



## **SAE 542 Advanced Topics in Systems Engineering**

**Units: 3.0**

**Spring 2025 — Tuesdays, 6:40-9:20 PM**

**Location:** RTH 109 & online via Distance Education Network (DEN)  
Brightspace

**Instructor:** Dr. Phan Phan

**Virtual Office:** Discussion Board on Brightspace

**Office Hours:** Virtually on demand and by appointment

**Contact Info:** [PPhan@Usc.Edu](mailto:PPhan@Usc.Edu)

**Guest Speaker:** Mr. Kenneth Cureton

**Office Hours:** Virtually on demand and by appointment

**Contact Info:** [Cureton@Usc.Edu](mailto:Cureton@Usc.Edu)

**IT Help:** DEN@Viterbi Technical Support Center.

**Hours of Service:**

M - TH: 8:00AM - 10:00PM (Pacific Time),

F: 8:00am - 6:00pm (Pacific Time),

Saturday - Sunday: Closed.

**Contact Info:** [dentsc@usc.edu](mailto:dentsc@usc.edu) or 213-740-9356.

### **Course Description**

Probability theory in systems engineering: test design and performance, reliability and maintainability, quantitative decision models. Constraint theory to manage and de-conflict complex requirements. Complexity theory.

### **Learning Objectives**

Upon successful completion of this course, a student should be able to demonstrate analytical skills in applying quantitative methodologies in critical consideration and performance of various systems engineering activities. Course topics are organized into the following modules:

- a. Probability Theory and applications in system testing and performance evaluation, test design, assessment of test accuracy and fidelity.
- b. Quantitative decision models and applications in risk management.
- c. Constraint Theory as an enabling tools set to manage system requirements and modeling of complex systems.
- d. Complexity Theory with applications to software-intensive and complex systems.

**Prerequisites:** SAE-541.

**Co-Requisite:** None.

**Concurrent Enrollment:** None.

**Recommended Preparation:** Calculus, linear algebra and multivariate probability.

## Course Notes

- The course is delivered to students in a Distance Education Network (DEN) section via Brightspace and is also available to on-campus students for in-person attendance.
- Video of course lectures are delivered synchronously to students in the DEN section and archived on DEN's Brightspace Web Portal for later viewing on demand by all students.
- Copies of lecture slides and other class information are posted on Brightspace Web Portal.
- Discussion Board is also available on Brightspace Web Portal to facilitate students' exchange of technical inquiries on course content.
- Administrative questions or requests of personal nature are to be addressed privately via one-on-one e-mail.

## Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Students must have access to (and be proficient in the use of) a web browser in order to access course materials, view lectures, submit assignments, and interact with the Instructor. For hardware/software required to access the course online:

<https://viterbigrad.usc.edu/technical-support/technical-requirements/>

For additional information specific to DEN's Brightspace course management system and the various learning tools offered by D2L:

<https://viterbigrad.usc.edu/technical-support/course-management-system/>

## Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

- To be acquired by students (available at <https://www.uscbookstore.com/textbooks/>):
  - Friedman, George J. & Phan Phan (2017). *Constraint Theory, Multidimensional Mathematical Model Management*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York, NY: Springer.
  - Blanchard, Benjamin S. & Wolter J. Fabrycky. *Systems Engineering and Analysis*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall. (Either 4<sup>th</sup> edition in 2006 or 5<sup>th</sup> edition in 2010 will suffice.)
- To be downloaded from Brightspace Web Portal by students:
  - Moffat, James. *Complexity Theory and Network Centric Warfare*, The DoD Command & Control Research Program (CCRP) publication (September 2003) ISBN 1-893723-11-9.

## Description and Assessment of Assignments

- Readings and homework problems are assigned and graded weekly. Homework solutions will be subsequently posted on Brightspace and walked through in class to enable knowledge check.
- Course grade will be based on homeworks and two exams, which will consist of multiple questions to assess students' knowledge about the advanced systems engineering topics presented in class.
- Each exam will cover the lectures, homeworks and assigned readings prior to the exam. The exams are not cumulative.
- These will be open-book, take-home exams over a four-day period. The exams can be downloaded, completed and submitted to Brightspace Web Portal.
  - Students are not allowed to collaborate on the exams.
  - Students are not allowed to copy-and-paste from the readings, publications, any other Internet sources, or the course materials.
  - All exam answers must be an individual student's own work in his/her own words.
  - A student's exams will be checked via anti-plagiarism tools (e.g. turnitin.com) and the system will catch violators of these warnings!
  - The default punishment for unauthorized collaboration, cheating, and plagiarism on the exam is a grade of F for the course.
- Since most students complete this course via DEN, they are not graded explicitly on class participation. Nevertheless, class participation via WebEx and/or Discussion Board is highly encouraged as it can be a factor in determining the final course grade for borderline cases.

## Grading Breakdown

- Homework Assignments - 10%
- Mid-term Exam - 45%
- Final Exam - 45%

## Grading Scale

Course grades are determined by the distribution of percentage point totals for the class. "Natural groupings" will be used to assign letter grades. The highest scoring group will receive A, the second highest group will receive A-, the third highest group will receive B+, and so on. A gap must exist to create a grade boundary.

## Assignment Rubrics

As assessed and graded in the mid-term and final exams, a student's answers must demonstrate that he/she:

- 1) understands the question;
- 2) understands the appropriate advanced systems engineering concepts covered in the class;
- 3) can apply those concepts to answer the question.

For questions that require computation, a student's answer must include both the result and the necessary steps to derive that result.

- A student must demonstrate (1) through (3) above.
- The computational steps used to obtain an answer are just as important as a correct answer!
- Partial credit will be awarded for demonstrated work and knowledge of key concepts presented in class.

## Assignment Submission Policy

- All homeworks and exams are administered online via DEN's Brightspace Web Portal with respective due date and time specified in Course Schedule below.
- Homeworks and exams submitted past due, based on time stamp by Brightspace, will not be accepted.
- Each homework and exam must be submitted in a complete MS Word document with machine-readable text (also in any embedded diagrams, computations, tables, etc.).
  - Do not submit hand-written material and diagrams.
  - Do not submit documents in other formats, such as PDF, PowerPoint, Excel, etc.
  - However, formulas may be embedded via Equation Editor or MS Excel table or MS PowerPoint objects, etc. in the MS Word document.
  - Do not "embed as static picture" of diagrams, formulas, computations, tables, etc.
  - Do not submit partial answers across multiple documents

## Grading Timeline

Grading and feedback will be typically provided in about a week after submission.

## Additional Policies

- If a student has any questions regarding the exams (either before or during the exam period):
  - DO NOT call or e-mail questions!
  - The student must use the appropriate Exam Discussion Board on Brightspace to ask exam-related questions.
  - A student's questions and all answers will be visible to all students.
  - All students are responsible to periodically visit the discussion board.

## Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

The exact course schedule is subject to change. Dates of readings may change to align with other schedule adjustments. Changes will be announced. Since this is a 3-unit course, each student is expected to spend an average of six (6) hours outside of class per week, over a 15-week Fall or Spring semester (or equivalently a 10-week Summer term), on homework, readings, writing and other academic activities, per University's policy.

	Lecture Topics	Readings, homework & exams
<b>Mtg #1</b> <b>14 Jan</b>	Course introduction and administration Review of set theory & probability theory Introduction to reliability & maintainability	HW set #1 and student biography assigned Read: Blanchard & Fabrycky (B&F), Appendix C.1, Sections 13.1 thru 13.3
<b>Mtg #2</b> <b>21 Jan</b>	Review HW set #1 answers Series, parallel & hybrid system architectures Imperfect testing and evaluation of test design	HW set #1 & student's bio due @ 6:30PM, PST HW set #2 assigned. Read: B&F, Appendix C.2 & Chapter 6
<b>Mtg #3</b> <b>28 Jan</b>	Review HW set #2 answers Discrete probability models Continuous probability models	HW set #2 due @ 6:30PM, PST HW set #3 assigned Read: B&F, Sections 12.1 thru 12.3
<b>Mtg #4</b> <b>4 Feb</b>	Review HW set #3 answers Distribution models of failure rate & reliability Reliability of series & parallel systems	HW set #3 due @ 6:30PM, PST HW set #4 assigned Read: B&F, Sections 12.4 thru 12.6
<b>Mtg #5</b> <b>11 Feb</b>	Review HW set #4 answers Reliability assessment & life testing Interval Estimation of Reliability	HW set #4 due @ 6:30PM, PST HW set #5 assigned Read: B&F, Sections 7.1 thru 7.3 and 7.6
<b>Mtg #6</b> <b>18 Feb</b>	Review HW set #5 answers Decision-making models under risk & uncertainty Intransitive Dice, Irrationality & Systems Engr	HW set #5 due @ 6:30PM, PST HW set #6 assigned Read: B&F, Sections 7.4, 7.5 and 7.7
<b>Mtg #7</b> <b>25 Feb</b>	Review HW set #6 answers Decisions with multiple objectives & trade off Intransitive Dice, Irrationality & Utility Functions	HW set #6 due @ 6:30PM, PST HW set #7 assigned Read: INCOSE Article by Dr. G. J. Friedman
<b>Mtg #8</b> <b>4 Mar</b>	Review HW set #7 answers Utility models and risk management	HW set #7 due @ 6:30PM, PST HW set #8 assigned
<b>MID-TERM</b>	<b>Take-home mid-term exam covering lecture topics associated w/ homework sets 1 through 7</b>	<b>Open on Friday 7 Mar @ 6:00 AM PST and due on Monday 10 Mar @ 6:00 PM PST.</b>
<b>Mtg #9</b> <b>11 Mar</b>	Review solutions set to mid-term exam The Seven Bridges of Königsberg Intro to Graph Theory & Constraint Theory	HW set #9 assigned Read: Constraint Theory (CT) - Introduction, A Warn-up Problem in Complexity, Chapters 1 & 2
<b>18 Mar</b>	Spring recess – no class meeting	
<b>Mtg #10</b> <b>25 Mar</b>	Review HW sets #8 and #9 answers CT: Motivations & The Four-Fold Way (Part 1)	HW sets #8 and #9 due @ 6:30PM, PST. HW set #10 assigned. Read: CT, Chapter 3.
<b>Mtg #11</b> <b>1 Apr</b>	Review HW set #10 answers CT: The Four-Fold Way (Part 2) & General Results	HW set #10 due @ 6:30PM. HW set #11 assigned. Read: CT, Chapter 4
<b>Mtg #12</b> <b>8 Apr</b>	Review HW set #11 answers CT: Regular Relations	HW set #11 due @ 6:30PM. HW set #12 assigned. Read: Chapter 5
<b>Mtg #13</b> <b>15 Apr</b>	Review HW set #12 answers Model Consistency & Computational Allowability	HW set #12 due @ 6:30PM. HW set #13 assigned Read: Complexity Theory, Chapters 1 & 2.
<b>Mtg #14</b> <b>22 Apr</b>	Analysis of Networked Systems (Guest Speaker – K. Cureton)	HW set #13 due @ 6:30PM. HW set #14 assigned. Read: CT, Chapter 8
<b>Mtg #15</b> <b>29 Apr</b>	Review HW sets #13 and #14 answers Advances in Constraint Theory & Its Applications	HW set #14 due @ 6:30 PM Study and prepare for final exam
<b>FINAL</b>	<b>Take-Home Final Exam covering lecture topics associated with homework sets 8 through 14</b>	<b>Open on Friday 9 May @ 6:00 AM PDT and due on Monday 14 May @ 6:00 PM PDT.</b>

## 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, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

### Support Systems:

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. [engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu)

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu)

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

*USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.*

Provides overall safety to USC community. [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)