BIOL 4400.91L Biological Communication syllabus Fall 2019

Instructor: Zen Faulkes  
Email: zen.faulkes@utrgv.edu  
Phone: 956-587-9363 (text messages); 956-664-2614 (voice mail only)  
Meeting times and location: Not applicable; online  
Office location: ESCNE 2.364  
Student consultation hours: Wednesday 11:00 am-12:15 pm, using Blackboard Collaborate Ultra.

Required course materials

Textbooks

There are no required textbooks for this course. Most readings will come from journal articles that I will provide.

Computer hardware

To participate in this online course, you should have easy access to a computer less than 5-years old with high-speed internet connection via cable modem, LAN or DSL. To ensure you are using a supported browser and have required plug-ins, please refer to Supported Browsers, Plugins & Operating Systems for Blackboard Learn from Blackboard's resource page.

Student technical skills

You are expected to be proficient with installing and using basic computer applications and have the ability to send and receive email attachments.

Software

- Web browser such as Firefox or Chrome
- Adobe’s Flash Player & Reader plug-in
- Virus protection
- Microsoft Office

Technical assistance

If you need technical assistance at any time during the course or to report a problem with Blackboard you can:

- Visit the Blackboard Student Help Site
Course description and prerequisites

Capstone course.

Describes, analyzes, critiques, and applies biological communication and writing styles. Writing topics include vitas, professional letters, research/laboratory reports, and research proposals. Also focuses on manuscript editing, literature searches and referencing, reviewing published research papers, data analysis, and interpretation.

Prerequisites: Senior standing and 15 advanced hours of biology.

4.000 Credit hours
4.000 Lecture hours

Learning objectives / outcomes for the course

Department of Biology student learning outcomes

1. Role of the cell: The Biology graduate knows the role of the cell in life and living systems, and understands the interrelationships among subcellular structures that contribute to its functioning as a unit.
2. Role of genetics: The Biology graduate understands the role of genetics in inheritance and can explain how environmental conditions influence natural selection processes and contribute to adaptation.
3. Diversity of life: The Biology graduate is aware of the diversity of life and interrelationships between an organism and its environment.
4. Structure and function: The Biology graduate understands how the organization of a specific structure within an organism is related to a specific function, understands interrelationships among organs and organ systems within an organism, and how interaction between structure and function contribute to the survival of the organism.
5. Scientific method: The Biology graduate can formulate a testable hypothesis, evaluate and design experiments, analyze and interpret data, and communicate research findings in both oral and written form.

Specific course learning objectives

These learning objectives are not in chronological order, as some are combined or run across several weekly modules. See the Course Schedule below.
1. Create a curriculum vita (CV) and professional letters.
2. Evaluate the quality of information and determine its credibility.
3. Perform background research when presented with a biology research question.
4. Design an experiment.
5. Design and carry out a testable empirical research project.
6. Analyze data qualitatively.
7. Analyze data quantitatively using statistics.
8. Read and create graphs of data.
9. Differentiate fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism.
10. Describe the narrative structure and common components of scientific papers.
11. Perform constructive peer review.
12. Distinguish different types of scientific literature.
13. Distinguish popular and scientific literature.
14. Describe scientific methodologies.
15. Write applications for competitive fellowships, internships, and jobs in a scientific field.
16. Create a poster of research appropriate for a biological conference.
17. Give an oral presentation on a biological subject.

**Learning objectives for core curriculum requirements**

This course is a core requirement for all biology undergraduate programs (Biology with Biological Science Focus; Biology with Minor; Biology with Teacher Certification).

This course addresses core outcomes set by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) for communication skills.

**Course grading policies**

Final grades assigned for this course will be based on the percentage of total points earned.

**Letter grading scheme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90 – 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80 – 89.9...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70 – 79.9...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60 – 69.9...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt; 60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Viewing grades in Blackboard**

Points you receive for graded activities will be posted to the Blackboard Grade Book. Click on the “Your Progress” link on the Course Menu to view your points. I will update the online grades
each time a grading session has been completed. This will often be within 7 days after an
assignment is submitted.

Due dates and times

All assignments for this course will be submitted electronically through Blackboard. All due
dates and times are shown in Central Standard Time. If you are traveling or live outside of this
time zone, adjust your schedule accordingly.

Because quizzes are operated by computers, times are accurate to the second, not minute. For
example, if a due date is “11:00 pm”, 10:59:59 pm is on time, but 11:00:00 pm is late. I strongly
recommended you complete work hours before the deadline, in case a technical problem arises.

Unavoidable absences

If unforseeable events prevent you from completing work, you must provide written
documentation of those events to be eligible for any opportunity to complete the missing
assignments or to your grades adjusted so you are not penalized by the missing work. The exact
nature of the adjustment that will be provided will depend on the nature and timing of the events
affecting you (i.e., a single day where you missed one quiz deadline may not be handled the
same was as if you missed an entire week). Written documentation must be from verifiable
sources that do not have clear ties to you. For example, memos on company letterhead with
contact information of individuals who can confirm events are acceptable. Letters from family
members are not adequate.

Incomplete policy

In case of emergency or special circumstances, students may petition for an “Incomplete” grade.
All incomplete course assignments must be completed before the end of the next semester.

Important dates for Fall 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>26 August</th>
<th>First day of classes</th>
</tr>
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<td>Labour Day – no classes</td>
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<td>Final exams</td>
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</table>
Course policies

Forums versus email

If you have a general question about course content or mechanics, please post it to one of the two Course Help discussion forums. Doing so gives students in the course an opportunity to help one another and allows everyone to benefit from answers to your questions.

Any email asking a **general course question** will get a standard reply asking that the question be posted in the appropriate discussion forum and will **not be answered by email**. I apologize for this, but with hundreds of students in this class, it is not practical to respond to general questions individually. You are welcome to email me directly if your question is specific to you personally.

Example: “When is the final exam?” or “Can you clarify the mode versus median?” are general questions that should be posted in the help forums. “I need an extension for the week 6 assignment because I was in the hospital” is a question specific to you that should be emailed.

Participation

Online courses require your active participation. Here are some tips for success:

- Log in to the course frequently (at least several times per week; logging in daily from Monday to Friday is recommended) and check the announcements. This will keep you informed of course updates, progress in discussions, assignment information, and messages requiring immediate attention.
- Be aware of and keep up with the Course Schedule in the syllabus.
- In discussion forums, you learn from one another by posing questions, justifying your comments, and providing multiple perspectives. When you prepare for discussions through thoughtful reflection, you contribute to your own successful learning experience as well as to the experience of your peers.

Build rapport

If you find that you have any trouble keeping up with assignments or other aspects of the course, make sure you let Zen know as early as possible. As you will find, building rapport and effective relationships are key to becoming an effective professional. Make sure that you are proactive in informing Zen when difficulties arise during the semester so that we can help you find a solution.

Course organization and online tools

Course structure

This course will be delivered online through the course management system Blackboard Learn. You will use your UTRGV account to login to the course from the My UTRGV site and under applications click on Blackboard Learn.
The course is organized into weekly modules, running from Monday to Friday. All assignment due dates fall within those days.

Although the official start of each module is Monday, material for the coming week is usually made available on Saturday morning. (For example, the materials and instructions for the module starting Monday, 9 September, should be online Saturday, 7 September.) This will allow you to get a head start on the coming week if you so choose.

Course schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26 August</td>
<td>Introduce yourself</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 September</td>
<td>Professional CV</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 September</td>
<td>Personal statements</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 September</td>
<td>Peer review of personal statements</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 September</td>
<td>Statistics assignment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 September</td>
<td>Natural history project proposal</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 October</td>
<td>Natural history project annotated bibliography</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 October</td>
<td>Poster</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 October</td>
<td>Peer review of posters</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 October</td>
<td>Natural history research paper draft</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 November</td>
<td>Peer review of natural history paper draft</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 November</td>
<td>Departmental capstone class assessment: Quantitative skills</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 November</td>
<td>Oral presentation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 November</td>
<td>Peer review of oral presentations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 December</td>
<td>Revised natural history research paper</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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Time commitment

Online courses are typically much more time intensive, and equally rigorous as a traditional course. This is an advanced course for Biology majors and as such you should expect a significant workload. As you begin this course, you should schedule as much time for this course as any other four credit hour course (normally six contact hours a week: three for lecture, three for lab).

Falling behind in this course is bad, because several projects are cumulative. Not completing objectives presented in one week will hinder your ability to complete later ones.

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**UTRGV policy statements**

**Students with disabilities**

Students with a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects academic performance) who would like to receive academic accommodations should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as soon as possible to schedule an appointment to initiate services. Accommodations can be arranged through SAS at any time, but are not retroactive. Students who experience a broken bone, severe injury, or undergo surgery during the semester are eligible for temporary services.

**Pregnancy, pregnancy-related, and parenting accommodations**

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination, which includes discrimination based on pregnancy, marital status, or parental status. Students seeking accommodations related to pregnancy, pregnancy-related condition, or parenting (reasonably immediate postpartum period) are encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services for additional information and to request accommodations.

**Student Accessibility Services**

Brownsville Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in 1.107 in the Music and Learning Center building (BMSLC) and can be contacted by phone at (956) 882-7374 or via email at ability@utrgv.edu. Edinburg Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in 108 University Center (EUCTR) and can be contacted by phone at (956) 665-7005 or via email at ability@utrgv.edu.

**Mandatory course evaluation period:**

Students are required to complete an online evaluation of this course, accessed through your UTRGV account (http://my.utrgv.edu); you will be contacted through email with further instructions. Students who complete their evaluations will have priority access to their grades. Online evaluations will be available:
Module 1: 2-8 October

Module 2: 27 November - 3 December

Full fall semester: 14 November - 4 December

**Attendance**

Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes and may be dropped from the course for excessive absences. (For purposes of this class, attendance is tracked by logins to the class website.) UTRGV’s attendance policy excuses students from attending class if they are participating in officially sponsored university activities, such as athletics; for observance of religious holy days; or for military service. Students should contact the instructor in advance of the excused absence and arrange to make up missed work or examinations.

**Scholastic integrity**

As members of a community dedicated to Honesty, Integrity and Respect, students are reminded that those who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and expulsion from the University. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism (including self-plagiarism), and collusion; submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person; taking an examination for another person; any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student; or the attempt to commit such acts. Since scholastic dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced (Board of Regents Rules and Regulations and UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines). All scholastic dishonesty incidents will be reported to Student Rights and Responsibilities.

**Sexual misconduct and mandatory reporting**

In accordance with UT System regulations, your instructor is a “Responsible Employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and so must report to the Office of Institutional Equity & Diversity (oie@utrgv.edu) any instance, occurring during a student’s time in college, of sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, and sexual harassment, about which she/he becomes aware during this course through writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. More information can be found at www.utrgv.edu/equity, including confidential resources available on campus. The faculty and staff of UTRGV actively strive to provide a learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect that is free from sexual misconduct, discrimination, and all forms of violence. If students, faculty, or staff would like confidential assistance, or have questions, they can contact OVAVP (Office for Victim Advocacy & Violence Prevention) at 665-8287, 882-8282, or OVAVP@utrgv.edu.

**Course drops**
According to UTRGV policy, students may drop any class without penalty earning a grade of DR until the official drop date. Following that date, students must be assigned a letter grade and can no longer drop the class. Students considering dropping the class should be aware of the "3-peat rule" and the "6-drop" rule so they can recognize how dropped classes may affect their academic success. The 6-drop rule refers to Texas law that dictates that undergraduate students may not drop more than six courses during their undergraduate career. Courses dropped at other Texas public higher education institutions will count toward the six-course drop limit. The 3-peat rule refers to additional fees charged to students who take the same class for the third time.

Student services

Students who demonstrate financial need have a variety of options when it comes to paying for college costs, such as scholarships, grants, loans and work-study. Students should visit the Students Services Center (U Central) for additional information. U Central is located in BMAIN 1.100 (Brownsville) or ESSBL 1.145 (Edinburg) or can be reached by email (ucentral@utrgv.edu) or telephone: (888) 882-4026. In addition to financial aid, U Central can assist students with registration and admissions.

Students seeking academic help in their studies can use university resources in addition to an instructor's office hours. University Resources include the Advising Center, Career Center, Counseling Center, Learning Center, and Writing Center. The centers provide services such as tutoring, writing help, critical thinking, study skills, degree planning, and student employment. Locations are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center name</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Brownsville office</th>
<th>Brownsville phone</th>
<th>Edinburg office</th>
<th>Edinburg phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advising Center</td>
<td><a href="mailto:AcademicAdvising@utrgv.edu">AcademicAdvising@utrgv.edu</a></td>
<td>BMAIN 1.400</td>
<td>956-665-7120</td>
<td>ESWKH 101</td>
<td>956-665-7120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Center</td>
<td><a href="mailto:CareerCenter@utrgv.edu">CareerCenter@utrgv.edu</a></td>
<td>BCRTZ 129</td>
<td>956-882-5627</td>
<td>ESSBL 2.101</td>
<td>956-665-2243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling Center</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Counseling@utrgv.edu">Counseling@utrgv.edu</a></td>
<td>EUCTR 109</td>
<td>956-665-2574</td>
<td>BSTUN 2.10</td>
<td>956-882-3897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Center</td>
<td><a href="mailto:LearningCenter@utrgv.edu">LearningCenter@utrgv.edu</a></td>
<td>BMSLC 2.118</td>
<td>956-882-8208</td>
<td>ELCTR 100</td>
<td>956-665-2585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Center</td>
<td><a href="mailto:WC@utrgv.edu">WC@utrgv.edu</a></td>
<td>BUBLB 3.206</td>
<td>956-882-7065</td>
<td>ESTAC 3.119</td>
<td>956-665-2538</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Updates and changes

Course policies are subject to change. It is the student’s responsibility to check Blackboard for corrections, clarifications, and updates to the syllabus. Any changes will be posted in Blackboard using the Announcements tool.