
George Mason University
College of Science

EVPP 108 – Ecosphere I: Environmental Science I

Spring 2026 – 3 credits

Sections 001 and P01

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>Peterson Hall</u> Rm # 2413
OFFICE HOURS	<u>Book here</u> at least 24 hours 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 Mason Core – Natural Science course requirements. The combination of EVPP 108 and EVPP 109 (lab) fulfill 4 credits for the Natural Science with lab requirement. Read 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 Structure and Organization

Course Activities

Classes will include participation activities, lecture presentations from the instructor, videos, worksheets, individual/group activities, discussions, website tutorials/activities, 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 various on-paper or digital assignments. **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 Monday and the start of a Wednesday 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>Class Attendance/Participation</i>		180 pts	15.0%
<i>Homework</i>		180 pts	20.0%
<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

- **Class Attendance / Participation (15%)** will usually come from 1 to 2 activities in class, usually (a) a Kahoot at the beginning of class (9 AM), and (b) an on-paper or online activity between 9:30 and 10:15 AM. **The top 3 Kahoot winners will earn +1 point EC for each top performance, up to 3 times.** Most participation activities will be graded leniently for effort/completion, at the instructor's discretion. 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 talk to the professor before leaving class. Arrivals after 9:15 and/or departures before 10:00 AM will not be allowed makeup opportunities.
- **Homework (20%):** Homework (HW) assignments require work by the student(s) outside of class and will be graded more stringently than participation work. Assignments will include a variety of activities and will be provided on Canvas ≥ 46 hours before their due date. Such activities include basic concept assignments (e.g., reading or video responses), scientific inquiry assignments, discussion posts, or other assignments aligned with course objectives. Some work will be collaborative.

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 or case study, complete a research report or poster(s), and potentially present it to the class. The assignment will be iterative with various due dates. More details will be provided before March.
- **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. The instructor has the right to provide a limited set of makeup options which students should be flexible to accommodate. For more information, see course expectations.
- **Final Exam (20%):** The [final exam](#) will be **Monday, May 11th (5/11)** 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.

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 without the final exam category (e.g., with all other categories scaled out of 80%).

Course Requirements and Expectations

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

- **Required Technology & Course Materials:** Students do not need to purchase a book, but should have a **lined notebook, pen/pencil, and digital wifi-connected device** (e.g., phone, laptop, or tablet) that they can bring to class. Please be prepared to submit pictures of handwritten notes for some homework assignments, which will require a smartphone with internet and camera for uploading pictures of handwritten notes, OR another means of taking and uploading pictures. Students must also have access to a word processor and a working webcam and/or phone camera with a microphone. Required software download/use may be announced in class, and will include Mason-approved software (e.g., Microsoft suite, Zotero, etc).
- **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 M-F. 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), or 72 hours otherwise. Please book an office hours meeting if you wish to have an immediate response to a question.

- **Lectures, Attendance, Participation:** Students are required to **attend and participate** in **in-person lectures**, and will be graded on their contributions to various participation activities. Each class will include 1 to 2 participation activities, which may be logged at any time between 9:00 AM and 10:15 AM. Some participation quizzes will be closed-note to prepare students for assessments. Participation cannot be made up, but should be made up on a student's own time to keep up. A student will have 12 total participation grades dropped (~6 total absences / late arrivals / early departures.)
- **Zoom Lectures:** Lectures will be recorded via Zoom. Access to live sessions will not be provided to students, but recordings will be posted after class for students who miss class and wish to catch up (NOT to make up participation), OR for students who wish to rewatch lectures to study.
- **Absences:** Students can make up missed work only if documentation of a **medical emergency** is provided within 3 days of the missed class, OR a **scheduling issue** is discussed with the instructor at least 1 class ahead of time. Foreseeable issues with reliable attendance must be discussed with the instructor before week 3.
- **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.
- **Formatting Images:** .png, .jpg, .jpeg, .gif, or .pdf extensions are acceptable for images.
 - o Other image formats (e.g., **.HEIC** or **.SVG**) will not be accepted and **will earn a 0**. 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 at the beginning or end of classes. Deadlines are strict and must be adhered to by all students.
 - 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, and received before 5/5 at 5 PM, will be penalized as follows: 0% if less than 1 hour late; **50% if more than 1 hour late and < 5 days late; and 100% if > 5 days late.**
 - o Besides the final exam, any work received after 5/5 at 5 PM will not be graded.

- **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).
- **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 if they wish to have control over the makeup time/date. Dr. Schmidt has the right to govern the makeup exam date/time at a time that works for her and within 5 days of the missed exam.
- ***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 of this syllabus below for more detailed information.

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 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—including that provided by browsers or software—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, where applicable. 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, inaccessible, or fake sources provided by AI.

Prohibited uses of AI: Uses of AI that are always prohibited include copying/pasting or uploading course-provided assignments, instructions, procedures, rubrics, etc. into AI; using AI to generate/fill out files or text such as PDF annotations, Excel sheets, reports, or other deliverables; using AI to make graphs, figures, or tables; using AI to generate text to answer questions and/or fulfill prompts; using AI to produce and/or analyze data; and/or using AI to provide references that a student does not verify in terms of their existence, content, and/or relevance.

Please Review This Information From The Academic Standards Office:

AI and Grammarly: “Many individuals have been using Grammarly since it launched in 2009 to help them refine their writing... in May 2023, they launched an AI feature that is automatically set to “on”. If you are taking a course where the use of Generative AI is limited, it is important you go in to your settings and deactivate it when you are doing assignments in that course.” **For this course, use of Grammarly is not permitted if it helps you discuss or connect ideas in a way that you would not be able to communicate without the use of AI.**

AI and Web Extensions: “Many use Generative AI for personal purposes... This involves the use of extensions on your web browser. It is important that you deactivate those unless you have permission to use Generative AI in your course”. **Examples of prohibited extensions include those that will answer, or provide example answers to, assignments or deliverables to be completed by you.**

Other examples may be prohibited if deemed as fabrication and/or cheating. It is always a student’s responsibility to explicitly confirm with their instructor whether, and how, AI may be permitted for a given 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.

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

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).

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](#).