
George Mason University
College of Science

EVPP 108-001 – Ecosphere: Environmental Science I

Fall 2025 – 3 credits

INSTRUCTOR:	Dr. Stephanie Schmidt (Dr. Steph, Dr. Schmidt, Prof. Schmidt) (she/her) email: sschmi11@gmu.edu
CLASS DATES/TIMES:	Mondays & Wednesdays, 9:00 AM – 10:15 AM (in person)
CLASS LOCATION:	<u>East Building</u> Rm # 201
OFFICE HOURS	<u>Book here</u> at least 24 hours in advance
<i>VIRTUAL ONLY</i>	Wednesdays, 11:00 AM – 11:30 AM
<i>IN PERSON ONLY</i>	Wednesdays after class 10:15 AM – 10:45 AM (up to 5 min walk from class)
<i>VIRTUAL <u>OR</u> IN PERSON</i>	Please request date & time via email ≥ 24 hrs in advance

Course Description

This course introduces students to the components and interactions making up Earth's environmental systems. It teaches applied concepts in biological, chemical, physical, and earth sciences as relevant to environmental issues in an integrated format, with complementary lab and field exercises in EVPP 109.

Mason Core – Natural Science

EVPP 108 fulfills 3 non-lab credits for the Natural Science Mason Core requirement for non-science majors. Taken with EVPP 109, EVPP 108/109 fulfill the 4-credit lab requirement. See more [here](#).

Course Objectives

As a Mason Core Natural Sciences course, students will engage in scientific exploration; foster their curiosity; gain enthusiasm for science; and apply scientific knowledge and reasoning to personal, professional and public decision-making. In particular, this class will challenge students to more fully:

1. Understand how scientific inquiry is based on investigation of evidence from the natural world, and that scientific knowledge and understanding: a) evolves based on new evidence, and b) differs from personal and cultural beliefs.
2. Recognize the scope and limits of science.
3. Recognize and articulate the relationship between the natural sciences and society and the application of science to societal challenges (e.g., health, conservation, sustainability, energy, natural disasters, etc.).
4. Evaluate scientific information (e.g., distinguish primary and secondary sources, assess credibility and validity of information).

Course Requirements and Expectations

Note: These do not include EVPP 109 requirements; please also consult the EVPP 109 syllabus if you are enrolled.

- **Course Textbook (Not Required):** *Environment: The Science Behind the Stories*, 7th edn., by J. Withgott & M. Laposata (ISBN: 9780135848661) will be used for the course. Most material will be presented in lecture, but information from book reading or homework can enhance learning. Readings from the textbook will be provided to students by the instructor.
- **Technology and Other Required Course Materials:** Bring a **lined notebook, pen/pencil, and digital wifi-connected device** to class. Please be prepared for both hand-written / turned in activities and digital activities. Please be prepared to submit pictures of handwritten notes for some homework assignments, which will require **a)** a smartphone with internet and camera for uploading pictures of handwritten notes, **OR b)** another means of taking and uploading pictures. Also have access to **(c)** a word processor; **(d)** a working webcam and/or phone camera with a microphone; **(e)** any required software for completing and submitting required reading, homework, etc, for which at least 7 days' notice will be given before software is needed. The MS Suite provided to you through Mason will be heavily relied upon in this course and cannot be substituted by Google Docs.
- **Digital Devices in Class:** Students should not use digital devices unless a digital activity is currently ongoing in class. Students must receive permission in the first week of class if they wish to take notes on a laptop or tablet. When digital activities are not occurring, students who are actively using a digital device in class should sit behind other classmates.
- **Regular use of Canvas:** Announcements/updates, assignment guidelines, and other course materials will be available on Canvas. Use of Canvas is required to turn in relevant assignments or other deliverables. Beyond the website, use of the Canvas app ([Apple](#) or [Android](#)) is encouraged.
- **Course Communication:** Use of a [@gmu.edu](#) address is required. Email and Canvas will be the primary modes of communication. Please check your email and Canvas daily during the week. Please reach out to Prof. Schmidt using email through Outlook, with **EVPP 108-001** in the subject line. Dr. Schmidt will generally respond to emails within 24 to 48 hours on business days (M-F), but expect a response within 72 hours if an email is sent after 10 PM on Thursday night.
- **Lectures, Attendance / Participation, and Pop Quizzes:** **Attendance AND participation** (henceforth "participation") to in-person lectures are required. Participation may be logged at any time between 9:00 AM and 10:15 AM. Most class dates will include 2 participation activities.
Pop quizzes will be held without warning and will be closed-note. They will count as participation credit, but, unlike other participation assignments, cannot be made up, and will be graded for accuracy.
- **Zoom Lectures:** Lectures will be recorded via Zoom. Access to live sessions will not be provided to students; however, recordings will be posted after class. Zoom links are provided to allow students who miss class to make up participation, OR for students who wish to rewatch lectures to study.
- **Absences:** Students will automatically receive 6 excused absences, with exception to any missed pop quizzes, as long as for each absence: (1) students submit completed participation activities via email within 7 days; and (2) students watch the recorded lecture and submit the virtual participation form within 7 days ([access here](#)). **Regarding pop quizzes:** If documentation of a **medical emergency** is provided within 3 days of the missed class, OR if students discuss a **scheduling issue** with the instructor at least 1 class ahead of time, students can also take missed pop quizzes.

- **Submitting Work - Formatting, Timeliness, and Related Policies:** Students are responsible for timely submissions of any work in the correct **format** (e.g., .docx) and in the correct **location**. Work may need to be submitted in person or on Canvas.
- **Formatting Documents:** Documents must be submitted in the format instructed by the assignment; acceptable formats for non-pictures **are limited to** the following: **.doc, .docx, .pdf, .xlsx, .pptx**, or, when instructed by the professor, as a link to a OneDrive document with accessible version history. Google files are not allowed. **.pages** extensions, or others not listed here, will not be accepted and will earn a 0.
- **Formatting Images:** .png, .jpg, .jpeg, .gif, or .pdf extensions are acceptable for images.
 - o Other formats (e.g., **.HEIC** or **.SVG**) will not be accepted and **will earn a 0**.
 - o Students must convert their HEIC or SVG files using an appropriate method.

Any work that is submitted in the wrong format, or in the wrong place (e.g., via email), will be counted late until the time at which the student submits it in the appropriate format/place.
- **Timeliness and Policies:** Due dates and times will be provided on Canvas and weekly announcements. Deadlines are strict and must be adhered to by all students.
 - o No assignments, quizzes, or exams (besides the final) will be accepted after 12/9 5:00 PM ET.
 - o **Extensions: 3 48-Hr Extensions Are Provided, with Communication, For Any Homework (Non-participation, non-quiz, non-exam).** Students will have a no-questions asked extension of 48 hours (2 days) on 3 chosen assignments without penalty. Students must email the instructor **before a due date**, or within 1 hour of the deadline, to document use of the 48-hour extension. **Emails must contain the subject "EVPP 108-001 Extension" and explicitly note the assignment.**
 - o **Other Excused Late Homework:** A student should aim to use their 3 extensions for emergency situations. However, if a student has used all 3 extensions and requires additional extensions due to a medical situation or other emergency, they must a) send an email to the professor with "EVPP 108-001 Extension" in the subject, b) explicitly state the name of the assignment, c) provide documentation of the extenuating circumstance, and d) provide a timeline for completion, all within 2 days of the deadline.
 - o **Penalizations for Late assignments** that are not granted a 48 hour extension or other excused extension will be penalized as follows: **0% if less than 1 hour late; 50% if more than 1 hour late and less than 5 days late; and 100% if late by more than 5 days.**
 - o **To ensure technology issues do not lead to penalties, please confirm access of resources at least 24 hours ahead of due dates.** If a technology issue arises, students may receive an extension **only if they** a) email the instructor, and b) provide receipt of contacting IT Services via a ticket, and c) include the instructor in the IT communication at the start (i.e., on the ticket).
 - o **Extensions on Quizzes and/or Making Up Exams:** If a student misses an exam or quiz deadline, a makeup opportunity will **only be provided if due to a medical situation or other emergency. To receive a makeup, within 24 hours** of the missed assessment, a student must a) send an email to the professor with "EVPP 108-001 Missed Exam (or Quiz)" in the subject, b) provide documentation of the extenuating circumstance such as a doctor's note that includes the date of the missed assessment, and c) provide 2 alternative timelines for completion.

- **No Sale of Course Content:** ALL class content is the property of GMU and may not be duplicated or used for commercial purposes without instructor permission. Course content cannot be copied and pasted into any generative AI tool without explicit instructor permission.
- **Professor Privacy:** Recording and/or distributing recordings of the instructor are to be avoided unless conducted (a) with prior approval and (b) for the sake of learning.
- **Academic Honesty:** Academic integrity is of utmost importance in this course. I take it extremely seriously and will hold all students to the Honor Code as a member of the Mason Community. Please review the Academic Integrity portion on the final page of this syllabus.

Course Structure and Organization

Course Activities

Classes will include participation activities, lecture presentations from the instructor, videos, worksheets, individual/group activities, discussions, website tutorials, and mini-student presentations. Each class may require online research and/or hand-written deliverables.

Outside of class, students will be responsible for completing readings, watching videos, and completing assignments including Canvas discussions, handouts, etc. **Assignments will be explained (a) in-class and/or (b) via Canvas announcements with clear expectations at least 46 hours before the due date.** In some cases, students may be expected to complete an assignment between Tuesday and the start of a Thursday class.

Grading Schema

Canvas will be used for updating and submitting grades and will adhere to the following schema. The schema will be strictly enforced; changes to final grades will only be made if you find and report a discrepancy in grades on Canvas and it is redressed by the professor.

<i>Course Professionalism</i>	60 pts	5.0%
<i>Class Attendance/Participation</i>	180 pts	15.0%
<i>Homework</i>	180 pts	15.0%
<i>Individual Project (all parts)</i>	60 pts	5.0%
<i>Quizzes</i>	180 pts	15.0%
<i>Midterm I</i>	150 pts	12.5%
<i>Midterm II</i>	150 pts	12.5%
<i>Final Exam*</i>	240 pts	20.0%
	1200 pts	100.0%

A+ : 97.45% – 100+%	B+ : 87.45% – 89.45%	C+ : 77.45% – 79.45%	D : 64.45% – 69.45%
A : 92.45% – 97.45%	B : 82.45% – 87.45%	C : 72.45% – 77.45%	F : < 64.45%
A- : 89.45% – 92.45%	B- : 79.45% – 82.45%	C- : 69.45% - 72.45%	

Grade Categories

- **Professionalism (5%):** Students' professionalism includes respecting course rules (i.e., the syllabus), respectful, timely, and professional communication, and appropriate conduct in class. Professionalism will be self-graded through monthly reflections. Grades may be altered by the instructor if deemed appropriate.
- **Class Attendance / Participation (15%)** will come from 2 activities in class, usually (a) a beginning of class activity at 9 AM, usually a Kahoot and (b) an on-paper or online activity between 9:30 and 10:15 AM. Students may also be given pop quizzes during class. Most participation activities will be graded leniently for effort/completion, with exception to pop quizzes. To gain participation points, students must complete the activity by the end of class and/or within the provided time, unless otherwise instructed. Students who are not logged in for a Kahoot, but arrive by 9:15 AM, and wish to make it up must follow the excused absence policy, but for the Kahoot only. Arrivals after 9:15 and/or departures before 10:00 AM require the student to also complete the virtual participation form. **The top 3 Kahoot winners will earn +1 point EC for each top performance, up to +10 for the semester.**

Quizzes (15%): Closed-note quizzes will be given on dates listed in the schedule. They will be closed-note and timed; students with accommodations should provide testing forms to the instructor at least 3 days before the scheduled quiz. A student's lowest quiz grade will be dropped from their final grade.

- **Individual Science Project (5%):** Students will have the opportunity to focus on a related course topic, complete a research report, and present it to the class. Students will create a source portfolio throughout the course. More details will be provided by the end of September.
- **2 Midterm Exams (25%):** Exams to help you master course topics and evaluate your understanding will be on paper. They will be in-person, closed-note, and 75 minutes. Each exam will have some short answer and include extra credit. Rescheduling of exams will not be offered without a documented reason at least 1 week ahead of time and/or a documented emergency with a doctor or nurse's note within 24 hours of the missed exam. For more information, see course expectations.
- **Final Exam (20%):** The final exam will be on **12/15** from 8:00 AM – 10:15. It will be comprehensive and evaluate learning from the entire course. It will be in-person & (mostly) closed-note. It may include a variety of question types and may require a scantron. **Students will have 120 minutes** to take the exam; at the 120 minute mark, **15 minutes** will be given for students to consult their **hand-written notes** and modify their answers. Please bring hand-written notes with you. The same makeup exam policy for midterms will apply; only 1 makeup date will be provided per the University's set makeup date.
 - o **Note:** A student will not have to take the final exam if all quiz grades and both midterm grades are at or above 89.45%. If a student meets these criteria and chooses not to take the final exam, their grade will be calculated as 6.25% professionalism; 18.75% participation; 18.75% homework; 18.75% quizzes; 6.25% individual project; and 31.25% midterm exams.

Learning Accommodations

If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) **make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Services** (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; <http://ds.gmu.edu>) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) **talk with me to discuss your needs**. I must have your accommodation(s) on file with DS before you request accommodation(s).

Academic Integrity

What is academic integrity in this course? When you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task using **your own work**. You will perform individual assignments without collaborating with others and/or using generative artificial intelligence (AI) inappropriately. It is assumed students have a sense of personal responsibility in all course work they complete.

It is expected that students adhere to the George Mason University Honor Code: *"Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal and/or lie in matters related to academic work."*

Plagiarism: Anti-plagiarism software will be used in this class for scanning student submissions. Please contact your instructor if you have questions **before you submit an assignment**. Plagiarism includes:

- 1) Presenting the data, words, work, or opinions of someone else—including yourself (*self plagiarism*)—**or AI**—as one's own work **without proper acknowledgment**.
- 2) Borrowing the data, sequence of ideas, arrangement of material, or pattern of thought of someone else, including personal work, **or AI**—without proper acknowledgment.

Fabrication: It is never appropriate to make up data, sources, or other information. Any student caught fabricating information will be referred to the Academic Standards Office.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI): In this course, AI of any type is not appropriate unless used as a research or comprehension tool rather than an answer or task completion tool (unless that task is deemed rudimentary, per the course's and/or assignment specified learning objectives). In any permitted use of AI, citing AI is always required, including a link to the transcript. Citing and verifying any information it provides is always a student's responsibility, and students will be held responsible for incorrect, out-of-context, over-simplified, and/or incorrectly cited information, as well as irrelevant or inaccessible sources provided by AI.

Uses of AI that are **always prohibited** include (a) copying/pasting or uploading course-provided assignments, instructions, procedures, rubrics, etc. into AI; (b) using AI to generate files or text such as data sheets, Excel sheets, reports, or other deliverables for assignments; (c) using AI to make graphs, figures, or tables; (d) using AI to generate text to answer questions and/or directions; and (d) using AI to produce and/or analyze data.

Other examples may be prohibited if deemed as fabrication and/or cheating per the above stipulations. It is always a student's responsibility to explicitly confirm with their instructor whether AI is permitted for a task.

Consequences of academic misconduct: Failure to adhere to the Honor Code and this section's course stipulations will be deemed a violation of academic integrity. Any individual who becomes aware of a violation is bound by honor to take corrective action. Independent of the extent to which these policies have been violated (e.g., a single answer versus a whole assignment), students will be referred to the Academic Standards Office. Consequences will not be decided by your instructor and may range from a course grade deduction or course failure to University suspension or expulsion. **Please see the [Academic Standards website](#) for more information.**

Grading in the age of AI: It is the instructor's right to create course assignments and rubrics that penalize students based on projected results of inappropriate AI use, even without proof of AI use, if said rubrics are aligned with learning outcomes.

Mental and Physical Health

Physical Health Concerns: If you require accommodations for any health-related issues, please email your instructor **proactively** to receive accommodations. **If you suspect that you are sick or have been directed to self-isolate, please quarantine or get tested and email your instructor a medical note.** If needed, call the [Student Health Services](#) to get a note from a nurse; their **phone number** is (703) 993-2831.

Mental Health Concerns: Diminished mental health can interfere with optimal academic performance. However, it is expected that you show responsibility over your health. In pursuit of this, nurture productive habits and behaviors and do not be afraid to seek out resources that can aid in this nurturing.

Counseling and Physiological Services (CAPS) (<http://caps.gmu.edu>) provides confidential mental health services, including telehealth meetings, to support the academic success of students. Their free and confidential psychological services include group counseling, skills-based workshops, case management, crisis consultations, and time-limited individual counseling.

Please contact your instructor about any struggles affecting your coursework, and please email your instructor as early as possible regarding health concerns and/or falling behind.**

Notice of Mandatory Reporting of Sexual Assault, Interpersonal Violence, & Stalking

George Mason University is committed to providing a learning, living and working environment that is free from discrimination and a campus that is free of sexual misconduct and other acts of interpersonal violence in order to promote community well-being and student success.

We encourage students who believe that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted or subjected to sexual misconduct to seek assistance and support. [University Policy 1202: Sexual Harassment and Misconduct](#) speaks to the specifics of Mason's process, the resources, & options available to students.

**Please note that, as a faculty member, your instructor is designated as a *Responsible Employee* and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, & stalking to Mason's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. In other words: *I want to support you, but I am a mandatory reporter.*

If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason's confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC; <https://ssac.gmu.edu/>) at 703-380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS; <https://caps.gmu.edu/>) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance from Mason's Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

Diversity and Inclusivity

Diversity entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Students of diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices are encouraged to voice their opinions or perspectives and hear those of others; however, pursuit of knowledge via the scientific method is the focus of this course, and students may be penalized for submitting answers that do not appropriately meet the learning outcomes of the course.

Common Policies of the University

Please access the GMU Common Policies [here](#).