

EEB 208 (Introduction to Conservation Biology)

Primary literature readings

In about a third of the lectures we will break for 10-15 minutes to discuss a paper from the research literature that relates to the lecture topic. You should not treat these readings as optional because they will form the basis of class discussions and brief writing assignments that, collectively, will be worth 20% of your grade. Questions about the readings might also appear on exams.

Class discussions (10% of total grade)

During the class discussions I will randomly select people to either summarize key points from the paper or to answer simple questions about them. You will not have to talk at length, but you will need to know what the papers are about and to have thought about what they mean. These discussions are not meant to be intimidating (really!), but are to help me get to know you a bit better, to give you a sense of what current research in conservation biology involves, and (hopefully) to make the lecture material more real to you.

The best way to avoid making this a horrible, high-pressure experience is to prepare for it – if you are prepared, I promise it won't be bad! To prepare for each discussions you should (a) make sure that you have read and thought about the paper, (b) be able to summarize what the paper is about in a couple of sentences (this is the type of thing I will ask people to do in class), (c) be able to say something about how you think the paper relates to the lecture (if you read the course notes before class, this will probably be easier), and (d) be able to say what you think of the paper (Was it easy to understand? Do you agree with the results? Are the results surprising? etc. Note, there are no “correct” answers to (d) – if you hate the paper, or found it completely impenetrable, then you should say so.

I am not expecting you to understand every detail of every paper (and definitely not all the statistical analyses). But I do expect you to know why the study was done, what the main findings are, and how it relates to the course material.

Grading: Your participation in these discussions is worth 10% of the course grade, so if you never have anything to say (or you are not present when I pick your name) you will not get many points. Links to the papers and the dates we will discuss them are noted on the syllabus so there is no excuse for not showing up or not having read the paper. **MAKE SURE YOU CAN DOWNLOAD THE PAPERS WELL IN ADVANCE OF CLASS.**

Grading of discussions will be based on your participation both in scheduled discussions and also in class generally. Everyone will start with the equivalent of a C. Simply answering questions in a basic way will keep you on a C. Adding more content to the discussions would move you into the B range. Showing a truly exceptional understanding of the material and making insightful connections to the class material will be required for an A. If you have nothing to say, have not read the paper, or are not present when your name is called, you will drop points. I will make sure everyone has the opportunity to speak at least once by calling on people in class, but the onus is on you to participate. If you are shy and feel uncomfortable about speaking up, please talk to me early in the class so that we can discuss ways to make it easier for you to join in.

In-class writing assignment (10% of total grade)

On the day of each discussion you will get 2-3 minutes to write answers to two simple questions about the paper. We are purposefully not giving you very long because we want you to have thought about these questions before you come to class and be ready to write something concise when you arrive. Usually, we will do this at the start of class. If you turn up late, you will not get another opportunity later in the class (so don't be late!).

The questions will be the same every time:

- 1) Describe one thing from the paper that surprised you.
- 2) Explain why it was surprising.

In each case we are looking for a short simple answer. For example, an answer like this would be just fine:

"I was surprised the species was listed as endangered because it is a habitat and food generalist and those types of species are usually secure."

You can be surprised by things in the methods used, the interpretation of the results, the findings, things that were not discussed in the paper, etc., etc., etc. But you must justify the reason for your surprise.

Grading: As with the discussions grading will be based largely on thoughtful participation. There are ten readings and you will get one point for completing each assignment. If you are not present when we do an assignment you will not get the point (documented emergencies are the only exception – in these cases your grade will be averaged over the assignments you did complete). If you do not answer both questions you will not get the point.

Do not copy your neighbor. If your answer is that same as the person sitting next to you (or in front, etc.), and you are seen glancing their way, then you will not get the point. If this happens more than once, you will get zero for this portion of the class and risk getting an F overall. You would be amazed how obvious it is when people try to do this. (I apologize for even bringing this topic up as I know that most students are honorable – unfortunately there are often a few people who are not which forces me to be blunt and to explain that there will be serious consequences for cheating.)

Everyone can gain back up to three points (1 extra point per assignment) for particularly thoughtful responses. But such things have to really surprise the grader into thinking "Wow, that's a good point." This doesn't happen often, and only happens when people try to be really original in their responses. So, if you are surprised by the same thing that your friend is surprised by, you can guarantee that you will not get any bonus points.

No one can get more than 10 points no matter what, but we will keep track of especially good answers from the very beginning of the class so that you can "stockpile" replacement points in case you miss a lecture later on in the semester.