

EEB 2208 (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 relating 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 are worth 20% of the final grade. Questions about the readings might also appear on exams.

Class discussions (ungraded, but important)

During discussions I will randomly select people to either summarize key points from the paper or to answer simple questions about the reading. 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 conservation research involves, and (hopefully) to make the lecture material more real. They are also intended to teach you how to read scientific papers so that you can better evaluate the evidence for scientific findings on your own.

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! For each discussion, 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 one or two 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 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.). There are no “right” answers to (d) – if you hate the paper, or found it impossible to understand, then please say so. I do not expect 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: You will not be graded on your participation in the discussions, but do not take this as a sign that you should not participate. First, I will pick people at random to answer questions, so preparation will save you the embarrassment of having nothing to say. Second, when people participate in discussions you don't have to listen to me drone on so much ... which makes class more interesting. Third, these discussions are designed to help you use and understand peer-reviewed papers, which will be essential for the posters you have to do later in the semester. Finally, you'll have to read and understand the papers in order to do a good job on the in-class questions, so you might as well be ready to talk about them too.

In-class writing assignments (20% of total class grade)

On the day of each discussion you will get 2-3 minutes to answer 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. Often, 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. 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 but seemed important, etc., etc., etc. But you must justify the reason for your surprise. For example, an answer like this would be just fine and would get full points: "*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.*" There is no need to write more than this.

Simple ignorance of facts is not a sufficient reason for surprise. For example, this answer would not be just fine and would only get 1 out of 2 points: "*I was surprised the species was listed as endangered because I assumed there were lots of them.*"

You will also lose points if it is clear that you have not carefully read the paper (e.g., by referring to things that are not relevant to the study; do not follow logically from the findings, etc.).

Grading: Grading will be based largely on thoughtful participation, rather than specific answers. There are ten readings and you will get up to two points for each assignment. If you are not present for an assignment you will not get any points. If you do not answer both questions you will not get both points.

Do not copy your neighbor. If your answer is the same as the person sitting next to you (or in front, etc.), and you are seen glancing their way, then you will get no points. If this happens more than once, you will get zero for this entire 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 who are not, and this forces me to be blunt and to explain how seriously I take cheating.)

Everyone can gain bonus points for particularly thoughtful responses. But such things have to really surprise the grader into thinking "Wow, that's a good point." These points are given out very rarely, and only when people are truly 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 a bonus.

No one can get more than 20 points total no matter what, but we will keep track of especially good answers from the very first discussion so that you can "stockpile" replacement points in case you lose points later in the semester.

Responses can only be given during the assigned class time (no email responses allowed). If you have to miss a discussion for one of the reasons listed below, your grade will be averaged over the assignments that you did complete (e.g., if you attend 9 of the 10 discussions and get 15/18 points (83%), your grade will be adjusted to $16\frac{2}{3}$ out of 20).

This accommodation will apply only if (a) you have a sickness or emergency for which you have written documentation (e.g., a doctor's note saying that you could not come to class that day), or (b) you are absent due to extra-curricular/co-curricular activities performed in the interest of the university and/or activities that support your scholarly development. Examples include participation in scholarly presentations, performing arts, and intercollegiate sports, when the participation is at the request of, or coordinated by, a University official. Students involved in such activities must inform me in writing prior to the anticipated absence and have the coordinating UConn official send me email confirming their participation in the activity. Guidelines for (b) are based on those laid out by the Provost.