

BIOL/EVPP 318: CONSERVATION BIOLOGY

SPRING 2020

TR 9-10:15 AM Innovation Hall 136 3 credits

Instructor: Dr. Travis Gallo

Office: 3018 David King

Office hours: 11:30am-1pm Tuesdays or by appointment

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Course Description:

This course focuses on the scientific foundations of conservation. We will address major threats to biodiversity and discuss approaches for overcoming these threats in ways that balance the needs of people and nature. Students will gain a greater understanding of the major principles and contemporary issues in Conservation Biology, while practicing techniques for communicating conservation science to diverse audiences. This interactive class emphasizes student involvement and participation. Although there will be regular lectures by the instructor and guest speakers, the focus of the course will be on student-led in-class discussions, writing assignments, and presentations.

Assigned Readings:

Course materials include articles from the primary literature and occasionally from other media sources. All readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Textbook (optional):

Edited by Navjot S Sodhi and Paul Ehrlich. Conservation Biology for All. Open Source:
<https://conbio.org/publications/free-textbook/>

Discussions:

During many class periods we will have an in-class discussion focused on papers from the scientific literature. Typically, a team of 4-5 students will be assigned to lead each discussion section. The lead students are expected to submit 3-5 discussion questions on the reading for posting on canvas no later than the due date posted on Blackboard. Students not leading discussion must come to each discussion section with brief, typed answers to these discussion questions and be prepared to discuss and critique the paper. At the start of the discussion, the lead students will provide a thorough yet concise (no more than 5 minutes!) overview of the paper. In the summary, you should: 1) review the major points of the paper, 2) highlight novel results and conclusions, 3) relate the paper to other readings or discussions in class or your own knowledge, and 4) raise questions or objections you have with the methods, results, and/or conclusions. Following the summary, the lead students should then be prepared to actively generate and facilitate discussion for the rest of the allocated time. 50% of your grade will be leading a discussion, and the other 50% will be participating in non-led discussions.

Term Paper & Oral Presentation:

Each student will use the primary literature to research and prepare a literature review on a conservation biology topic. Your paper should consolidate what is known about your topic, highlight information gaps, and set priorities for future research and practice. More detailed information on this assignment will be provided early in the semester, including examples of review papers. The paper will be submitted mid-semester, at which point I will grade them and return edits. Students will then be expected to revise the paper according to feedback, and submit a revised paper along with a letter with explaining how comments were addressed towards the end of the semester.

Each student will also present their paper topic before the class as a 3 minute Ignite Talk. More details will be provided.

One-pager Policy Handout:

Each student will be required to write a 1-page policy brief on the topic of your term paper. More details on this assignment will follow.

Participation:

Attending class is important. There will be 8 participation assignments throughout the semester. These will consist of “responses” to various topics we will be discussing in class. Each response will be worth 5 points and you will need to obtain 25 points for full participation credit. For this assignment there is built in flexibility. Note that I will offer 3 more participation assignments than needed, so you essentially have 3 free absence – no questions asked.

Midterms and Final Exam:

We will have two midterm and a final exam. The midterm will cover all material up to the previous class period. The final exam will be designed to encourage students to review and synthesize all course material. Exam questions will be taken from lectures, discussions, presentations, and assigned readings. Everything discussed in class is fair game, even if I do not post it on Blackboard. An alternative exam date will only be approved if you speak with me at least several weeks in advance with a valid reason.

Grading

Point allocation for evaluation of students (**all late assignments will incur a 10% drop in grade per day**):

	TOTAL POINTS
Term Paper	
First Draft	100 points
Revision	50 points
Oral Presentation (speed talk)	50 points
Discussions	25 points
1-page Policy Brief	50 points
Participation/Attendance	25 points
Exam I	50 points
Exam II	50 points
Final	100 points
TOTAL	500 points

Cutoffs for grades will be based on the following percentages: 100-98 = A+; 98-93 = A; 92-89 = A-; 88-87 = B+; 86-83 = B; 82-79 = B-; 78-77 = C+; 76-70 = C; 69-60 = D; ≤ 59 = F.

Lecture Slides:

I will do my best to post a PDF of the lecture slides by midnight the night before class. Please note that portions of the posted lecture slides will be missing information that can be filled in during lecture.

Mental Health:

Diminished mental health, including significant stress, mood changes, excessive worry, or problems with eating and/or sleeping can interfere with optimal academic performance. The source of symptoms might be strictly related to your course work; if so, please speak with me. However, problems with relationships, family worries, loss, or a personal struggle or crisis can also contribute to decreased academic performance and I recognize that.

Counseling and Physiological Services (CAPS) <http://caps.gmu.edu> provides mental health services to support the academic success of students. Their free and confidential psychological services include group counseling, skills-based workshops, case management, crisis consultations, time-limited individual counseling as well as faculty and staff consultation. They also have great online resources under the Well-Being tab.

In the event I suspect you need additional support, I will express my concerns and the reasons for them, and remind you of these resources that might be helpful to you. It is not my intention to know the details of what might be bothering you, but simply to let you know I am concerned and that help, if needed, is available.

Getting help is a smart and courageous thing to do -- for yourself *and* for those who care about you.

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking:

As a faculty member, I am designated as a "Responsible Employee," and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason's confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) 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.

Academic Integrity:

It is expected that students adhere to the George Mason University Honor Code as it relates to integrity regarding coursework and grades. The Honor Code reads as follows: "To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the University Community have set forth this: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal and/or lie in matters related to academic work." More information about the Honor Code, including definitions of cheating, lying, and plagiarism, can be found at the Office of Academic Integrity website at <http://oai.gmu.edu>

Special Needs:

If you have special needs for lectures, assignments or tests, please contact me as soon as possible after the first day of class to explain these needs. Please also speak with me anytime if something should develop later in the semester.