

**EEB 2254W**

Current Research Topics in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology  
Monteith 414 (MONT 414), Wednesday 2pm-4pm

**Instructor:** Dr. Ed McAssey (he/him)

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Office: Gant West 411

Student hours: By Appointment

**Course Catalog Description**

Engagement with primary research literature in ecology and evolutionary biology, and development of written communication skills through writing, editing, revising, and peer feedback.

**Course Description and Objectives**

Students in this course will develop scientific writing and communication skills by engaging with primary literature. We will be focusing our writing activities this semester on the general topic on Artificial Selection. Artificial selection stands out in the study of evolution in three large ways – 1) Darwin saw it as an important case study to support evolutionary change, 2) It has produced the majority of the plants and animals we consume in a Western diet, 3) It provides quantitatively rigorous ways to test evolutionary theory in the lab. Together we will break down the writing process into discrete parts and learn to synthesize scientific ideas effectively. By the end of the course, you will have a foundational understanding of the scientific writing process, and likewise be able to use the writing process to engage with scientific concepts.

This is a writing intensive course (W). According to university-wide policies for W courses, you cannot pass this course unless you receive a passing grade for its writing components.

**Course objectives**

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

- Engage with the primary literature
- Synthesize multiple sources into a logical written argument
- Critically and constructively evaluate self and peer writing
- Use the writing process as a way to learn about scientific concepts

**Required materials:**

There are no textbooks or other required materials for this course. All readings will be provided by the instructor via HuskyCT.

## Class Format

This course meets weekly for a two-hour period. During those two hours, we will go over key concepts related to writing and reading the scientific literature, have discussions on the writing process and our readings, and have in-class activities. These activities serve two purposes: they will serve as writing exercises and opportunities to work in small groups, and they will also provide some time to work on your assignments. W courses at UConn require 15 pages of revised writing, which is a lot! To make that more manageable, we will spend some portion of classes working on those assignments. You are expected to spend class time working on work for this class.

Please come prepared to write in class via a laptop (or similar). Come ready to engage with your classmates and me on the readings and the writing process.

## Main writing assignments

Assignment	Length	First Draft Due:	Final Draft Due:
Mini-lit review #1	1	9/11	9/25
Perspective #1	2	9/25	10/9
Mini-lit review #2	2	10/9	10/23
Public Science Writing	4	10/23	11/6
Literature review	4	11/6	11/20
Perspective #2	2	11/20	12/6

**Peer reviews:** In addition to the above, you will be responsible for writing and submitting evaluations on peer work throughout the semester. We will discuss the best practices in constructive peer review so that you can work on this important skill.

**Self-reflection:** There will be two short self-reflections – one in the mid-term, and one on the last day of class. The purpose of these is to develop skills on self-evaluation and progress.

All writing assignments are to be submitted via HuskyCT as a Word Document.

## Revision

All your assignments will get feedback either from me or peers. Many assignments may be revised for a final draft submission. We will discuss in class how to revise, but here are my general expectations for revisions:

- You should reflect on suggestions and comments and incorporate them in a way you see fit.
- However, the revised document should be substantially revised from the first draft, in accordance with the feedback. The revised copy **must** have track changes so that I can see exactly how comments were addressed.

- This is an opportunity for you to think deeply about your writing; revising is a thoughtful process. Simply accepting grammatical suggestions but not addressing larger structural or logical issues will not constitute a revision.
- Only **one** revision can be submitted, and it is due on the final draft due date.

### Grading

Grades are an inherently flawed way to assess learning and understanding (we will discuss this more on the first day!). However, we are bound by university guidelines to provide semester grades. As a compromise, no assignment during the semester will be given a letter or numerical grade. Instead, assignments will be marked as either Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. You will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit **once** after receiving an Unsatisfactory mark to potentially receive a Satisfactory mark. The revision must be received by the above due date to be considered. Your semester grade will be determined based on how many assignments and tasks you complete, and how many of those receive Satisfactory marks. We will discuss the “no grading” policy at length on the first day, and work together to develop benchmarks for end of semester grades as well as overall course learning goals.

### Grading Scale

Grade	Number of Satisfactory Assignments
A*	7
B*	6
C	4-5
D	2-3
F	1

### Notes:

- There are no curves or extra credit. Progress will be regularly updated on HuskyCT.
- + and – grades may be awarded based on quality of participation, discussion, and engagement throughout the semester. For example, attendance without regular quality participation, discussion, and engagement would result in an A- instead of an A (assuming all other assignments were completed at a satisfactory level).
- Please schedule meetings with me to ensure you are on track with your learning goals. I will be able to suggest concrete actions to help you succeed in this course.
- \*To earn an A or B in the course you must have satisfactorily completed the final drafts of the 1, 2, and 4 page-literature reviews AND completed participation activities in 80% of classes.
- Total number of assignments = six writing assignments + 80% completion of participation activities = 7 assignments total

**Attendance and participation:** Attendance and participation in class are expected, but I understand that extenuating circumstances arise. Please let me know if you will be missing a class in advance so we can make sure you stay on top of the course content. You'll see in the above notes on grades that in order to get an A or B at the end of the semester, you must complete participation activities in at least 80% of classes found in our class schedule. This is to ensure that you are learning the required content and writing strategies to produce your own high quality work. However, simply attending class and putting your name on our worksheets is insufficient to earn full credit. To earn full credit in this category you should be a regular quality participant in our course. This is primarily done by answering questions, asking questions, and sharing opinions. Each class affords many opportunities to participate. Please see me if you have questions or want help in learn how to effectively participate.

**Late work:** Work must be completed on time. Deadlines for all assignments are describe above and via email reminders. Submitting work on time is important so that I can provide feedback to help with your revisions as soon as possible. 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 C+ if two assignments are turned in late. No late work will be accepted one week after the original final due date.

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.

**Academic Integrity:** I expect all submitted assignment 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](http://equity.uconn.edu) and [titleix.uconn.edu](http://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](tel:8604862020) 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/>.