

UMass Boston
Department of Mathematics
Math 390 - Problem Solving Seminar
Fall 2014

- Description:** This course is an undergraduate seminar on mathematical problem solving. It is intended for students who enjoy solving challenging mathematical problems and who are interested in learning various techniques and background information useful for problem solving.
- Pre-requisites:** MATH 280 (Introduction to Proofs) OR Permission of Instructor.
- Schedule:** TuTh 9:30am - 10:45am in M02-0214.
For every hour in class, you should dedicate at least three additional hours studying for this course. Students should not make any travel plans that would require them to leave before December 12, 2014.
- Instructor:** Catalin Zara, Associate Professor of Mathematics.
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Office: Science 3-091
Website: www.math.umb.edu/~czara
Phone: 617 287-6463
- Office hours:** By appointment, Tu 11:00am - 1:00pm and Th 12:00pm - 1:00pm, in S-03-091. Please use the online form available on the course website (linked from the page above) to schedule a 10 or 20 minute appointment. You can stop by without an appointment, but I may be not available.
- Additional Info:** This course promotes creative thinking and logical reasoning. The course is built around solving problems, which are used to learn key methods of mathematical reasoning, such as: looking for patterns, testing via examples, reasoning by contradiction, invariants, induction. The course also teaches students how to explain ideas and write them down in a well-organized, logical, and convincing way. The goal is to use problems to teach mathematics that is not usually seen in ordinary classes. I will give a short lecture on a topic and then hand out a slate of problems. Students work in small groups and present their solutions. We discuss the problems and ideas for their solutions for a week or so, identifying the particular techniques used and situations where similar techniques may be useful. MATH 390 counts as a 300+ elective for the Mathematics degrees (BS/BA/minor). You may take this course for graduation credit twice, but only one instance (highest grade) will be counted towards your Math elective requirement and your GPA in the major requirement.
- Expectations:** All students taking the seminar are expected to:
- Work on the assigned problems;
 - Participate actively in group problem solving;
 - Present solutions to the class;
 - Turn in carefully written solutions for assigned problems.

- Textbook:** (Recommended) *Putnam and Beyond*, by R. Gelca and T. Andreescu, published by Springer. Softcover: ISBN 978-0-387-25765-5. E-book: ISBN 978-0-387-68445-1.
- Assignments:** *Homework assignments.* For each topic there will be about several assigned problems, with various levels of difficulty.
- Active participation.* For each topic, you are expected to present a solution to at least one problem. For each class meeting you should come with ideas for several problems.
- Midterm exam.* The test will have the format of the Putnam Competition. There will be six problems, with a wide range of difficulty. For full credit you are expected to solve one of the problems and make significant progress towards finding a solution for another one. You will be given the opportunity to continue to work individually on the problems at home and submit more solutions for credit at the next class meeting.
- Term paper.* Topic: “What have I learned in the Problem Solving Seminar?” A draft is due around the mid-term and the full version is due at the last class meeting. The goal of the paper is to offer you an opportunity to reflect about the contribution of the seminar activities to the development of your mathematical maturity. It should be an opportunity to review the new techniques and concepts learned this semester.
- Grading:** The final grade will be determined as follows:
- 35% - Homework. Written solutions to problem sets: correct, complete, clear.
 - 35% - Class activities: participation, active involvement, presentations.
 - 20% - Midterm Exam Tuesday, October 14, 2014.
 - 10% - Term Paper: “What have I learned in the Problem Solving Seminar?”
 - Extra: Good faith effort and performance on the 2014 Putnam Competition.
- Attendance:** Regular class attendance is required and active class participation is expected. Students are responsible for material and announcements missed due to an absence. Please come to class on time and turn off your cell phone before the class begins.
- Student conduct:** Students are required to adhere to the University Policy on Academic Standards and Cheating, to the University Statement on Plagiarism and the Documentation of Written Work, and to the Code of Student Conduct as delineated in the University Catalog and Student Handbook. The Code is available online at http://www.umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies/code/
- Accommodations:** Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 offers guidelines for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If applicable, students may obtain adaptation recommendations from the Ross Center for Disability Services, Campus Center, UL Room 211, (617-287-7430). The student must present these recommendations and discuss them with each professor within a reasonable period, preferably by the end of Drop/Add period.
- Changes:** Any changes or class cancellations will be announced in class or by e-mail or will be posted online.

Tentative course schedule:

Week 1	Tue, Sep 2:	Topic 1 - Induction . Introduction.
	Thu, Sep 4:	Problem Set 1 - discussion
Week 2	Tue, Sep 9:	Problem Set 1 - discussion
	Thu, Sep 11:	Topic 2 - Pigeonhole Principle . Solutions to Problem Set 1 due .
Week 3	Tue, Sep 16:	Problem Set 2 - discussion
	Thu, Sep 18:	Problem Set 2 - discussion
Week 4	Tue, Sep 23:	Topic 3 - Invariants . Solutions to Problem Set 2 due .
	Thu, Sep 25:	Problem Set 3 - discussion
Week 5	Tue, Sep 30:	Problem Set 3 - discussion
	Thu, Oct 2:	Topic 4 - Counting . Solutions to Problem Set 3 due .
Week 6	Tue, Oct 7:	Problem Set 4 - discussion
	Thu, Oct 9:	Problem Set 4 - discussion.
Week 7	Tue, Oct 14:	Solutions to Problem Set 4 due . Midterm Exam
	Thu, Oct 16:	Midterm - discussion
Week 8	Tue, Oct 21:	Topic 5 Games and Puzzles
	Thu, Oct 23:	Problem Set 5 - discussion. Draft of term paper due.
Week 9	Tue, Oct 28:	Problem Set 5 - discussion
	Thu, Oct 30:	Topic 6 - Combinatorics . Solutions to Problem Set 5 due .
Week 10	Tue, Nov 4:	Problem Set 6 - discussion
	Thu, Nov 6:	Problem Set 6 - discussion
Week 11	Tue, Nov 11:	Topic 7 Number Theory . Solutions to Problem Set 6 due .
	Thu, Nov 13:	Problem Set 7 - discussion
Week 12	Tue, Nov 18:	Problem Set 7 - discussion
	Thu, Nov 20:	Topic 8 - Sequences and Series . Solutions to Problem Set 7 due .
Week 13	Tue, Nov 25:	Problem Set 8 - discussion
	Thu, Nov 27:	Thanksgiving Vacation
Week 14	Tue, Dec 2:	Problem Set 8 - discussion
	Thu, Dec 4:	Solutions to Problem Set 8 due . Review - miscellaneous
	Sat, Dec 6:	2014 W.L. Putnam Competition
Week 15	Tue, Dec 9:	Putnam Competition - discussion
	Thu, Dec 11:	Putnam Competition - discussion. Term paper due .

Alternative topics: Complex Numbers, Identities, Inequalities, Groups, Graphs, Matrices and Determinants, Vector Calculus, Geometry.