STAT 544 Applied Probability

Spring 2008, Prof. Bell

Frequently Asked Questions:

Pre-requisites

Q1: I have never had any courses in Probability or Statistics before, but I did well in my Calculus undergraduate course. Do you think I can take your course without the STAT344 background?

Q2: It's been many years since I had a calculus course. Is this going to be a problem?

A: Students with the appropriate pre-requisites (good multivariable calculus skills and an undergraduate probability class) should have adequate preparation for this course. We cover much of the same material as in an undergraduate class but at a faster pace, with a higher level of underlying calculus, and with additional advanced topics.

You can do well in this class without much probability background, as long as you have good calculus and problem solving skills. You'll probably have to work harder than students who have had an undergraduate course in probability. Plan to read ahead in the text each week so that the lectures will be your second exposure to the material, and make sure you allocate enough time to do a good job on the homework.

Inadequate calculus skills will be a problem. The first half of the course uses fairly basic math skills, but we really use a lot of calculus during the second half. Homework #0 will give you an idea of which topics you are weak in. You should use the first half of the semester to brush up on these topics so that you will be ready.

Textbook

Q: I have an earlier edition of the Ross textbook. Can I use it?

A: Most of the material in the current edition (7^{th}, black cover) is the same as the 6^{th} and previous editions. Some sections and problems have been added and removed, so things may be numbered differently. You may use an earlier edition, but you are responsible for determining what the differences are and doing the correct problems on the homework. Please do not ask to borrow my textbook for this purpose.

General

Q: I need help on the homework but I can't come during office hours. Are you available other times?

A: Short questions may be sent in by email. I generally check my email several times a day and will respond promptly. In your email, explain how you have approached the problem and where you are stuck (i.e "This is what I did but I can tell this part isn't right, do you see my mistake?" and not "I don't know what to do on this problem.")

For questions that take more than a few sentences to answer, it will be better to come in and see me. Please do not stop by without making an appointment and expect me to stop what I am doing to help you. I am happy to set up appointments outside of posted office hours. Send me an email requesting an appointment and suggest a time. I am usually here most days during regular business hours. *I strongly prefer email over telephone calls.*

The TA is not available outside of his/her office hours.

Q: I can't make it to class to turn in my homework. Can I send it to you by email or fax?

A: No! It's your responsibility to get me a *paper* version of your homework by the deadline. You can have another student turn it in, or turn it in early. You can leave it in one of the bins outside my office door or in my mailbox in the Statistics department. You should follow up with an email to let me know and so I can confirm that I've received it.

Q: Can I use my calculator to solve the integrals?

A: I would like you to do the problems the "old-fashioned" way without your calculator. You may use your calculator to check your answer. The reason is that in this class we are focused more on methodology (how you solve the problem) than on obtaining the correct answer by any means. For the integration, I want you to do the integrals by hand at first (and certainly on HW#0). After a while, we will begin to see the same types of integrals over and over, and you may write down the answer by inspection. In other cases, setting up and solving the integrals correctly requires using probability concepts, and I want to make sure that these concepts are mastered. Using a calculator would circumvent this process.