



## **Course Syllabus: Discussions in Biology**

### **College of Science and Mathematics**

BIOL 5002 Section 180

Fall 2026

### **Contact Information**

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### **Course Description**

The course will consist of review and discussion of current scientific literature and research in the biological sciences. Each student describes and critiques at least two original research publications. Discussions will focus on the analysis of raw data, methodology, appropriateness of experimental approaches and hypotheses being tested. May be repeated once with the consent of the Graduate Coordinator.

### **Course Objectives**

1. Provide a forum for discussion and evaluation of peer-reviewed research journal publications on current topics in biology.
2. Provide students with an opportunity to express themselves orally by preparing and presenting seminar presentations such as would be expected at professional meetings and conventions. This should help the student prepare to communicate with an audience of peers both formally and informally.
3. Provide open roundtable discussion opportunity after reading and evaluating recently published peer-reviewed journal articles.
4. Examine and evaluate all the components that comprise peer-reviewed journal articles.

### **Textbook & Instructional Materials**

None required.

## Student Handbook

Refer to: [Student Handbook](#)

### Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work not the individual's to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the Office of Student Conduct. [Office of Student Conduct](#)

### Moffett Library

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support student's studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Get started on this [Moffett Library webpage](#) to explore these resources and learn how to best utilize the library.

### Grading

*Table 1: Percentage allocated to each assignment*

| Assignments                                                                 | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Student Discussion Leader Evaluation (graded by instructor)                 | 40         |
| Student Seminar Presentation (graded by the instructor and by fellow peers) | 40         |
| Participation/Questions Asked                                               | 10         |
| Attendance                                                                  | 10         |
| Total Percentage                                                            | 100        |

*Table 2: Total percentage for final grade.*

| Grade | Percentage   |
|-------|--------------|
| A     | 90 to 100    |
| B     | 80 to 89     |
| C     | 70 to 79     |
| D     | 60 to 69     |
| F     | Less than 60 |

## Research Discussion

Students enrolled in this course will be expected to lead group discussions of research papers assigned to you by the instructor. Each student will facilitate round table discussions of scientific papers chosen by the instructor. The instructor will give each student a copy of each paper to read in advance in order to be prepared for round table discussions about the research to occur. In order for fruitful discussion of each paper to occur, it is imperative that each student have the article read and analyzed PRIOR to the meeting in which the discussion takes place. This will be a weekly task throughout most of the semester and is why this course is entitled **Discussions** in Biology.

## Paper Presentations

Students will choose a specific peer-reviewed, primary research journal article published within the last THREE years involving research on some aspect of biology and get the article approved by your instructor for use in giving a 25-minute oral presentation about that research. You will also need to present basic background information on the general area of biology with which the specific chosen article concerns. Powerpoint visual aids should accompany the oral presentation. After approval of article/topic by instructor, provide a reprint of the journal article to everyone in the course THE WEEK BEFORE YOUR PRESENTATION DAY. Each student must then read each article prior to the actual presentation and **come with at least two written questions** about the article or topic to ask the presenter during the question and discussion period after the presentation has been made. The presentations will be graded by both the instructor and fellow students in the class using evaluation sheets. Components of grading on the evaluation sheets consist of: Presentation of Content (50 points), Presentation Style/Delivery (20 points), Handling of Questions (10 points), Critique of Paper (10 points), and Time Limit (10 points). Depending on number of students enrolled in the course, each student will give a maximum of two oral presentations. Here is a general outline for your oral presentation to follow (and some things to think about): A. Background on the topic of the research article (assume audience knows little about the topic) 1. Why is it important? 2. Any prior or related work reported on the topic? B. Hypothesis/Problem addressed in the research article 1. Why was the research performed in the first place? 2. What was trying to be answered? C. Methods and Procedures used D. Results of the research E. Conclusions drawn from the research F. Critique of the work 1. Was the hypothesis/problem studied and answered? 2. Were methods appropriate for the study? 3. Were appropriate conclusions drawn? 4. What other work would you suggest be done? Your presentation should be one that YOU have prepared **specifically for this class** and should not be one that was used in any of your previous classes. In other words, DON'T recycle presentations.....prepared by you, or by anyone else! Be forewarned, if it has been determined that you have recycled a presentation for this course, this will be grounds for an automatic "F" to be assigned as your grade for the course. Student oral presentations will be scheduled during the first week of classes. We will likely schedule the first

presentation to occur close to the midterm of the semester. My advice is to start working on looking at articles for approval early in the semester so that you have more time to get your presentation constructed and practiced before your presentation date. DON'T PROCRASTINATE! The student presenter is expected to answer questions concerning your topic from those in attendance at the conclusion of your oral presentation. We will also conduct our general class discussion of the research during this time. Each student is expected to evaluate all of your fellow classmates' presentations. Therefore, **attendance at ALL discussions classes is MANDATORY**. Points will be deducted from your final grade for any classes missed. We only meet one night a week, so I expect you all to always be there. Before you give your presentation, make sure that you have given it a "trial run" with the computer/projection set-up in our classroom that you will be using for your actual presentation.

### **Exams/Final Exam**

Due to the nature of this class, there will be no exams administered for this course.

### **Extra Credit**

Extra credit assignments are not available.

### **Make Up Assignments**

Any instances of need for make-up assignments will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

### **Important Dates**

- Last day for term schedule changes: August 27, 2026.
- Deadline to file for graduation: September 21, 2026.
- Last Day to drop with a grade of "W": November 23, 2026.
- Refer to: [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#)

### **Attendance**

You are expected to attend all classes unless you have a University-excused absence. Your attendance will be documented. Points will be deducted from your final grade for any classes missed with an unexcused absence. We only meet one night a week, so I expect you all to always be there.

### **Recording Classes**

***\*Recording classes is generally prohibited without the professor's explicit permission.*** Such recordings, when permitted, are for personal use only and may not be uploaded to the internet or otherwise shared, transmitted, or published without the professor's prior consent. Some faculty may not permit

recordings of their classes. When it is feasible and appropriate, students may record classes to accommodate disabilities under the Americans With Disabilities Act, with prior approval of Disability Support Services. Such recordings may not be uploaded to the internet or otherwise shared, transmitted, or published.

### **Instructor Class Policies**

#### **ALL PHONES SHOULD BE OFF IN THE CLASSROOM**

### **Change of Schedule**

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first 12 class days of a regular semester or the first four class days of a summer semester is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

### **Refund and Repayment Policy**

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Northwestern State University (NSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees and room/board charges that were paid to NSU for the semester. HOWEVER, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. As described below, two formulas (federal and state) exist in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

### **Services for Students with Disabilities**

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Northwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Student Wellness Center, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

### **Emergency Aid Resources for Basic Needs**

Unexpected life circumstances can affect anyone. If you are experiencing challenges meeting basic needs—such as housing, utilities, food, transportation, healthcare, technology, textbooks or other life necessities, resources may be available to help. Visit the [Student Emergency Support and Resources webpage](#) to learn more, and explore emergency support opportunities through NSU and

how to access them. For additional information, please contact the Office of Student Affairs: Clark Student Center #108, (940) 397-7500, [student.affairs@mstuexas.edu](mailto:student.affairs@mstuexas.edu).

## **College Policies**

### Campus Carry Rules/Policies

Refer to: [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#)

### Smoking/Tobacco Policy

Midwestern State University seeks to provide a safe, healthy, pleasant environment for its faculty, staff, and students. To this end, the use of tobacco products, including smoke and smokeless tobacco, and the advertising, sale, free distribution, and discarding of tobacco products shall be prohibited in all indoor and outdoor facilities and in all university vehicles. The policy extends to faculty, staff, students, vendors, guests, and visitors.

### Alcohol and Drug Policy

To comply with the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibits the unlawful possession, use or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

### Campus Carry

Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes has prohibited. The new Constitutional Carry law does not change this process. Concealed carry still requires a License to Carry permit, and openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit [Campus Carry](#).

### Active Shooter

The safety and security of our campus is the responsibility of everyone in our community. Each of us has an obligation to be prepared to appropriately respond to threats to our campus, such as an active aggressor. Please review the information provided by MSU Police Department regarding the options and strategies we can all use to stay safe during difficult situations. For more information, visit [MSUReady – Active Shooter](#). Students are encouraged to watch

the video entitled "*Run. Hide. Fight.*" which may be electronically accessed via the University police department's webpage: ["Run. Hide. Fight."](#)

### **Grade Appeal Process**

Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [MSU Catalog](#)

**\*Notice:** Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor.

### **Course Schedule:**

| <b>Week and Dates</b>      | <b>Topics</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week 1<br>8/24             | Introduction; Orientation; Course Expectations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Week 2<br>8/31             | Discussion of layout, examination, and evaluation of sections of a peer-reviewed journal article                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Week 3<br>9/7              | Labor Day Holiday                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Weeks 4-11<br>9/14 to 11/2 | Weekly discussion of papers will be distributed to students to read and evaluate throughout most of the semester. This will be done in a "journal club" fashion. All students will be given a copy of each paper to read in advance. A discussion leader will be chosen for each paper and student discussion leaders will be graded by the instructor as part of their grade for the course. |
| Weeks 12-15<br>11/9-11/30  | Student oral presentations of chosen peer-reviewed journal articles to present will occur during the last half of the course in order to give students time to get their presentations constructed. These presentations will be graded by both the instructor and fellow students.                                                                                                            |