AE 8803: Optimization-Based Learning Control and Games
Course Syllabus
Fall 2026

Instructor: Dr. Kyriakos G. Vamvoudakis
Dept.: The Daniel Guggenheim School of Aerospace Engineering
Office: Knight Building 415-B
Phone: 385-3342
E-mail: kyriakos@gatech.edu
Web: http://kyriakos.ae.gatech.edu/

Time & Location: MW 12:30 PM - 01:45 PM, Allen Sustainable Education | Room 110
Office Hours: TThu 11:00AM-12:30PM
Course Web Page: http://kyriakos.ae.gatech.edu/ae8803AI.html

Textbook: There is no required text. The instructor will provide notes and research papers.

Helpful Texts:
F. L. Lewis, D. Vrabie, and V. L. Syrmos. *Optimal Control*, John Wiley & Sons, 2012 (ISBN: 978-0-470-63349-6) Preliminary version is provided by author in http://www.uta.edu/utari/acs/FL%20books/Lewis%20optimal%20control%203rd%20edition%202012.pdf

D. Liberzon, *Calculus of variations and optimal control theory: a concise introduction*, Princeton University Press, 2012 (ISBN: 978-0-691-15187-8) **(good reference on calculus of variations).** Preliminary version is provided by author in: http://liberzon.csl.illinois.edu/teaching/cvoc.pdf

D. Vrabie, K. G. Vamvoudakis, F. L. Lewis, *Optimal Adaptive Control and Differential Games by Reinforcement Learning Principles*, Control Engineering Series, IET Press, 2012 (ISBN: 978-1-84919-489-1) **(good reference on RL and optimal control)**

T. Basar, G. J. Olsder, *Dynamic noncooperative game theory*, Vol. 23. Siam, 1999 (ISBN: 978-0-89871-429-6) **(good reference on game theory)**

Required Software: Student Edition of Matlab (or Python)

Course Description: This course will cover analysis and design techniques in optimal control systems and differential games.

Tentative Topics:

I. Static and Dynamic Optimization
   A. Unconstrained Optimization and Efficient Algorithms, e.g., steepest or gradient descent methods
   B. Constrained Optimization with Lagrange Multipliers (First-Order Necessary Conditions) and Second-Order Conditions

II. Calculus of Variations
   A. Motivation Examples
   B. Hamiltonian Formalism and Mechanics
   C. First and Second-Order Conditions

D. Specification of Performance Indices

III. Optimal Control of Discrete-Time Systems
- A. Solution Concept
- B. Linear Quadratic Regulator (LQR) and Matrix Equations
- C. Steady-State Closed-Loop Control
- D. Advanced Topics

IV. Optimal Control of Continuous-Time Systems
- A. Solution Concept
- B. LQR and Matrix Equations
- C. Steady-State Closed-Loop Control
- D. Advanced Topics

V. Extensions of LQR
- A. Cross Terms in the Cost Functional
- B. Servo and Tracking Problems

VI. Final- Time-Free and Constrained Input Control
- A. Constrained Minimum-Time Problem (Bang-Bang Control)
- B. Constrained Minimum-Fuel Problem (Bang-Off-Bang Control)
- C. Constrained Minimum-Energy Problem

VII. Dynamic and Approximate Dynamic Programming
- A. Bellman's Principle of Optimality
- B. Continuous versus Discrete-Time
- C. Hamilton-Jacobi-Bellman (HJB) Equation
- D. Policy and Value Iteration
- E. Q-learning

VIII. Differential Games
- A. Pontryagin's Principle and Bellman's Equation
- B. Zero-Sum Games and Hamilton-Jacobi-Isaacs Equation (HJI)
- C. Non-Zero-Sum Games and Nash Equilibrium

IX. Reinforcement Learning
- A. Reinforcement Learning
- B. Duality of Optimal Control and Optimal Estimation
- C. Motion Planning with Randomized Trees and Optimal Control
- D. Output Feedback

Tentative Grading Policy: Homework 30%
Midterm 35% (Mid-class)
Final Project 35% (Please come talk to me to pick a project that is related to your field of interest.)

Homework Assignments:

- Due at the beginning of the class on the due date. Solutions to the homework will be posted on the web at the time that they are due. Therefore, NO LATE HOMEWORK will be accepted.
- Electronic submissions will be accepted before the class starts.
- Late homework will not be accepted without formal documentation of extenuating circumstances (e.g., a note from a Dean, a physician, etc.).

Professor's Right Policy: The professor reserves the right to change the course within Georgia Tech policy. Due dates are tentative for general information. They may be shifted to other dates at the discretion of the professor.

AI Policy: Generative AI-based assistance, such as, but not limited to ChatGPT and Copilot, is comparable to collaboration with other people – for an individual assignment the use of generative AI is a violation of the Honor Code. This course is designed to teach you how to do graduate level writing, coding, and analysis, so all the work you submit must be your own. You should never include in your assignment anything that was not written directly by you without proper citation (including quotation marks and in-line citation for direct quotes). Inclusion of anything you did not write in your assignments (prose or code) without proper citation will be treated as an academic misconduct case. If you are unsure if you have gone too far consider these two simple guidelines: (1) avoid hitting "copy" in a conversation with an AI assistant; (2) do not have both your assignment and the AI agent open at the same time. Avoid using tools that directly add content to your submission. Use of spell and grammar checkers are acceptable (and encouraged) for all assignments.

Course Policies: 1. NO CELL PHONES are allowed during lectures. 2. Be on time for class. Tardy is discouraged. 3. No make-up exams/quizzes. If you miss the exam, a zero score will be assigned to the missed exam/quiz. 4. If you miss a class due to personal emergency or medical reasons, please be sure to inform the instructor by e-mail. 5. Homework assignments are to be submitted by the due date. You may discuss homework problems with your classmates, but you are responsible for your own work. 6. After an assignment grade has been posted online, students must see the instructor within one week if they wish to discuss the assignment and their work.

Principles of Community: Students are expected to be polite and professional when interacting with one another and with the instructor. Abusive or insensitive behavior will not be tolerated.

Academic Support: The instructor will help through normal protocols, such as office hours, but cannot serve as a private tutor.

Special Accommodations: If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mailme as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement: At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. The Student-Faculty Expectations articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Georgia Tech School of Aerospace Engineering Values

Discussion Points

1. **Honesty:** The School of Aerospace Engineering values honesty and integrity of all members of our community. An important element of this value is the academic honor code.

   Georgia Tech Honor Challenge Statement: I commit to uphold the ideals of honor and integrity by refusing to betray the trust bestowed upon me as a member of the Georgia Tech community.

   Honor Code: http://policylibrary.gatech.edu/student-affairs/academic-honor-code#Article_I:Honor_Agreement

2. **Well Being:** The School of Aerospace Engineering values the complete well-being of all members of its community, which includes professional, physical, spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions. There are numerous resources to support the health and well-being of all members of our community: https://gatech.instructure.com/courses/108574

   Mental Health Resources:
   Emergencies: Can either Call 911 or call Campus Police at 404.894.2500 http://www.police.gatech.edu/
   Center for Assessment, Referral, & Ed. (CARE): https://care.gatech.edu/ 404.894.3498 (Counselor On-Call)
   Counseling Center: https://counseling.gatech.edu/ 404.894.2575
   Stamps Health Services: https://health.gatech.edu/ 404.894.1420
   Student Life and Dean of Students: https://studentlife.gatech.edu/content/get-help-now 404.894.6367
   Victim-Survivor Support (VOICE): https://healthinitiatives.gatech.edu/well-being/voice 404-385-4464/(or 4451)
   National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1.800.273.TALK (8255)

Georgia Crisis and Access Line: 1.800.715.4225

3. **Social Justice:** The School of Aerospace Engineering values social justice for all members of the Georgia Tech community and the larger society. Social justice means that everyone's human rights are respected and protected. We stand committed in the fight against racism, discrimination, racial bias, and racial injustice. Our shared vision is one of social justice, opportunity, community, and equity. We believe that the diversity and contributions from all of our members are essential and make us who we are. We believe that our impact must reach beyond the classroom, research labs, our campus, and the technology we create, but must also improve the human condition where injustice lives. We will continue to work to understand, value, and celebrate all people and create an inclusive educational and work environment that welcomes all.

   As a matter of policy, Georgia Tech is committed to equal opportunity, a culture of inclusion, and an environment free from discrimination and harassment in its educational programs and employment. Georgia Tech prohibits discrimination, including discriminatory harassment, on the basis of race, ethnicity, ancestry, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, age, disability, genetics, or veteran status in its programs, activities, employment, and admissions.

   http://policylibrary.gatech.edu/equal-opportunity-nondiscrimination-and-anti-harassment-policy

Tentative Roadmap			Fall 2026 (AE 8803)	
Number of Lecture	**date**	**day**	**Topic**	**Reading Assignments**
1	24-Aug	mon	Introduction, Unconstrained and Constrained Optimization	Sections 1.1-1.2 Liberzon and Chapter 1 in Lewis
2	26-Aug	wed	Unconstrained and Constrained Optimization	Sections 1.1-1.2 Liberzon and Chapter 1 in Lewis
3	31-Aug	mon	Unconstrained and Constrained Optimization	Sections 1.1-1.3 Liberzon and Chapter 1 in Lewis
4	2-Sep	wed	Calculus of Variations	Chapter 2 in Liberzon
	7-Sep	mon	Labor Day, No Class	-
5	9-Sep	wed	Calculus of Variations	Chapter 2 in Liberzon
6	14-Sep	mon	Calculus of Variations	Chapter 2 in Liberzon
7	16-Sep	wed	Calculus of Variations	Chapter 2 in Liberzon and Section 3.1 in Lewis
8	21-Sep	mon	Optimal Control of Discrete-Time Systems	Chapter 2 in Lewis
9	23-Sep	wed	Optimal Control of Discrete-Time Systems	Chapter 2 in Lewis
10	28-Sep	mon	Optimal Control of Discrete-Time Systems	Chapter 2 in Lewis
11	30-Sep	wed	Optimal Control of Discrete-Time Systems	Chapter 2 in Lewis
	5-Oct	mon	Fall Break, No Class	-
12	7-Oct	wed	Optimal Control of Continuous-Time Systems	Chapter 3 in Lewis
13	12-Oct	mon	Optimal Control of Continuous-Time Systems	Chapter 3 in Lewis
14	14-Oct	wed	Optimal Control of Continuous-Time Systems	Chapter 3 in Lewis
15	19-Oct	mon	Applications of Optimal Control	-
16	21-Oct	wed	Extensions of LQR	Chapter 4 in Lewis
17	26-Oct	mon	Extensions of LQR	Chapter 4 in Lewis
18	28-Oct	wed	Dynamic Programming	Chapter 6 in Lewis
19	2-Nov	mon	Midterm Exam in Class	-
20	4-Nov	wed	Approximate Dynamic Programming and Learning	Notes
21	9-Nov	mon	Differential Games	Chapter 10 in Lewis and Section 7.3 in Liberzon
22	11-Nov	wed	Policy and Value Iteration	Notes
23	16-Nov	mon	Q-learning	Notes
24	18-Nov	wed	Differential Games and Learning	Part 3 in Vrabie and Chapter 11 in Lewis
25	23-Nov	mon	Differential Games and Learning	Part 3 in Vrabie and Chapter 11 in Lewis
	25-Nov	wed	Thanksgiving Break, No Class	-
26	30-Nov	mon	Advanced Topics	Research Papers
27	2-Dec	wed	Advanced Topics	Research Papers
28	7-Dec	mon	Project Presentations	-