

EEB 3256

Plants and Civilization

TLS301, Monday/Wednesday/Friday 9:05am-9:55am

Instructor: Dr. Ed McAssey (he/him)

Email: edward.mcassey@uconn.edu

Office: Gant West 411

Student hours: Mondays 11 am-12pm or By Appointment

Enrollment requirements:

Three credits of introductory biology.

Course Catalog Description

Plants and animals used by people; origin, history, biology, distribution, and role in development of civilizations.

Course Description

This course will engage students in understanding the fundamental role that plants have in the development of human civilizations. The importance of plants is multifaceted and as such we will address the many aspects in which plants have affect people by focusing on examples and ideas from topics like: Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, domestication, plants causing conflict, medicine/art/creativity, and infrastructure. The above topics overlap considerably and will serve to show the ever-present importance of plants.

Course objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Hypothesize why certain plants have played a disproportionate role in human civilization
- Synthesize the importance of particular plant species to humanity via oral and written communication
- Critique the negative ways that plants have been used throughout human history
- Compare and Contrast approaches and findings in Indigenous Ecological Knowledge to western science

Required materials:

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer – freely available online copy via UConn Library

Most Delicious Poison by Noah Whiteman electronic and print versions available online. EBook version available through the school bookstore.

Class format

You'll see a tentative class schedule (order and duration of topics may change) below that contains an outline of different types of class activities including: Mini-lectures, book discussions, in-class group activities, presentations, and trips to the greenhouse. Each

class period will include some sort of in-class activity to increase student engagement with the material. These activities may take a variety of forms: summarizing a reading, developing a list of ideas, devising an experiment, explaining an example, or something else entirely.

Assignments

In-Class Activities – Each class there will be an activity to help explain and enhance our understanding of concepts. To earn all **100 points** in this category, you must complete in class activities in at least 33 different class meetings (~80% of class meetings). To complete an activity, you'll need to turn in the day's individual or group worksheet associated with the activity. We have 41 classes total, which means you can miss eight in-class activities without incurring any penalty. **Because of this flexibility, there are no makeups when it comes to in-class activities.** Missed activities simply represent one of your eight free misses and do not require any email explanation to the instructor. If more than eight in-class activities are missed, points will be awarded according to the scale listed below:

In-Class Activities Completed	Points earned
33-41	100
25-32	80
17-24	60
9-16	40
0-8	20

Presentations – Throughout the semester each student will present a short (< 5 minutes) presentation on a plant and how it has impacted humanity. A rubric for the presentation will be provided to you on HuskyCT. This will involve you proposing a plant to me, sending in a draft presentation, and then presenting a final presentation. Proposed plants will have to go beyond well-known supermarket plants, as the goal of this project is for you to teach your classmates about lesser known (but still important) ways that humans use and interact with plants. **50 points**

Quizzes – Twice this semester we will have in-class individual quizzes. The first one will be on domestication and the second one will be traditional ecological knowledge. These quizzes will be a combination of multiple-choice questions, short answer questions, and problem solving. **100 points (50 points each; 2 quizzes)**

Ethnobotanical curation of UConn Herbarium Project

The UConn Herbarium contains preserved plants from across Connecticut, New England, the US, and the world. To enhance the utility of this database, you will help research and curate the ethnobotanical content associated with our local plants in the Herbarium. This

will involve writing up a narrative of how particular plants are important to groups now and historically AND producing a social media post for the UConn herbarium that will be posted for the University Community to view. You will find specific instructions and a rubric on HuskyCT when the assignment is announced during the semester. **50 points**

One-page paper

This short paper will give you an opportunity to explain to a non-scientist audience why you believe that people in Connecticut should be more aware of the plants around them. This can take many different approaches: food, conservation, medicine, history, ethics, and much more. The point of the assignment is for you to take your academic knowledge and translate it into a persuasive essay that non-scientists will enjoy and benefit from reading it. You will find specific instructions and a rubric on HuskyCT when the assignment is announced during the semester. **25 points**

Three-page paper

Proposal to CT governor on how our relationship with plants in Connecticut can be improved and/or changed. This could be agricultural, ecological, community building, educational, and much more! As this is a formal proposal, you will need to provide scientific citations to bolster your argument. You will find specific instructions and a rubric on HuskyCT when the assignment is announced during the semester. **75 points**

Grading Scale

Percentage Score	Letter Grade
>92.5	A
>89.5	A-
>86.5	B+
>82.5	B
>79.5	B-
>76.5	C+
>72.5	C
>69.5	C-
>66.5	D+
>62.5	D
>59.5	D-
<59.49	F

*Note – There are no curves in this course

Late work: Work must be completed on time. Deadlines for all assignments will be posted on HuskyCT and announced in class and via email. Please email me if you are having issues with meeting a deadline. Late work on each individual assignment, with no prior

communication, will affect your end of semester +/- grades. E.g., B grade may be reduced to a B-/C+.

Syllabus information may be subject to change. All changes will be announced to the class. The most up to date syllabus is located on HuskyCT.

Course Schedule

Class	Date	Topic	Due
1	26-Aug	Intro	
2	28-Aug	Plants and hominins	
3	30-Aug	Intro to domestication	
4	4-Sep	How to study domestication	
5	6-Sep	Brassicacae	
6	9-Sep	Legumes	
7	11-Sep	Cereals	
8	13-Sep	Herbarium tour	
9	16-Sep	Solanaceae	
10	18-Sep	Cucurbits and Bananas	
11	20-Sep	Vegetatively propagated crops	
12	23-Sep	Intro to IEK	
13	25-Sep	New England IEK	
14	27-Sep	Braiding Sweetgrass Disc.	Read pg 3-117
15	30-Sep	Africa IEK	
16	2-Oct	Americas IEK	Domestication Quiz
17	4-Oct	Braiding Sweetgrass Disc.	Read pg 128-140; 167-201
18	7-Oct	Asia IEK	
19	9-Oct	Polynesia IEK	
20	11-Oct	Braiding Sweetgrass Disc.	Read pg 310-347; 374-384
21	14-Oct	Medicinal Plants Intro	1-pg paper
22	16-Oct	Taxol case study	
23	18-Oct	Most Delicious Poison Disc.	Read Ch 1-3
24	21-Oct	Caffeine	
25	23-Oct	Opioids / Cannabis	
26	25-Oct	Most Delicious Poison Disc.	Read Ch 7-9
27	28-Oct	Alcohol	
28	30-Oct	Tobacco	IEK Quiz
29	1-Nov	Most Delicious Poison Disc.	Read Ch 10-12
30	4-Nov	Intro to Plants and Conflict	
31	6-Nov	Cotton	

32	8-Nov	Rubber	
33	11-Nov	Sugarcane	
34	13-Nov	Defoliation	
35	15-Nov	Spice trade; Colonies	
36	18-Nov	Collective farming	
37	20-Nov	Agricultural labor in war	
38	22-Nov	Plantsgiving / Grocery store activity	
39	2-Dec	Timber	
40	4-Dec	Ornamentals	
41	6-Dec	Summary	3-pg paper

*This course schedule (and duration) of topics is subject to change. However, the quiz and paper due dates will not change.

Academic Integrity: I expect **all** submitted assignments in our class to represent **your** own **original** thoughts and ideas. In the context of writing, this means that plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you have any questions about what is allowed or not allowed – please reach out to me, so that we can discuss and avoid any issues. AI based generation of text is neither “yours” nor “original”, and thus is not allowed in the context of producing submitted assignments for our class. In this course we aim to conduct ourselves as a community of scholars, recognizing that academic study is both an intellectual and ethical enterprise. You are encouraged to build on the ideas and texts of others; that is a vital part of academic life. You are also obligated to document every occasion when you use another’s ideas, language, or syntax. You are encouraged to study together, discuss readings outside of class, share your drafts during peer review and outside of class, and go to the Writing Center with your drafts. In this course, those activities are well within the bounds of academic honesty. However, when you use another’s ideas or language—whether through summary or paraphrase—you must formally acknowledge that debt by signaling it with a standard form of academic citation. Even one occasion of academic dishonesty, large or small, on any assignment, large or small, will result in failure for the entire course and referral to Student Judicial Affairs. For University policies on academic honesty, please see UConn’s Responsibilities of Community Life: The Student Code and the Office of Community Standards: <http://www.community.uconn.edu> . The policy on Academic, Scholarly, and Professional Integrity and Misconduct can be found here: <https://policy.uconn.edu/2023/07/11/academic-scholarly-and-professional-integrity-and-misconduct-aspim-policy-on/> .

Additional Resources

Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment and Related Interpersonal Violence

The University is committed to maintaining a safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and working environments for all members of the University community – students, employees, or visitors. Academic and professional excellence can flourish only when each member of our community is assured an atmosphere of mutual respect. All members of the University community are responsible for the maintenance of an academic and work environment in which people are free to learn and work without fear of discrimination or discriminatory harassment. In addition, inappropriate amorous relationships can undermine the University’s mission when those in positions of authority abuse or appear to abuse their authority. To that end, and in accordance with federal and state law, the University prohibits discrimination and discriminatory harassment, as well as inappropriate amorous relationships, and such behavior will be met with appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from the University. Additionally, to protect the campus community, all responsible employees (including faculty), as outlined in the Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment and Related Interpersonal Violence, are required to report to the Office of Institutional Equity any information that they receive related to sexual assaults, intimate partner violence, and/or stalking involving a student. *An exception to this reporting exists if students disclose information as a part of coursework submitted to an instructor in connection with a course assignment. Even in the absence of such obligation, all Employees are encouraged to contact OIE if they become aware of information that suggests a safety risk to the University community or any member thereof.* The University takes all reports with the utmost seriousness. Please be aware that while the information you provide will remain private, it will not be confidential and will be shared with university officials who can help. More information, including confidential and exempt employee resources available for support and assistance, can be found at equity.uconn.edu and titleix.uconn.edu.

Center for Students with Disabilities

The University of Connecticut is committed to protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities and assuring that the learning environment is accessible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability or pregnancy, please let me know immediately so that we can discuss options. Students who require accommodations should contact the Center for Students with Disabilities, Wilbur Cross Building Room 204, (860) 486-2020 or <http://csd.uconn.edu/>.

Office of Emergency Management on Emergency Preparedness

In case of inclement weather, a natural disaster, or a campus emergency, the University communicates through email and text message. Students are encouraged to sign up for alerts through <http://alert.uconn.edu>. Students should be aware of emergency procedures, and further information is available through the Office of Emergency Management at <http://publicsafety.uconn.edu/emergency/>.