

From Andes to Amazon: Biodiversity, Conservation & Sustainability

Course structure

Because this course is an “exploration” seminar, we want to allow ample time for the exploration and reflection that travel allows. To facilitate this, we will not be overloading you with traditional classroom style assignments, or even the same kind of structure you may be accustomed to in the classroom. That being said, we will provide some structure, through readings, seminars by guest speakers, and discussion assignments. For you to get the most out of your experience we expect you to be engaged and ready to participate in the structured activities we do provide. This means keeping up with the few mandatory readings, being ready to ask questions at seminars, participating in discussions and group activities, keeping up with your journal, and generally being engaged in the course.

Grading

Please read the following and the additional grading rubric so that you are very clear on our expectations for you.

Participation:

20 points of your grade will be based on participation in the course: class discussions, group projects, attentive listening during lectures, etc. We don't expect that you will always have an opinion to express, but we do expect that you will be an active listener, engaged as much as possible in the topics and activities at hand, and perhaps asking provocative questions. If you are a shy person, force yourself to speak up at least occasionally, and make sure you “shine” in situations that are more to your liking, e.g. small group activities, journal reflections, etc. We will encounter many speakers throughout the course. It is important that you show respect by listening attentively and actively, being prepared by reading appropriate readings ahead of time, asking questions and allowing others to ask questions, and being respectful of differing opinions or differing cultural viewpoints. In group projects, we expect that you will take an active role, either as a leader or a proactive follower. Contribute to the group in the areas where you have the most to offer. You will have many opportunities to be an active participant throughout the course. We also expect you to be on time to course activities and to be engaged (i.e. not sleeping in the back row during an activity, catching up on your journal at inappropriate times, distracting others from the task at hand, etc.). Finally, we also expect that you support and participate in our efforts to minimize individual and group ecological footprint.

Journal:

40 points of your grade will come from a journal that you will maintain on a daily basis. you will take 30 minutes a day to summarize and reflect on things you have learned or observed that day. You should go into depth on and highlight the things that interest you and are pertinent to the course themes. You may create more or less time for yourself depending on your needs or wants, but we expect that you will respect the space and privacy of your classmates when they are journaling. Small group discussion of the day's experiences may be desirable before writing.

Content: Your journal will serve as a place to make notes on daily course related activities. **We expect your notes to be fairly detailed and complete with respect to structured course activities, such as lectures, readings, field classes, and group discussions.** Feel free to record any other aspects of the trip that move you—such as things you saw out the bus window, special cultural or biological encounters you had, etc. **In addition to basic notes and observations, we expect that you will also make some reflections on the themes of our course: biodiversity, conservation, and sustainability.** Many of your reflections may come out of group discussions, but start trying to link your field observations to course themes and discussion topics. You might also think about how course themes relate to your own life. In short, make an effort to draw some connections between reading/discussion topics, course themes, and field experiences. The goal is that you begin to synthesize the observations and factual notes you have taken into some sort of overall impression that relates to themes of the course. For example, this would be a time to express feelings and emotions, and to begin trying to develop your opinions and “world views” based on your observations. We recognize that your opinions and views will continue to evolve, but we want to know how your thoughts and views are being changed and shaped by what you experience on the course. This is also a good time to weigh in with your opinion on academic topics we may have discussed in the evenings, especially if you didn’t express your opinion verbally during the discussion. We recognize that some days you will come to more cohesive and formulated conclusions or opinions than other days, but every day, we want to know what struck you as especially interesting, or what caught your fancy, and why. You might want to compare and contrast observations of society and ecosystems of Peru to society and ecosystems you are more familiar with at home. **Check the posted samples from some excellent journals from previous years if you are curious about what your journal should look like.**

Format: It is up to you to decide the format of your journal, as long as it is sufficiently clear and organized to be comprehensible to us, and a useful set of notes that you can take with you. You should be able to look back on your journal someday, as both a reference for where you were, what you saw (including species seen), and what you learned, and to chart the evolution of your personal thoughts and opinions. For basic factual notes, you can write in shorthand, full sentences, or outline format, and we always encourage the use of pictures/drawings/diagrams to aid your descriptions. For your more reflective writing that might be done in the evening, it would be better to use full sentences and paragraphs, and pay more attention to your writing craft. You are welcome to use several notebooks for your journal—e.g. a set of field notebooks with “rite-in-the-rain” paper that you can take outdoors in all weather conditions and a larger notebook that you can use in indoor settings. Likely the former will be used for factual observation and note taking, and the latter will be used for reflection and interpretation. We expect that you will have one of these notebooks with you at all times when appropriate, so that you can make notes as you go. You are welcome to touch up your notes, thoughts, and handwriting at the end of the day, or when you return to Seattle, both for ease of reading and clarification of observations or thoughts. We will be collecting your journals within the first week back in Seattle.

Assignments:

Pre-course reading quiz and proposal: 10 points of your grade will come from this assignment. See the assignments tab for detailed instructions on the proposal. See the readings tab for readings that you will be quizzed on and a link to the quiz under the assignments tab. Make sure you complete both of these before noon on August 28th. Upload your proposal to the dropbox.

Discussion Leading: 10 points of your grade will come from the group presentation you do on the topic you signed up for before the course. We assigned some chapters from one or both of two E.O. Wilson books to help you address your assigned topic. The goals of this presentation should be as follows: 1) Provide the group with basic background knowledge in biodiversity issues addressed by the course

(specifically the issue assigned to you—don't try to cover another group's topic too) and 2) Provoke some good discussion on the topics, perhaps relating it to tropical issues or even South American issues. The floor is yours. You will have up to an hour to be the "professors." We expect that your "lecture" should last no more than 20 minutes. The rest of the time should be spent in discussion. There are many ways to do this. It could be an all class discussion, or you could break the group into smaller subsections to address some questions. Each member of your group could work as a facilitator with a smaller subgroup. Then the whole group can come back together to flesh out ideas, share ideas, come to consensus, etc. Feel free to assign a short reading from the primary literature (some possibilities include those listed below, available on website). You can put up some data or graphs for the group to interpret (PPT or white board). You should have at least 4 people in your group. Between now and when you leave, get together with your group to select extra reading(s), and come up with some interesting discussion and lecture points. Make sure that each person in your group is assigned something to say, and that they say it concisely—that is, everyone should have about 5 minutes of speaking time. Don't let one person hog 20 minutes! Some general discussion topics that came out last year included: 1) problems with quantifying diversity, 2) extinction as a natural/unnatural process, 3) competing theories on the origins of biodiversity, 4) maintenance or coexistence of biological diversity from an ecological or evolutionary sense, 5) conservation strategy and goals, and 6) many philosophical/ethical conservation issues. 2 points of these 10 points will come from submitting a good outline of what you propose to do during your presentation, including what readings you will use.

Research Project: The final 40 points of your grade will come from one of two projects that you work on with your peers during the course. We will be visiting two field stations (one in the Andes and one in the Amazon) in which you will spend your first few days learning field techniques and familiarizing yourself with the natural history/environmental issues of these areas, through tours, hikes, faculty-led field projects, etc. The remaining 4 days or so at each site will be open for you to conduct a project of your choosing, in a small group of your peers. Projects must deal with one or more of the themes of the course, and can be approached from many angles and techniques. Examples of techniques include: biological experiment/field data collection (most likely format), education project with local schools (not always possible), photo essay or graphic art with well-researched and focused biological/conservation theme, peer or community interviews (not always possible), etc. You typically will conduct 1 large project at our main field site in the Amazon region. There will be little time for a second project at the Andes site, but you might be able to collect some comparison data if you are organized and motivated. With your group, you will present your project orally in an 8-10 minute presentation to the rest of the class while we are in Peru. Because electricity will be in short supply, we are not expecting PowerPoint presentations, or fancy graphics (but you will have at least a white board to use). We just want a summary of the reasoning that went into the project, as well as results, and conclusions. The presentation is part of your participation grade (see above). You will write up your project in detail (5 pages MS Word) with your group when we get back to Seattle. Most likely your written project will be in the format of a scientific paper. If your project does not lend itself to that format we should meet with you or your group prior to starting your project, both to help you focus your work and outline our expectations for your final product. Every group will be required to send us your write-up for comments in mid October prior to handing in a final draft.