

Biology Education Seminar, 2 credits  
BOT4935 Section 06A5 (11688) / ZOO4926 Section 06BC (20169)  
Syllabus for Fall 2020

**I. Course Description**

The Biology Education Seminar is designed to help Learning Assistants in BSC2010 and BSC2011 integrate learning theory and effective practices for engaging students. In this course, LAs will read articles from the education literature, engage in discussions about their experiences with students and how this relates to the literature, complete weekly online teaching reflections, conduct interview or observation - based investigations into students' current ways of thinking about a topic, and solicit and analyze mid-semester evaluations of their teaching.

**II. Course Meetings**

**First day of classes:** Monday 31 August 2020

**Last day of classes:** Wednesday 09 December 2020

**Final Exam:** None

**Course Meeting Times:** Mondays period 9, 4:05-4:55 p.m. This course is entirely online; synchronous course meetings will be via Zoom.

**III. Instructor**

**Course Instructor:** Dr. Nicole Gerlach

Department of Biology

Office: 520 Carr Hall

E-mail: [ngerlach@ufl.edu](mailto:ngerlach@ufl.edu)

**Office Hours:** Immediately before class or by appointment (via Zoom).

**IV. Learning Objectives and Course Goals / Principles**

**Purpose of the course:**

- To support and prepare LAs to interact with students, question students according to class topic, make claims about students' ideas, and take action as a result. Ideally, to help students interact with one another.
- To inspire and motivate LAs to recognize and exercise their capabilities and responsibilities for making the world a better place.
- To provide a community for new LAs to discuss their roles and experiences working with students and faculty.

**In this course, LAs will:**

- Reflect on their teaching and learning.
- Reflect on and develop their views on teaching and learning.
- Make connections to relevant education theory and literature and share this with the instructor.
- Try out a variety of strategies in their learning teams and revise these strategies according to their experience.
- Listen to their students, make claims about their students' ideas, and take action to address those claims.
- Develop awareness of the intellectual, social, cultural diversity of students and begin thinking about how to differentiate instruction.
- Begin thinking about the ways in which they would like to see change, and begin to see themselves as

- influencing this process.
- Discuss their roles and experiences working with students and faculty.

#### **A statement on my philosophy for this course this semester:**

Fall 2020 is not going to be what any of us would consider a “normal” semester. We are all trying to adapt to online teaching and learning as best we can in the midst of an ongoing pandemic that contributes an enormous amount of additional stress and uncertainty to our daily lives. My hope is that this course will serve as an outlet for some of that stress, rather than an additional source of it, and that it will give you a chance to connect with your peers, discuss some of the challenges you’re facing as LAs and as human beings, and learn more about the best tools and methods to meet those challenges.

To this end, I propose that all of us (myself included) adopt an approach to this course that is based on the following principles:

- **Communication:** I pledge to do my best to keep the lines of communication open, and to let you know what’s happening in the course as frequently and as clearly as I can. I ask that you do the same – if there is something that is hampering your performance in the course, or that would make things easier for you to do well, please let me know so we can see if it’s something we can change.
- **Flexibility:** Because this is a new situation for all of us, we’re all going to need to be flexible. Some things that we try as we shift this class online will work, but it’s inevitable that some things won’t. We should all expect to have to adjust on the fly so that we can achieve a learning experience that is as beneficial as possible for as many people as possible.
- **Compassion:** We’re all humans, and many aspects of the current situation can be quite challenging – even taking care of our basic needs requires more time, energy, and mental effort than usual. The more empathy, kindness, and grace we can extend – both to others and, equally importantly, to ourselves – the better able we will be to meet those challenges.
- **Community:** Online learning can be incredibly isolating, but we can do things to fight that isolation. The success of this course is going to depend on us coming together as a community, not only to learn together, but also to learn from each other, and to support one another.

## V. Course Resources

### A. Textbook

There is no required textbook for this course. Required readings will be posted on the Canvas course site: <https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/406316>

### B. Course Fee

There is no additional course fee for this course.

## VI. Assessments and Grading

### A. Components of the final grade

#### 1. Participation (25% of total points)

All class members are expected to contribute to class discussions and activities. The purpose of these discussions is to help us as individuals, and as a group, develop meaningful interpretations of the ideas conveyed by the readings and to make connections to the Learning Assistant experience. Please come prepared each week with (1) a provocative question, (2) something interesting you found in the article, and (3) something you are confused about or want to know more about. You are expected to attend every class session and participate in the discussions and activities each week.

#### 2. Reflections (25% of total points)

Five times during the semester, you will submit a reflection about your LA experiences by responding to prompts posted to the Canvas site. Each reflection will draw from activities led in BSC2010 / BSC2011 as well as your readings in this class.

**3. Student evaluations and observations (10% of total points)**

You will solicit feedback from your students on your teaching in BSC2010/2011 and analyze the results to share with the class. For students who are not active LAs this semester, an equivalent assignment will take the place of this assignment. We will discuss this assignment as the semester progresses. You will present the results of your data analysis in class (see schedule at the end of the syllabus).

**4. Projects and Presentations (40% of total points)**

This year, we'll collaborate to evaluate the LA programs in BSC2010 and BSC2011. We'll discuss the details of this group project as the semester progresses.

Point Range (%)	Letter Grade
≥ 90	A
≥ 80	B
≥ 70	C
≥ 60	D
< 60	E

**B. Grading**

Minimum grade cutoffs are listed in the table to the right. Note that the current UF policy for assigning grade points is available at the following undergraduate catalog web page:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

**C. Late Work:** Assignments should be submitted by the assigned deadline. Late work will be subject to a 20% penalty for every day it is late. For example, an assignment initially worth 10 points will be subject to a 2-point penalty if it is submitted up to 24 hours after the deadline, a 4 point penalty up to 48 hours, etc. Assignments may not be submitted more than four days after the assigned deadline without a notification from the Dean of Students documenting a medical/family emergency, as described below (Section VIII.B).

**D. Incomplete ("I"):** If a student has completed the majority of the course work with a passing grade and particular DOCUMENTED circumstances prevent completion of the course in the time allotted, the student may, with the agreement of the instructor, be assigned an "I" pending resolution of the grade. All incompletes MUST be resolved by the end of the following term or the student will receive a grade of "E" (failing).

**VII. Course Policies**

**A. Time Commitment**

The UF College of Liberal Arts and Sciences assumes that each student will devote on average 3-4 hours per week per credit-hour to each course during the regular semester. Because this course is 2 credits, each student should therefore expect to devote an average of 6-8 hours per week to this. This time will not necessarily be evenly distributed; some weeks will have heavier workloads than others.

**B. Attendance**

**All class members are expected to attend each class and contribute to class discussions and activities.**

Unavoidable emergency circumstances (e.g. severe illness, hospitalization, family emergencies, hurricane-related power outages, etc.) that prevent you from attending class require documentation (e.g. a doctor's note or a letter from the Dean of Students office (<https://care.dso.ufl.edu/instructor-notifications/>)) in order for participation points for that day to be waived.

While this course is entirely online, we hope that all members of this course will follow physical distancing guidelines and good hygiene practices in the rest of their courses and in the rest of their lives. If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, please use the UF Health screening system and follow the instructions on whether you are able to attend class. Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence (see above), and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work.

- Guidance from the CDC on symptoms of coronavirus: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

- UF Health guidance on what to do if you have been exposed to or are experiencing Covid-19 symptoms: <https://coronavirus.ufhealth.org/screen-test-protect/covid-19-exposure-and-symptoms-who-do-i-call-if/>

### C. Classroom Behavior

Please behave with courtesy towards your fellow students and the instructors. This is particularly important in class discussions where you are voicing opinions and commenting on those of other students.

### D. Zoom Guidelines

Your display name in Zoom should include your real name (not “gatorfan2020”, etc.). To minimize feedback and background noise, it’s generally best to keep your microphone muted unless you are actively speaking. For the sake of getting to know one another and building community, I’d prefer for students to have their cameras on during class, but if you need to have your camera off due to privacy concerns, internet bandwidth issues, etc., that’s fine as well. If your dog or cat wanders on-camera during class, please do not apologize; they are all good doggos/kitties yes they are, and we are happy to see them!

## VIII. UF Policies

### A. Academic Honesty

All students registered at the University of Florida have agreed to comply with the following statement:

*“I understand that the University of Florida expects its students to be honest in all their academic work. I agree to adhere to this commitment to academic honesty and understand that my failure to comply with this commitment may result in disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the University.”*

In addition, on all work submitted for credit the following pledge is either required or implied:

*“On my honor I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”*

More details can be found in the UF Honor Code at <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-honor-code/>. Academic dishonesty, plagiarism, or other Honor Code violations will not be tolerated, and *each incident* will result in sanctions included (but not limited to), a zero on the assignment and/or reduction in the overall course, potentially up to a failing grade in the course. For more information on plagiarism and how to avoid it, see: <https://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/copyright/plagiarism>.

### B. Accommodations for Students With Disabilities

Students who will require a classroom accommodation for a disability must contact the Dean of Students Office’s Disability Resource Center, in 001 Reid Hall (phone: 352-392-8565). Please see the University of Florida Disability Resources website for more information at: <https://disability.ufl.edu>. Students should provide their DRC accommodation letter to Dr. Gerlach as soon as possible, ideally by the second week of classes.

### C. Drop/Add/Withdrawal

A student can drop/add this course during the drop/add period with no penalty. After drop/add, a student who drops will receive a W until the date listed in the academic calendar. After that date, the student may be assigned an “E” (fail). Note: it is the responsibility of the STUDENT to withdraw from a course, not the instructor. Failure to participate/complete the class does NOT constitute a drop.

### D. Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

**IX. Getting Help**

**A. Computing Problems**

For issues with technical difficulties in Canvas, or general computing questions, contact the UF Help Desk:

- (352) 392-HELP
- <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>

**B. University Support Services**

College can be a very stressful time in a person’s life. Resources are available on campus to help students meet academic goals and solve personal problems that may interfere with their academic performance. If you find that you are having difficulty emotionally or academically, there is substantial support available. You can use the U Matter We Care website (<https://umatter.ufl.edu/>) or the list below to help identify the appropriate resources. Please reach out if I can help you identify or connect to these resources.

- Dean of Students Office (<https://dso.ufl.edu/>) (352-392-1261) provides a variety of services to students and families, including Field and Fork ([https://dso.ufl.edu/areas\\_services/hitchcock-field-fork-pantry/](https://dso.ufl.edu/areas_services/hitchcock-field-fork-pantry/)) (UF’s food pantry) and New Student and Family programs ([https://dso.ufl.edu/areas\\_services/new-student-family-programs/](https://dso.ufl.edu/areas_services/new-student-family-programs/))
- Counseling and Wellness Center (<https://counseling.ufl.edu/>) (352-392-1575) provides counseling and support as well as crisis and wellness services including a variety of workshops (<https://counseling.ufl.edu/services/gw/workshops/>) throughout the semester (e.g., Yappy Hour, Relaxation and Resilience).
- Multicultural and Diversity Affairs (<https://multicultural.ufl.edu/>) (352-294-7850) celebrates and empowers diverse communities and advocates for an inclusive campus.
- Office of Student Veteran Services (<http://veterans.ufl.edu/>) (352-294-2948 | [vacounselor@ufl.edu](mailto:vacounselor@ufl.edu)) assists student military veterans with access to benefits.
- Career Connections Center (<https://career.ufl.edu/>) (352-392-1601) connects job seekers with employers and offers guidance to enrich your collegiate experience and prepare you for life after graduation.
- UF Police Department (<http://www.police.ufl.edu/>). 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies)

**X. Disclaimer**

This syllabus represents the current plans and objectives; however, schedules, requirements, and assignments may change throughout the semester as the need arises. Such changes, communicated clearly, are not unusual and should be expected.

**XI. Weekly Course Schedule**

The following schedule is a draft; we may tailor the topics and readings to fit student areas of interest. This will be discussed in class and the updated schedule and readings will be posted on the Canvas Course site.

Week	Date	Topics	Readings	Assignments due this week
1	31 Aug	Introductions and preparing to teach	None this week	
2	07 Sep	No Class – Labor Day		
3	14 Sep	Questioning and Discussion Techniques	Blosser, P. (2000). How to Ask the Right Question. National Science Teachers Association. ISBN 13: 978-0-87355-102-1	Reflection #1
4	21 Sep	Learning Theory	TBA	
5	28 Sep	Resistance	Smith, G.A. (2008). First Day	

			Questions for the Learner-Centered Classroom. The National Teaching and Learning Forum. 17:1-4.	
6	05 Oct	Inclusivity	Garcia, M. (2018). Why teachers must fight their own implicit biases. Education Week Teacher.	Reflection #2
7	12 Oct	Discussion and planning of project	None this week	
8	19 Oct	Cooperative Learning	Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T. (1999), Making cooperative learning work; Theory into Practice, (38) 2.	
9	26 Oct	Metacognition	Tanner, K.D. (2012). Promoting Student Metacognition. CBE Life Science Education 11 (2) 113-120.	Reflection #3
10	02 Nov	Evaluations	TBA	Conduct and analyze evaluations, prepare presentation
11	09 Nov	Presentation and discussion of LA evaluations	None this week	Reflection #4
12	16 Nov	Topic TBA (to be chosen by class)	TBA	
13	23 Nov	Project work day	TBA	
14	30 Nov	Project work day	TBA	Reflection #5
15	07 Dec	Presentation of projects	None this week	