

## Overview of Biodiversity Conservation: EVPP 621 Section 001 - Fall 2020

### PRELIMINARY COURSE SYLLABUS, PART I (see also Syllabus Part II, Guide to Citations and References)

*The professor reserves the right to modify the course content or syllabus. Any changes will be announced in class, via email, and on Blackboard.*

**Instructor:** Lee M. Talbot, Ph.D.

**Teaching Assistant:** Cheryl Rash Jones (last name = Rash Jones. No hyphen.)

**Course Meets:** Tuesdays, 7:20 – 10:00 pm  
Online  
(if on campus: Robinson B-108, Fairfax Campus, GMU)

#### **To Contact Instructor:**

Office: 3048 David King Hall

Office Hours: by appointment, normally on class days but if that is not possible I will arrange other times and places to fit students' schedules.

Telephone: calls could be directed Cheryl Rash Jones (see below). If it is really urgent call me at home: 703 734 8576.

E-Mail: [ltalbot@gmu.edu](mailto:ltalbot@gmu.edu)

Fax: 703 734 8576

#### **To Contact Teaching Assistant Cheryl Rash Jones:**

Office: I do not have an office, but I'm happy to meet in the Johnson Center.

Office hours: by appointment-normally afternoons before class, but other times can be arranged

Telephone: 571-205-3654 (my cell – if you text, just let me know who you are)

E-Mail: [crashjon@masonlive.gmu.edu](mailto:crashjon@masonlive.gmu.edu)

**Course Website (Blackboard):** Log in at <http://mymason.gmu.edu> using your Blackboard (Bb) user ID and password. (NOTE: This is the same user ID that you use for accessing your email account, but it is not the same password.) Click on the courses tab in the top banner and choose EVPP 621 from the left sidebar. Within the course, links on the left sidebar will take you to the sections we will be using: Syllabus, Course Content, Assignments, and Discussion Board

Files will be uploaded to Bb for your use (Syllabus parts I & II, readings, etc.) and may be updated during the semester. The schedule for discussion leaders and presentations will be announced in class and posted in Bb. All assignments should be uploaded to the appropriate section on the Assignments tab in Bb IN ADDITION TO emailing them to Dr. Talbot and Cheryl.

If you are having trouble accessing Bb, make sure your pop-up blocker is disabled, and that you have added this site to your list of trusted sites. If you still have trouble, try a different browser. Please let Cheryl know if you are still having problems accessing or using this site after trying these troubleshooting tips.

## 1. General Policies for this Course:

**Contract:** This Syllabus is in effect a contract between the instructor and the students - read it well – know it well - so you will know what we expect of each other. Failure to follow the instructions in the syllabus will lead to reduced grades.

**Prerequisites:** A minimum of 8 hours of graduate course work with graduate courses in environmental science including ecology, and environmental or public policy. In practice this means a minimum of one year of graduate course work. If you do not have the prerequisites you must get the instructor's approval.

**Attendance:** You are expected to attend every class session and to be there on time. If you have a legitimate excuse for missing a class or being late please let me know, in advance if possible. Unexcused absences or lateness will result in a lowered grade.

**Submit dates:** The date and time for submitting topics, preliminary statements of papers, case study papers, tests, etc., will be clearly stated. Unless you have cleared with me in advance with a really good reason for delay, late submissions will not be accepted.

## 2. GMU Policies

**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. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else'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. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification. For information on Plagiarism please visit:  
<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/?p=499#more-499>

**Email:** GMU policy requires us to use your GMU email address for correspondence regarding this class (as well as other important information. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information.

**Cell phones:** As a courtesy to your classmates, professor and guest speakers, please turn your cell phone off during class. If you are experiencing a medical or family situation where you need to receive an incoming call, please let us know, mute the ring on your phone, and feel free to exit the class to receive your call.

**Disabilities:** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see Professor Talbot at the start and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 703 993 2474 (<http://ods.gmu.edu>). All academic accommodations must be arranged through ODS.

### **Other Useful Campus Resources:**

Writing Center: Robinson Hall B 213; (703) 993-1200; <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

University Libraries: <http://library.gmu.edu/>

“Ask a Librarian”: <http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>

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

### **Other 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

### **3. Course Overview:**

The purpose of this course is to provide students a global overview of biodiversity conservation, through exploring what biological diversity is, why is it important, what is its present status and trends, what are its threats, how has concern with and action on biodiversity conservation evolved, where do we stand now and what might be done in the future.

It is only in recent years that the conservation of biological diversity has become academically acceptable and politically stylish. Many think of it in terms of **recent** United Nations meetings or the strident debates on endangered species in **recent** sessions of the U.S. Congress. The term “Biodiversity” itself has been in use for about **30** years, there is substantial confusion about what it really is, and most believe that concern with biodiversity conservation is a new phenomenon. However, the history of what we now call biodiversity conservation goes back well over two thousand years and the subject is so well established as a central aspect of human welfare that it has even spawned a **new** scientific discipline, Conservation Biology.

This class will use lectures, reading assignments, case studies and class discussions to explore our subject. We will consider it from a global perspective, with examples from all parts of the world. Among the issues considered will be how ideas have changed (in a sense, this part will be a history of ideas); the role of governments and international agencies; national and international policy and law which affects biodiversity conservation; the changing role of the public and non-governmental organizations; the development and status of scientific knowledge; the development and evolution of management techniques; and changing approaches to conservation.

Among the concepts and topics to be considered are:

The Nature of Biodiversity – What do we mean by Biodiversity?

Science, the Scientific Method, and Biodiversity:

Values of Biodiversity and Rationales for its Conservation.

How is Biodiversity Conserved?

Conservation: What It Is and What It Is Not.

The Role of Policy in Biodiversity Conservation

Status and Trends of Biodiversity.

Nature of the Threats to Biodiversity

Direct Exploitation, Human Modification of the Environment, Alien Species, Other Types of Threats.

Human Recognition of the Problem the Origins of Biodiversity Conservation

Evolution of Conservation Recognition, Thinking, Efforts and Approaches.

State and National Policies and Programs

International Policies - Institutions and Conventions

The Role of Governments, International Bodies, NGOs, the Public.

The Role of Development and Development Assistance.

The Role of Science.

What is the Present Situation?

What is the Likely Future for Biodiversity; what are Possible Ways to Improve it?

#### 4. Texts:

BioDiversity. Wilson, E.O. (Editor.) National Academy of Sciences, Washington D.C. 1986  
ISBN 0-309-03739-5

Biodiversity II; Understanding and Protecting our Biological Resources. Edited by M.L. Reaka-Kudla, D.E. Wilson, and Edward O. Wilson. Joseph Henry Press, Washington D.C. 1997.  
ISBN 0-309-05584-9.

Other reading will be assigned. A list of assigned reading and the required journal articles will be posted to Blackboard.

#### 5. The Approach to Learning in this Course; Instructional Methods:

The **objectives** of the course include:

1. Providing students with **substantive information and understanding** about biodiversity conservation and the scientific and policy issues and principles involved.
2. Fostering **critical thinking**; and
3. Promoting **effective oral and written communication**.

**Critical thinking** implies independent analysis of the issues. Students are expected to ask themselves (or the class or professor as appropriate) questions such as: "Is this statement or analysis true?" "How do I know it is true?" "Are there other factors involved?" "Is the author basing this statement on scientific research, personal opinion, advocacy, hearsay, faith, or what?" "Given the facts, do I reach the same conclusion?" "What criteria are appropriate here?" Simply accepting and repeating what someone else has written or said is not critical thinking, and it can lead to repeating past mistakes.

To be successful in this course a student must *use* and *demonstrate* critical thinking in written work, presentations, and class participation.

**Effective oral and written communication:** A person's success in almost any career is determined very largely by that person's abilities to communicate. This principle applies especially to environmental, policy, scientific, and other academic careers. Consequently, there will be strong emphasis in this class on effective **oral and written communication**. I will be happy to meet with students to provide all the help I can in communication, but to be successful in this class students must – or must quickly learn to – communicate effectively.

While this is a course, not a seminar, lectures will only be a part of the course process. As noted above, the subject of the course will be explored and developed through active class discussions as well as through the case studies. The only way students can contribute to the class discussions is to discuss, i.e. participate. Consequently, there will be very strong emphasis on active and effective **participation** in class discussions, not only during the paper presentations and discussion periods following these presentations but also throughout all the other class periods. There will be tests, but 20% of a student's grade is based on his or her participation (in addition to leading discussion of reading assignments and case history presentation) so the message to students taking this course is, if you do not participate, you will get a low grade.

At the same time, talking for the sake of talking also is counter-productive. In any class discussion everyone who has knowledge or ideas should have the chance to speak, which means that the participation should not be dominated by a few particularly outspoken people. In all discussions students are expected to raise their hand to be called on if they wish to speak. I will try to be sure to call on everyone and give everyone a chance, not just the few who always wish to speak first. Further, what students say tells me what they know and how they are thinking, and especially whether or not they are applying critical thinking to the subject. So, lots of talk with little substance is not the way to contribute to class discussions or to improve grades.

I recognize that many people do not feel that they are born communicators. Many of us feel that we are not naturally articulate and find it difficult to speak in front of class. If a student has trouble or needs assistance I will be happy to try to help. Let me know, we can meet and discuss it and I'll see what we can do. But don't just sit quietly.

## **6. Case Study Presentation and Paper:**

During the semester each student will prepare and present a case study. 35% of a student's grade and a particularly important part of the learning from this course comes from the case studies and their presentation. In addition to the Presentation and Paper, submissions of the proposed topic and a short description with preliminary references will be due as incremental steps. All writings should be in Times New Roman 12-point font, with 1" margins all around.

**Purpose and Subject:** For the case study each student is expected to choose an example illustrating the central themes of this course, and to prepare a paper and oral presentation on it. The topic should be one which allows the student to address both the scientific and the policy perspectives of biodiversity conservation. The studies must explicitly address how the subject illustrates or relates to the central themes of the course. If a student has questions about what is relevant for a case study subject I will be happy to discuss them.

The purpose of case studies is to explore in detail the different dimensions of our subject. The case study should involve a unit of biodiversity (for example, a species, community, population, or ecosystem) for which conservation efforts have been or are being made. If you have other pertinent ideas for a relevant case study subject, try them out on me.

The study should be based on review of the relevant literature and, where practical, also on consultations with key individuals and organizations. If a student has personal experience with the case, that experience could also provide part of the basis for the study. The study should: (1) describe the present status of the biodiversity unit; (2) provide relevant history or background; (3) analyze the factors that have affected the status of the biodiversity; (4) describe in detail and analyze the conservation efforts which have been made; (5) assess the success of the conservation efforts to date, especially from the standpoints of the original conservation objectives and the sustainability of the results; and (6) where the results of the conservation activities have been less than successful, describe what could have been done to achieve success and make recommendations on how to better assure success in such management in the future; where the results of the conservation efforts have been successful, discuss the key elements which contributed to that success and make recommendations, if appropriate, for ways to improve the process.

Students should get Dr. Talbot's approval for the topic of their case study before the third class, by email, telephone, or by an appointment. By the fourth class, you should submit a brief preliminary statement of the approved subject with a preliminary list of references. The statement can be one or more paragraphs, not more than one page double-spaced, and the references are initial or preliminary, not the final bibliography, since, it is expected, additional references will be found as the student proceeds with the study. **The references should be in the form specified by Part II of this Syllabus.**

**Oral Presentation:** All students will give an oral presentation followed by a class discussion/question and answer period. The oral presentation will be a maximum of 30 minutes. The presentation may be illustrated, for example, with slides or computer-generated displays. Each presentation should be accompanied by a handout, comprising a brief written outline (not the abstract) of the presentation and the bibliography. The presentations should be of the type and quality for submission at a professional, scientific, or academic conference or symposium. Following their presentation of the case study the students will chair a question and answer period (up to 20-minutes). They should be sure to call on everyone who wishes to speak, who has not spoken before, before calling on someone who already has spoken.

**Written Paper:** All students will also prepare a written paper on their case study. The paper, including an abstract, should be a minimum of 15 pages, maximum of 17, double line-spaced, with 1" margins, in Times New Roman 12-point font. References should start on a separate page and are not included within the page limit. Please number the pages and put your name on each page (in the header). The paper should be the type and quality for submission to a professional or scientific journal. Style should be guided by appropriate journals. Papers should be submitted both to Blackboard and by email. If class meets in person, you should also submit a hard copy, printed single sided.

All papers must have an **abstract** at the start, and a proper **bibliography** at the end that includes all references cited in the text, correctly formatted (see Syllabus Part II). All in-text citations should be referenced in the bibliography, and all entries in the bibliography should be cited within the text. References should be predominantly from scholarly, peer-reviewed sources. The most common error I find in case study papers is improper bibliographies. The bibliography documents where a student found the information and cites the authority for opinions or hard data in the text; it indicates how thorough the student has been in his or her research; and it shows that the student knows how to use and cite sources -- which is absolutely basic for professional research and writing.

Note: While some references from the internet are scientifically valid, many are not, and some web references are ephemeral. Consequently, no more than 30 percent of the references cited for a term paper should be from websites (other than from peer reviewed journal articles and federal and state legislation accessed via the internet). If in doubt, ask. If there is a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) for an internet source, you should always include it in your end reference.

## **7. Examinations:**

There will be a comprehensive take-home, closed book examination, and a short take-home late-term quiz. Each will include instructions on when and how to return your responses. In short, your answers should be typed in a document (1" margins, Times New Roman, 12-point font), named according to the instructions provided, and submitted both to Blackboard Assignments and by email to Professor Talbot and Cheryl by the due date. We will acknowledge receipt of answers by email. If we have not done so within three days, please contact both of us by email.

## **8. Reading Discussion Leaders:**

Each day's reading assignment from the text and from some of the other assigned reading will be discussed in class. One or more students will serve as leaders for class discussion of each reading assignment. They will identify key issues and subjects from the reading which they believe should be considered by the class, and they will lead the class discussion on that part of the text. The discussion leader may highlight some key points, but most of their time should be spent in discussion by class members. Each student will be expected to serve as discussion leader during the course. Leading discussions will account for 10% of your grade.

## **9. Basis of Grading**

Leading Class Discussions	10%
Other Class Participation	20%
Mid Term Exam	25%
Presentation & Q&A	10%
Paper	25%
Late Term Quiz	10%

Grading Scale							
A+	98 and up	B+	87 – 89	C+	77 - 79	D	65 - 69
A	94 – 97	B	84 – 86	C	74 - 76	F	<65
A-	90 – 93	B-	80 – 83	C-	70 - 73		

The major criteria for grading the **papers** include content, i.e., the substance, including adequacy of information and quality of references; responsiveness to the instructions in this syllabus (especially Sections 5 and 6); knowledge and understanding of the subject; quality of analysis and critical thinking applied; organization, and presentation including use of English, writing style, and treatment of references.

Criteria for grading the **oral presentations** include the same factors plus oral presentation effectiveness, visuals and handout, time management, and handling of the question and answer period following the presentation. Among other things, the question and answer periods provide further indication of the students’ knowledge and understanding of the subject and ability to communicate.

The criteria for grading **discussion leaders** include identifying and understanding key issues, critical thinking, communication skills including presentation style, time management, and most important, how effectively the class is brought into the discussion.

The grading for **class participation** reflects the emphasis on **active participation**. Sitting quietly in class does not constitute active and effective participation. Participation includes attendance; if a student doesn’t attend, participation is not possible.

## 10. Résumés:

Since a major purpose of this course is to explore the different dimensions of the subject by class discussions, I expect to draw on the experiences and (where appropriate) professional knowledge of the members of the class. Consequently, please provide me a brief resume (maximum 2 pages) by the start of the second class at the latest. It can be sent by email, fax, or brought to class. The resume can be one you already have, or it can be prepared for the class, and it should include your telephone number (home and work, with fax), mailing and email addresses.

## 11. Assignment Submissions

All written assignments should be submitted by BOTH methods:

1. Email to Professor Talbot ([ltalbot@gmu.edu](mailto:ltalbot@gmu.edu)) and to Cheryl ([crashjon@gmu.edu](mailto:crashjon@gmu.edu))
2. Upload to the designated Assignment on the Assignments tab in Blackboard



## Course Schedule Fall 2020 (DRAFT)

Aug. 25	Introduction, overview of the course and requirements. Lecture and class discussion.
Sept. 1	Lecture and class discussion. See separate sheet for Reading Assignments. Resumes due.
Sept. 8	Lecture and class discussion. Subjects for case studies should be approved by this class.
Sept. 15	Lecture and class discussion. The brief case study description & draft bibliography is due by class time.
Sept. 22	Lecture and class discussion.
Sept. 29	Lecture and class discussion.
Oct. 6	The take-home midterm examinations will be distributed.
SUN., Oct. 11	Take-home Midterm due by 11:59 pm
Oct. 13	NO CLASS Midterm exams due by 11:59 pm.
Oct. 20	Discussion of midterm results. Discussion of oral presentation expectations. Lecture and class discussion.
Oct. 27	Student presentations.
Nov. 3	Student presentations. Papers due for those who presented last week.
Nov. 10	Student presentations. Papers due for those who presented last week.
Nov. 17	Student presentations. Papers due for those who presented last week.
Nov. 24	Papers due for those who presented last week. Take-home quiz distributed.
SAT., Nov. 28	Quiz due by 11:59 pm.
Dec. 1	Course wrap-up; review of quiz results and term papers. Discussion and critique of presentations.