



Course Syllabus – Spring 2026
BIOL 5913 – Mammals of the Trans-Pecos
Lecture: Bolin Hall, Room 248
Lab: Bolin Hall, Room 211

Contact Information

Instructor: Joel G. Brant, PhD

Office: Bolin Hall 224A

Office hours:

- Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays: 9:00-11:00
- Tuesdays & Thursdays: 9:30-11:00

Office phone: (940) 397-4408

E-mail: joel.brant@msutexas.edu

Course Description

This is a directed study to explore the current understanding of the mammals in the Trans-Pecos region of Texas. This course is restricted to graduate students in the department of biology.

Course Objectives

- Students will possess an intermediate level of understanding of mammalian classification & taxonomy.
- Students will possess an intermediate level of understanding of mammalian biogeography & ecology.
- Students will possess an intermediate level of understanding of the mammalian fauna of the Trans-Pecos of Texas.

Textbook & Instructional Materials

Feldhamer, G. A., L. C. Drickamer, S. H. Vessey, J. F. Merritt, & C. Krajewski. 2020. *Mammalogy: adaptation, diversity, ecology*. 5th Edition. McGraw Hill Publishers, New York, New York. (ISBN13 = 978-1421436524)

Schmidly, D. J., & R. D. Bradley. 2016. *The Mammals of Texas*. 7th Edition. University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas. (ISBN13 = 978-1477308868)

Yancey, F. D., D. J. Schmidly, R. W. Manning, & S. Kasper. 2023. *The Mammals of Trans-Pecos Texas: including Big Bend and Guadalupe Mountains National Parks*. 2nd Edition. Texas A&M University Press, College Station, Texas (ISBN13 = 978-1648430244)

Appropriate clothing for lab & field.

Course Policies

Absences

Attendance of both lecture and lab are essential for successful completion of this course. Attendance will be taken regularly and failure to attend will have consequences. Absences due to participation in university-sponsored co-curricular events or university-recognized religious observances are considered excused absences provided appropriate procedures are followed. The student must notify the instructor at the earliest possible time before the absence and will be responsible for the work and material we cover in class. A student with excessive absences may be dropped from a course by the instructor.

Make-up Work

If a student misses an exam due to a university-approved absence or due to an unforeseen health or family emergency, they may make arrangements with the instructor to take a make-up exam. You are responsible for providing evidence to substantiate the reason for any absence as soon as possible. Missed exams will be recorded as a score of zero unless written documentation is received and authenticated. Missed exams must be made-up within a week of the exam date. There will be no make-ups for missed quizzes.

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

For this course D2L will generally be used as a document repository (lecture notes, lab notes, recorded lectures, and lab videos). You can log into D2L through the MSU Homepage (or <https://d2l.msutexas.edu/d2l/home>). If you experience difficulties, please use links to technical help found on the D2L site.

Grade Determination

The final grade for this course will be determined by considering both your lecture grade and your lab grade. The lecture grade will comprise 75% of the final grade for the course and consist of four 150-point exams, five 30-point literature summaries, and a 200-point Bibliography of the Research associated with the mammals in the Trans-Pecos, Texas. The first 3 exams will not be comprehensive and cover material from both the reading and lecture since the last exam. The final exam will be comprehensive, dealing with all the material covered during the lecture portion of the course. All lecture exams will consist of a combination of multiple choice, matching, short answer, and short essay questions.

The lab grade will comprise 25% of the final grade for the course and consist of two 60-point exams, seven 10-point taxonomy quizzes, 50 points for field trip participation, and 10 points for lab cleanliness (see below). All exams will be practical based (i.e. specimen based) and not comprehensive. Each quiz will cover material from the preceding week and will also be practical based.

Table 1: Grade determination based on 1000 points: lecture (950 points) + lab (250 points)

Grade	Points
A	≥ 1080
B	906 to 1079
C	840 to 905
D	720 to 839
F	< 720

Lab Cleanliness

Lab partners will be responsible for their assigned space and specimens. Label your specimen clearly. When you are finished working with your specimen, return the specimen to the bag, spray it with preservative, and place it in the proper place. Do not work on any specimen other than your own. **Do not put solid waste in the sink – all solid waste is to be placed in the specified trashcan at the front of the lab.** Do not leave your table greasy or dirty – use the provided cleaner to wipe down the table. Clean all dissection tools and trays and replace them for the next lab section. Make sure the stools are pushed in before you leave. Persistent failure to leave the lab in a clean state will result in points being deducted from the final lab grade for all individuals involved.

Rules of Conduct

Students in this course will conduct themselves in a respectful and appropriate manner. Disorderly conduct, as defined in the student handbook, will not be tolerated. The instructor may dismiss students from lecture and lab sections due to instances of significant disorderly conduct (especially disruptive,

discriminatory, or threatening behaviors). Return to class will be prohibited prior to meeting with the instructor and Biology Department Chair to discuss the incident. A second instance of dismissal will result in permanent removal from the course and an automatic assignment of an “F” grade for lecture and lab. In cases of severe disorderly conduct (usually involving campus security) the student will immediately be removed from the course and assigned an “F” grade, regardless of the number of previous instances.

Please turn off any cell phones or other electronic communication devices (i.e. pagers or instant messaging devices) unless prior permission has been obtained by the instructor. Laptop computers and voice recorders may be used as note taking aids, however individuals who surf the web or play games during class will lose this privilege. Any use of electronic devices during an exam will be taken as a form of cheating and dealt with accordingly (see below).

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Generative artificial intelligence can be an effective aid for studying and the writing process. However, graded assignments are intended to assess the output of the student, not the AI. Students submitting written assignments, data, or other inputs synthesized from artificial intelligence software (ex. ChatGPT, Jasper, Google Bard, etc.) will be given a “0” on assignments and may be failed from the course in accordance with MSU’s policies on academic dishonesty and plagiarism.

University Policies

Campus Carry Rules/Policies

Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (TX Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as 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 Information

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 demanding situations. For more information, visit [Safety / Emergency Procedures](#). 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."](#)

Smoking/Tobacco Policy

University policy prohibits the use of tobacco products in any building owned or operated by Midwestern State University. Adult students may smoke only in the outside designated-smoking areas at each location.

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 University are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibit 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. Please refer to the **2025-2026 Student Handbook** for further information.

Academic Dishonesty

Dishonesty within the academic community is a profoundly serious matter because dishonesty destroys the basic trust necessary for a healthy educational environment. Academic dishonesty is any treatment or representation of work as if one were fully responsible for it when it is in fact the work of another person. Academic dishonesty includes cheating, plagiarism, theft, or improper manipulation of laboratory or research data or theft of services. A substantiated case of academic dishonesty may result in disciplinary action, including a failing grade on the project, a failing grade in the course, removal from the course, and/or expulsion from Midwestern State University. Please reference the **2025-2026 Student Handbook** for additional information.

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, Midwestern 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 **Clark Student Center, Room 168, (940) 397-4140**. Current documentation of 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](#).

Grade Appeal Process

To appeal a grade, consult the Midwestern State University 2023-2024 Student Handbook and visit the following checklists: the [Grade Appeal Checklist](#) provides the timeline for appealing from the instructor to the next in line (dean of the college). The [Academic Honesty Checklist](#) describes the timeline for appealing from the instructor to the next in line (chair of department) and who must be notified of academic honesty infractions.

Tentative Lecture Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Chapter
1	1/21 – 1/23	Introduction & Characteristics of Mammals	1
2	1/26 – 1/30	History of Mammalogy	2
3	2/2 – 2/6	Methods of Studying Mammals	3
4	2/9 – 2/11	Phylogeny & Diversification of Mammals	4
4	2/13	EXAM #1	
5	2/16 – 2/20	Mammalian Evolution	5
6	2/23 – 2/27	Mammalian Anatomy	7, 9
7	3/2 – 3/6	Modes of Feeding	8
	3/9 – 3/13	SPRING BREAK	
8	3/16 – 3/18	Reproduction	11, 23
8	3/20	EXAM #2	
9	3/23 – 3/27	Population Ecology	26
10	3/30 – 4/1	Social Behavior	22, 24
11	4/6 – 4/10	Dispersal, Migration, & Habitat Selection	25
12	4/13 – 4/15	Community Ecology	27
12	4/17	EXAM #3	
13	4/20 – 4/24	Biogeography	6
14	4/27 – 4/29	Conservation	30
15	5/4 – 5/8	Disease Ecology	16
16	5/11	FINAL EXAM (10:30 am)	

Tentative Lab Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Chapter
1	1/23	Introduction to Lab, Monotremes, Marsupials	12
2	1/30	Afrotheria & Xenarthra	13, 16, 19
3	2/6	Chiroptera	14
4	2/13	No Lab (TSM Meeting)	
5	2/20	Primates, Scandentia, Dermoptera	13, 15
6	2/27	No Lab (TAS Meeting)	
7	3/6	Lab Mid-Term Exam	
	3/9 – 3/13	SPRING BREAK	
8	3/20	Lagomorpha & Rodentia	18
9	3/27	Rodentia	18
10	4/3	No Lab (Easter Break)	
11	4/10	Eulipotyphla & Pholidota	13, 16
12	4/17	Carnivora	17
13	4/24	No Lab (SWAN Meeting)	
14	5/1	Whales & Ungulates	20, 21
15	5/8	Lab Final Exam	