Syllabus

Global Biodiversity Governance
EVPP 475/575

Spring 2025

4:30 – 7:10 PM on Thursdays

Aquia Building 213

Introduction

Welcome to the Global Biodiversity Governance (EVPP 475/EVPP 575) course. Biodiversity governance implies that all actors in society — government, business, and civil society—have a role in conserving biological resources. This course discusses the mechanisms and frameworks steering contemporary international biodiversity governance initiatives and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Instructor

Dr. Rhema Bjorkland *[Rhema, she/her/hers]*
Email: RBjorkla@gmu.edu
Phone: (240) 685-6903
Office hours: By appointment

Course Prerequisites

Completion of a minimum of one environmentally focused social science course or by permission of the instructor.

Credits

3 credits

Course Profile

This course examines global biodiversity governance from a social science perspective. It introduces regime and governance literature and draws on these and a variety of other sources to examine key theoretical concepts. Using empirical examples, the course explores biodiversity-related policies, platforms, and instruments in the intergovernmental arena (e.g., multilateral agreements and science-policy interfaces) and private arenas (e.g., sustainable forestry and seafood certification schemes). The main activities include lectures, student-led discussions, and a simulation of an intergovernmental

negotiating session. As course instructor, I will endeavor to help you expand your knowledge base of global biodiversity governance and develop skills that complement your academic portfolio.

You will (further) develop your own views on contemporary governance issues by writing a proposal for a paper that combines theoretical and empirical aspects of governance. Students registered for EVPP 575 will practice applying policy-relevant social science concepts (e.g., policy effectiveness, stakeholder participation, power relations) **by expanding this proposed outline into a written paper**.

Course Relationship to Existing Programs
The course can be taken by any student meeting the prerequisite, but it is especially designed to be part of the following undergraduate and graduate programs. Please check with your advisor on the relevance to your specific program.
Environmental Science and Policy, M.S., all concentrations, but especially:
- Conservation Science and Policy (COSP)
- Environmental Science and Policy (EVSP)
- Environmental Management (EVMG)

Environmental Science and Public Policy, Ph.D.
Environmental and Sustainability Studies, B.A.
Environmental Science, B.S., all concentrations, but especially:
- Conservation (CNSV)
- Human and Ecosystem Response to Climate Change (HERC)

Global and Environmental Change, B.S.
Biology, B.S.
Environmental Policy minor
Sustainability Studies minor

Course Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes

This course will examine international public and private biodiversity-related governance from a conservation science and policy perspective. At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:
1. Identify the main governance theories
2. Explain empirical examples of global biodiversity governance
3. Analyze an empirical case using theoretical constructs
4. Debate different approaches to governance
5. Share their opinion on the impact of governance on mitigating biodiversity loss

Educational Activities Associated with this Course

The course includes the following activities:
- Prepare for and attend lectures
- Lead one discussion/review session
- Review a classmate's anonymous short assignment
- Participate in general group discussions and the simulation activity

The course content is provided through literature, lectures, group discussions, and a simulation exercise. The latter weeks of the course will focus on applying the course concepts in preparing a proposal outline for a paper or thesis.

We will learn about governance theory through academic literature (see learning material), and students are expected to read and prepare to discuss the material before the lectures. These discussions are designed to: develop an understanding of the governance literature; provide an opportunity to discuss different visions of governance to develop your own views of the issues; and practice the application of theoretical constructs by analyzing empirical cases. The literature, lectures, and simulation exercise will provide you with case studies and empirical examples of a diversity of governance approaches.

The paper assignment involves two steps: 1) an informal presentation to the class of your ideas for the paper; 2) a written proposal for the paper. The final exam for the class will be a presentation of your proposal. Your presentation should highlight your vision of using a governance approach to your proposal topic. You will receive further instructions on the presentations later in the semester.

There is an additional assignment for **EVPP 575 registrants—the submission of a comprehensive paper—** based on the proposal you have developed.

Assessment Strategy

The following are the minimum requirements for passing the course:
1. Attendance during scheduled class times (no grade, but prerequisite to pass)
2. Submission of four (4) written short assignments based on the governance literature
3. Review of a classmate's anonymous short assignment
4. Outline of a thesis or research proposal
5. A presentation to the class on the thesis or research proposal (final exam)
6. Submission of a final paper based on the research proposal **(EVPP 575 students only)**

Participation in all course activities is mandatory. In-person attendance at all scheduled class times is expected and contributes to the participation score (see below). A satisfactory attendance record is no more than a single absence due to illness or unforeseen circumstances communicated to me via email or phone notification before the start of the scheduled class or activity. Students should come to class ready to participate in all activities and produce assignments on the due dates. Please contact me early on if you anticipate or experience major life-changing events that may impact your timely submission of your assignments or in-class participation. Your participation assessment is based on volunteering to lead a discussion on one of the assigned readings and on contributing feedback to the other classmates on their proposal assignment and presentation. Details will be provided during the first meeting of the course.

Grading Criteria

Assignment	Percentage Contribution to the Total Grade	
	EVPP 475	EVPP 575
In-class participation and discussion	15%	10%
Four (4) short assignments on the literature	40%	25%
Peer review	15%	10%
Proposal	20%	20%
Paper	—	25%
Final presentation	10%	10%
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**

Letter Grade – EVPP 475	Letter Grade – EVPP 575
A (100-93%)	**A (**100-90%)
A- (92-90%)	
B+ (89-86%)	**B** (89-80%)
B (85-83%)	
B- (82-80%)	
C (79-70%)	**C** (79-70%)
D (69-60%)	**D (69-60%)**
F (<60%)	**F (<60%)**

Scores will be summed based on a 0–100 scale. **Grading on a curve will not be applied**. The minimum passing grade is 60%. The conversion into letter grades (A–D, F) is shown above.

Academic Integrity

George Mason University is an Honor Code university. Students are required to be familiar with and comply with the Mason Honor Code requirements; please see the [Office for Academic Integrity](#) for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. Three fundamental principles to follow at all times are: (1) all work submitted must be your own, as defined by the assignment; (2) when you use the work, the words, or the ideas of others, including fellow students or online sites, you give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules for a particular assignment or exam, ask for clarification.

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using the appropriate format for this class. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and will not be tolerated in the academic setting.

Generative-AI:
All work submitted in this course must be your own original work; use of AI writing tools, such as ChatGPT, are prohibited in this course and will be considered a violation of academic integrity. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Academic Integrity. Student work may be analyzed using an originality detection tool focused on Generative AI tools.
No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism or the course policy on Generative AI, please see me.

Communication

I will respond within two hours to emails and calls within normal business hours. Responses outside of that time frame may take longer. Students must use their MasonLive email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.

Disability Accommodations

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking any accommodations for this class, please first visit http://ds.gmu.edu/ or Disability Services in the Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email:ods@gmu.edu | Phone: (703) 993-2474 for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process.

If you have been granted disability accommodation, I encourage you to **provide the** faculty contact sheet regarding the approved disability accommodation to me **at the beginning of the semester**, even if you are unsure whether you will seek such accommodations. Per university regulations, **disability accommodations can only be put in place after the instructor has received the accommodations notice and are not retroactive**.

Student Resources

- Stearns Center student support resources: https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu//student-support-resources-on-campus/
- Mason COVID Health√™ https://www2.gmu.edu/mason-covid-health-check
- COVID-19 Evaluation and Testing https://shs.gmu.edu/services/covidservices/