
George Mason University
College of Science

EVPP 490 – SOIL, PLANTS, & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Spring 2023 – 3 credits

INSTRUCTOR:	Dr. Stephanie Schmidt (Dr. Steph, Professor Schmidt, etc) email: sschmi11@gmu.edu
CLASS DATES/TIMES:	Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:00 PM – 4:15 PM (face to face, synchronous lectures)
CLASS LOCATION:	East Building Rm 134
OFFICE HOURS:	Email first when planning to attend: 1) Tuesday 1:30 – 2:30 PM, David King Hall Rm 3079A 2) Friday 2:00 – 3:00 PM, Panera (outside on nice days) 3) Email me and propose a time at least 48 hours in advance

Course Description

Note: This course assumes that students have a general understanding of biology, environmental science, and ecology.

In terrestrial ecosystems, soils and plants play significant roles in regulating ecosystem services like water purification, nutrient cycling, and erosion control, and are of utmost importance in sustaining wildlife populations and ecosystem integrity as fundamental components of wildlife habitat and niches. In this class, we will take a deep dive into soils and plants under the context of habitat and wildlife management to support student's understanding of more holistic conservation and management of wildlife. After covering basics of soil science, plant biology, and community ecology, case studies including forestlands, grasslands, croplands, and urban ecosystems will expose students to soil–plant–wildlife interactions in various settings.

Course Objectives

- 1) Describe the importance of the living soil system for ecosystem functioning, plant survival/growth/reproduction, and wildlife habitat and niches
- 2) Assess the importance of a diversity of plant anatomies and physiologies under the lens of organismal, population, community, and ecosystem ecology
- 3) Identify multi-trophic interactions between soils, plants, and consumers in terrestrial ecosystems to inform assessments of, and management decisions for, wildlife habitats
- 4) Gain a hands-on and research-oriented experience in both soil science and botany through field surveys and a literature review to supplement a habitat assessment and/or management plan

Course Expectations

- **Course Communication:** Per university policy, students are required to use a @gmu.edu email address to communicate with me (sschmi11@gmu.edu). Please read/respond to emails within 24 hours (business day hours). Please check your email **the morning and night of class meeting days (T/R)**. When sending emails, use "490" in the subject. If your concern is urgent, please [flag the email as high importance](#).
- **Privacy:** Student email addresses will remain private by default. Students can communicate with one another by sending emails in Blackboard. Student permission given on the introductory survey will serve as explicit permission for email addresses to be shared throughout the remainder of the course.
- **Regular use of Blackboard (Bb):** Any announcements will be made on Bb (and sent via email). Weekly schedules will be posted to Bb on Tuesdays before class. Course materials, assignments, assessments, etc. will be uploaded on Bb. *It is your responsibility to stay up to date by using Blackboard.*
- **Lectures and Deliverables:** You are expected to come to each class period **on time (3:00 PM)**. You are responsible for timely submissions of assignments and assessments. If this course is overly demanding, please get in touch with me or the GMU counseling services, outlined on page 5 (<http://caps.gmu.edu>).
- **Technology:** Be familiar with [use of proper Netiquette](#). Ensure access to **(a)** a laptop/tablet that can be used in class; **(b)** an app-enabled smartphone or tablet; **(c)** photo/video software, & **(d)** a word processor. *Note: the ESP Department has laptops you can rent out if you do not have a laptop you can bring to class.*
- **No sale of course content:** ALL class content is the property of GMU. It may not be duplicated in any format or used for commercial purposes without instructor permission.
- **Academic honesty:** George Mason University requires all members of its community to be honest in all their endeavors. As members of the Mason community, **students pledge on their honor to neither give nor receive unauthorized aid while working or completing assignments and examinations.**
 - a. When producing assignments or assessments, EACH piece of information that you provide that is NOT common sense requires citations of **(a) academic readings** or **(b) lecture slides/discussions**.
 - b. ChatGPT or other AI can be used (a) when encouraged by instructor, or (b) as long as each point made by ChatGPT or AI is subsequently researched and cited using an academic reading or lecture slides/discussions (see bullet a.) ChatGPT or other AI must be cited when it is used, even after its responses have been edited to cite primary or secondary sources.
 - c. **Similarly, students pledge not to reuse assignments from previous or concurrent classes without EXPLICIT authorization from the instructor. If you do not ask, a violation will be honor coded.**

Please see more on page 5 under **Academic Integrity**.

Failure to adhere to the Honor Code will result in the student being "honor coded" (i.e., instructor reporting an honor code violation). Consequences will range from a letter grade deduction to an F on the assignment in question, but will be first reviewed by the Honor Committee, independent of the extent to which the honor code has been violated (i.e., full copy of an assignment, or one paragraph of an assignment copied).

Any individual who becomes aware of a violation of the Mason Honor Code is bound by honor to take corrective action. For more information, visit the Mason Honor Code website.

Course Structure and Organization

Class Activities

Classes will include lectures, videos, group/individual exercises, discussions, and videos. Some activities may require laptop or tablet use. Additionally, some classes will be off campus and may be scheduled outside of normal meeting times (see *Class Engagement* → *Field Trips* below).

Outside of class, students will be responsible for completing readings, watching videos, and completing assignments and assessments including Blackboard discussion and/or Wiki posts, on-paper drawings and/or handouts, and bi-weekly assessments. **Assignments will be explained in-class and via Bb announcements with clear expectations at least 48 hours before the due date.**

Grade Categories

Class Engagement: You are expected to engage in each scheduled class, including any field trips. 37% of this category (56 pts) will come from attendance. The remaining 63% (94 pts) will come from engagement and class activities, work from which may need to be finalized outside of class.

If you are unable to make class, please email me at least 3 hours ahead of time (before 12:00 PM) and, if you wish to be excused, provide a plan for receiving class credit. Emails less than 3 hours ahead of time will be ignored unless an emergency is evidenced. Because announcements may be made exclusively in class, it is your responsibility to request updates on announcements if you will be missing class.

Field trips are likely in this course and important for your learning and success. Trips will be both on and off campus. Trip times and transportation are TBD, but trips will be scheduled at least 1 week in advance. I will do my best to accommodate schedules. **If you cannot attend a scheduled field trip, it is your responsibility to make it up on your own time.**

Homework: Homework (HW) assignments will be on paper or on Blackboard and will be assigned at least one week in advance. **Optional assignments (<30 min) will be provided with less notice (e.g., 3 week days); students are required to complete half of these assignments for full HW credit.** These will be clearly delineated. Please pay attention in class + check the schedule to ensure clarity.

Homework deadlines will be strictly enforced. Late submissions are accepted for up to one week (7 days); 5% of the grade will be subtracted for each day late (rounded up). Submissions turned in after 1 week will receive an automatic 50% **maximum** unless a doctor's note is provided by the initial deadline. **Two homework assignments will be granted a 48 hour grace period.**

Bi-weekly Assessments: Students' understanding of the lecture material will be tested in bi-weekly assessments on Blackboard. 5 short assessments and 2 long assessments will replace quizzes and exams. The assessments will be open note and consist of multiple assessment styles (e.g., multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false questions, essays). Each assessment will be open from Saturday at 12:01 AM on the week it is assigned until Monday at 11:59 PM the following week. Assessments may include a reflection section for your personal development and to provide course feedback.

Given a 3 day window for completing each assessment, no make-ups will be allowed.

Student-led Discussion(s): Discussion is critical in higher-level undergraduate courses. Each student will be assigned to lead at least one discussion in class based on a reading, topic, case study, or field work. Further information will be provided at least 2 weeks before the discussion will take place.

Final Paper and Presentation: Each student will produce a final paper akin to a soil and plant inventory / assessment / management plan at a visited field site, to be due the week of finals. Further instruction will be provided before spring break. Iterative assignments during the semester will aid in its completion. Each student will also give a presentation during the last 2 weeks of class.

Grading Schema

Blackboard 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 a grade on Blackboard and your final grade becomes updated as a result of the redress.

<i>Class Engagement</i>	150 pts	25.0%
<i>Homework</i>	75 pts	12.5%
<i>Short Assessments (5)</i>	75 pts	12.5%
<i>Long Assessments (2)</i>	90 pts	15.0%
<i>Student-led Discussion(s)</i>	60 pts	10.0%
<i>End-of-semester Writing Project & Presentation</i>	150 pts	25.0%
	600 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%	

COVID-19 Accommodations

COVID-19 has changed all of our lives. Stacked responsibilities can create scheduling difficulties. While self-care and your health should be your top priority, please also prioritize the learning opportunity that this in-person class will present. Please help me make it mutually beneficial for the class as a whole and for your student and professional development by showing up to class in person.

- 1) Lectures may or may not be recorded, but Zoom sessions will not be offered.
- 2) Missed attendance can be made up in a myriad of ways—**it is up to you to propose a way.**
A promising option is to email me about coming to office hours.

If you fall behind, do not hesitate to communicate with me as early as you can. I am very approachable!

F2F Safety Requirements

Please be respectful of your individual classmate’s choices to mask or not mask. If you require accommodations for high-risk housemates/family, COVID quarantining/isolation, or other health-related issues, please email me. See <https://www2.gmu.edu/safe-return-campus> for the August 2022 health and safety precautions and procedures outlined on the University Safe Return to Campus webpage. **If you suspect that you are sick or have been directed to self-isolate, please quarantine or get tested.**

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. Whether the source of symptoms is course work related or due to problems with relationships, families, or personal struggles, getting help is a smart and courageous thing to do -- for yourself *and* for those who care about you.

Please note that **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, time-limited individual counseling as well as faculty and staff consultation. They also have great online resources under the Well-Being tab.

Finally, you are welcome to reach out to me in person or via email about any struggles affecting your course work. Please see the note on page 6 about my identity as a mandatory reporter.

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 does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task using novel ideas. When you rely on someone else's (or an AI's) work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form.

Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions.

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>. However, please note that **plagiarism includes the following:**

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

The University has made software available to the faculty to use for scanning student submissions; **it will be used in this class**. Contact me if you have any uncertainty **before you submit an assignment**.

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.

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, and the options available to students.