Rethinking Computing and Statistics Instruction with Vocareum and Gradescope

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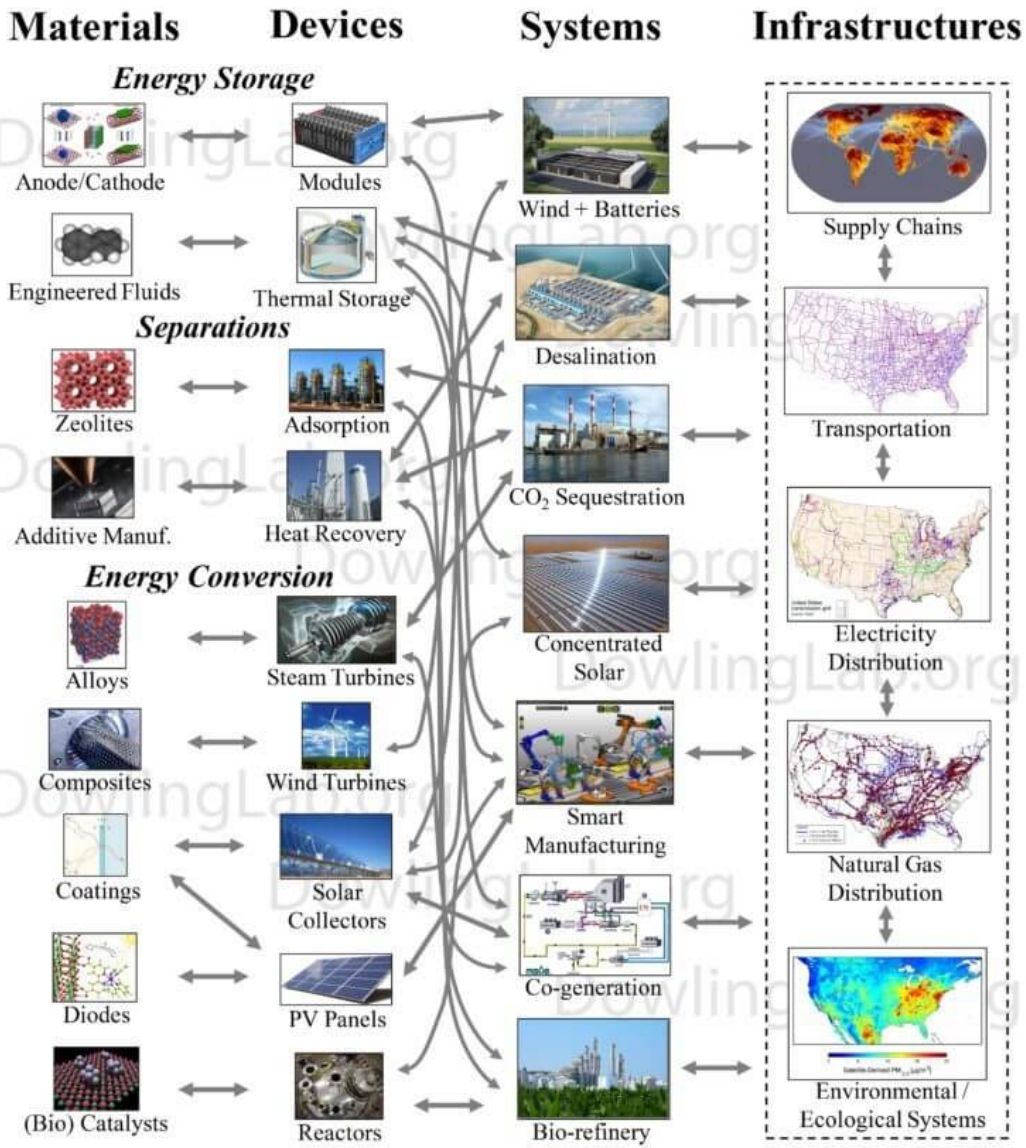
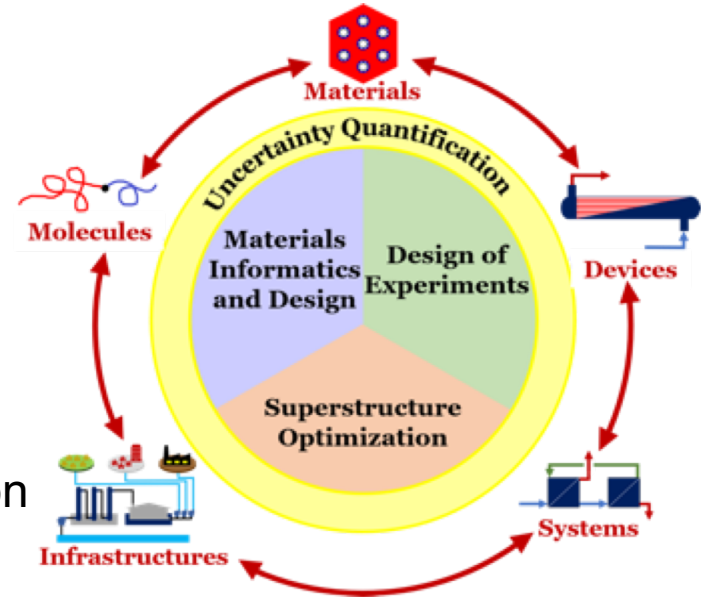
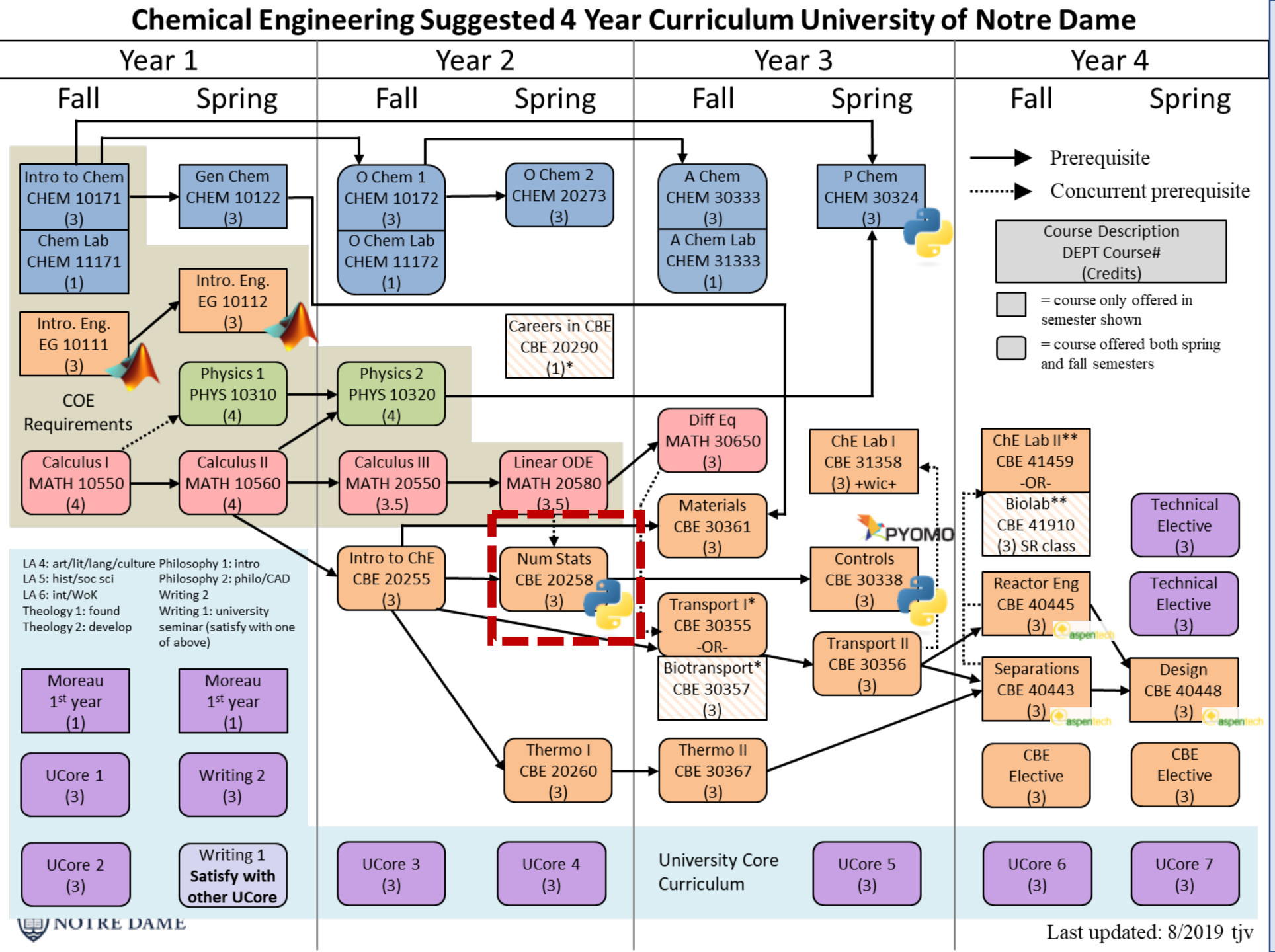
Research: Process Systems Engineering



Themes

- Mathematical Modeling
- Computational Optimization
- Applied Bayesian Statistics and Uncertainty Quantification
- Energy & Sustainability Applications





Current Practice: Computing & Statistics

MATLAB in freshman engineering sequence

Sophomore-required **Numerical & Statistical Analysis** (NSA)

Ad-hoc computing & statistics in upper-level classes:

"You learned this as sophomores… just figure it out" – Prof. Anonymous

Vision

Vertically integrate computing and statistics throughout the undergraduate curriculum

Modernizing Numerical and Statistical Analysis

Backward Course Design

Set Clear Learning Objectives

At the end of the semester, you should be able to…

1. **Create mathematical models** and **apply computational methods** to analyze systems using basic principles of chemical engineering (e.g., mass and energy balances, thermodynamic equilibrium, etc.)

2. **Analyze data** and **quantify uncertainty** using standard statistical techniques and mathematical models grounded in engineering fundamentals

3. Independently plan, implement, and debug short (100 to 300 lines) **Python computer programs** to analyze data, solve engineering mathematical models, and visualize results

Major Changes

Reorganized class topics

- Removed advanced topics (QR factorization, compression with SVD, trust regions, BVPs, PDEs)
- Emphasized fundamentals, especially probability & statistics
- Added mass and energy balance examples

Switched to **Python**, with great student buy-in

Incorporated **active learning** into lectures

Shortened assignments

Active Learning is Essential for Computing and Statistics

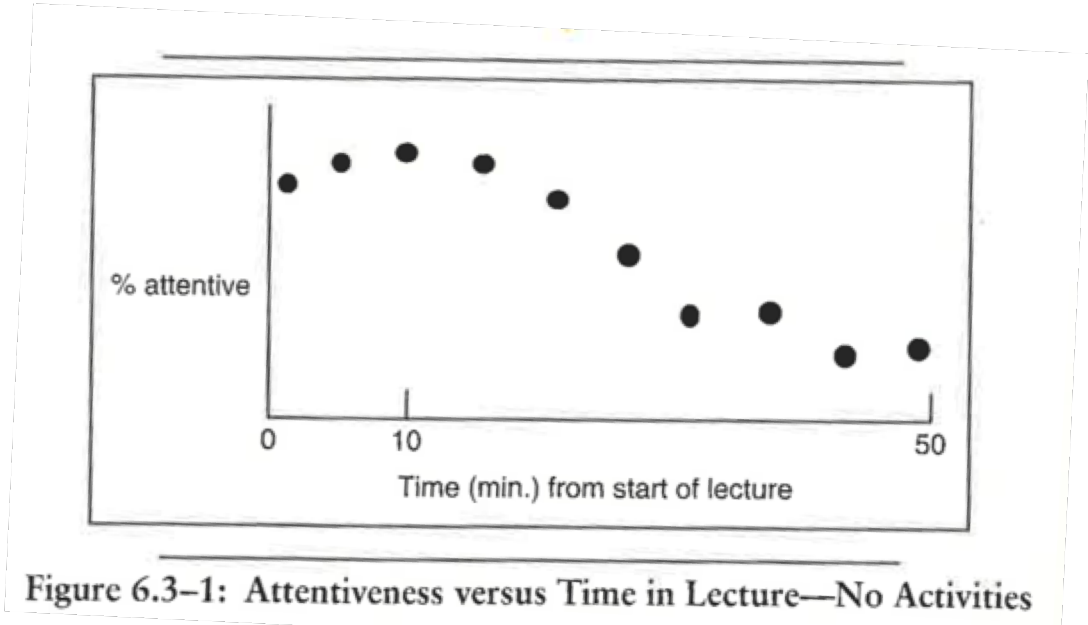


Figure 6.3–1: Attentiveness versus Time in Lecture—No Activities

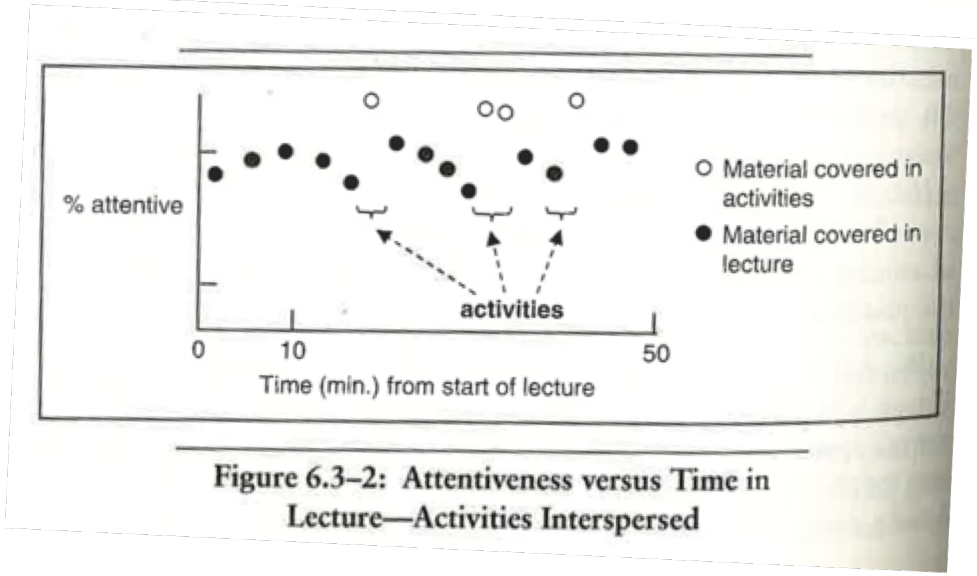


Figure 6.3–2: Attentiveness versus Time in Lecture—Activities Interspersed

Right: Felder and Brent (2015), *Teaching and Learning STEM: A Practical Guide*

Spring 2019: Cloud-based Google Colaboratory (Jupyter Notebooks)

`colab.research.google.com`

Benefits of Google Colaboratry:

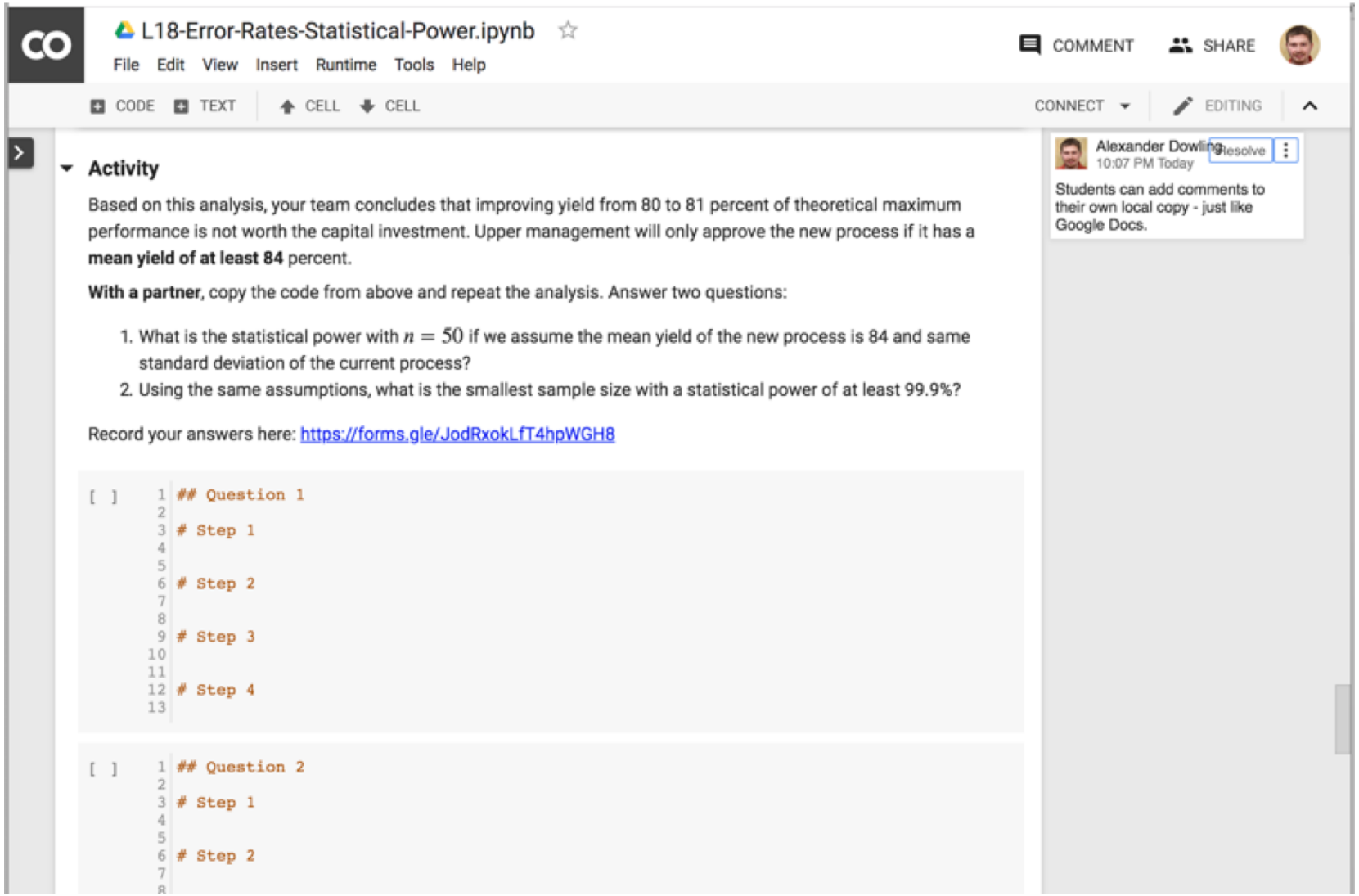
Like Google Docs, but for code

Integrated with **Google Drive**: automatic versioning, easy sharing

Removes barriers to access: students can complete assignments from **any internet connect computer** – no need to support 80+ local Python installations

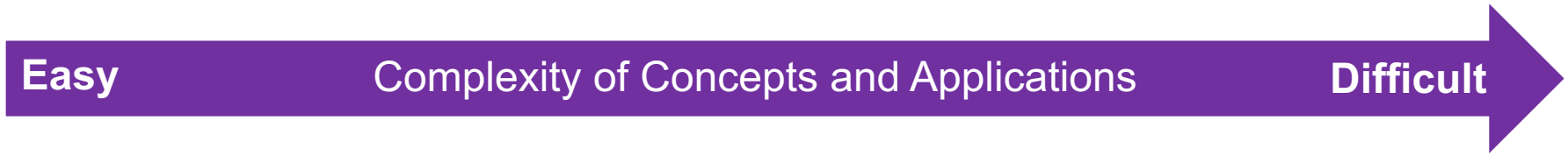
Facilitates **active learning**

Free



I show this slide on day 1.

Making your time more effective



Traditional Class (plan)

Lecture 3 hr / wk + **Tutorial** 1 hr / wk + **Studying** 2 hr / wk + **Homework** 3 hr / wk = **Total** 9 hr / wk

Initial exposure | *Practice* | *But how?* | *Builds on lectures*

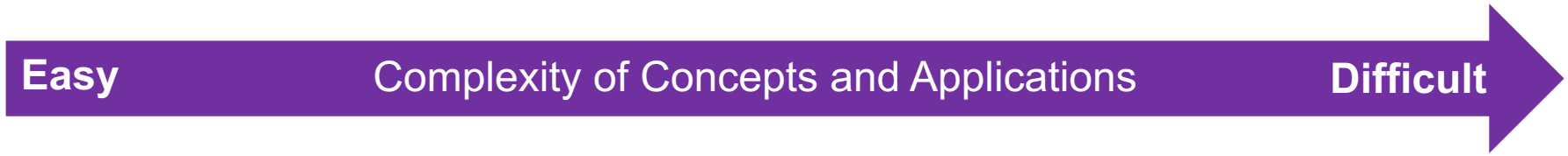
Traditional Class (reality for many)

Lecture 3 hr / wk + **Tutorial** 1 hr / wk + **Studying** 1 hr / wk + **Homework** 10+ hr / wk = **Total** 15+ hr / wk

Difficult to focus 100% of time | *Too busy to start homework before* | *Either skipped or not effective* | *Really difficult if not comfortable with lecture examples*

I show this slide on day 1.

Making your time more effective



**We'll start some homework problems during class.*

This Semester

Class Preparation
2 hr / wk

Initial exposure at home

Tutorial
1 hr / wk

Practice & jump-start homework

Studying
1 hr / wk

I'll teach you how to do this & give extra practice problems

Class*
3 hr / wk

Problem solving together

Homework*
2 - 4 hr / wk

Easy extensions of home and class activities

Total
9 - 11 hr / wk

This is 100% on task time… i.e., Facebook closed, not watching Netflix, not texting

Fall 2019: Cloud-based Vocareum (Jupyter Notebooks)

www.vocareum.com

Benefits of Vocareum:

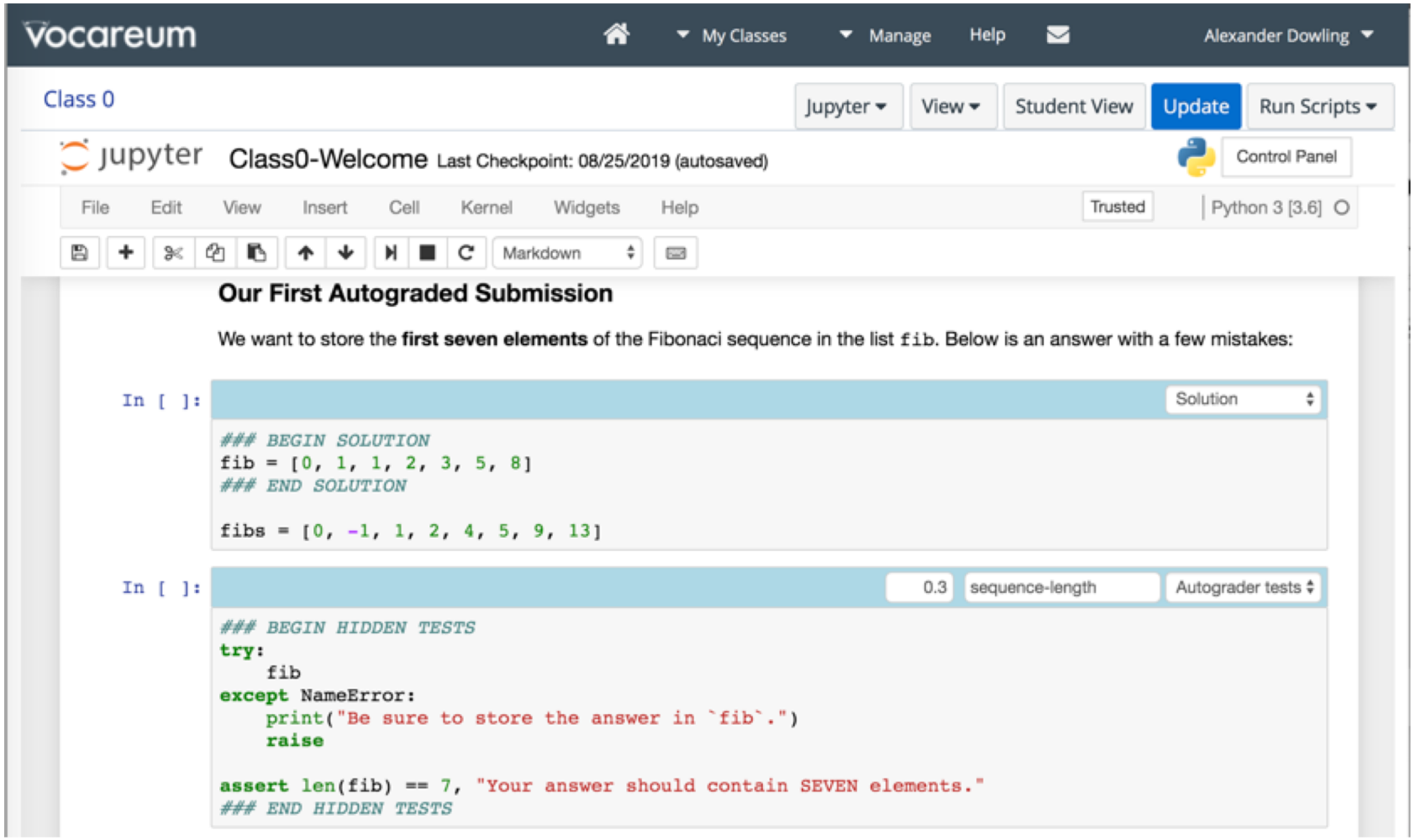
Many of the same cloud-based benefits as Colaboratory

Integrated with **Learning Management System** (e.g., Sakai) and gradebook

Supports **autograding** via nbgrader (with some enhancements)

Supports plagiarism detections (if you want it)

Paid service, but responsive technical support



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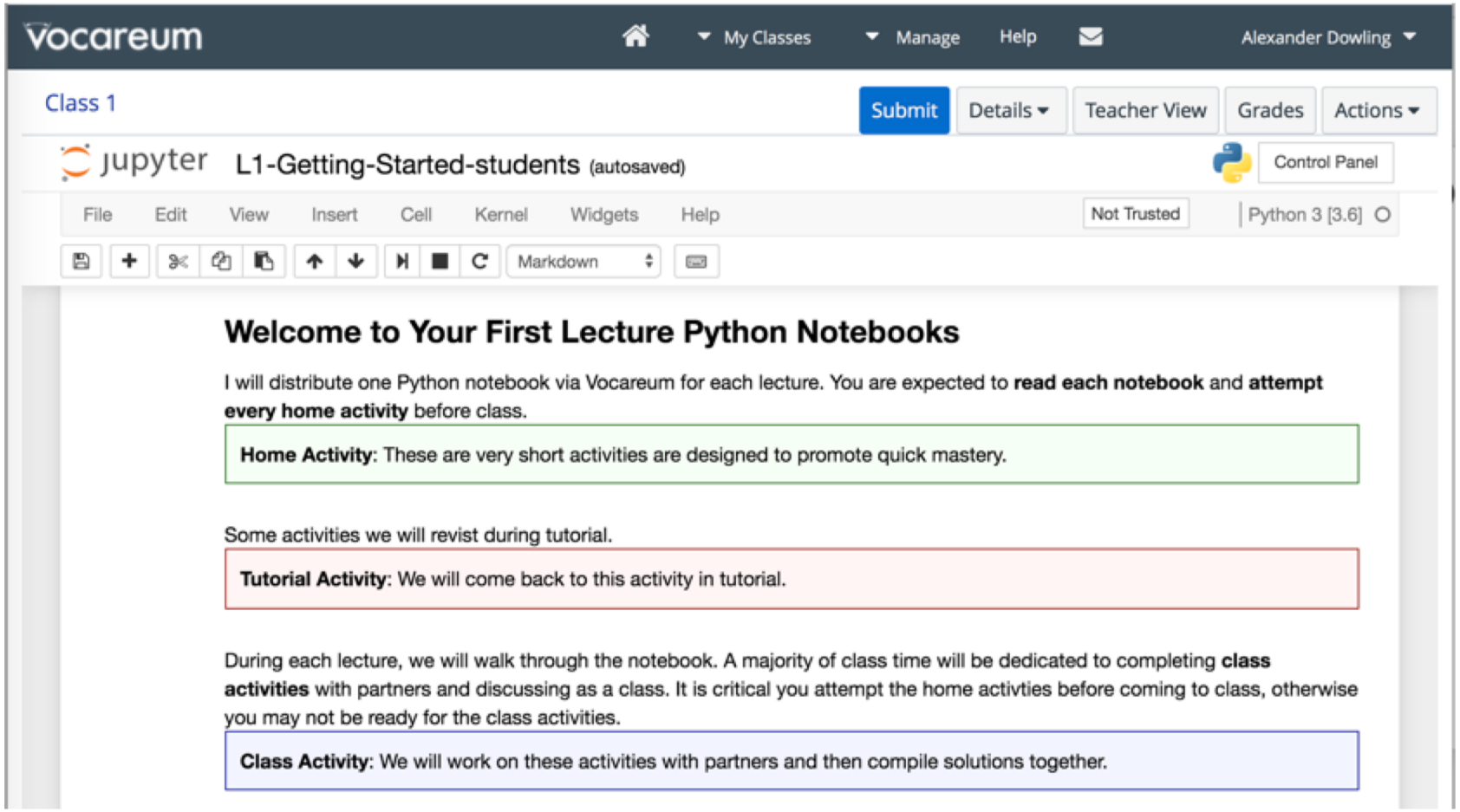
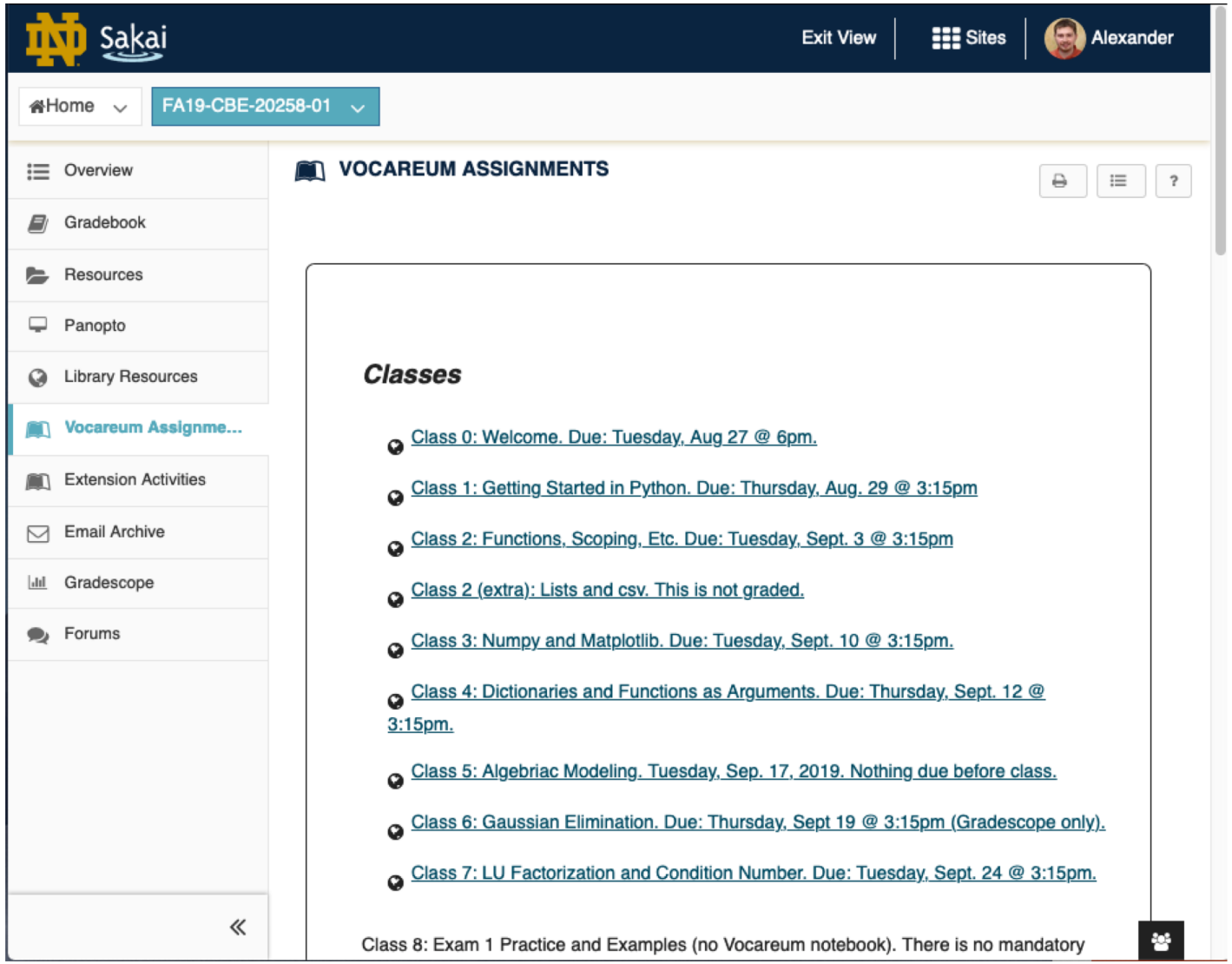


Bottom Line: Autograder (Vocareum) enables accountability for meaningful home activities before class, which translates to more engaging class sessions.

Enabling Technologies: Sakai, Gradescope, Vocareum



Sakai provides a single access point to Gradescope & Vocareum

Home Activities
Either Vocareum (3/4) or Gradescope (1/4)

Problem Sets & Mini-Projects
Both platforms for each assignment

Vocareum: check answers

Gradescope: plots, discussion, pseudocode, derivations

Positive Impact:
- Reduced grading time
- Faster feedback to students
- Regular accountability

Vertical Integration: Opportunities and Challenges

Numerical Methods
Equation solving (thermo., separations)
Optimization (controls, design)
Numeric integration (transport, reactions)

Statistics and Data Analysis
Probability (physical chemistry)
Visualization
Regression
Error Analysis
Uncertainty Propagation

labs

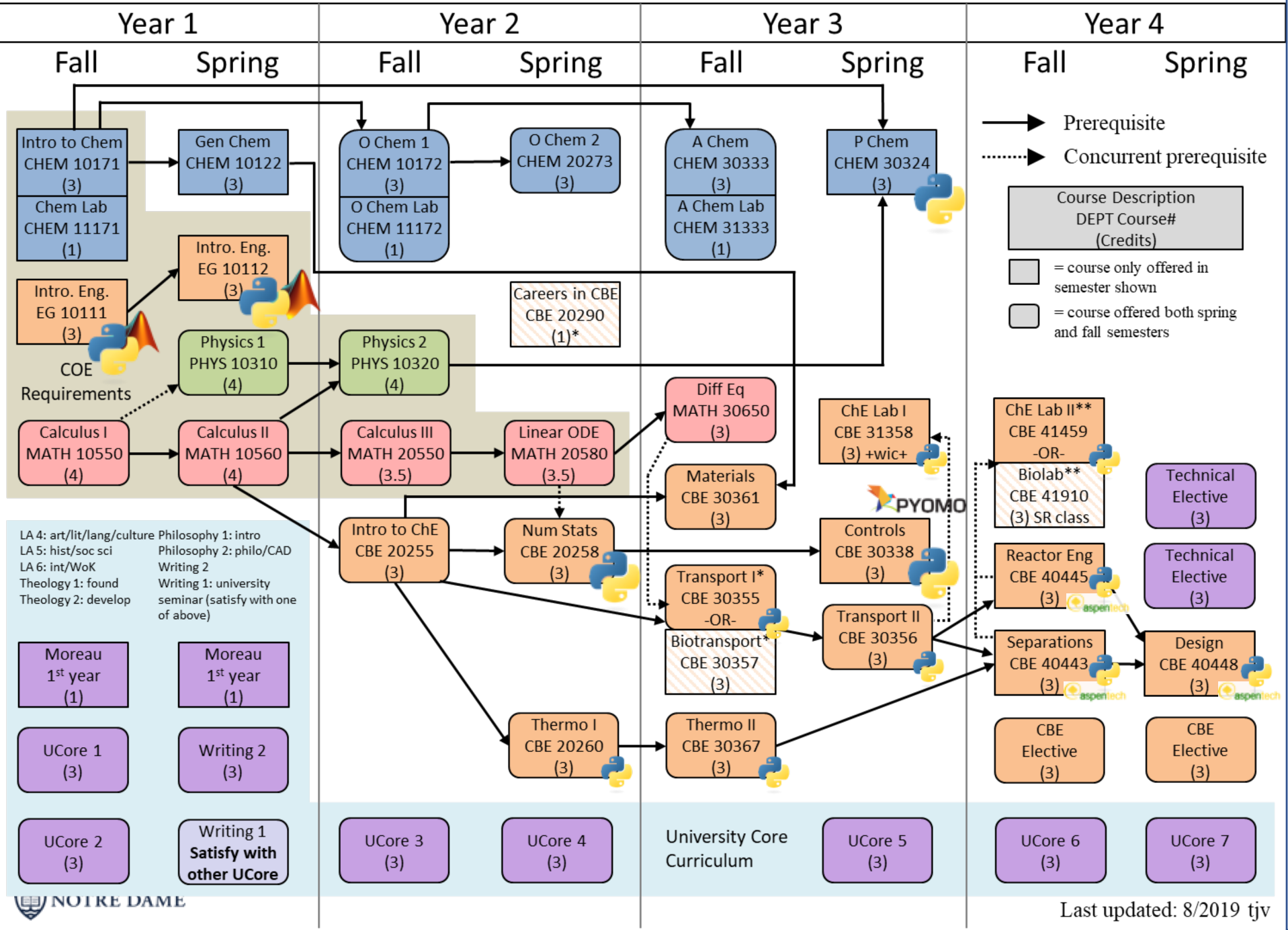
Challenges
Difficult to learn advanced topics sophomore year (e.g., PDEs, BVPs)

"Brain drain" without repeated exposure

Common software tools?

How to avoid burdening all faculty?

Chemical Engineering Suggested 4 Year Curriculum University of Notre Dame



Last updated: 8/2019 tjv

Vision

Vertically integrate computing and statistics throughout the undergraduate curriculum

Library of Cloud-based Jupyter Notebooks

Complement existing core CBE classes with examples that use computing and statistics for problem solving

colab

Vocareum

Special Thanks

https://github.com/jckantor

Chemical Process Control

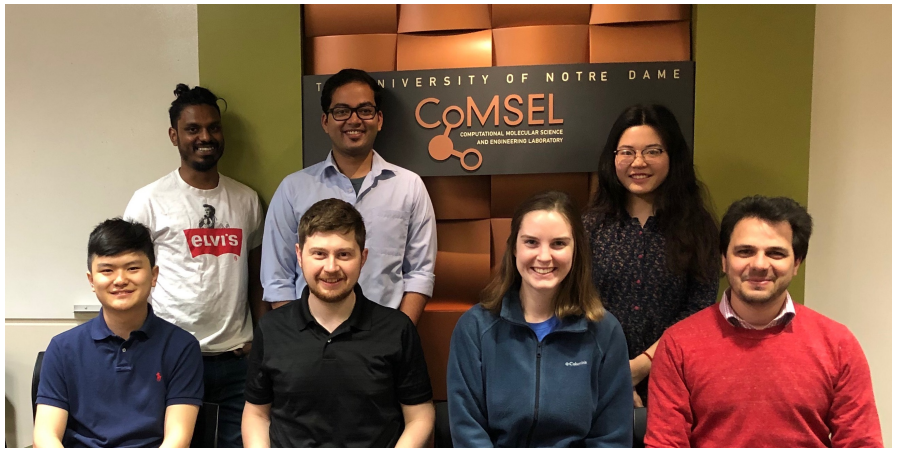
Introduction to Chemical Engineering Analysis

Introduction to Operations Research

Process Operations

Prof. Jeff Kantor

Elvis Eugene **Kanishka Ghosh** **Jialu Wang**



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