CDSS Data Discovery Mentor Orientation

Spring 2026

UC Berkeley College of Computing, Data Science, and Society

Agenda

1. Overview and expectations
2. Our partnership in mentoring students
3. Other logistics
4. Q&A
    a. Answers to previously asked questions



Program team

George Obaido, PhD
Program Director



Emily Remirez, PhD
Program Co-Director



You may also hear from

- Associate Dean of Students **Prof. Narges Nourouzi**
- Assistant Dean of Students **Robbie Powers**
- Data Discovery Faculty Advisor **Prof. Emerita Deb Nolan**

Thank you!

- Thank you for being here today!
  - We appreciate the chance to connect and are looking forward to working together!
- Thank you for being a mentor
  - This transformative experience is deeply valued by students and only possible with your participation
  - Your support has a direct impact on your students and the Berkeley and CDSS community

Program overview and expectations

- Timeline
- Symposium
- Data Discovery class: CDSS 170
- Expectations for students

Data Discovery Program Overview

Project: Working with you

- Hands-on data practicum
  - Set expectations with your individual team
- Weekly team meeting
- Assign tasks for each week and provide feedback

CDSS 170: Working with us

- Weekly in-person classes:
  - Student team meeting
  - Short written assignments
- Course credit and letter grade
- Technical and professional support for your students

Students' weekly time commitment

Your project: 6 hours

- ➔ Average, not minimum
- ➔ Flexibility appreciated (e.g., around exams)
- ➔ Avoid after hours, holidays, weekends

- Regular weekly meetings with you
- Tasks you assign for your project
- As-needed requirements:
  - Trainings, extra meetings
  - Events, presentations and prep

CDSS 170: 3 hours

- ➔ 1 hour in person

- 1 hour weekly class meeting
  - Student meeting/work time
- Class assignments and prep

Spring 2026 dates and timeline

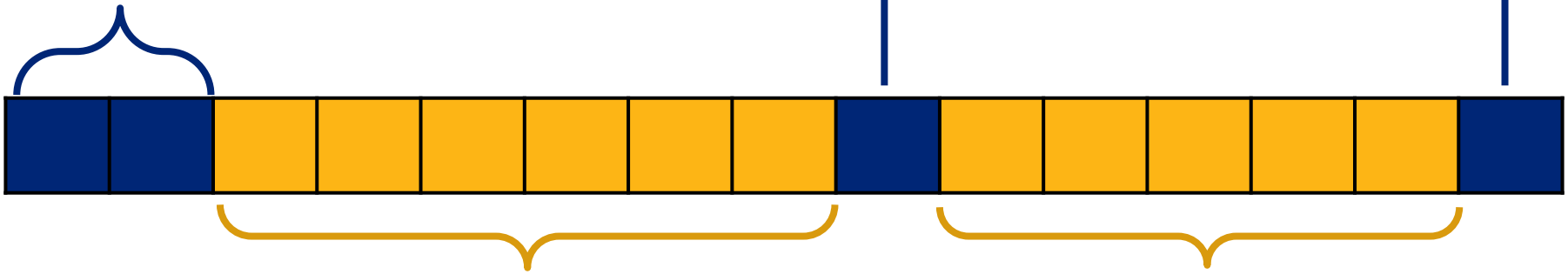
January 23	Deadline to form your team using DDMatch
January 26	Program begins; first CDSS 170 meeting
March (TBD)	Mid-term student progress check-in
Apr 27 - May 1	Last week of classes/project work ends
May 7	Data Discovery Symposium
Student holidays	January 19, February 16, March 23-27

That allows about 10-12 weeks of work

Set up
Starting Jan 26
Up to 2 weeks

Spring break
March 23-27

Symposium
May 7

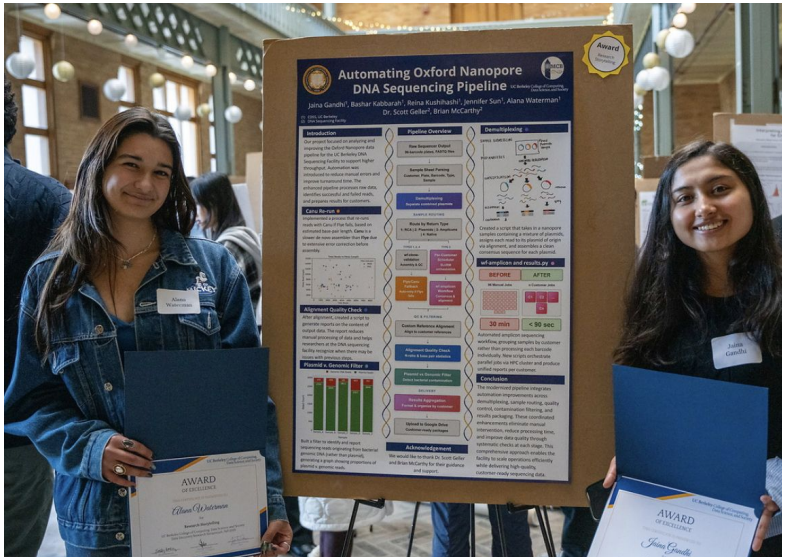


6 weeks of work

5 weeks of work

Data Discovery Symposium: May 7

- We welcome you to join us on campus for student poster presentations!
  - **Thursday, May 7, 1:30-3pm**
  - Detailed invitation to follow
- Awards and faculty keynote
- Your presence improves the symposium for all students!



More on poster presentations

- Students are encouraged to present a poster at the Symposium
  - Fulfills our final presentation requirement; alternatives are available
  - The poster can cover any aspect of their work with you
- We provide students templates, resources, and preparation
  - Your guidance is also welcome! (But posters should be student work)
  - Students should give you a chance to review the poster for accuracy
- **Please plan to cover the cost of printing for your student team this semester ($30-$50)**
  - If you are unable to do so, please email us as soon as possible
  - More details to follow

New Data Discovery course: CDSS 170

- ***Updated course from Fall 2025!***
  - No hour-long lectures or weekly assignments
- All students required to enroll; teams enroll in the same section
- 1 hour in-person meetings Mondays 3-4 ***or*** 4-5 pm, focusing on:
  - Teams working together with support from staff
  - Discussing with the larger group to connect with other teams
- Limited number of written assignments and asynchronous lectures
- **Course is designed to help students work with you**
  - Assignments can be done with any sort of Data Discovery project, and specifics can always be tailored for your team

Benefits of course and in-person meetings



- ➔ Dedicated time and space for students to work together with real-time staff support
- ➔ Engagement within and across teams
- ➔ Insight into team progress and dynamics
- ➔ Assignments help prepare for final presentations and contextualize the work

Questions about class? *Ask us!*
Students sometimes miss important details or context

Our expectations for students

- We ask all students to:
  - Maintain their weekly hourly commitment, on average
  - Proactively communicate with you and their teammates
  - Remain intellectually honest in their work and not use generative AI on your project without explicit permission
  - Attend class meetings regularly and complete all requirements
- You set the expectations for your project
  - Document expectations in the Mentoring Agreement (more info on next slide; students will have detailed instructions)

The Mentoring Agreement

- Explicit conversation about expectations and policies
  - Clarity now avoids issues later
  - Something concrete to revisit if issues do arise
- Agreement covers things like:
  - Contact info, meetings, schedules, your existing policies
  - Milestones and background for the semester
- Creating the agreement with you is students' first assignment
  - We'll provide a template, or use your own preferred or existing format
  - Important thing is that you're all on the same page!

Your expectations for students

- This may be one of students' first professional experiences
  - Provide mentorship for professional norms and "soft" skills
  - Be prepared to give extra time and direction, including for things that feel obvious or straightforward
- Students juggle many commitments
  - Schedules fluctuate with exams and extracurriculars
  - Losing steam mid-semester is unfortunately common
- Revisit roles and goals as you work together
  - Balance of flexibility and accountability
  - Students vary in the level of independence they're ready for

Our partnership



Working together to mentor students and see meaningful impact on your work

- ➔ Commitment to students
- ➔ Regular communication

Ensuring an educational experience for students

- Data Discovery is part of students' curriculum:
  - Their learning and mentorship should be a primary goal
- Every task should have some kind of educational or professional development value, even if it's not glamorous
- Include students in discussions about the larger context
  - They should understand why they're doing what they're doing
- Talk to students about their individual goals; share your experience or advice and connect them with your network where appropriate

Building an arc to your project

- Setting clear goals with defined milestones helps students get the most out of their experience
  - Objectives help mark progress and give direction
  - Matches the cadence of their coursework
  - Sets up a narrative for contextualizing their work
- Especially helpful for exploratory or really big projects
  - Carve out a “chunk” they can work on with a sense of progression
  - Situate the work within the broader context so they understand how they’re contributing



Committing to students and Data Discovery

- Commitment is for the duration of the program
  - Students cannot be unilaterally removed from your team
- Provide a welcoming, equitable environment for all students according to university standards
  - As a university-sponsored program, we're responsible for students' welfare and learning
- Encourage students' input and feedback
  - Be flexible where you can (e.g., if students prefer particular tasks)
- Support students in completing our assignments and requirements

If students aren't meeting your expectations

- Check in with them, starting with compassion and curiosity
  - Is something else going on?
  - Are your expectations clear and feasible?
- Loop us in early
  - We can also nudge them and offer support!
  - Send them back to us as needed for guidance
- Students aren't penalized just because you check in
  - Our goal is to intervene early and course correct
  - For egregious and/or persistent behavior, students may fail the class and be barred from future participation (e.g., "ghosting," plagiarism)

Characteristics of a good mentor

The most important characteristic is **honesty**.

A great mentor can build trust and harness a mentee's full potential

Other characteristics:

- Committed to the mentee's intellectual growth, academic development, and cultural integration
- Effective communication skills
- Behaves with integrity, is trustworthy, has respect for others; respect for different viewpoints
- Willingness to consult others
- Willingness to be a confidant and a friend
- Diplomacy, perceptiveness, and reflectiveness

A Handbook on Mentoring Students in Undergraduate Research: Proven Strategies for Success (Undergraduate Research Committee)

Regular communication with us

- We plan to provide increased, regular insight into what's happening in class and what we're asking of students
- **Reach out to us** sooner rather than later!
  - Concerns about a student or logistics of your project
  - Questions or ideas about the program, the course, or CDSS
  - Good news to share or exceptional students to shout out
  - Setting up chats to connect with each other
- We depend on your feedback to assess students' progress, assign grades, and evaluate our program
  - Thank you in advance for responding to our surveys!

Other logistics



Non-disclosure agreements & confidentiality

- NDAs or confidentiality agreements may be used to protect your project while maintaining an open, supportive environment
  - Refer to this example for a UC Berkeley aligned format https://tinyurl.com/DD-NDA-example
- NDAs should:
  - Clearly define what info is confidential and how it can be used
  - Avoid overly broad restrictions that can interfere with students' work
  - **Avoid financial penalties** that can cause anxiety and detract from the educational focus of the program
- Any associated trainings should be factored into project work time

Computational resources

- We provide high-performance computing resources for your project
  - **CDSS DataHub** for large-scale data processing, AI, and machine learning tasks
  - **Savio,** Berkeley's supercomputing infrastructure
  - Both platforms include pre-installed Python and R data science libraries, with options for additional software
- You can request access to DataHub (but not Savio) by emailing us
  - Students have access to DataHub by default and can set up a Savio account by following the instructions here

Reminders for forming your team

- **Extend all offers through the DDMatch platform**
- Aiming to have all teams confirmed by **January 23** for a prompt start to the program
- We recommend **teams of 3-5** with a hard of cap of 5
  - You can extend up to 7 offers at a time to find your team
- You can rescind an offer if you haven’t heard back after 48-72 hours so that you can move on to another student
  - But please try to accommodate if students say they need more time!
- **Email us to confirm when your team is full**

Your first meeting with students

- Schedule your first meeting with students the week of **January 26** or as soon as possible after that
  - Set up a weekly standing meeting moving forward
  - Plan to work on a Mentoring Agreement during the first meeting
- We recommend emailing all of your students as a group as soon as you've formed your team
  - Reassures them to hear from you
  - Helps introduce them to each other

Action items and takeaways

- Form your team ASAP or by January 23
  - Start meeting/working with your team the week of January 26-30
  - Make all offers within DDMatch
- **Email us when you finalize your team**, or if:
  - You want access to CDSS DataHub
  - You won’t be able to help pay for printing your team’s poster
- Keep in touch!
  - Reach out with any concerns and look out for our updates

Program team and contact

George Obaido, PhD
Program Director

Emily Remirez, PhD
Program Co-Director

Email
cdss-datadiscovery@berkeley.edu

Questions?

Links and resources

- *A Handbook on Mentoring Students in Undergraduate Research: Proven Strategies for Success*
- Berkeley Standards of Conduct
- Sample NDA
- Computing resources instructions for students:
  - Accessing DataHub, Accessing Savio, more on Savio

Answers to questions from sessions



The course/CDSS 170

- Will all students be enrolled in the same hour of class?
  - Yes! Students will be in the same space as their team to meet and work together
- Are all students required to take the class, even if they're returning?
  - Yes, all students are required to take the class. The format is radically updated from Fall 2025 and will not feature repeat lecture material. Class time will be focused on team meetings. The class is also how students get course credit for their work and necessary for some student visa requirements

Symposium and posters

- When is the Symposium?
  - Save the date for May 7, 1:30-3:00 pm! More details to follow.
- I have a question about printing posters
  - We hope to have more details soon!

Communication with program staff

- Is there a faculty coordinator who will check in? Do we meet regularly with someone?
  - There are no regularly scheduled meetings, but George and Emily are always available to meet. We'll provide regular informational updates and occasionally request feedback.

Working on the project

- Who is responsible for making the assignments?
  - CDSS 170 assignments: We will handle assigning and evaluating assignments for our class (e.g., writing up progress reports and drafting their poster)
  - Project assignmentsYou'll handle weekly project tasks for students to complete, including feedback on past work. (You don't need to assign students a grade.)
- Is generative AI use allowed on the project?
  - This is up to you! We require students to get your permission, be transparent, and follow the usual intellectual honesty guidelines

Forming your team

- What is the deadline for students to accept offers?
  - You should give students at least 48 hours to respond to an offer
  - We're aiming to formalize all teams by Friday January 23 so that students can attend class Monday January 26, but there is some wiggle room. The January 21 deadline for extending offers is suggested to keep us on track and not binding.
- What if a student wants to change projects after accepting an offer?
  - We strongly encourage students to keep their commitment if they've accepted an offer, but can consider special requests. Please follow up over email!

Program background

- How long has the program existed, and what is the attrition rate?
  - Data Discovery has existed in some form since 2016. With the formation of CDSS as a new college, we've been transforming the program to better serve students and mentors. George and Emily started Fall 2024.
  - We don't have insight into prior attrition, but can say that we've seen it go down since we've started paying closer attention. Last semester we began with about 210 students and ended with about 200
- What is the average number of applicants per project?
  - We hope to share more insight soon. This semester we had 700 unique students submit a total of 1,750 applications across all projects