
George Mason University
College of Science

EVPP 108-DL1, EVPP 108-DL2, and EVPP 108-DP2
Ecosphere: Environmental Science I
Spring 2026 – 3 credits

CLASS DATES/TIMES: **Asynchronous/Online via Canvas** (*Weekly online engagement required*)

INSTRUCTOR: **Dr. Stephanie Schmidt** (sschmi11@gmu.edu)

INSTRUCTOR OFFICE HOURS: [Book here](#) at least 12 hours in advance

TEACHING ASSISTANT: **Anthony Reyes** (areyes28@gmu.edu)

Course Description: Mason Core – Natural Science

This course introduces students to the components and interactions making up Earth's environmental systems. It teaches basic concepts in biological, chemical, physical, and earth sciences in an integrated format complemented by laboratory and field exercises in the EVPP 109 lab class. Taken with EVPP 109, EVPP 108/109 fulfill the 4-credit Natural Science Mason Core With Lab requirement; EVPP 108 alone contributes 3 credits to the Natural Science Mason Core non-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).

EVPP 108 Course Requirements and Expectations

- **Time and Effort Expectations:** EVPP 108 is 3 credits; students should thus expect to devote **9 hours each week to the course** (up to 3 hours for class instruction; up to 6 hours for homework and studying.) See more at <https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/credit-hours/>. While it will be up to a student's discretion to decide when work is completed, **weekly engagement will be required (see below)**.
- **Regular Engagement and Deliverables:** The course topics have been split into modules with weekly to biweekly deadlines. Each module will include lecture videos, lecture video quizzes, suggested and/or required readings, and at least 2 assignments. Successfully completing all work in one weekend may not be achievable. Students may be penalized if technology or other issues are not solved before the deadline.
- **Regular Technology and Materials:**

Use of Canvas. Canvas will be used for all course work and communication including assignment directions and submission, assessments, and announcements. [Use of the Canvas app](#) is encouraged.

Paper or Tablet Notebook. Each student must have a **notebook and/or tablet** to use for **hand-written or stylus-written notes**. Various pictures of **personal and unique** notes or sketches will be submitted by each student onto Canvas, OneDrive, and/or Microsoft Forms during assignments, and may be required to receive a C or greater on assessments or assignments. Please email the instructor before the third week of classes (1/31) with motor concerns that require accommodations, and/or if you believe your typed notes have sufficient additions of hand-drawn sketches, picture additions, or thoughtful organization to earn an exception. Requests cannot be made after 1/31.

Course Textbook. This course will use the **optional** textbook *Environment: The Science Behind the Stories*, 7th edn., by J. Withgott & M. Laposata. Any required reading will be provided to students by the instructor.

Technology. Students **must** ensure reliable internet, Canvas, and other digital literacy (e.g., file uploading, web navigation) consistently throughout the course. Students must have reliable and consistent access to (a) a laptop/ tablet; (b) a smartphone; (c) a digital device capable of taking pictures and recording video and audio with internet; (d) a word processor that can produce .docx or .pdf documents; and (e) other software required for completing and submitting work, for which students will be given at least 7 days' notice.

Be Prepared to Use These Websites/Apps: Microsoft (MS) Suite (e.g., Word, Excel); MS OneDrive, Forms, & Outlook using your GMU account; Poll Everywhere; Kahoot; Canvas; Quizlet; and other accessible sites.

Technology issues. It is each student's responsibility to ensure technological challenges do not interfere with class engagement and/or completion of work in a timely fashion.

Please see the appropriate bullet point for 2 classes of technological issues that you may encounter:

- **For issues such as video links not playing, Canvas tools like Kaltura media missing, Kaltura grades not transferring from the quiz to the grade center, or student files that are not uploading correctly, please:**
 - **1)** contact **IT Services** via Chat or a ticket (<https://its.gmu.edu/chat/>) **and 2)** include Dr. Schmidt (sschmi11@gmu.edu) on the ticket
 - **4)** Continue communication with ITS and continue to CC Dr. Schmidt to ensure the problem is resolved
 - **Extensions will not be provided without continued communication and resolution of issue with ITS in a ticket or email thread that includes Dr. Schmidt.**
- **For issues related to instructor responsibilities—such as the instructor's proper uploading of required materials and/or proper setup of availability settings on Canvas —please contact the instructor first. Emails must describe the issue and must include a picture or screenshot.**

- **Course Communication:** Use of a @gmu.edu address and MS Outlook email is required for course communication. Please check, read, and (if warranted) reply to any emails and/ or updates within 48 hours (i.e., at least every other day); the instructor will do the same.
Emailing the instructor: Please email the instructor (Dr. Schmidt) and/or TA (Anthony Reyes) using the gmu.edu Outlook service and use **EVPP 108 Online** in the subject line if you wish for the email to be read. Any concerns, requests, etc. should be raised to the instructor in email >24 hours before an answer is needed. Please first ensure the syllabus, announcements, or provided directions/overviews do not answer your questions/concerns before sending. Additionally, please see the syllabus for various policies regarding the advanced notice students must provide when emails concern technology issues, extensions, emergencies, etc.
- **Student and 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. Student-created videos should remain within the Canvas course.
- **Submission of Assignments and Assessments:** Students are responsible for timely submissions of assignments/ assessments in the correct **format** (e.g., .docx, .pdf) and in the correct **location**.
 - o **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 unless approved with >72 hrs notice.
 - o **Images** are limited to the following formats: .png, .jpg, .jpeg, .gif, or .pdf extensions.
 - o **Other formats (e.g., .pages, .HEIC or .SVG) will not be accepted and will earn a 0.**
 - o Students must convert HEIC or SVG files using an appropriate method; see Canvas for resources.
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.
- **Timely Submission of Assignments and Assessments:** Due dates and times will be provided on Canvas and weekly to biweekly announcements. Deadlines and late policies are strict and must be adhered to by all students. See the class schedule for late policy due dates, where late course work from any module will not be accepted past Tuesday, May 5, 2026 (5/5) at 5:00 PM.
 - o **Module Quizzes:** Quizzes will have a 1-hr grace period upon closing. Quizzes can also be taken late for up to 1 week and for a 50% deduction.
 - o **Exams:** Exams will close at the deadline and will not be available for students to take once the deadline has passed. 48-hr extensions will only be provided for extreme cases of medical emergencies and/or computer failure that are accompanied by a note from a medical and/or IT professional.
 - o **Homework Extensions: 3 72-Hr Extensions Are Provided, with Communication, For Chosen Work.** Students will have a no-questions asked extension of 72 hours (3 days) on 3 chosen assignments or lecture video quizzes (not quizzes or exams) without penalty. Students must email the instructor before a due date, or within 1 hour of the deadline, to document use of the 72-hour extension. Emails should contain the subject "EVPP 108 Extension" and explicitly state the assignment name.
 - 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 Extension" in the subject, b) explicitly state the name of the assignment, and c) provide documentation of the extenuating circumstance. These steps must be completed within 5 days of the missed deadline.
 - o **1 Makeup Assignment:** Students can resubmit any one assignment and/or assignment part by 5/1 5:00 PM to earn half credit on points they missed.

- **Penalizations for late HW assignments or lecture video quizzes** that are not granted a 72 hour extension or other excused extension will be penalized as follows: 0% if less than 24 hours late; **50% if late by > 1 – 3 days, and 100% if late by more than 96 hours.**
Please note: this policy does not apply to exams or module quizzes, which must be submitted on time.
- **To ensure technology issues do not lead to penalties, please confirm access of resources at least 24 hours ahead of due dates.** Emails sent to the instructor >24 hours before deadlines that appropriately request instructor address of issues, provide receipt of IT Services contact and documentation of the issue, and facilitate the resolution of the issue, will receive an extension deemed appropriate by the instructor. Emails that do not discuss potential steps to resolve the issue will not warrant extensions.
- **Planned Absences:** If a student has plans that render the student unable to engage in the course (e.g., travel with no internet access), the student must work around the schedule to complete work as needed and without extension. If resources, assignments, quizzes, or exams are not accessible to the student before their absence or loss of internet access, **they must email their professor at least 1 week ahead of time to request early access to materials.**
- **See more homework policies under the Grade Category section.**
- ***No Distribution of Course Content:*** ALL class content is the property of GMU and may not be duplicated or used for commercial purposes. Furthermore, sharing of course content is also not allowed. A 2-percent drop in final grades will be applied to every student in the course if any materials unique to this semester are uploaded to online websites, including discussion sites, Generative AI, CourseHero, Chegg, Discord, etc.
- ***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. All students are required to pledge to neither give nor receive **unauthorized aid** while working on/completing **any** work. In this context, “aid” refers to resources beyond an **individual student’s own book or instructor-provided readings; notes; work completed for this current (spring 2026) class (EVPP 108); and/or experiences. Receiving “aid”** thus refers to any use of external resources including other people in or out of the current course; websites, readings, or videos; previous work in this course; and any form of artificial intelligence (AI). Conversely, **providing “aid”** refers to giving another student one’s own notes or sketches, collaborating with others on any submission of work, or uploading course content online and/or via other avenues.

Aid is often encouraged, but under a specific set of conditions. Other times, aid will be prohibited.

Please thoroughly read the page 7 of the syllabus for further information about academic honesty and permissions in this course.

Course Structure and Organization

The course will be entirely conducted on Canvas, though some activities may be required to be completed outside of Canvas. The course has been split up into several modules (1, 2, 3) and sub-modules (e.g., 1A, 1B, 1C), most of which will be open for 1 to 2 weeks (see schedule). The Canvas “Modules” page will show these submodules ordered chronologically. For the sake of brevity, “submodules” and “modules” will be used interchangeably.

Students are responsible for navigating through all material in each module and ensuring they complete all required work, which may include recorded lecture presentations and/or Youtube videos with embedded quizzes (“lecture” or “video” quizzes); reading, research, application, and discussion homework that may build on itself in one or multiple (sub)modules, end-of-module quizzes (“module quizzes” or “quizzes”); and other engagement activities as warranted. **See “Grade Categories” for more information.**

Module content may not unlock unless students have completed previously assigned work. **In other words, if a student falls behind, they must make up their missed work before they can catch up**, even if means submitting blank assignments.

Assessments, comprised of module quizzes (2 total) and exams (2 total), will be given periodically throughout the course. All assessments will allow for use of student notes saved in the Canvas course, and other Canvas course sites/resources (e.g., past quizzes, lecture slides, etc.). Quizzes will be housed in their respective sub-module provided on the schedule, while exams will be provided in separate modules; exams will be open for 2-5 days and will be cumulative. Quizzes and exams will include a pre-test where students upload the paper (or tablet) notes they have used to prepare, which can include filling out study guides (by hand or stylus).

While assessments will be open-Canvas-course, they are otherwise closed-note. They will require use of **HonorLock** to capture student IDs (physical Mason or state/national IDs required) and environment space. HonorLock will also be used to monitor student’s screen, restrict copying/pasting material, and control/monitor web use. Finally, HonorLock may or may not be used to continuously record students during the quizzes/exams using required laptop cameras; phones are not acceptable. Please enroll in the in-person lecture if you are not comfortable with the privacy concessions of this online course.

Finally, students should be physically and technologically comfortable recording and posting a video of themselves for a discussion and/or presentation, which will be required at least once in the course.

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>Class Engagement – Lecture Video Quizzes</i>	25.0%		
<i>Homework</i>	25.0%		
<i>Poster Multi-Part Project</i>	5.0%		
<i>Quizzes</i>	10.0%		
<i>Midterm Exam</i>	15.0%		
<i>Final Exam</i>	20.0%		
	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

Class Engagement (25%): Class engagement will be comprised of graded video quizzes from recorded lectures or YouTube videos; lecture video quizzes will allow for multiple attempts such that each student can master the questions. PowerPoint slides will be provided as PDFs.

Homework (25%): Homework (HW) assignments are differentiated from class engagement as it requires further work by the student(s) and will be graded more stringently. Assignments will include a variety of activities and will be provided on the course schedule ≥ 7 days before their due date. Using the numbering presented in the schedule, such activities include (2) basic concept assignments (e.g., reading or video responses), (3) scientific inquiry assignments, (4) Wiki or discussion posts, and (5) reflections, where reflections are also the means by which students will self-evaluate their professionalism. Some work will be collaborative. If students choose to do collaborative work on their own, they are still responsible for the same amount of work as that which a group is completing.

Makeup grade: Beyond three 72-hr extensions, each student will have the opportunity to make up one homework assignment even after it is graded, but only before 3/18. They must email the professor about their choice and submit the re-do no later than 3/18. Changes to initial work should be made clear.

Poster Multi-Part Project (5%): A scaffolded poster project will be completed iteratively throughout the semester using Onedrive Powerpoint, Canva (a graphic design app), and/or Google Slides. Students will be required to choose a location to research and relate course content to the location in several informational signs and/or posters, similar to what is found at a park or nature center. More information will be provided for each iterative assignment, but students need to initially share a blank project with editing privileges that they will work on throughout the semester. Any discussion or reflection related to the poster will count as the Poster Project and not general homework.

Quizzes (10%): 2-3 quizzes will be administered on Canvas throughout the semester to help students master course topics, reflect on progress, and prepare for exams. Quizzes cannot be submitted past the deadline. They will be open note and timed. Students will have 2 attempts on each quiz; grades will be the **highest** of the attempts, where students must wait 5 minutes between attempts.

Midterm Exam (15%): A midterm exam will be administered to help students master course topics and evaluate learning. **The exam will be closed-note, but open-Canvas, and open for at least 48 hours per the schedule;** students will have **90 minutes** to take the exam once they start, and will have one attempt allowed. Before taking an exam, students must upload proof of their unique hand-written or tablet-written notes reflecting course content that they have used to study and/or that they believe will be beneficial to taking the exam, which will be a large component of the student's midterm exam grade.

Final Exam (20%): The final exam will be administered similar to the midterm exam, but will be comprehensive and 150 minutes long. The exam will be open for 2 days— **5/8 and 5/9**. Students must earn over 60% to pass the course. *Students who score >89.45 on both quizzes and midterm exam can opt out of the final exam.*

Learning Accommodations

If you have a documented learning disability or other condition affecting academic performance, **make sure it is documented via Disability Services** to determine the accommodations you need (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; <http://ds.gmu.edu>). Please **talk with your instructor to discuss your needs**. The instructor and lab coordinator must have your accommodation(s) on file with DS **before** you request accommodation(s). Requests for accommodations **will not be accepted retroactively**.

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**. 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 lab observations, 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, 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: As it is often impossible and time-consuming to prove inappropriate AI use, 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 penalties are aligned with learning outcomes and/or academic integrity. In particular, the instructor has the right to provide a 100% penalty to grades based on aforementioned projections even if an Academic Standards Office Honor Code referral is not made (for example, fake sources, irrelevant sources/citations, incorrect citations, improbable vocabulary / depth of responses, etc.), even if a rubric with such penalties are not made available ahead of time.

Additionally, the instructor has the right to request follow-up zoom or in-person meetings where students explain the meaning behind certain answers and vocabulary used when patterns aligned with AI emerge in responses, where failure to meet and express understanding of responses may result in a 100% penalty or Academic Standards Office Honor Code referral.

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 and/or coordinator 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 lab 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 faculty members, your lab instructor and lab coordinator are designated as *Responsible Employees* and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, & stalking to Mason's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. In other words: *we want to support you, but we are mandatory reporters.***

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 work that does not pursue knowledge creation through the scientific method.

Common Policies of the University

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