

Syllabus CS STARS Seminar

Spring 2026

Important Links:

- **Course Website:**
- **Course Schedule/Topics:**

Course Overview

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Teaching Assistants: Marta Markowicz martasm2@illinois.edu, Isaac Love iblove2@illinois.edu

Course Meeting Time and Room: Wednesdays 5:00 – 6:00 PM in Siebel 2405 (typically we will end at 5:50, but keep the entire hour reserved).

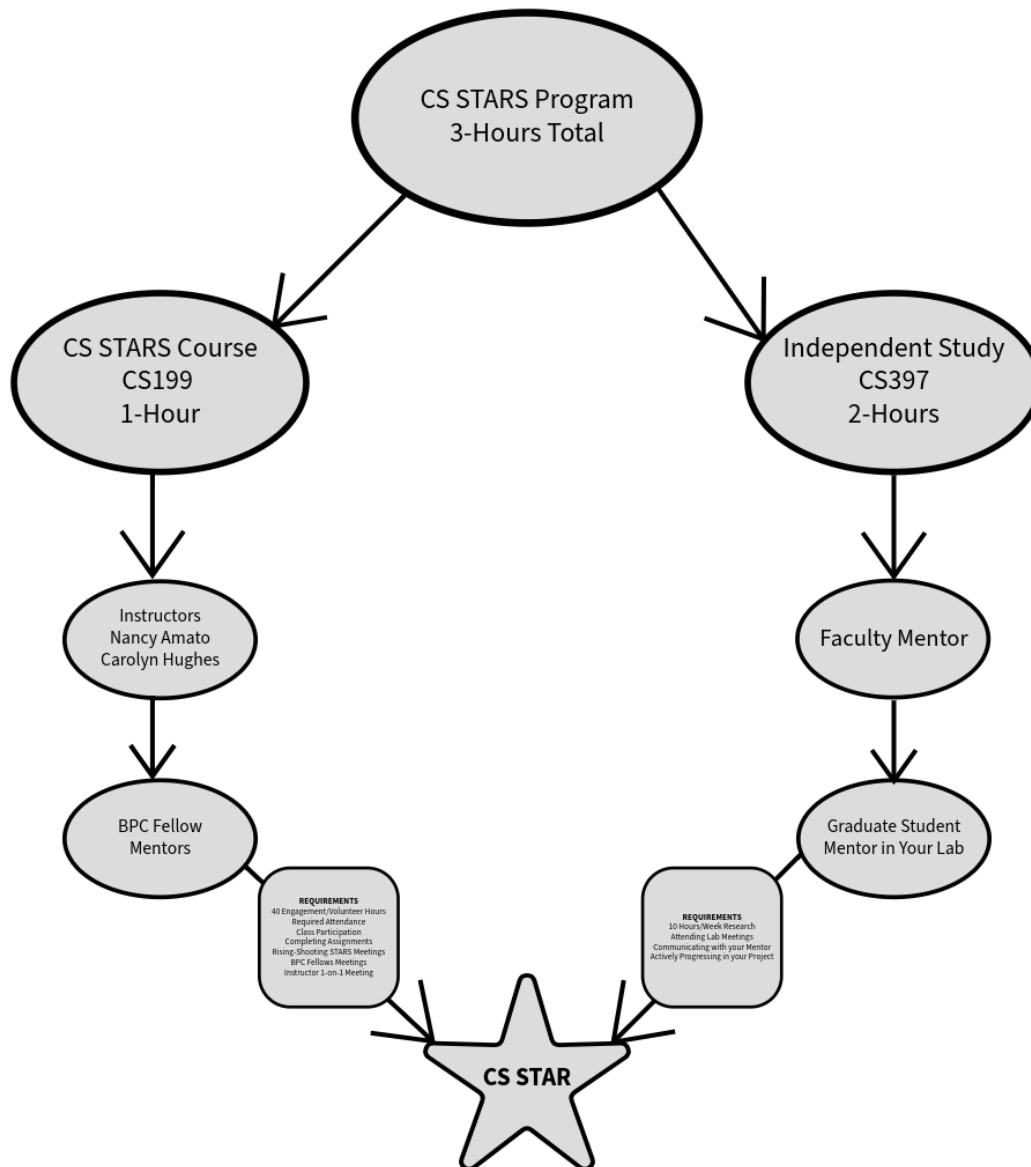
Course Requirements: In order to participate in the STARS Program, it is required to register, attend and participate in:

- 1-Hour CS199 course that meets on Wednesdays from 5pm-6pm
- 2-Hour Independent Study course for research with your approved faculty mentor
 - ***All STARS are required to find your own faculty mentor and confirm who they are with us***

New STARS who ARE NOT currently doing research with faculty are required to participate in a “How to do Research” training course that covers the fundamentals of research, working on a team of 2-4 other STARS with your faculty mentor on a research project. This will count towards your independent study course hours for your first semester as a STAR.

[NEW STARS INDEPENDENT STUDY INFO](#)

CS STARS Program Illustration:



Attendance: The course is heavily focused on hands-on planning and active, in-class participation. In person attendance is mandatory unless extenuating circumstances arise, which should be communicated to the instructor and course staff in advance.

Grading: Late policy is a 10% penalty for each day after the due date. There is also a -1 point penalty for every no-show to any volunteer/engagement activities.

Letter Grade: A >93%, A- >90%, B+ >87%, B >83%, B- >80% etc.

Point Distribution:

1. Participation: **30**, composed of
 - Class attendance: 15 (1 for attendance at each class)
 - Individual Mentoring Meeting with BPC Fellow: 2 (2 for the meeting)
 - Individual Mentoring Meeting with Course Instructor: 3 (3 for the meeting)
 - Rising/Shooting STAR meetings: 6 (2 for each meeting)
 - Feedback surveys: 4 (2 each for midterm and final survey)
2. Assignments: **25**, composed of
 - CS STARS Profile Information (personal information, research description, resume, elevator pitch): 5
 - Poster & Presentation: 10 (5 poster, 5 presentation at Trick-or-Research)
 - Midterm Report: 5
 - Final Report: 5
3. Engagement & Leadership Activities: **45**, composed of
 - Engagement activities: such as recruitment and engagement, outreach, and peer mentoring. On average, 2 hours per week.

Course Description

CS STARS are expected to engage in research with their mentors and in recruitment, community building, peer mentoring and outreach activities (per the CS STARS [program description](#)).

During the class meeting time on Wednesdays from 5-6pm, we will have presentations related to research skills (e.g., reading/writing research papers, poster developments and presentation), professional development(e.g., resume writing, graduate school) and opportunities to share and practice these skills with other CS STARS. We will also have dedicated time for training and planning for recruiting, engagement and outreach activities.

To support these missions, the CS STARS course includes the following components:

Participation (30 points)

- Class Attendance. One aim of CS STARS is to build community among the students in the program. The course is also heavily focused on hands-on planning and active, in-class participation. In support of this, in-person class attendance is mandatory barring extenuating circumstances (e.g. illness, research conference travel). Please contact the course staff as soon as a conflict arises!
 - Points: 15 total, 1 point for in-person attendance for each class. Students can miss two classes and still receive full attendance credit. If students attend 14 or 15 classes, they will receive extra credit.
- Mentoring meetings. Each CS STAR will have one meeting with Carolyn OR Nancy and one meeting with your BPC Fellow. These will be 30 minute mentoring sessions. The intent of these sessions is to help ensure CS STARS receive assistance they may need navigating their research or other parts of their academic career.
 - Points: 5 total (3 instructor, 2 BPC Fellow)
- Rising/Shooting STARS pairs: Three meetings with your Shooting/Rising STARS group, lasting at least 45 min each. You should meet once each in September, October, and November.
 - Points: 6 total (2 per meeting)
- Class Feedback Surveys, Week 8 (Oct 15) and End of Semester (Dec 3). We want to improve the CS STARS program and know that you will have some of the best feedback for us. We welcome your ideas anytime, and will formally request feedback from you about midway through the semester and at the end. These surveys will be anonymous, if you wish, but we will track who has completed them so that we can give you credit for them.
 - Points: 4 total, 2 for the midterm survey and 2 for the final survey

Assignments (25 points)

As a CS STAR, you are REQUIRED to be registered for 2-Hour Independent Study (CS 397) with your faculty mentor.

There are several milestones related to research activities. These milestones are intended to keep CS STARS on track with their research and help the course staff provide support where needed. The milestones are as follows:

- CS STARS Profile (Week 2-Sep 3) and Research (Week 5-Sep 24): Each CS STAR will be featured on the CS STARS webpages. The profile includes some information about you and your research activities. This is an

opportunity for us to promote you, but it also lets prospective students learn a bit about you and see that computer science might be for them. It will include a short description (1 paragraph) about your research topic/project. You should review this with your mentor and get their feedback before submitting it. Initially, this may just be a brief description of the topic, and later you might revise it to describe what you are doing in more detail. Note: STARS with new research mentors can submit their research description within two weeks of having a mentor assigned.

- Points: 3 total, 2 points for personal information and 1 point for research description
- Resume, Week 3 (Sep 10): You will submit a resume that will be included in your CS STARS profile on the CS STARS webpages. You will receive feedback from the course staff to help you present your accomplishments and you'll have an opportunity to update your resume based on that before it is posted publicly.
 - Points: 2 total
- Midterm Research Status Survey, Week 8 (Oct 15): You will submit a midterm report regarding your research activities. The goal of this report is to ensure your research is on track and that you are working effectively with your research group, and to identify any areas which might need additional attention so that we can help you address them. We will also ask your research mentor to provide a status report regarding your research activities. The intention here too is to understand how things are going and if there is anything the course staff can do to assist.
 - Points: 5 total
- Poster & Poster Presentation, Weeks 10-11 (Oct 29-Nov 5): You will prepare a poster describing your research activities and present it at Trick or Research on Wednesday, November 5, 2025. Students that are working with teams will be able to collaborate on joint posters, if they wish. Your poster should include an introduction that motivates your work, methods, preliminary results, discussion, and conclusion. If you do not have any preliminary results, talk about what you plan to do and what progress you have made thus far. You will bring a preliminary version of your poster to class to revise in class on Wednesday October 29th, giving you time to update it based on the feedback you will receive and prepare a final version for presentation at the Research Expo
 - Points: 10 total, 5 points for final versions of the poster, and 5 points for the presentation at Trick or Research
- Final Research Status Survey, End of Semester (Dec 10): You will submit a final report regarding your research activities. The objective of this report is to provide you an opportunity to share your reflections regarding your research

experience over the semester. We're interested to know how you interacted with your research group, how the experience impacted your interest in engaging in research in the future, and generally what you felt you learned from the experience. We will also ask your research mentor to provide feedback regarding your research activities over the semester.

- Points: 5 total

Engagement and Leadership Activities (45 points)

As a CS STAR, you are expected to spend an average of 2-3 hours a week outside of class over the course of the semester to support the CS department's outreach, engagement, and recruiting efforts, particularly as they relate to Broadening Participation in Computing (BPC). Although this will be the average, depending on the activity, and the level of the CS STAR's engagement, the actual time spent on any given week may vary. The course staff will work with the CS STARS to ensure the schedule is manageable for the individual CS STARS and each activity is properly supported.

These activities include assistance with undergraduate recruitment (e.g., Illini Days, admitted student events), departmental community building activities (e.g., Trick-or-Research, Celebration of Excellence), and community outreach activities (e.g., ChicTech, elementary school visits, or Engineering Open House). Some of these events are led by the CS STARS and some are run by the department or student organizations already, but for which the CS STARS will provide volunteering and support. There are also opportunities for CS STARS to serve as liaisons with student organizations to help facilitate connections with the CS STARS so that we may support their programs and events where possible.

We know that we do not have a full understanding of all the activities our CS STARS are already engaged in. As such, we will have optional activity reports to serve as a way to document your other ongoing activities. CS STARS are encouraged to submit Activity Reports for the activities they already do which are not otherwise tracked in our activities (e.g., Reflections/Projections conference planning, WCS planning) to help document the scope of the department's ongoing activities and also to ensure these activities are taken into account for load balancing.

- Other Engagement Activities throughout the semester. Each CS STAR will also participate in additional engagement activities. As described above, these may include Engineering Open House, recruitment events, outreach activities, RSO facilitation, etc. In addition, also as described above, each CS

STAR is expected to take on a leadership role in at least one such activity over the semester. Near the beginning of the semester, CS STARS will indicate the preferences and the course staff will work to make assignments. Rarely, there will be opportunities with less than a week's notice, although we expect that the STARS may be unable to cover all of these requests. Typically, the staff will endeavor to have a month or more lead-time on requests for STARS.

- Points: 45 points total. Each point corresponds roughly to 1 hour of activity, with students earning an average of 2-3 points a week for 14 weeks of the semester.

Attendance policy

CS STARS exists to build community among women researchers in CS and build and broaden our CS community. In addition, as outlined elsewhere, many of the CS STARS activities require collaboration and active hands-on engagement. In support of this, **in person attendance in class is mandatory** barring extenuating circumstances (e.g. illness, research conference travel). Please contact the course staff as soon as a conflict arises!

FAQ

Q: Required? Is enrollment in this course required if I am a CS STAR?

A: As the course time serves as dedicated planning for CS STARS activities, registration is required.

Q: Schedule Conflict? I have a one-off schedule conflict, what should I do? Will my grade be impacted?

A: If extenuating circumstances arise, let the staff know as soon as possible!

Q: Communication? Is email the only way to communicate?

A: All CS STARS will also have access to the UIUC CS Community slack for communication and coordination purposes.

Important Info Not Specific to the Course

CS CARES and CS Values and Code of Conduct

All members of the Illinois Computer Science department - faculty, staff, and students - are expected to adhere to the [CS Values and Code of Conduct](#). The [CS CARES Committee](#) is available to serve as a resource to help people who are concerned about or experience a potential violation of the Code. If you experience such issues, please [contact the CS CARES Committee](#). The Instructor(s) of this course are also available for issues related to this class.

Classroom Climate: Statement on Anti-Racism and Inclusivity

The goals of this course can only be accomplished in a setting of mutual respect. We are committed to creating a classroom environment that welcomes all students, regardless of their identities (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs). We all have unconscious biases, and we will try to continually examine our judgments, words and actions to keep our biases in check and treat everyone fairly. We request that you will do the same. If you feel comfortable, please let the course staff know if there is anything we can do to make sure everyone is encouraged to succeed in this class.

Here's the official UIUC text that has helpful info:

The intent of this section is to raise student and instructor awareness of the ongoing threat of bias and racism and of the need to take personal responsibility in creating an inclusive learning environment.

The Grainger College of Engineering is committed to the creation of an anti-racist,

inclusive community that welcomes diversity along a number of dimensions, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, disability status, class, age, or religious beliefs. The College recognizes that we are learning together in the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement, that Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous voices and contributions have largely either been excluded from, or not recognized in, science and engineering, and that both overt racism and micro-aggressions threaten the well-being of our students and our university community.

The effectiveness of this course is dependent upon each of us to create a safe and encouraging learning environment that allows for the open exchange of ideas while also ensuring equitable opportunities and respect for all of us. Everyone is expected to help establish and maintain an environment where students, staff, and faculty can contribute without fear of personal ridicule, or intolerant or offensive language. If you witness or experience racism, discrimination, micro-aggressions, or other offensive behavior, you are encouraged to bring this to the attention of the course director if you feel comfortable. You can also report these behaviors to the Bias Assessment and Response Team (BART) (<https://bart.illinois.edu/>). Based on your report, BART members will follow up and reach out to students to make sure they have the support they need to be healthy and safe. If the reported behavior also violates university policy, staff in the Office for Student Conflict Resolution may respond as well and will take appropriate action.

Disability-Related Accommodations

The staff wants this course to be accessible to everyone beginning on the first day! In our experience, we can't count on timely official accommodation information. There is no expectation or need for students to share personal information about *why* a particular accommodation would or wouldn't be helpful. And we can continue to iterate during the semester. If there's something that might get in the way of you being successful in the class - feel free to reach out!

Here's the official UIUC text that has helpful info (LINK):

To obtain disability-related academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the course instructor and the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) as soon as possible. To contact DRES, you may visit 1207 S. Oak St., Champaign, call 333-4603, e-mail disability@illinois.edu or go to <https://www.disability.illinois.edu>. If you are concerned you have a disability-related

condition that is impacting your academic progress, there are academic screening appointments available that can help diagnose a previously undiagnosed disability. You may access these by visiting the DRES website and selecting "Request an Academic Screening" at the bottom of the page.

Wellbeing and Distress, and Statement on Mental Health

We care about you first and foremost as a human (not as a student). We hope for your wellbeing to be your top priority and much more important than this class. We think of this wellbeing as being able to continually meet your needs for sleep, food, exercise, socializing, relaxing, and emotional support. Additionally, this sense of putting the human first is a focus we want to see in our community building efforts, as well!

We'd be thrilled to be someone you reach out to if any of these aren't going great. We can work together to identify what resources might be helpful (some great UIUC resources are described below). We want to *destigmatize* distress, but not *normalize* distress. It is unfortunately common to experience distress in school and we want you to know that you're not alone if you're experiencing some form of distress! When this happens, reaching out is essential! If we *normalize* this distress, we might incorrectly assume that we shouldn't reach out. (Oftentimes new researchers get stuck and feel trapped – advisors *want* them to reach out! But we know it can be scary for them! The same thing applies to us!)

Here's the official UIUC text that has helpful info:

As members of the Illinois community, we each have a responsibility to express care and concern for one another. If you come across a classmate whose behavior concerns you, whether in regards to their well-being or yours, we encourage you to refer this behavior to the Student Assistance Center (1-217-333-0050) or online at

odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/referral/. Based upon your report, staff in the Student Assistance Center reaches out to students to make sure they have the support they need to be healthy and safe. Further, as a Community of Care, we want to support you in your overall wellness. We know that students sometimes face challenges that can impact academic performance (examples include mental health concerns, food insecurity, homelessness, personal emergencies). Should you find that you are managing such a challenge and that it is interfering with your coursework, you are encouraged to contact the Student Assistance Center (SAC) in the Office of the Dean of

Students for support and referrals to campus and/or community resources. The SAC has a Dean on Duty available to see students who walk in, call, or email the office during business hours. For mental health emergencies, you can call 911 or contact the Counseling Center.

Diminished mental health, including significant stress, mood changes, excessive worry, substance/alcohol abuse, or problems with eating and/or sleeping can interfere with optimal academic performance, social development, and emotional wellbeing. The University of Illinois offers a variety of confidential services including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, psychiatric services, and specialized screenings at no additional cost. If you or someone you know experiences any of the above mental health concerns, it is strongly encouraged to contact or visit any of the University's resources provided below. Getting help is a smart and courageous thing to do -- for yourself and for those who care about you.

Counseling Center: 217-333-3704, 610 East John Street Champaign, IL 61820

McKinley Health Center: 217-333-2700, 1109 South Lincoln Avenue, Urbana, IL 61801

Sexual Misconduct Reporting Obligation and Confidential Sources

If we learn about a situation in which a student is in danger of harming themselves or others, or has been seriously harmed, we may be legally required to notify the Title IX Coordinator. If students want to speak with someone confidentially, the following resources are available on and off campus:

- <https://wecare.illinois.edu/resources/students/#confidential>

Speaking with a confidential resource does not preclude students from making a formal report to the Title IX Coordinator. Confidential resources can walk students through all of their

reporting options. They can also provide students with information and assistance in accessing academic, medical, and other support services they may need.

Here's the official UIUC text that has helpful info (LINK)

The University of Illinois is committed to combating sexual misconduct. Faculty and staff members are required to report any instances of sexual misconduct to the University's Title IX and Disability Office. In turn, an individual with the Title IX and

Disability Office will provide information about rights and options, including accommodations, support services, the campus disciplinary process, and law enforcement options.

A list of the designated University employees who, as counselors, confidential advisors, and medical professionals, do not have this reporting responsibility and can maintain confidentiality, can be found here:

<https://wecare.illinois.edu/resources/students/#confidential>

Other information about resources and reporting is available here:

<https://wecare.illinois.edu>.

Religious Observances

For people of many religions, school conflicts with their religious holidays. Please let our staff know if you need to miss a class for a religious holiday - we can create a plan so that you can get the most out of the class. Even when religious holidays don't fall on a class day, you might typically take time off from work to celebrate. We're happy to figure out alternate plans so that you can take this time off! Just let us know!

Here's the official UIUC text that has helpful info:

Illinois law requires the University to reasonably accommodate its students' religious beliefs, observances, and practices in regard to admissions, class attendance, and the scheduling of examinations and work requirements. You should examine this syllabus at the beginning of the semester for potential conflicts between course deadlines and any of your religious observances. If a conflict exists, you should notify your instructor of the conflict and follow the procedure at [odos.illinois.edu/community-of](https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/resources/students/religious-observances/)

[care/resources/students/religious-observances/](https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/resources/students/religious-observances/) to request appropriate accommodations. This should be done in the first two weeks of classes.

Academic Honesty

It is unlikely you will run into situations where academic honesty is a concern in this course, given it is primarily a space for collaboration and group planning. We will discuss some about academic honesty as it pertains to research, as it is important to

appropriately cite and reference work. We hope you develop a deeper understanding of and commitment to academic honesty during the class and help build that commitment into the community at UIUC CS.

Here's the official UIUC text that has helpful info:

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Student Code should also be considered as a part of this syllabus. Students should pay particular attention to Article 1, Part 4: Academic Integrity. Read the Code at the following URL: studentcode.illinois.edu/.

Academic dishonesty may result in a failing grade. Every student is expected to review and abide by the Academic Integrity Policy: studentcode.illinois.edu/article1/part4/1-401/. Ignorance is not an excuse for any academic dishonesty. It is your responsibility to read this policy to avoid any misunderstanding. Do not hesitate to ask the instructor(s) if you are ever in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, or any other breach of academic integrity.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

We plan to ensure that we provide the same FERPA protections to you as we provide to our students, future mentees, and other student community members we interact with.

Here's the official UIUC text that has helpful info:

Any student who has suppressed their directory information pursuant to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) should self-identify to the instructor to ensure protection of the privacy of their attendance in this course. See

<https://registrar.illinois.edu/academic-records/ferpa/> for more information on FERPA.

Emergency Response

Emergency response recommendations can be found at the following website:

<http://police.illinois.edu/emergency-preparedness/>. UIUC encourages you to review this website and the campus building floor plans website within the first 10 days of class.

<http://police.illinois.edu/emergency-preparedness/building-emergency-action-plans/>.