

**The Challenge of Biodiversity**  
**EVPP 619 - 3 credits**  
**Spring, 2024**  
**Course Syllabus**

<b>Instructor</b>	Dr. Sudha Balajapalli
<b>Class Meeting</b>	M: 4:30pm to 7:10pm, online
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:sbalaja2@gmu.edu">sbalaja2@gmu.edu</a>
<b>Office Hours</b>	By appointment

**Objective of the Course:** The principal objective is to enrich students' understanding of solving problems in conservation and conservation biology. Such problems require sound science but also include considerations that go beyond science; in lectures, readings, presentations, and papers the class will work with real and sometimes very current problems. This course is intended to give students the necessary background to pursue advanced studies and careers that involve both international and domestic issues in conservation and conservation biology. Major themes include finding solutions, the value of conflicting perspectives, and the importance of learning to engage others effectively.

**Course Prerequisites:** Graduate Standing & 6 credit hours of graduate course work or permission of instructor.

**Course Overview and Content:** This course emphasizes effective communication, research skills, and critical thinking, and provides opportunities to further your skills. Active discussions, presentations, assignments, and your research paper (or alternative assignment) are the assessments used in this course. Assigned reading for this course includes portions of two textbooks, as well as journal and newspaper articles. One textbook for this class is available for download at no charge (see below.) The other textbook is available through Yale University Press and/or the campus bookstore. Other readings will be assigned to augment class discussion; typically, pdf files will be posted on Blackboard.

All students will choose a topic (subject to approval of instructor) relating to the challenge of biodiversity conservation. Students will prepare a research paper (or alternative assignment) on their topic and give a presentation.

Class exercises were chosen to represent an extensive variety of challenges and activities in conservation and conservation science; most are multi-factorial in nature. All are intended to develop students' abilities to recognize and analyze issues, to devise solutions, and to provide a wide spectrum of perspectives of value to a conservation career.

**REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:**

1. Conservation Biology for All. 2010. Sodhi, N.S. & P. R. Ehrlich, Editors. Oxford University Press 358 pp. Available at: <http://www.mongabay.com/conservation-biology-for-all.html>

2. *The Future of Nature: Documents of Global Change*. 2013. Edited by Libby Robin, Sverker Sörlin, and Paul Warde. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT. ISBN: 9780300184617. Available at: <http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks>

## GENERAL POLICIES AND RESOURCES

**Attendance:** You are expected to attend every class session and to be there on time. If you must miss a class, please let the instructor and teaching assistant know ahead of time, if possible. Absences may affect your participation grade.

**Email:** GMU requires students to use the GMU email system. You can set up this email to forward it to a different email address. Your GMU email address will be used for all contact regarding this course.

**Academic Integrity:** GMU is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. Academic Integrity is taken very seriously; violations are treated gravely and will be reported directly to the Office of Academic Integrity, who will investigate, and if a violation is substantiated, will impose sanctions, which can be severe. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you yourself will perform that task, and do your own original work. When you rely on someone else's work in any 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. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification. See <http://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system>

**University Policies:** The University Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/>. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.

**Office of Disability Services:** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodation, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodation must be arranged through the ODS. <http://ods.gmu.edu>.

**Other Useful Campus Resources:** Writing Center: Lab for Writing & Communication, Johnson Center 227E; (703) 993-1200; <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu> University Libraries "Ask a Librarian" <http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>

**Counseling And Psychological Services (CAPS):** (703) 993-2380; <http://caps.gmu.edu>

**Cell phones:** As a courtesy to your classmates, professor, and guest speakers, please turn your cell phone ringer off during class. If you are experiencing a medical or family situation where

you need to receive an incoming call, please let us know, and feel free to exit the class to receive your call.

**Inclement Weather and Class Cancelation:** We will still plan to have class virtually. Any additional information will be provided if necessary. GMU posts closings on its website ([www.gmu.edu](http://www.gmu.edu).) You can receive notification from Mason Alerts via email or text to a cell phone.

## GRADING

### Grading Scale:

A+ 98 - 100	B+ 88 - 89	C+ 78 - 79	F < 70
A 93 - 97	B 83 - 87	C 73 - 77	
A- 90 - 92	B- 80 - 82	C- 70 - 72	

### Basis Of Grading - Overview (100 Points Possible)

**A. Class participation: 13 points total**

1. Class discussion of readings & discussion leading: 8 points
2. Student presentation evaluations: 5 points

**B. Assignments: 29 points total**

1. Experience Reflections: 16 points
2. Solutions article discussion leading (10 min) and reflection: 5 points.
3. Team project & presentation (Buffett Awards – 30 minutes/team): 10 points

**C. Midterm Exam: 15 points total**

**D. Case Study or Alternative Assignment: 36 points total**

1. Case Study/Alternative Assignment Outline: 3 points
2. Case Study/ Alternative Assignment Presentation: 10 points.
3. Case Study/Alternative Assignment paper Peer Review: 3 points
4. Case Study or Alternative Assignment Paper: 20 points

**E. Final quiz: 7 points total**

### TOTAL POSSIBLE COURSE POINTS 100 POINTS

### Basis of Grading – Details

Following directions for all graded materials is expected. If in doubt, please consult the syllabus and Blackboard. If you are still unclear about something, please ask your instructors. Clear communication, including correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation, is expected in all written assignments. You should not expect full credit if there are mistakes in usage. Thorough proofreading is expected. Most written assignments have a maximum word count. We hope you will write both deeply and concisely. Full credit will not be given if you go over the maximum word count, if you are significantly under, or if you merely pad it.

### Class participation:

Students are expected to attend class, to engage in and lead class discussions, and participate fully and meaningfully in the group project. Emphasis is placed on effective communication;

class discussions and question/answer sessions after presentations provide avenues to demonstrate and develop your critical thinking and communication skills.

### **Assignments:**

Assignments include discussion leading, presentations, research, team project, peer review, and written reflections. Assessment of assignments is based on content, adherence to parameters of assignment (following instructions, completeness, observance of deadline etc.) as well as spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Your writing reflects not only yourself, but on your university, your organization, and our profession, and should demonstrate professionalism in quality of research, content, and usage. Reflections on a presentation or activity are intended to engage students in higher order thinking skills by analyzing, reconsidering, questioning, and relating the content within a broader context of student knowledge and experience. Reflections should not be just a summary or a description but should involve your own thinking about the subject. You should not expect full credit unless you demonstrate an interaction with your own thoughts and outlook. All reflections are due by 11:59 pm on the Friday following the related class.

### **Midterm Exam:**

An essay format, take-home midterm exam will be distributed. It will be due one week later to the Assignments tab on Blackboard. Your responses will be graded on factual content and understanding expressed, depth of personal reflection, following directions, and quality of writing.

### **Case study (CS) or Alternative Assignment (AA):**

Each student will identify a challenge in conservation biology/conservation and research the factors and drivers creating the problem, strategies and actions taken to address the problem, key players, and potential solutions for the problem.

### **Alternative assignment:**

There is an option to complete an alternative assignment to fulfill this requirement. This option offers you an opportunity to be creative and design/implement a project that relates to biodiversity conservation, as you apply your course learning to a project related to your interests. The time, effort, and rigor put in should be comparable to a standard case study assignment. You should discuss your ideas with your instructors and seek approval for your project design. The opportunity to complete an alternative assignment project will be discussed further during the first class. Regardless of the option chosen, there are incremental assignments, and two end products for this semester-long assignment: a presentation, and a paper.

### **Presentations:**

All students will give an oral, timed presentation on their case study/AA (time limit specified in Blackboard), followed by a class discussion and question/answer period. The presentations should be of the type and quality for submission at a professional, scientific, or academic conference or symposium. All presenters should prepare a “handout” with an abstract, outline, and references to be posted to the Blackboard Discussion Board for access by your classmates, the instructor, and teaching assistant. (A bare minimum number of references is 15 for MS, 25 for PhD, with the majority and most significant from peer-reviewed journals. If you need help,

please contact a GMU librarian either on site or online to learn how to search the GMU online library & identify which sources are peerreviewed.) References should be listed in APA 7th Edition format.

Please submit your PowerPoint slides to Bb Assignments, and post your handout (with your presentation abstract, outline, and references) before noon on the day of your presentation.

**Criteria for grading:** the presentations include content, research quality, organization, analysis, visual clarity, and presentation style. Correct spelling and grammar usage do count. You are in graduate school and are expected to express yourself in a professional way. Proofread carefully.

**Critique of presentations:** Using a basic form (provided on Blackboard for you to download, fill out digitally, and submit), students will critique each other's presentations. These critiques will be collected and reviewed by the instructor. Names will be removed, and the critiques forwarded to the presenters for constructive feedback. These evaluations carry course credit, and we expect you to offer thoughtful and genuine feedback to your classmates.

### **Paper:**

All students will prepare an academic paper on their selected topic. Case studies will be in the form of a traditional research paper; Alternative Assignments will be based on relevant literature in the field as background, and describe the objectives, methodology undertaken, results, analysis, future steps/directions, and lessons learned.

Formatting and citation style should follow the American Psychological Association (APA) Style, 7th edition, the standard/dominant professional style for the biological sciences. Generally speaking, formatting should be left justified, Times New Roman 12-point font, 1-inch margins, double-spaced throughout, including abstract and references. Specified format for headings / subheadings should also be followed. Reference formatting varies by source type. The Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edition is required for your reference in this course and will be a valuable addition to your professional collection. **Zotero** citation software (free download at <https://www.zotero.org/>) is also recommended for ease in creating correct citation format.

A **Running head** should be included in the header on each page per APA guidelines.

Each paper should include an Abstract, on a separate page before the body of the paper. The Abstract should summarize and preview the problem, methodology, and conclusions of the paper. The **Abstract** should be a maximum of 200 words.

The **Body** of your paper should be complete, clear, and logically organized to lead a reader through an understanding of your topic. Case study papers should be a minimum of 12 pages, maximum 14. References, images, and tables are not included in the page count.

**References** should start a new page at the end of the body of the paper and follow APA formatting. Generally, references should be listed in alphabetical order by the first author's last name. Date (generally, year) of the publication should follow the authors' names. Please format to leave the first line hanging for each reference. Master's students are expected to have a bare minimum of 15 references, and PhD students a minimum of 25. Most references should be from

peer-reviewed journals. Any reliance on others' work should be credited, including ideas, thoughts, concepts, data, images, etc. Direct quotes should be avoided or used only when necessary. All in-text citations should appear in end references, and vice versa. Please refer to the APA 7th edition style guide for specifics. **Zotero** reference software is recommended to organize your sources; it was developed here at GMU and is available as a free download ([www.zotero.com](http://www.zotero.com)). The library offers Zotero workshops; your TA can also help you get started.

### **Additional guidelines:**

- References, images, and tables are not included in the page count. References should begin a new page after the body of the paper (use a page break). Images and tables may appear within the body (but are not included in the page count), or in a separate appendix after the References.
- Please number the pages (in the top right) and put your name on each page under the running head in the header.
- Please use spelling and grammar check, and carefully proofread your work. Correct usage counts in your grade.
- Submit an electronic file. The electronic file is submitted to GMU plagiarism software and should be in a .doc or .docx format.

**Peer review:** You will review another student's paper before final submission to give constructive feedback to your classmate. This feedback can be helpful to the author as they revise and complete their paper before submitting. You will receive credit for the quality of your peer review. Check the Blackboard for details.

**Criteria for grading the papers** include content, research, analysis, organization, and writing style, including spelling, punctuation, and grammar usage. Students are expected to produce a paper suitable for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, which includes proper references, citations, language usage, and format.

### **Final Quiz:**

Like the Midterm Exam, but shorter and lighter. This essay format, take-home quiz will be distributed during the next-to-last class and be due by 11:59 pm on the following Saturday. It should be submitted to the Assignments tab on Blackboard. Your responses will be graded on factual content and understanding expressed, depth of personal reflection, following directions, and quality of writing.

**NOTE:** All writing should adhere to the basics of APA writing style and additional specifications for this course. This includes proper citation and heading format, as well as parameters described in the APA manual and above in this section. A professional writing style, including correct use of spelling and grammar, is expected. See the Grammar Tips document under the Syllabus tab on Blackboard for more information.

**Late submissions may not be accepted; if accepted the grade will be reduced. The professor reserves the right to modify the course content or syllabus.**