Seminar in Biology (Biology 470 001): Spring 2016
Plant Ecology and Plant Geography

Instructor: Dr. James Van Kley
Office: Science 115
E-mail: jvankley@sfasu.edu

Time: Mondays, 5:00-6:15pm, Miller Sci. 139, as necessary.
Phone: 468-2068
Office hours: M,W 11:00-1:00; T,Th 11-12; or by appointment

Course description:
The ability to organize and publicly present your findings in a brief, informative presentation is an essential skill for scientists and professionals. Accordingly, Bio 470 will provide students with experience in researching, preparing, and presenting a seminar on a specific topic.

The topic of this section is Plant Ecology and Plant Geography. You will either choose a plant species and describe its life history and how it interacts with its environment or choose a location and describe the plant communities (assemblages of species) characteristic of this region and the soil, topographic, human, climatic, and other factors that cause the vegetation types to be present, or choose a specific ecosystem type and discuss the plant species and environmental factors that structure this ecosystem. We will meet on Monday afternoons 5-6:15 pm as needed.

Presentation Topics & Sources:
You must clear your topic with me by March 10. Presentations must be based on references from the primary literature. Some examples of such journals are Ecology, Ecological applications, Ecological Monographs, Ecologia, Journal of Vegetation Science, Science, Nature, Texas Journal of Science, American midland Naturalist, Castanea, and Conservation Biology—(there are many more). Good sources for finding recent articles include the reference publications “Current Contents” and “Biological Abstracts”. Generally, websites are not peer-reviewed and do not constitute reliable primary although they may provide useful references to published literature that is. The science reference librarian at the Steen Library can be a resource for search strategies and finding references. Presentations should emphasize research data: the main focus should be on summarizing the data and results of recent scientific studies for the chosen topic.

Abstracts and Papers:
Students must write a brief (6-10 pages not including abstract and references) properly-referenced research paper describing their findings. The paper should be based on the material you researched for the presentation and should form the basis for your presentation. As part of the paper you must submit will need to turn in an abstract to me no later than one weeks prior to your scheduled seminar date. The abstract should be a 200-word summary of your presentation and paper and will be the first section of the paper before the 'Introduction'. A good abstract introduces, presents the research results and conclusions of your paper or presentation –it is your paper in miniature -not just a proposal or list of what topics you will talk about. Send the abstract and paper to me in an email message as an attached MS Word or text file. Alternatively, bring a disk with the file to my office. Abstracts will be published in a program of Abstracts and handed out to the class for them to follow on the day of your presentation. Abstracts and papers are due no later than the Monday one week before your scheduled presentation!

Presentations:
You will sign up for your presentation date at the first meeting. Presentations should last no more than 15 minutes plus 2 or 3 minutes reserved for questions. This format (often you are allowed only 12 minutes!) is typical for presentations at scientific meetings. Expect questions from your classmates and me after your presentation. Your talk should include visual aids to support your ideas and concepts. You may use PowerPoint, slides, overhead transparencies, and/ or the chalkboard. Keep the use of videos to a minimum.

Participation points relate to both whether you attend all talks and ask questions of other presenters. I will take attendance each time we meet. You must attend all presentations. Attendance will be checked!

Bibliography:
A minimum of 10 references should be used in preparation for your seminar. A minimum of 6 should must from the primary literature. Others can come from published books, symposium proceedings, and literature review articles. Web pages, which are not subject to any form of peer review, are not acceptable sources (although they can sometimes lead you to good references for published articles). You will submit your bibliography in the final (referencees Cited) section of your paper.

Meetings:
In addition to the current meeting we will meet 3 or 4 times at the end of the semester for the presentations. Attendance of each session is mandatory; Any absences will strongly impact your participation score. Each student must also meet individually (face to face) with me at least once to discuss and approve
your topic. Failure to meet with me will negatively impact both your participation and presentation scores! Students are also encouraged to meet with me periodically to discuss progress on their presentations.

**Biology Special Fields Test!**

The Biology Department requires that all majors take the special fields test before they graduate. Taking this test is therefore a requirement for Biology 470. You will be provided an opportunity to sign up to take this on-campus test. Students failing to take the test will receive a withheld grade (WH) for the course. While results of the test will not in any way penalize your course grade, I will award bonus points for good performance on a competitive basis to your percentage grade as follows: Those scoring in the top 20% of our individual class section will receive 25 extra points; those scoring in the 60th-80th percentile, 10 points; those with scores in the 40th-60th percentile, 5 points; and those with scores in the lower 40%, 0 points.

**Grading:**

Your final grade in this course is determined in the following manner:

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Paper (Abstract, text &amp; Bibliography)</td>
<td>100 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>75 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>150 pts (see evaluation list)</td>
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<td><strong>Total Points</strong></td>
<td><strong>325 pts</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bonus (Special Fields Test)</td>
<td>0-25 points</td>
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Your final grade will be the percentage of 320 points of your final score: Percentage scores greater than 90% will result in a grade of “A”; 80’s, “B”; 70’s, “C”; 60’s, “D”; and those with scores of less than 60% will fail.

**Presentation Evaluation:**

I will use the following categories to determine your presentation grade. Each category will be scored on a scale of 1-10. A total score (maximum possible of score 110) will be calculated and multiplied by 3 to get 150 possible points.

- Organization and Delivery of Content
- Subject Knowledge and Ability to Answer Questions
- Graphics
- Eye Contact – Non-verbal skills
- Oral Delivery – Use of the English language and oral skills

**Miscellaneous**

*Academic Integrity (A-9.1)* Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism. **Definition of Academic Dishonesty:** Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one’s own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one’s paper without giving the author due credit. Please read the complete policy at [http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp](http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp)

*Withheld Grades Semester Grades Policy (A-54)* Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average. The circumstances precipitating the request must have occurred after the last day in which a student could withdraw from a course. Students requesting a WH must be passing the course with a minimum projected grade of C.

*Students with Disabilities* To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to [http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/](http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/).
Biology 470 Plant Ecology & Plant Geography: Spring 2016 Sign-up Sheet for Presentations:

We will be meeting 3 or 4 times for our presentations. All are required to attend each meeting! You will be allowed 15 minutes for your talk. This timing is very standard for professional meetings. Students who go over their allotted time will be asked to stop and points will be deducted from their score (in professional meetings the moderator often asks you to step down: very embarrassing)!

Remember that you must meet with me at least once before March 10 to discuss and approve your topic. Failure to have your topic approved on time will result in a penalty against your grade. Don’t forget to sign up for the Special Fields Test using the schedule that will be provided!

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**April 11**

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6:00  

**April 18**

5:00  

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**April 25**

5:00  

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**May 20**

5:00  

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