender and nonbinary students such as faculty notifications, and more. If you need supportive accommodations, you may contact the Title IX Coordinator directly (titleix@usc.edu or 213-821-8298) without sharing any personal information with me. If you would like to speak with a confidential counselor, Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) provides 24/7 confidential support for students (213-740-9355 (WELL); press 0 after hours).

COVID-19 policy -- Students are expected to comply with all aspects of USC’s COVID-19 policy including, but not limited to, vaccination, indoor mask mandate, and daily TrojanCheck. Failure to do so may result in removal from the class and referral to Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards. Students are recommended to keep safe physical distancing, whenever possible, to prevent any possible transmission. Please contact your instructor if you have any safety concerns.

Diversity and Inclusion – It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students’ learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful to everyone, and you are also expected to respect of others regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender identity and expressions, cultural beliefs, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, age, abilities, ideas and perspectives, or socioeconomic status. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Feel free to let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students.

Course Structure

The course will be taught as a seminar and class meetings will be split between presentations and discussions of the assigned readings and any questions and related topics that arise from the readings. The learning and teaching strategies are student-centered. They aim to encourage a deep-learning approach by using reflection and self-evaluation. The course readings are designed to provide the essential background and framework for study. Students will be required to reflect on their learning through in-class discussions and a series of carefully crafted assignments.
Technological and Communication Requirements

Students are expected to have a working knowledge of GIS. The modeling software programs and geospatial data required for course assignments will be accessed using computing resources provided by the Spatial Sciences Institute.

If a student does not have access to any of these, please speak with the instructor at the start of the semester. Also, see the USC ITS Student Toolkit here: https://keepteaching.usc.edu/students/student-toolkit/

SSI Server and Tech Support – At times this course utilizes the SSI Server which is a virtual desktop giving access to many different professional software. If you are unable to connect to the server or experience any type of technical issues, send an email using your USC account to SSI Tech Support at spatial_support@usc.edu, making sure to copy (cc) me on the email.

Communications – All materials to be handed in will be submitted via Blackboard. It is each student's responsibility to stay informed about what is going on in our course. In addition to email about time-sensitive topics, any important announcements will be posted on the Announcement page in Blackboard. Be sure to check these each time you log onto Blackboard.

I will send via email through Blackboard any notices that are time sensitive. Please be sure that you read as soon as possible all email sent from Blackboard or from me. Do not ignore course email until the day before assignments are due. Also double check to be sure that email sent from the USC blackboard account does not go into your junk mail!

While I am usually on-line all day and will probably respond to emails from students very quickly, I will endeavor to respond to all email within 24 hours of receipt, aiming for no more than 72 hours delay. In the rare case when I expect to be off-line for more than 72 hours, I will post an announcement on the Blackboard site.

Required Readings

Students are expected to acquire the textbooks on their own, electronic versions are acceptable when available. Most journal articles are accessible through the USC Libraries system. If a student is unable to access the textbooks, please speak with the instructor at the start of the semester to establish a workaround.


**Supplemental Readings**

Students may utilize any of the following readings as supplemental materials, as background if needed on a certain GIS-related concept or for further exploration of topics covered in discussions. Many, though perhaps not all, are listed in the syllabus where they may support course material.


**Description and Assessment of Assignments**

Students must participate in class discussion on a regular basis, prepare written assignments in the form of discussion boards and model reports, and complete technical exercises and presentations.

**Class Participation (10%)**: A class participation grade for the semester will be assigned based upon how actively students engage in the course. Students will be required to read all material outlined for each week of the course, and be prepared to lead and participate in group discussions about the readings in class. Failure to attend or to be adequately prepared to discuss the readings will lead to the assignment of a lower grade for that week.

**Conceptual Model (5%)**: At the start of the semester students will work up and present a conceptual model of their respective research. A discussion on conceptual models will precede this assignment and the conceptual model should be developed utilizing these concepts (yup) and readings. This assignment is designed to provide students the opportunity to holistically examine and model their research question and variables, an integral part of developing methodologies and workflows.

**Modeling Exercises (40%)**: Throughout the semester students will complete four exercises that provide students the opportunity to utilize and reflect upon the technical aspects of various modeling software. Students will implement the model design to health issues/projects of their own. These exercises will require independent background research of the models and/or
modeling software and incorporate written reviews of supporting documentation. The modeling exercise may take some time to work through and deliverables will consist of final model outputs plus a write up of 5-6 pages.

**In-Class Presentation (15%)**: Students will conduct a seminar on a topic determined in consultation with the instructor in the second half of the classes scheduled in Weeks 10 and 11. A one-page summary will be distributed in advance of the class itself and the topic may be an evaluation of a model or software (Caline, RePast, etc.), a complex systems subject (fractals, modifiable areal unit problems, neural networks, etc.) or some specific technique or application that is relevant but not otherwise covered in the course.

**Final Project (30%)**: In the second half of the course, students will work on projects determined in consultation with the instructor. Students will construct a spatial model to address some geographically relevant health problem, or problem of their own choosing. The final report and class presentation will summarize insights from each phase of the modeling process as experienced in the problem context.

### Grading Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Points Each</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Model</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling Exercises</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Class Presentation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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### Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments will be submitted for grading via Blackboard using the due dates specified in the Course Schedule below. Students are expected to attend and participate in every class session and to complete and upload all assignments by the deadlines detailed in the Course Schedule. Late work will be assessed a penalty of 10% per day and zero grades will be assigned for work that is more than one week late.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings and Assignments</th>
<th>Deliverables/Due Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module 1: Fundamentals of Spatial Models</strong></td>
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| **Week 1** 1/12 | **Introduction to Class**  
Brief introductions coupled with a discussion of class goals, projects, technology, reading assignments, and conceptual models. | Maglio et al (2014); Wilson & Burrough (1999); Crooks et al (2019)  
Forward, Ch1; Skidmore (2002) Ch 1 (optional, as needed) | No deliverables. |
| **Week 2** 1/19*  
*Monday, 1/16 is a university holiday | **Presentations and Discussion of Conceptual Models**  
**Why Use Models and Differentiating Spatial Models**  
Discuss the importance and value of modeling processes. We discuss what differentiates spatially explicit models and spatial modeling software. | O'Sullivan & Perry (2013) Ch. 1; Gebbert and Pebesma (2014); Stewart et al. (2013); Brimicombe (2010) Ch. 2; Longley et al (2015) Ch. 14, 15 (as needed); Skidmore (2002) Ch. 2 (as needed) | Conceptual Model |
| **Week 3** 1/26 | **The Art of Modeling and Avoiding Bias in Models:**  
Discuss the various features of successful modeling applications, including the need for parsimony, transparency, patience, and the human element of modeling. How these elements can be captured and passed to the users and use cases; how to avoid model bias | Alexandrov et al. (2011); Jakeman et al. (2006); Schmolke et al. (2010a, b); O'Sullivan & Perry (2013) Ch. 3; de Vos et al. (2013); Weisberg (2007); | No deliverables. |
| **Week 4** 2/2 | **Rethinking and Preparing Models in a GIS:**  
A discussion of the importance of and methods used to revise and process a variety of social and environmental datasets, and new data sources for use with a GIS and spatial models. | Crooks, et al. (2019) Ch. 9; Boulton et al. (2011); Bhaduri et al. (2007); Thomson et al (2017); Thomson et al (2020) Graham et al. (2004); Li et al (2019)  
Martin (2008) (optional)  
Green et al (2017) Ch. 3, 4, 7, and 9 (if unfamiliar with Remote Sensing) | Modeling Exercise #1 |
<p>| Week 7 2/23* *Monday, 2/20 is university holiday | Uncertainty and Error Propagation in Models: | Brimicombe (2010) Ch. 8; Patterson et al. (2007); Kwan (2018) | No deliverables. |</p>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 10</strong>&lt;br&gt;3/23</td>
<td><strong>Agent-Based Models:</strong>&lt;br&gt;A discussion of some of the ways which agents have been used to represent mobile individuals in dynamic models of human and environmental systems, and how complex system dynamics may be agent/individual-based or differential equation-based or both.</td>
<td>Abar et al (2017); Crooks et al (2019) Ch. 2, 3, and 7; Tracy et al (2018); Taboada et al (2013); Mustapha et al (2012)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 11</strong>&lt;br&gt;3/30</td>
<td><strong>ABM in GIS:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Incorporating ABM into GIS.</td>
<td>Crooks et al (2019) (selected chapters); Li (2020); Jiang et al (2019); Zellner et al (2012); Huang et al. (2014); Gurram et al. (2019)</td>
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**Module 4: Coupled Human-Environment Systems**

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<tr>
<th><strong>Week 12</strong>&lt;br&gt;4/6</th>
<th><strong>Presentations:</strong>&lt;br&gt;In-class presentations on model or software evaluation.</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 13</strong>&lt;br&gt;4/13</td>
<td><strong>Modeling the Built and Social Environments:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Discussion of the interactions of our dynamic built environment and social environment with health outcomes and various forms of exposure</td>
<td>Moore et al. (2007); Kanarogloua et al. (2005); Marusek et al. (2006); <strong>Additional readings TBD</strong>&lt;br&gt;**</td>
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**Module 4: Research Trends and the Future of Spatial Modeling**

| **Week 14**<br>4/20 | **Spatial and Computational Models:**<br>Discuss the distinction between spatial and computational models and an introduction to how spatially explicit models can be transformed. | Mallalo et al. (2019); Crooks et al (2019) Ch. 12; **Additional readings TBD** | Modeling Exercise #4 |

| **Week 15**<br>4/27*<br>Friday, 4/28 last day of classes | **Final Presentations:**<br>Students will present their projects, summarizing the insights garnered from each phase of the modeling process as experienced in their specific problem context. | Final project presentations in class. Final report due by 5 p.m. on last day of classes 4/28 |

**Final Exams**<br>5/3-5/10 | Final Assessment: Tuesday, 5/9, 8:00-10:00 am PT |
Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity:
The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, comprises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university’s mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or “recycle” work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity’s website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Students and Disability Accommodations:
USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University’s educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.
Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call
The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086
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
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776
OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411
Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101
Information on events, programs and training, the Provost’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.
**USC Emergency** - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

**USC Department of Public Safety** - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

**Office of the Ombuds** - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

**Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice** - (323) 442-2850 or otpf@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.