

Welcome to Community Ecology BI 472

About the Course

Instructor: Brendan Bohannon

Office: 309 Pacific Hall

Phone: 346-4883

Email: bohannon@uoregon.edu

Class hours: TTh 2:15 – 3:45PM, held remotely via Zoom link below.

Zoom: click [here](#).

Office Hours: Thursdays 4:00 - 5:00PM and by appointment (held remotely via Zoom link above).

Prerequisites: BI 370 Ecology (or equivalent). Please check with me if you are missing the prerequisite. A course in Statistics is recommended, and courses in Calculus and/or Population Ecology (e.g. BI 471) are helpful.

Web Site: Our web site is accessible via the UO Canvas server. Login requires your UO Information Services (Computing Center) email address and the corresponding password.

How I will contact you: All of my communication to you outside of class will take place via email. Specifically, I will use the email registered to you by the University of Oregon. If you use another ISP for your email, make sure you arrange to have your UO email forwarded to it, or arrange to change your registered email address with UO.

Required readings and assignments:

I will be assigning reading from a variety of sources. By 5:00PM Friday, I will have posted the next week's readings and writing assignment on the class website. Most of the readings will be available for download as pdf files. To read these you will need Adobe

Acrobat Reader, free software that is installed on UO computers and can be downloaded from [here](#).

There is a textbook available for this course: Community Ecology (2nd edition) by Gary Mittelbach and Brian McGill. I will be assigning background reading from this text, and the course outline will generally follow the outline of the book. A e-version of the text is available from the Science Library [here](#).

About Community Ecology

Community ecology is a subdiscipline of ecology that studies the properties of species assemblages.

Community ecology arose at the end of the 19th century as an attempt to understand the "balance of nature". Given the bewildering variety of species that can be found in a prairie, pond, or forest, naturalists were curious why there were repeated patterns of species composition and life form. Community ecology seeks to answer these and related questions.

The central questions of community ecology are:

- 1) How do communities form (i.e. what are the processes that allow species coexistence) and what causes communities to change?
- 2) How are communities organized (i.e. are there regularities in the structure of communities)?
- 3) What are the attributes of communities (i.e. how does one describe and compare

communities) and what causes variation in these attributes?

- 4) What patterns do communities exhibit in space and time, and why?

We will explore these and related questions during this course.

Community ecology is also a foundational science for many applied disciplines, including conservation biology, ecological restoration, the study of invasive species, environmental management, and environmental engineering. We will have the opportunity to discuss examples of these applications during this course.

About Me

I joined the University of Oregon faculty in September of 2006, after 8 years on the faculty at Stanford University. My research group studies the community ecology of microorganisms (viruses, bacteria, archaea, and microeukarya), using a combination of laboratory microcosm experiments and field studies using molecular techniques. I am particularly fascinated with the diversity of microbial life and much of my research is focused on the causes and consequences of microbial biodiversity.

Course Goals

I have two goals for this course.

Help you learn some of the central ideas in community ecology—This course is not a panoramic overview of community ecology. Community ecology is a very broad and integrative science. In a 10 week course an

overview could only be cursory. I feel strongly that as upper division and graduate students you will learn more if we take the time to explore in detail some of the major controversies and hot topics in community ecology.

Help you continue your transition from student to *scholar*—A scholar is someone who can think critically, argue logically, write clearly, and read effectively. Most importantly, a scholar understands how to organize and use knowledge, and takes responsibility for their own learning. My goal is to provide you with opportunities to practice all of these skills.

Critical thinking involves using a variety of forms of information, synthesized logically, to solve a problem. Critical thinking is a key tool for any educated citizen of the planet and is essential for a practicing scientist. It will be my job to give you a structured opportunity to practice critical thinking by interacting with the literature, your colleagues, and me. This means giving you readings and assignments that allow you to stretch your mental muscles a bit.

A great way to practice critical thinking is to write out your argument—an idea that sounds great in your head may be less wonderful when down on paper. In this class, you will write short paragraphs and longer essays that ask you to synthesize and apply what you have learned.

The primary literature remains the first front in the advance of science. The quantity of the literature is growing exponentially. Reading it *effectively* is a skill that can be learned and practiced.

Strategy for Achieving these Goals

By now, 95% of your education has likely been structured around lectures. Lectures are good tools for downloading information. They require a particular dynamic. This dynamic, bluntly stated, is “professor professes, student writes it down”. Lectures, however, are pretty lousy ways to learn how to engage the literature and to learn how to read and think like a scientist. Instead, we will use the following tools to work on these skills.

Readings and the case method—We will use the case method to dissect the readings. Through this analysis, we get to know the material by working with it, not by memorizing it. Thus for a typical class, you will be given a background reading (usually from our textbook), one or two readings from the scientific literature, plus some study questions. During the class period we will work our way through the readings in order to better understand the context of the research, its major findings, its flaws and strengths. We may do in-class exercises that will help us explore the ideas in the readings. These exercises may take the form of debates, small group discussion of a scientific question, a computer simulation or other exercise.

Essay Paragraphs—Each week, you will be asked to write a short essay on a study question or questions key to understanding that week’s topic. These essays are an opportunity to get some feedback on your writing and to engage with the material.

Research Proposal — You will have an opportunity to work with ideas from community ecology by writing a research proposal. I will give you a

handout describing this assignment in more detail later. In brief, you will write a proposal in small groups (2 - 3 students). You will begin by deciding (in consultation with each other and with me) on a topic for your proposal. You will then write a short literature review (1 – 2 pages) on your research topic, and craft a 5 page research proposal (including information from your review). Near the end of the term the class will be divided into two groups, and each group will read the other groups’ research proposals, write reviews of each, and choose the best proposal for “funding”. You will be given the reviews of your proposal and will have the opportunity to revise it before it is given a final grade. Your grade for the proposal assignment will be based on your literature review, your initial proposal, your participation in the review process (including the reviews you write) and your revised proposal.

Take-home exam — There will be a midterm exam in this class. This exam will be a “take-home” exam and will consist primarily of questions you will have already encountered as study questions, or as questions posed in class. This is an opportunity for you to think more deeply about the course topics and to demonstrate your progress in understanding the material.

Grading — Your final grade will depend on your performance on the weekly essay questions (40%), the midterm (20%), and the group project (40%).

Keys to Remote Learning

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there are a few things we can do to enhance our social learning. Please attend our remote class meetings whenever possible (I will post recordings but they are a poor substitute for actual attendance). Please participate (ask questions, contribute to breakout discussions, etc.) as often as you can during our meetings. Please leave your video on if possible, to enhance your connection to the group (but I understand if this is not always possible).

Tentative Deadlines

(by 2PM, unless stated otherwise)

Groups assigned: January 14.

Proposal topic due: January 26.

Literature review due: February 9.

Midterm handed out: February 11.

Midterm due: February 18.

Proposal due: February 25.

Proposal reviews due: March 4.

Revised proposal due: March 12.

Tentative course schedule

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Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. We will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise us of this preference early in the quarter (or before) so that we may address you properly.

Open inquiry, freedom of expression, and respect for difference are fundamental to a comprehensive and dynamic education. We are committed to upholding these ideals by encouraging the exploration, engagement, and expression of divergent perspectives and diverse identities. Classroom courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Our classroom is a learning environment, and as such should be a safe, inclusive and respectful place. Being respectful also includes using preferred pronouns for your classmates. Disrespecting fellow students as well as combative approaches, tones and/or actions are not acceptable. Please make us aware if there are classroom dynamics that impede your (or someone else's) full engagement.

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Safe Ride

541-346-7433 ext 2

pages.uoregon.edu/saferide

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We are a schedule-ahead service and riders can (1) call once we open to schedule a ride with a dispatcher or (2) leave a voicemail on the day of their ride request. We do not call riders ahead of time to confirm due to capacity constraints, but riders are always welcome to call us to double-check that their ride was scheduled. We are a feminist, 'for-the-students/by-the-students' organization and operate out of the Women's Center in EMU 12F.

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Essay Paragraphs—Each week, you will be asked to write a short essay on a study question or questions key to understanding that week’s topic. These essays are an opportunity to get some feedback on your writing and to engage with the material.

Research Paper — You will have an opportunity to work with ideas from community ecology by writing a research paper. I will give you a

handout describing this assignment in more detail later. In brief, you will write a scholarly paper (~5 pages) on a topic of your choice within the field of community ecology. My goal is for this paper to be an opportunity to synthesize ideas in community ecology in a way that is maximally useful to you as a graduate student. This paper could be a draft of an introduction or background section of a proposal, a literature review of a topic related to your own research interests, a position paper or perspective essay on a controversial topic, etc. Whatever topic and format would be most useful to you as a scientist. You will send me a synopsis of your topic (i.e. a tentative title and brief summary) by week three and the complete paper will be due during week 10. As part of this assignment you may schedule a one-on-one meeting with me during Spring term to give you oral feedback regarding your paper.

Proposal review. The undergraduate students will as part of their class requirements craft a 5 page research proposal. Near the end of the term the entire class (grads and undergrads) will be divided into two groups, and each group will read the other groups’ research proposals, write reviews of each, and choose the best proposal for “funding”. Although graduate students will not be required to write a proposal, you will be expected to write written reviews and participate in the in-person proposal review process.

Class presentation — One of the best ways to learn a topic is to teach it. You will have the opportunity to present on a topic of your choice during this term. You will be asked to choose a recent paper (or papers) to share with the class, and then present the ideas in this paper or papers during a ~15 minute

presentation. Your topic should be related to a broad topic we discuss in class, but it can be more applied, in more detail or take a different perspective than that provided by me or our textbook. The talks will be scheduled for weeks 3 – 10, and you will sign up for a speaking slot by the end of Week 1.

Grading — Your final grade will depend on your performance on the weekly essay questions (40%), your presentation (20%), your proposal reviews (10%) and your final paper (30%).

Keys to Remote Learning

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Tentative Deadlines

(by 2PM, unless stated otherwise)

Presentation date chosen: January 12.

Paper synopsis due: January 21.

Proposal reviews due: March 4.

Final paper due: March 12.

Tentative course schedule

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pages.uoregon.edu/saferide

Safe Ride is an **assault prevention shuttle** that works to provide free, inclusive, and accessible alternatives to traveling alone at night for **UO students, faculty, and staff**.

We are a schedule-ahead service and riders can (1) call once we open to schedule a ride with a dispatcher or (2) leave a voicemail on the day of their ride request. We do not call riders ahead of time to confirm due to capacity constraints, but riders are always welcome to call us to double-check that their ride was scheduled. We are a feminist, 'for-the-students/by-the-students' organization and operate out of the Women's Center in EMU 12F.