

Course: EE 685-001

Title: Digital Computer Structure

Term: Fall 2026

Credit hours: 3

Meeting days/time/location: Tuesday & Thursday, 3:30-4:45PM, 265 FPAT

Instructor Information

Name: Professor Henry (Hank) Dietz

Email: hankd@engr.uky.edu (please put "EE685" in subject line)

Office building and room number: 203 Davis Marksbury Building

Office phone: (859) 257 4701

Office hours: Schedule & live office camera at <http://aggregate.org/hankd>

Preferred method of communication: email

Course Description

Study of fundamental concepts in digital computer system structure and design. Topics include: computer system modeling based on instruction set processor and algorithms for ALU, processor, control unit and memory system. Special topics include floating-point arithmetic, cache design, pipeline design technologies, and parallel computer architectures.

Course Prerequisites

EE 380 or consent of instructor. (EE380 is now known as CPE380/CS380; EE581 is listed in the course catalog, but that course is no longer offered.)

Required Materials

Various materials for the course will be provided, primarily via canvas or the course website, <http://aggregate.org/EE685>. The textbook is **Computer Architecture, Sixth Edition: A Quantitative Approach**, Hennessy & Patterson, Morgan Kaufmann publisher, 2019. Although the course loosely follows the structure and topics of this text, it is not directly used, and is thus **optional**.

Associated Expenses

Rather than requiring software to be installed on personal computers or in-person use physical lab facilities, Verilog and simulation software are provided in forms that allow work to be done using a web browser interface that gives access to software running on machines in 108 Marksbury (Dietz's research lab). Students are expected to have personal systems able to use this web browser interface. They also need access to a computer that can pack their project files into either a **tar** or **zip** archive containing the files for submission.

Activities Outside of Regular Class Meetings

The class may make fairly heavy use of computing facilities in the 108A Marksbury supercomputer machine room and some equipment there is highly relevant to the class material. Thus, it might make sense to physically meet in 108 Marksbury at some point during the semester.

If any regularly in person class meeting is not held in person for any reason, the material *usually* will be made available online via a recorded presentation, perhaps with the option of live Zoom attendance, rather than by scheduling in-person make-up sessions. Online “virtual flipped classroom” meetings also may be substituted for some in-person class meetings.

Skill and Technology Requirements

Students are expected to have some C/C++ programming experience and exposure to digital logic design, and they are generally expected to be computer literate. Students need access to a system that allows them to use various WWW form interfaces provided for the projects and other course materials. There is also portable, open-source, software provided that they can install and use on their own computers as alternatives to some of the WWW form interfaces.

For technical assistance, contact ITS Customer Services 24/7 at 859-218-HELP (4357) for urgent needs. For non-urgent matters, visit the ITS web page at <https://its.uky.edu/> or submit a: [Customer Services Assistance Request form](#).

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, a student will be able to:

- Describe the levels of software and hardware in a computer system and the meaning and purpose of an Instruction Set Architecture (ISA)
- Analyze, evaluate, and compare the performance of computers
- Describe how specific high-level-language program constructs are implemented in assembly and machine language for various computers
- Write and run programs on a simulator for a designed computer
- Describe how computers perform integer and floating-point (IEEE 754 format) addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division/reciprocal
- Organize, and design at the gate and register level, the datapath, control, and memory of a simple computer

- Describe pipelining, speculation, and various other modern architectural features
- Describe how Verilog HDL implementations of various computer subsystems work
- Describe the historical and continuing evolution of computing systems and the effects of technological changes on computer design

Note that these are essentially the same outcomes as CPE380, but both the breadth and depth of the treatments here are significantly greater. Very little time is spent in reviewing CPE380-level basics. This course focuses much more on architectural content involving caches, virtualization support, networking, and various forms of both instruction-level and scalable SIMD/MIMD parallelism.

Regular and Substantive Interaction / Academic Engagement

Regular and substantive interaction (RSI) mechanisms will be used to ensure academic engagement between students and course staff if circumstances dictate that portions of this nominally in-person course must be taught using online mechanisms. This includes regularly scheduled office hours during which remote students can communicate with course staff via mechanisms such as Zoom conferencing.

Distance Learning Strategies

Each synchronous lecture meeting will be recorded and posted on Canvas within 24 hours of the meeting's occurrence. These detailed video lectures will be organized into modules by topic. Lecture videos will be posted weekly. These lectures can be viewed asynchronously but you are expected to follow the detailed learning schedule outlined on Canvas. If you have any questions outside of the synchronous lecture meetings, please (i) email me with any questions, (ii) schedule a meeting with me, or (iii) post the questions on Canvas's online forum for the class. Student communications will be answered as quickly as possible, but always within two working days.

Course Details

Tentative Course Schedule

For many graduate students, this course may be the first CPE380-like course taken at UK. Further, CPE380 has recently been upgraded to contain much more Verilog exposure than it did when current graduate students took it as an undergraduate. Thus, the precise topic schedule and content of this course are generally tuned to the backgrounds of the students enrolled that semester. For that reason, the

following lecture schedule is tentative and allows for a class period or two of slip to accommodate tuning.

8/25	Introduction
8/27	Verilog
9/ 1	""
9/ 3	"" and assignment: Verilog project
9/ 8	A complete pipelined RISC system design
9/10	""
9/15	""
9/17	""
9/22	""
9/24	"" and assignment: processor enhancement
9/29	Instruction-level parallelism
10/ 1	""
10/ 6	""
10/ 8	Review for midterm
10/13	In-class midterm exam
10/15	Advanced processor internals
10/20	""
10/23	"" and assignment: floating point
10/27	No class; Fall break
10/29	Memory hierarchy and protection
11/ 3	""
11/ 5	""
11/10	""
11/12	"" and assignment: cache
11/17	Scalable parallel architectures and networking
11/19	""
11/24	""
11/26	No class; Thanksgiving break
12/ 1	""
12/ 3	<i>this day reserved for schedule slippage</i>
12/ 8	Review for final exam (last class; no assignments)
12/10	No class; Reading Day
12/15	Final exam in person from 1:00–3:00PM

The two dates shown in orange, 11/17 and 11/19, it is expected that Professor Dietz will be presenting research work at the IEEE/ACM Supercomputing SC26 conference, so these lectures would be conducted via Zoom rather than in person unless all class members can agree on in-person make-up times.

We expect to make minor adjustments to the above schedule in order to tune the content and presentation to better fit the backgrounds and interests of the students in the class. However, more significant changes may be required if the University of Kentucky has a closure due to weather or other circumstances beyond our control interfere with the normal operation of the course. Students

would be notified of any significant changes to schedule or content via Canvas and/or the course web site: <https://aggregate.org/EE685>

Course Activities, Assignments, Exams

There are **two in-person exams** planned: an in-class midterm and a final. The final exam will be comprehensive, and is planned to be given in person in the timeslot designated by the registrar: **1:00-3:00PM on Tuesday, December 15, 2026**. It would be appropriate to think of the final as being comprehensive, but weighting the material since the midterm more heavily (especially the portion on scalable parallelism and networking). The midterm will count for approximately 20% of your grade and the final approximately 40%.

Four assignments are expected to account for the remaining 40% of your grade, roughly 10% each. The first assignment will be a simple individual project written in Verilog, basically confirming that you are somewhat comfortable with the language. The remaining three projects are done in teams of 3-4 students. For the second assignment, you will be adding a few simple instructions to a complete pipelined implementation of a simple RISC processor. The third assignment will involve some advanced processor internals, most likely emphasizing floating point arithmetic. The last assignment will most likely emphasize cache. The last two assignments might or might not involve Verilog coding.

We reserve the right to tweak the above weightings, or to apply modest adjustment to grades, if there are problems with a particular component for the class in general. For example, if a flawed project specification made some part more difficult to accomplish than we had intended, we might give all full credit for that part.

Although there is no grade for class attendance or participation per se, it is expected that all students will regularly attend class unless there is a good reason not to (illness, travel to represent a UK team or research, etc.). We intend to record class lectures, but might or might not make the recordings available to all students scheduled to attend the class in person; recordings are not intended to serve as a substitute for regular in-person attendance of class unless you have a valid reason for being unable to attend. Participation in team projects is more directly involved in your grade via peer evaluations that can be used to apply an offset to an overall grade for the team. Failure to appropriately contribute to a team project may result in a corresponding reduction in an individual's grade for that team project. In general, we will not apply that reduction to an individual's

project score unless their lack of contribution is extreme or repeated across two or more projects.

Grading Scale

Nominally, we will use the standard grading scale for graduate students, which does not award “D” grades:

90 ≤ 100%	:	A
80 < 90%	:	B
70 < 80%	:	C
< 70%	:	E

Adjustments may be made to scores of specific graded materials as described in the previous section. Typically, any such adjustments are in the student's favor except for penalties imposed for failure to contribute to team projects.

Midterm Grades

Midterm grades will be posted in myUK by the deadline published in the [Academic Calendar](https://registrar.uky.edu/academic-calendars/university). (<https://registrar.uky.edu/academic-calendars/university>). Note that midterm grades will be based on the work completed and graded up to that point, which does not have the same ratio between projects, homework, and final exam as the course overall. In order to make your midterm grade more predictive of your overall final grade for the course, the midterm grade may be computed by a weighting formula somewhat different from those given in the previous section.

Attendance Policy/Acceptable Documentation

Although this course does not give grades for attendance nor class participation, students are expected to regularly attend class, and there may be class time allocated for students to coordinate their work on project teams, which would be missed by those not attending in person. The University of Kentucky generally expects appropriate documentation for an excused absence: e.g. a letter from a healthcare provider. In this course, we will generally be more flexible and *notification beforehand via email* to hankd@engr.uky.edu, with “EE685” in the subject line, will be accepted as a valid reason for an excused absence. Students missing class meetings generally are responsible for catching up on the material missed even if the absence is excused, although excused absences may be taken into account, for example, by extending assignment or project deadlines. Class presentation recordings generally will be made available to help those with an excused absence, but not necessarily to students with unexplained absences.

As described earlier, lack of appropriate participation in a project team can directly reduce your grade from the grade assigned for the team overall.

General university guidelines relating to attendance are summarized at: <https://provost.uky.edu/proposals/guidance-course-proposals/standard-academic-policy-statements>

Assignment Policies

Assignment Submissions

All assignments will be collected electronically using software to be discussed in class and via Canvas. Projects require submitting more than one file, in which case students are expected to submit either a **tar** or **zip** archive containing the files.

Returning Assignments to Students

Graded homework and projects will be available via Canvas, but not necessarily immediately after grading. Posting may be delayed somewhat to allow students with excused absences time to submit. All graded materials will be posted before the class period in which we will review everything for the final exam. Generally, the course instructor is the primary contact for questions about graded materials. The graded final exams are kept on file and can be accessed by meeting with the course instructor.

Late Assignments

Online assignments are expected to be submitted no later than the specified deadline, but the server will accept late submissions. Except in cases of excused absences, it is entirely at the discretion of the instructor as to how much, if any, credit will be awarded for a late submission. Late assignments that are submitted after the assignment answers are posted or discussed in class generally are given zero credit, but ones submitted before any answers have been made available are more likely to be given some credit. It is also useful to note that most assignments can be submitted multiple times without penalty, in which case only the last one submitted before the deadline is considered for grading.

Assignments Due during Prep Week

No assignments will be due during Prep or Reading Days. However, it is possible that make-ups for excused absences, review sessions, or optional activities (such as a lab tour) would be scheduled during that time.

University Policies and Student Support

The following links access university policy and student support:

- Academic policy statements are at <https://provost.uky.edu/proposals/guidance-course-proposals/standard-academic-policy-statements>
- Mental health resources are at <https://studentsuccess.uky.edu/get-help>
- Academic support is at <https://studentsuccess.uky.edu/academicresources>
- Disability resource center (DRC) information is at <https://studentsuccess.uky.edu/disability-resource-center>
- Academic ombud contact is <https://ombud.uky.edu/students>
- Classroom Emergency Preparedness and Response information is at <https://provost.uky.edu/instructor-resources>

A full list of UK academic policies is available at:

<https://provost.uky.edu/proposals/guidance-course-proposals/standard-academic-policy-statements> .

Academic Offenses (Cheating, Plagiarism, and Falsification or Misuse of Academic Records)

Whatever is stated in the following document applies:

<https://provost.uky.edu/proposals/guidance-course-proposals/academic-offenses>

In the classroom, students should not take any actions that would disrupt the classroom environment (e.g., talking on a cell phone during class). In general, students are expected to behave in a respectful way towards their fellow students, the TA, and the instructor. Failure to follow University of Kentucky guidelines involving appropriate precautions against the spread of COVID-19 or other communicable diseases will be treated as a very serious offense and dealt with as specified by the University.

Students are expected to generally behave ethically, and violations will be treated as serious offenses. Altering graded exams and then submitting them for regrade is obviously unethical, but you do not need to be trying to enhance your grade in order for your behavior to be inappropriate. For example, attempts to break into computer accounts associated with this course or to falsely identify yourself are serious ethical violations even if there was no intent to "cheat" per se.

There are lots of study materials for this course, including old exams, widely available; using them as study aids is perfectly acceptable, but be warned that an

apparent reuse of an old question usually has the question slightly reworded so that the old answer is not correct. Although students are encouraged to discuss course material with one another, everything you submit must be entirely your own original work. Similarly, for in-class exams that specify no textbooks, no calculators, etc., use of the banned resources is a serious offense. For assignments submitted online, the general rule is that referencing your notes, looking at online materials on the course website, etc. is OK. Submitting the work of another person, or of an AI tool, as your own original work is not OK.

Resources

There is a wide range of resources available to help you with this course, the most relevant of which will be cited on either Canvas or the course website. Arguably the most important resources are the instructor, TA, and your classmates – and you are strongly encouraged to interact.

The University of Kentucky and the Pigman College of Engineering offer a wide range of student support services. Below are links to a few good starting points for finding the support you may need for success in your studies:

- Center for Support and Intervention: <https://studentsuccess.uky.edu/center-support-and-intervention/resources/student-resources>
- UK Student Success services page: <https://studentsuccess.uky.edu/find-services>
- James and Gay Hardymon Center for Student Success
<https://www.engr.uky.edu/students/student-success>
- Disability Resource Center: <https://studentsuccess.uky.edu/disability-resource-center>
- Tutoring and Coaching: <https://studentsuccess.uky.edu/academicresources> and <https://www.engr.uky.edu/students/student-success/engineering-tutoring>

Course Recordings

The University of Kentucky Code of Student Conduct (<https://studentsuccess.uky.edu/student-conduct>) defines Invasion of Privacy as using electronic or other devices to make a photographic, audio or video record of any person without their prior knowledge or consent when such a recording is likely to cause injury or distress.

Meetings of this course may be recorded. All video and audio recordings of lecturers and class meetings, provided by the instructors, are for educational use by students in this class only. They are available only through the Canvas shell for this course and are not to be copied, shared or redistributed.

As addressed in the Code of Student Conduct, students are expected to follow appropriate university policies and maintain the security of linkblue accounts used to access recorded class materials. Recordings may not be reproduced, shared with those not enrolled in the class or uploaded to other online environments.

If the instructor or a UK office plans any other uses for the recordings, beyond this class, students identifiable in the recordings will be notified to request consent prior to such use. In anticipation of such cases, students may be asked to complete an “authorization of use” form by a faculty member.

Video and audio recordings by students are not permitted during the class unless the student has received prior permission from the instructor. Any sharing, distribution and or uploading of these recordings outside of the parameters of the class is prohibited. Students with specific recording accommodations approved by the Disability Resource Center should present their official documentation to the instructor.

Course Copyright

All original instructor-provided content for this course, which may include handouts, assignments, and lectures, is the intellectual property of the instructor. Students enrolled in the course this academic term may use the original instructor-provided content for their learning and completion of course requirements this term, but such content must not be reproduced or sold. Students enrolled in the course this academic term are hereby granted permission to use original instructor-provided content for reasonable educational and professional purposes extending beyond this course and term, such as studying for a comprehensive or qualifying examination in a degree program, preparing for a professional or certification examination, or to assist in fulfilling responsibilities at a job or internship; other uses of original instructor-provided content require written permission from the instructor in advance.

Policy on Artificial Intelligence

AI tools, such as ChatGPT, may be used in limited ways, but ***an AI-generated response used directly is not considered to be your own work***. It is also noteworthy that although LLMs regularly produce coherent-looking answers to homework questions and even can give justifications for their answers, for CPE380 we have found that the answers given by ChatGPT are factually wrong about 40% of the

time. This leads to the disturbing observation that students assisted by ChatGPT tend to answer more questions incorrectly than they would on their own!

Don't let an AI convince you to give a wrong answer. Similarly, many WWW searches find unvetted and incorrect answers to questions posed in this course. Thus, for any AI and search tools you employ to help you create your original work answers, be sure to follow the old rule of "trust, but verify" for factual content. The course materials themselves are by far the most trustworthy sources for answers to questions.

This syllabus was last updated August 245, 2025 by H. Dietz.

Appendix: Classroom Emergency Preparedness and Response

Nothing is more important than the safety and well-being of our campus community. While the University of Kentucky Police Department continues to enhance campus safety measures, it's important to remember that everyone has a responsibility in keeping our community safe. To find more information visit [Emergency Response Guide | University of Kentucky Police Department \(uky.edu\)](https://police.uky.edu/emergency-response-guide)

Emergency Reporting & Action

Reporting

If there is an emergency, **DIAL 911**. To report suspicious activity or non-emergency situations, call the UK Police Department at 859-257-8573 or #UKPD from any mobile phone.

If an emergency occurs in a classroom or residence hall with a red emergency button, press to quickly notify UKPD. Emergency responders will immediately be dispatched to your location.

Action

During an emergency, you are responsible for your own safety.

If an emergency occurs during class, your instructor will provide further direction based on university and department emergency plans.

Warning Systems

UK Alert

The university provides emergency notifications through UK Alert, which sends messages via email, text message, phone calls, building alarm systems, digital signage, social media and outdoor sirens. If you receive a UK Alert message during class, notify your instructor and classmates immediately.

For more information, visit <https://police.uky.edu/get-notified/uk-alert>.

LiveSafe

The university provides additional emergency preparedness information and safety tools through LiveSafe, a free mobile app for iOS and Android. You can report suspicious activity, message with UK Police and virtually escort your friends through the SafeWalk tool.

For more information, visit <https://police.uky.edu/safety/livesafe>.

Blue Emergency Towers

Blue Emergency Notification Towers are strategically placed at over 50 locations across campus to provide outdoor alert tones and broadcast emergency messages with loud speakers. Each tower also features an emergency push button speaker phone that reaches UKPD and a camera mounted above the tower.

For more information, visit <https://police.uky.edu/safety/blue-emergency-towers>.

Medical Emergency

If there is a medical emergency, dial 911 and do not act outside the scope of your medical training. After dialing 911, inform your instructor of the situation.

Appendix: Classroom Emergency Preparedness and Response

Evacuation

It is required to evacuate for a fire alarm or when university officials order us to do so. Evacuation routes are marked with illuminated exit signs throughout the building. Avoid using elevators during any evacuation.

Emergency Sheltering

Storm Sheltering

Report to the recommended shelter locations. Recommended shelter locations are marked throughout the building.

If shelter locations are unavailable, protect yourself from lightning and flying debris by moving to an interior room or hallway on the building's lowest level. Avoid outside doors and windows and get under a sturdy table and use your arms to protect your head and neck.

Shelter-in-Place

If a shelter-in-place order is issued, you will learn about this through UK Alert, the university's emergency notification system.

If you are inside, stay where you are unless the building you are in is affected. If the building is affected, and the fire alarm has been activated or directed by law enforcement, you should evacuate. If you are outdoors, proceed into the closest UK building or follow instructions from emergency personnel or alerts.

It is ideal to shelter-in-place in an interior room with the fewest or no windows and no doors to the outside if possible. Shut all windows and close exterior doors.

If a hazardous chemical release occurs outside the building, follow these same procedures.

Active Aggressor

In a situation where an aggressor is trying to attack you or others, follow three steps:

1. **Run** - Attempt to get away from the attacker.
2. **Hide** - If you cannot run, barricade yourself in a safe place. Turn your phone to silent and dim your brightness. If possible, use the LiveSafe App to message UK Police and alert them to your location. If you don't have the app, dial 911. If you cannot speak, leave the line open and allow the dispatcher to listen.
3. **Fight** - If you cannot run or hide, do whatever you need to do to stop the attacker.

UK Police will communicate additional information through the UK Alert system during an active aggressor situation. Every UKY email automatically receives UK Alerts. You can also sign up in myUK to receive alerts via text and phone call.