The best way to come to understand the semantics of a programming language exactly and comprehensively is to implement a language processor for it, such as an interpreter—a meta-program that takes as input any program of the language one is considering and executes that program.

In Computer Science 312, we’ll practice this way to understanding by developing interpreters for a variety of tiny languages, each illustrating some fundamental concept of programming-language semantics such as binding, scope, state, and control flow.

The class meets in Noyce 3813 at 11 a.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Friday, beginning on Friday, August 28.

The two-credit version of this course ends on Wednesday, October 7. For the rest of the semester, I’ll continue to meet at the scheduled class time with any of you who want to pursue further inquiries either informally, as unregistered auditors, or by enrolling in the “plus-two” course CSC 312P, which confers two additional credits.

The textbook


The authors have kindly made all the code for this book available as a git repository at https://github.com/mwand/eopl3. That repository also includes a list of errata for the third edition.

The instructor

My name is John David Stone. My office is Noyce 3829. My office hours this semester are Tuesdays from 9 to 11 a.m., Wednesdays from 1 to 3 p.m., and Fridays from 2 to 4 p.m., and by appointment. I can be reached by telephone at extension 3181. If you use PGP encryption, you can also send me e-mail as stone@cs.grinnell.edu. My PGP public key is available on the Web at http://www.cs.grinnell.edu/~stone/pgp-public-key.txt.

Requirements

Each student in the course is expected to read the assigned sections of the textbook carefully, to learn the ideas, methods, and techniques presented there, to submit solutions to exercises requiring the application of those ideas, methods, and techniques, to prepare for and attend the sessions of the class, and to take and pass an examination at the end of the course.

Readings

In the schedule of topics for the course, I have specified a reading assignment between successive class meetings. Please study each specified section before the beginning of the class that follows it in the schedule.

From time to time, I shall provide handouts on topics related to the course. You should study each of these, too, before the class session at which we discuss it.
Exercises

The authors have supplied many pleasant and ingenious exercises, and I'll also propose some. You may work on any of the exercises that you like, singly or in groups. Submit solutions to me in hard copy. Everyone who contributes to a solution should (and must) sign it.

Class attendance

I expect you to attend and participate actively in every session of the class. It is especially helpful if you raise for discussion any questions you may have about the day's topic, the assigned reading, or the exercises. I suggest that you write out such questions as part of your preparation for class sessions and pose them as opportunities arise.

Notwithstanding that general expectation, class attendance is optional, except on examination day. However, if you miss a class session for any reason, you must write up and submit solutions to certain designated exercises for that session.

Days of religious observance

Grinnell College acknowledges and embraces the religious diversity of its students, faculty, and staff. If you miss a class session in order to fulfill a religious obligation, your absence is excused. The accommodation is the one described in the preceding section: You must write up and submit solutions for the designated exercises for that session.

If one of your days of religious observance coincides with the examination, please let me know early on in the semester so that we can arrange for you to take it at an earlier time.

In religious matters, I am a free thinker. I have no religious obligations that are tied to specific days, and I expect to attend all of the class sessions scheduled for this semester.

Examination

The examination for the two-credit course will be cumulative and comprehensive. It will be held at 11 a.m. (our usual meeting time) on Wednesday, October 7. During the exam, you may consult printed books, hard-copy notes, and other papers that you bring with you, but you may not confer with anyone else nor use telephones, computers, or any other networked devices.

The examination will comprise about six questions, including some short-answer questions and some essay questions. No programming will be required.

For students enrolled in the “plus-two” course, there will be a second examination, similar in structure and with the same restrictions. It will be held at 11 a.m. on Friday, December 11.

Grading

Section IV.A.4 of the Faculty Handbook explains the duty of faculty members to report grades as follows:

Among the accepted responsibilities and obligations of each member of the faculty is that of reporting to the Registrar, at the appointed times, grades in accordance with the grading system and with the grading regulations which the faculty shall from time to time adopt. Further, faculty members are expected to make timely evaluations of students throughout the year.

Inherent in the responsibility of reporting grades is the further understanding that all such grades reported shall have been determined, in the final analysis, on the basis of the faculty members own professional evaluation of each individual students work.
This above indicated responsibility is considered to be part of the contractual relationship between the individual faculty member and the College, and the failure to fulfill this obligation will be considered a breach of contract.

In each of my courses, I fulfill this responsibility to the letter. However, I advise students that they should not regard the grades reported to the registrar as complete or even adequate assessments of their intellectual strengths and weaknesses. Grinnell College's grading system is extremely inexpressive and vague.

The role of grades in the operation of the College is to support the generation of factoids (such as grade-point averages) that provide specious quantitative justifications for decisions about progress towards graduation, off-campus study, academic honors, and such like. When collected on transcripts, grades also provide a convenient (though potentially misleading) way of summarizing academic performance for the benefit of personnel managers and graduate-school admission committees, who often cannot spare the time to read accurate assessments of candidates’ strengths and weaknesses.

I therefore urge you to pay much closer attention to your verbal interactions with me and to the comments that I make on your course work than to the grade that I report at the end of the course. Nonetheless, that grade is, as specified, based entirely on my professional evaluation of your individual work.

Your performance on exercises will determine seven-tenths of your final grade, class attendance and participation one-tenth, and your performance on the examination the remaining fifth, with the condition that you must pass the final examination in order to pass the course.

**Collaboration and plagiarism**

Since you will receive credit for this course on the basis of your individual performance, it would be unethical to submit the work of others as your own. You may, if you like, collaborate on solutions to exercises, but such solutions must be signed and submitted jointly by all the members of the collaboration. You may not collaborate on the examination or any part of it.

If I encounter clear indications of plagiarism or academic dishonesty, the Committee on Academic Standing will deal with them. The College’s policies for faculty members prohibit me from trying to investigate major offenses on my own. For the same reason, I impose penalties for academic dishonesty only as directed by the Committee on Academic Standing.

Because in recent years the Department of Computer Science has received mixed signals from the Committee on Academic Standing and from the Office of the Dean on the nature and scope of academic dishonesty, we are currently in the process of formulating departmental standards of academic integrity for students in our courses. Although we have not yet published even draft versions for review and comment, it is probable that we will adopt some such standards during this semester.

**Copyrights and software licenses**

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Source code that I have created for this course and placed on MathLAN in the `/home/stone/courses/languages/code` directory is licensed under the GNU General Public License (unless it is derived from someone else’s code; see the individual files for further information). Code released under the GPL can be copied, studied, revised, improved, and redistributed freely, subject to the restriction that any copies or derived programs are released under the same license.

Similarly, handouts and other prose course materials that I have created and distributed either in hard copy or in `/home/stone/courses/languages/handouts` are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–ShareAlike 4.0 International License and can be copied, studied, revised, improved, and redistributed freely, provided that my authorship of the original work is acknowledged and that any copies or derived works are released under the same license.

Under Grinnell College’s copyright policy, a student who submits a program or a prose text to satisfy a requirement of this course retains the copyright to it. Similarly, a group that submits such a work has and retains a collective copyright. In either case, however, the College asserts the right to distribute the work within the College community for instructional or administrative purposes without paying any royalty to the student.

You may, of course, choose to publish your work under some more generous license, and I encourage you to use the GNU General Public License (version 3) for software and the Creative Commons Attribution–ShareAlike 4.0 International License for text.

To my knowledge, the College has never abused its claimed right of distribution or used it in a way that would be contrary to the interests of student authors. In 2013, however, the College designated Microsoft Corporation as a school official with a “legitimate educational interest” in student records. Microsoft Corporation has a much sketchier track record that includes many instances of exploitation of its customers and users. Its rap sheet includes a felony conviction, in American criminal courts, on charges of abuse of monopoly and a similar conviction in the European Union. In addition, since 2007, Microsoft has given the National Security Agency access to most of its users’ emails, video chats, and cloud document storage, in unencrypted form.

In my opinion, Microsoft cannot be trusted to respect the rights and interests of student authors. Accordingly, I now advise students not to store any original writing, including source code for computer programs, on the College’s gShare site and not to e-mail it (without encryption) to or from any @grinnell.edu address, since either of those acts might be construed as allowing Microsoft, as a school official, to read, copy, modify, distribute, and mine data from your original work without your permission.