GHENT UNIVERSITY

Course Specifications

Valid as from the academic year 2024-2025

Introduction to Data Science (I002892)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 4.0 **Study time 120 h**

Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2027-2028

A (semester 2)	English	Gent	lecture

Lecturers in academic year 2027-2028

Verwaeren, Jan	LA26	lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2027-2028	**crdts**	**offering**
International Master of Science in Soils and Global Change (main subject Soil Ecosystem Services and Global Change)	4	A
Master of Science in Pharmaceutical Engineering	4	A
Exchange Programme in Bioscience Engineering: Ecosystem Management (master's level)	4	A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

Data wrangling, data exploration, data visualization, Python, machine learning

Position of the course

In a modern-day data analysis project, data can emerge in multiple forms and formats ranging from small structured flat-file datasets, that collect observations of a small dedicated research project to online sources that are less structured and potentially contain less reliable data, missing values, etc. The process of gathering, cleaning and wrangling these data and using them to solve a (business) question or problem is generally understood as *Data Science*. This process requires a specific set of skills from a data analist, including the knowledge of a (data-oriented) programming language that allows to clean, wrangle and explore large amounts of data in an efficient and reproducable manner. Moreover, a lot of data science projects require both theoretical an hands-on knowledge and skills on machine learning. In this course, students are introduced to the methodological and practical aspects of data science.

Contents

This course is subdivided into four parts. Each part involves both theory and practical skills (PC-labs in Python).

Part 1: Introduction to data science and Python as an environment for data science

- Introduction to data and the data analysis cycle
- Introduction to (or recap of) Python (important data types for data analysis, control flow, built-in and user-defined functions, vectorization, data intake)

Part 2: Data manipulation and visualization

- Principles of reproducible and transparent data analysis and communication
- Data manipulation (for data-preparation): selection, filtering, aggregation, join-operations, wide and long formats, tidy data. In the PC-labs, the packages Numpy and Pandas are used for this purpose.
- Data visualization: properties of good data-graphics, the layered grammar of graphics. In the PC-labs, Matplotlib and Seaborn are used for this purpose

Part 3: Introduction to machine learning

- Recognizing types of machine learning problems
- kNN as a prototype machine learning technique

- Supervised machine learning: Linear methods for regression and classification, Basis expansions and regularization, Performance evaluation, Tree-based methods and neural networks
- Unsupervised machine learning: dimensionality reduction and clustring

Part 4: Project: analysing unstructured data
Students work an a data science project that involves the analysis of unstructured data. Important aspects are: feature engineering, applying machine learning models on real-life data and transparant reporting on a data analysis project.

Initial competences

The students have programming experience (basic level) in at least one scientific programming language (R, Matlab, Python, etc.)
The students have a basic understanding of statistics (including descriptive statistics, simple linear regression)

Final competences

1 The student is aware of the different forms in which data appear, are capable of performing basic integrity checks for the most important data forms/types and can select and apply a proper visualization method.
2 The student can use Python as a programming environment for data analysis.
3 The student performs data loading tasks for data that are available in a variety of text-based data formats, merges these data and transform it into a shape that allows further processing.
4 The student applies dimesionality reduction techniques to gain insight into datasets.
5 The student selects and applies a predictive modeling method for solving a prediction problem.

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Group work, Seminar, Lecture

Extra information on the teaching methods

During the theoretical lectures, the fundamental concepts are discussed. The practical PC room classes exist of 10 hands-on practical sessions. In the group work, the students have to complete a real-life data collection and synthesis task.

Study material

Type: Handbook

Name: An introduction to statistical learning
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: yes
Language : English
Author : G. James
Online Available : Yes
Available in the Library : No

Type: Slides

Name: Slides theory lectures
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Language : English
Number of Slides : 200
Oldest Usable Edition : 2024
Available on Ufora : Yes
Online Available : Yes
Available in the Library : No
Available through Student Association : No

Type: Other

Name: Python Notebooks
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Language : English
Author : J Verwaeren
Oldest Usable Edition : 2024
Available on Ufora : Yes
Online Available : Yes
Available in the Library : No
Available through Student Association : No

References

Jake Vanderplas (2016). Python Data Science Handbook, O'Reilly Media, Inc., 548p
Gareth James, Daniela Witten, Trevor Hastie and Robert Tibshirani (2021). An Introduction to Statistical Learning - 2nd Edition, Springer, 597p.

Course content-related study coaching

Students can make an appointment with the lecturer for asking questions related to the theoretical classes throughout the entire semester. Teaching assistants address questions w.r.t. the PC-labs and Ufora is used to provide on-line feedback if needed.

Assessment moments

end-of-term and continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Written assessment with open-ended questions

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Written assessment with open-ended questions

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible

Extra information on the examination methods

The written exam (20% of total) evaluates the theoretical competences. Practical competences are evaluated during an open book PC-exam (50% of total). The written report (report of group-work) is evaluated and contributes to the final grade (30% of total).

Calculation of the examination mark

The final score is the weighted sum of: theoretical exam (20%), practical exam (50%) and group-work (30%).