

Supplemental Report: MAA Program Study Group on Computing and Computational Science

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This Supplemental Report follows a different structure. Section 2 provides a careful definition of each of seven distinct subdisciplines within computing and computational science. Section 2 also notes that the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), the Computer Society of the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE-CS), and the Association for Information Systems (AIS) publish separate curricular guidelines for five of these subdisciplines, in addition to an overview document.

With these subdisciplines identified, Section 3 provides some general comments regarding relationships between education in mathematics and various subdisciplines of computing and computation.

At a more detailed level, opportunities arise for cooperation and coordination with mathematics programs and each subdiscipline within computing and computational science. Possibilities include the following:

- mathematics courses to support majors in a subdiscipline
- mathematics minor paired with a major in a subdiscipline
- mathematics major paired with a minor in a subdiscipline
- tracks within a mathematics major that emphasize topics in a subdiscipline
- double majors involving both mathematics and the subdiscipline
- interdisciplinary majors

With so many opportunities between mathematics and each subdiscipline, a full discussion of each possible combination is impractical. Instead, Section 4 outlines five programs that illustrate some common ways that mathematics may connect with a subdiscipline of computing or computational science. This Supplemental Report then examines each of these illustrative programs in some detail in separate sections (Sections 5 through 9).

This Supplemental Report concludes with acknowledgments (Section 10) and a bibliography in Section 11.

Section 2: Mid-level definitions

On many campuses, several undergraduate programs have evolved to provide background related to computing and computation. However, since these fields are diverse, programs focus on selected elements of these subjects. Over the years, several names have emerged within the computing field to describe one focus or another.

To those outside the field, "computer science" may seem a generic term that covers many areas. For example, mathematicians may consider computing as a unified subject, suggesting that mathematics preparation for computing involves a single collection of recommendations. As the rest of this report indicates, however, the

mathematics needed for some areas of computing and computation are quite different than the mathematics needed for other areas.

The following definitions and explanations are intended to clarify several commonly-used terms related to computing and computation. First, the professional societies (the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), the Computer Society of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE-CS), and the Association for Information Systems (AIS)) identify five different foci for undergraduate programs. The following definitions are taken from Computing Curricula 2005: The Overview Report, developed by a joint ACM/IEEE-CS task force [1].

Computer engineering "is concerned with the design and construction of computers and computer-based systems. It involves the study of hardware, software, communications, and the interaction among them. Its curriculum focuses on the theories, principles, and practices of traditional electrical engineering and mathematics and applies them to the problems of designing computers and computer-based devices." [1, p. 13]

Computer science "spans a wide range, from its theoretical and algorithmic foundations to cutting-edge developments in robots, computer vision, intelligent systems, bioinformatics, and other exciting areas. We can think of the work of computer scientists as falling into three categories. They design and implement software. ... They devise new ways to use computers. ... they develop effective ways to solve computing problems. ... Computer science spans the range from theory through programming." [1, pp. 13-14]

"*Information systems* specialists focus on integrating information technology solutions and businesses processes to meet the information needs of businesses and other enterprises, enabling them to achieve their objectives in an effective, efficient way. This discipline's perspective on information technology emphasizes information, and views technology as an instrument for generating, processing, and distributing information." [1, p. 14]

Information technology "is a label that has two meanings. In the broadest sense, the term information technology is often used to refer to all of computing. In academia, it refers to undergraduate degree programs that prepare students to meet the computer technology needs of business, government, healthcare, schools, and other kinds of organizations. In some nations, other names are used for such degree programs." While "Information Systems focuses on the information aspects of information technology", the "emphasis [of information technology] is on the technology itself more than on the information it conveys." [1, p. 14]

Software engineering

situations and the increased importance of software in safety-critical applications. Software engineering is different in character from other engineering disciplines due to both the intangible nature of software and the discontinuous nature of software. It seeks to integrate the principles of mathematics and computer science with the engineering practices developed

computing and mathematics, particularly in areas where the disciplines intersect; this section examines several of those implications.

a. Pure vs applied mathematics

Mathematics is, of course, useful. Mathematicians as a group are inclined to emphasize the utility of mathematics for training minds in logical reasoning and proof. Within fields of computing, however, mathematics is equally if not more important as a way to envision and work with the objects involved in computation. Some of these objects are intrinsically mathematical, such as matrices, functions, graphs, differentiation, or integration. But mathematical representations also provide a framework for understanding data structures, the algorithms that work on those structures, and the problems those algorithms solve. Development of mathematical representations of and operations on such things is sometimes called "modeling," or at least is a component of the modeling process. People in computing fields emphasize this role of mathematics, yet it is one that is not always conveyed through mathematics curricula.

b. Elegance

A primary objective common to mathematics, computing, and computational science is to identify perspectives that simplify and clarify thinking about a problem. All of these disciplines value elegance. Beyond a sense of beauty and satisfaction, simple and elegant representations and perspectives encourage effective and correct ways to approach problems. In computing, for example, complexity can be a major obstacle to correct algorithms and programs, and elegance can have a direct impact on the validation and verification of systems.

Mathematics has a long history of discovering computational elegance. For example, today we take for granted abstract operations, such as addition and multiplication, yet these operations were challenging to perform until the development of appropriate representations and the corresponding algorithms: Arabic numerals and the place system, logarithms, etc. Advances in computing build on novel and changing mathematical representations of real-world objects, such as the sounds and images that today's students take for granted as objects of computation.

c. Notation and language

Mathematics, all fields of computing, computational science, and big data require precision in communicating ideas, approaches, and techniques. For example, the steps in a proof or an algorithm must be stated unambiguously. Historically, mathematics developed as a notational foundation for the description of both logical arguments and computational procedures. These perspectives for mathematical computation often have provided a foundation for the development of computer languages and representations. More recently, computing has provided insights into mathematical theory and notation, in such areas as the lambda calculus for mathematical function theory. With the cross fertilization of notations and

formalism that underlies both mathematics and all areas of computation, some might consider computer languages as a relatively new form of mathematical notation with algebraic notation and operations as a "natural" form of computer language. Both computing and mathematics students deserve a fuller understanding of these relationships than they typically get from current curricula.

d. Traditional and modern perspectives

Over the years, mathematical education has responded inconsistently to advances in representations, algorithms, and technology. Some technology has been embraced; for example, computer- or calculator-generated line graphs are now standard in calculus instruction. On the other hand, some technology may be downplayed; for example, some techniques well suited for digital computation, such as bisection for solving equations, have not been so widely accepted. At a deeper level, some modern representations may be largely absent from the mathematics curriculum, despite their utility and evidence [18] that they provide a clear path to learning. Particularly pressing cases are Monte Carlo algorithms and bootstrapping. At the same time, some traditional but idealistic viewpoints linger, although they have limited practical utility. Integration with partial fractions, for

e. Summary

The observations in this section illustrate that many areas of computing and computational science build strongly upon traditional mathematics. Mathematics provides a foundation that may fairly be considered essential. However, modern understandings of the fields indicate that a strictly traditional view of mathematics will likely leave students underprepared for work in computing, computational science, big data, and even significant areas of mathematics. Students need to appreciate not only traditional mathematical concepts and representations but also insights and perspectives that utilize modern computational practices. Overall, the interplay of understandings in these disciplines suggests a nuanced relationship between education in mathematics and in computation. Each has much to contribute to the other today, and each can profitably influence the evolution of the other in the future.

Section 4: Illustrative types of programs

With at least seven distinct subdisciplines within computing and computational science, and many ways to combine study of the disciplines (majors, minors, joint majors, emphases, interdisciplinary majors, etc.), there are more variations than can be productively described. The next five sections of this Supplemental Report explore five illustrative programs that combine mathematics and some subdiscipline of computing or computation.

- Mathematics minor to support a computer engineering or software engineering major
- Mathematics courses to support a computer science major
- A double major in mathematics and information systems or information technology
- Mathematics major with computational science emphasis
- Mathematics major oriented toward big data

Together, these programs illustrate a range of mathematical content, sometimes at the level of supporting courses, a minor, or a major. Further, each subdiscipline of computing and computation is represented in at least one program. Taken together, these examples suggest many ways in which mathematics courses, tracks, and programs can connect with coursework in each of the seven subdisciplines of computing and computation.

Section 5: Mathematics minor to support a computer engineering or software engineering major

The ACM and IEEE-CS overview of computing curricula [1] describes two engineering fields within computing: computer engineering and software engineering. The curriculum guidelines for both fields [2, 10] are similar in their

outcome for computer and software engineering students studying mathematics is therefore

adopting appropriate theory to suit applications: mathematics courses for computer and software engineers must develop students' ability to apply mathematics to engineering problems; while theoretical foundations cannot be neglected, applications should be emphasized.

Finally, although computing draws more heavily on discrete mathematics than on continuous, undergraduate engineering programs as a whole have traditionally included a large amount of continuous mathematics. Both computer and software engineering require study of probability and statistics as well as of deterministic mathematics. A mathematics minor that complements these engineering programs thus has an opportunity to demonstrate

the variety of mathematical ideas: both deterministic and stochastic mathematics should feature prominently in students' studies, and a core of discrete mathematics should be complemented with selected topics from continuous mathematics.

c. Required background for post-baccalaureate career paths

and critical thinking, problem solving, and similar intellectual skills developed by the study of mathematics are valuable.

Beyond the entry level, analytical thinking and problem solving are important, and specific mathematical knowledge may help employees advance. In particular, most computer systems rely on mathematically motivated algorithms or models in some way, and engineers who understand and can work with the underlying mathematics are in demand.

Prerequisites for 3-2 programs

Many students, particularly from liberal arts colleges, obtain a computer engineering degree through a "3-2" program. Such programs typically involve three (or occasionally four) years of study at a liberal arts college followed by two years of study at an engineering college. Students generally receive bachelors degrees from both schools, for example, a bachelor of science from the liberal arts college and a bachelor of science in engineering from the engineering college. While such programs exist in computer engineering, they are less common in software engineering.

Counting:

equations course for admission to the minor, a more advanced linear algebra course, either discrete mathematics or multivariable calculus, and finally two elective mathematics courses. However, even this program readily accommodates the needs of computer and software engineering: discrete mathematics satisfies one of the requirements of the minor, and a probability or statistics course can serve as one of the electives. [20]

Section 6: Mathematics courses to support a computer science major

Almost every computer science major program requires one or more mathematics courses in addition to computer science courses. The ACM and IEEE-CS curricular guidelines for computer science spell out specific mathematical foundations for undergraduate majors in those fields [3, 4, 5]. These guidelines specify both topics that students should study and the level of mastery that they should achieve. As a general rule, mathematics requirements for computer science are less demanding than those for computer or software engineering [2, 10].

a. Cognitive goals

Broadly, computational and mathematical styles of thought overlap to a significant degree. Of course, algorithms are central to computational thinking, and weave through much mathematical thinking; both the creative insight and methodical logic that go into a mathematical proof or derivation are also present in the creation and analysis of a computer algorithm or program.

using graphs and trees," "analyze a problem to create relevant recurrence equations or to identify important counting questions," and "Use formal logic proofs and logical reasoning to solve problems such as puzzles." In other areas the computer science learning outcomes call only for students to be able to describe or identify mathematical ideas (e.g., "describe how formal tools of symbolic logic are used to model algorithms and real life situations"). In all cases, however, the underlying mathematical outcome is

mathematical problem solving: students should be able to model a problem or algorithm mathematically, and to deduce properties of the problem or algorithm from the model.

Computer science draws on both applied and theoretical mathematics. Applied mathematics is a day-to-day tool in analyzing algorithms, while many advances in algorithm design are deeply rooted in theoretical mathematics — modern cryptography with its roots in number theory is an example. Thus another mathematical outcome for computer science and software engineering students studying mathematics is

adopting appropriate theory to suit applications: mathematics courses that support computer science programs have ample opportunities to both demonstrate applications of mathematics and to explore the theoretical roots from which those applications spring.

c. Required background for post-baccalaureate career paths

Most computer science majors see themselves destined either for careers either in the computing industry or in computing research and education. Many students who enter the industry eventually pursue graduate study at the masters level; those who seek careers in research and college-level education inevitably pursue a doctorate.

Prerequisites for graduate work

Particularly at the doctoral level, a strong mathematics background is very helpful to graduate study of computer science. Some programs even find a strong mathematics background is better preparation than a strong computing background with little mathematics. Students considering graduate school in any computing field should thus be encouraged to take as much mathematics as possible, and to pursue mathematics significantly beyond the introductory level.

Expectations for careers in industry

Software development experience, particularly in a team setting, is the crucial factor in qualifying students for many first jobs in the computing industry. Mathematical background *per se* has little bearing, although analytical and critical

thinking, problem solving, and similar intellectual skills developed by the study of mathematics are valuable.

Beyond the entry level, analytical thinking and problem solving are important, and specific mathematical knowledge may help employees advance. In particular, most computer systems rely on mathematically motivated algorithms or models in some way, and senior developers or technical managers who understand and can work with the underlying mathematics are in demand.

d. Program-specific courses

CC 2001: Computer Curricula 2001 [3] and CS 2008: Computer Science Curriculum Update 2008 [4] specify core mathematical knowledge that amounts to a survey of discrete mathematics, including these ingredients:

Functions, sets, and relations:

1. *Calculus*: some cal

there are, however, some core elements that are very important for IS professionals (of course, these needs will vary depending on an individual's specialty). To support in-depth analysis of data, IS professionals should have a strong background in statistics and probability. For those who are interested in building a strong skill set in algorithmic thinking, discrete mathematics is important. [7, p. 21.]

Within information technology, the 2008 guidelines provide reasonable detail regarding the mathematical and statistical background needed by all graduates intending to work in the information technology field. The high-level outline begins as follows:

Mathematics and Statistics for IT (38 core hours)
MS. Basic Logic [minimum 10 hours]
MS. Discrete Probability [minimum 6 hours]
MS. Functions, Relations, and Sets [minimum 6 hours]
MS. Hypothesis Testing [minimum 5 hours]
MS. Sampling and Descriptive Statistics [minimum 5 hours]
MS. Graphs and Trees [minimum 4 hours]
MS. Application of Mathematics and Statistics to IT [minimum 2 hours] [9, p. 94 ff]

The 2008 report observes that various areas within information technology may require additional mathematical and statistical background:

It is useful to point out that this knowledge unit only specifies core learning outcomes, i.e., learning outcomes that any graduate from an IT program, independent of specialization, must have acquired. Depending on their specialization, graduates may need to obtain additional knowledge of mathematics or statistics. For example, students specializing in the areas of networking or platform technologies are likely to need to become comfortable with a range of concepts from calculus, whereas students specializing in the area of information management and/or knowledge management are likely to require a deeper knowledge of statistics than this unit specifies. However, since the model curriculum is agnostic about the type of specializations that institutions create, it seems inappropriate to specify more advanced learning outcomes in detail. [9, p. 95]

Taken together, the most recent curricular guidelines for information systems and information science highlight the need for some mathematical background, particularly in the areas of discrete mathematics, probability, and statistics. In addition, the national recommendations for these disciplines provide opportunities for conversations with mathematics programs to coordinate work in double majors to strengthen students' background in significant and relevant ways.

a. Cognitive goals

Both information systems and information technology generally have a practical orientation. Typical questions might include the following:

How can information be gathered, processed, and reported to support the functions of the business or organization?

How can information be used to assist in decision making?

Topics: Math, statistics and probability in IT

Core learning outcomes:

1. Explain, with examples, the importance of a range of mathematical concepts, including sets, relations, functions, basic logic, and graphs and trees for IT.
2. Explain, with examples, the role of probability and statistics in IT.
3. Perform a statistical analysis of a system's performance.
4. Analyze a statistical analysis of a system's performance and recommend ways to improve performance. [9, p. 97]

Other stated outcomes for mathematics to support information technology are equally practical.

As already noted, the total time specified within the ACM/IEEE-CS curricular recommendations for topics in mathematics and statistics is "38 core hours" [9, p.

entering directly from undergraduate programs may have a BS degree with a major in IS, often their degree is in computer science, business, or some other field. The MSIS program may also attract experienced individuals including IS professionals and people seeking career changes. Often this experienced group will be part-time evening students or will access the courses through a remote learning environment. The architecture of the MSIS program accommodates this wide diversity of backgrounds and learning environments. [8, pp. 133-134]

To date, no national guidelines have appeared for graduate programs in information technology, but this field also seems to draw from a wide range of undergraduate backgrounds.

With the need for analytical skills, knowledge of probability and statistics, and logical reasoning, a double major that combines mathematics with information systems or information technology seems to provide a strong foundation for advanced work. However, students with bachelor degrees in many disciplines would seem to be potential candidates for graduate work in either of these disciplines.

Expectations for careers in industry

Many graduates of programs in information systems or information technology pursue careers in industry, since these programs emphasize skills that have direct relevance to companies. For example, the following statement comes from the 2010 national curricular recommendations for information systems:

IS Majors: An IS major consists of the entire model curriculum targeted for a particular career track. Students proficient at this level are prepared to enter a career in the IS field. They have competencies in basic technical areas and apply these to business processes and project management. Graduates of IS programs can work for different industries such as manufacturing, financial services, health care, and others including information technology providers of hardware, software, and services. [7, p. 15]

Similarly, the 2008 national curricular recommendations for information technology provides this context:

The fact that *Information Technology* programs emerged to meet demand from employers has had a significant effect on the evolution of the discipline. Entry-level knowledge and skill requirements gathered from potential employers of graduates naturally translate into learning or program outcomes for graduates from Information Technology programs. [9, p. 17]

Overall, undergraduate programs in both information systems and information technology seek to prepare students to enter specific types of careers within industry. These careers include a range of specialities, and this provides some diversity within programs and graduates. However, even with variations among

specialities, a career focus is a centerpiece of these types of undergraduate programs.

d. Program-specific courses: discrete mathematics, probability, and statistics

Since the national curricular guidelines for undergraduate programs in information technology specify 38 hours of coursework in areas related to discrete mathematics, probability, and statistics, a single course would likely provide a minimal covering of topics for an undergraduate degree in information technology.

A double major with mathematics, however, opens numerous possibilities to extend the level of this background. In particular, information technology makes extensive use of such areas as probability, hypothesis testing, sampling, and descriptive statistics. In mathematics programs, such topics might be explored in reasonable depth through several statistics-based courses.

Additional background from discrete mathematics also seems appropriate; and a typical, semester-

Programming Fundamentals
Fundamentals of Networking
Fundamentals of Web Systems

view that computational science is an emerging intellectual branch of mathematics that is part of the broad development and evolution of mathematics and its curricula over the centuries.

a. Cognitive goals

A mathematics major with computational science emphasis can highlight how mathematics and computational science can and should influence each other, rather than focus on what mathematical background is needed for computational science.

An appreciation for the meaning of notation and the allowable forms of operation. It is not clear whether mathematics training helps students to understand the idea of notation better, but clearly even if it does not create notationally skilled workers, mathematics helps to identify and select them.

Knowledge of the common forms of mathematical representation of real-world settings, such as matrices, differential equations, fitted curves, splines, etc.

Understanding of the different forms in which information is conveyed and the ways that information from different sources can be combined and transformed.

Familiarity with basic phenomena, both field-specific as in physics, chemistry, biology, and in general, such as equilibria, stability.

b. Desirable mathematical goals

Computational scientists have to be familiar with the mathematical representation of the objects of scientific interest. They also need to be familiar with mathematical modeling: the process and concepts of constructing a representation of real-world objects.

In the continuous domain, the ideas of functions and calculus in multiple variables are essential. The implementation of function- and calculus-oriented operat[()] TJ4] TJETBT1 0

transforms (e.g., Fourier transforms). It is helpful if mathematical concepts are taught at least partially in the context of objects often used in computational science (e.g., "smoothness" and "continuity" in the context of splines, convergence in the context of solution via iteration). Ideas of probability and sampling are also important: important basic distributions (e.g., Gaussian, binomial, Poisson, exponential), moments and expectation values, variance, basic statistical inference.

Although many of the natural science disciplines that the computational scientist will relate to are based in continuous mathematics, the discrete domain is also important. This is so both because scientific computing typically interrelates the continuous and discrete, and because discrete representations and information are important in many areas of science, such as Markov models, trees and graphs.

Insofar as science is engaging "big data," there will be overlap between the needs of computational science and those of big data.

c. Required background for post-baccalaureate career paths

Existing graduate programs in computational science have posted very general

achievement, is relatively specialized knowledge when it comes to big data. The topics covered in the standard introductory statistics course — means, t-tests, chi-squared tests — were developed in the days of small data generated by lab or field experiments, not big data from instrumentation and distributed data collection.

Big data is not just about large file sizes, but about large numbers of variables. To handle big data students need to be proficient at modeling with covariates, statistical adjustment/control, issues relating to multiple comparisons, and various architectures for modeling such as generalized linear models, including especially logistic regression.

Machine learning techniques — e.g., clustering and dimension reduction — are important in big data. Students need a background in statistics that equips them to deal with the corresponding statistical issues. Important techniques include resampling, bootstrapping, randomization, and cross-validation. It is feasible and sensible to base even elementary statistics instruction on these techniques.

The object of the analysis of big data is to draw conclusions and make decisions on the basis of information contained in data. Statistics is about drawing valid conclusions from data. But decision making is different; students need a background in decision theory. They also need to be able to communicate results to decision makers. This often requires sophisticated graphical presentation.

The conclusions to be drawn from big data are often intended to guide action; thus, the ability to provide a clear evaluation of causation is important. Although the most compelling support for causal claims comes from experiment, data resulting from experiments are often not available. The caveat “association is not causation,” although true, does not provide sufficient support for informed action.

The last couple of decades has seen important progress toward a causal calculus. Among the important figures is 2011 Turing Award winner Judea Pearl, who observes: “The advent of causal calculi now provides a fairly transparent understanding of the assumptions that must be undertaken to answer such questions, and this enables statisticians to address directly the problems that their customers/users have kept dormant for decades.” [16]

a. Cognitive goals

Interest in big data stems from the potential to discover and use patterns that reveal the operation and structure of complicated systems. It is therefore essential

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