The systematic study of communities is an amazingly diverse and fascinating branch of ecology, but it is not an easy subject to study. There are not simple answers and few undisputed tenants in this field. But, (don’t despair) this makes it an exciting enterprise to tackle. The boundaries of community ecology are fuzzy, its language is flexible and dynamic, and its practice is not often standardized. Yet this is what we will be spending the next 14 weeks wrestling with. You will not come away from this class with a prescription for how to do community ecology; instead you will leave with an appreciation of the complexity and dynamic nature of this growing and important branch of ecology.

For this class it is extremely helpful if you have taken general ecology, basic calculus and an introductory statistics class; see me if you have not.

Class Structure

The class will meet twice a week and have the following learning objectives:

- Students will demonstrate intellectual synthesis and interpretation of topics found in the chapters of “Community Ecology” by Peter Morin (1999 Blackwell Science) through written discussion questions.
- Students will present two 25 min powerpoint presentations and discussion on community ecology topics
- Participation in weekly in-class discussions of current and classic primary literature in community ecology.
- Students will synthesize and communicate their current understanding of topics in community ecology through two written papers.
- Students will learn to evaluate presentations and provide appropriate feedback on presentation construction and content.

Students in the class will be graded in 4 areas:

1. Two lecture/discussions (presentations) for the class on topics in Morin’s book (more below)
2. Two (1200-1500 word) research papers (more below)
3. Class participation (weekly summaries/syntheses and in-class participation)
4. Attendance (can only miss 2 classes before you drop one letter grade)

Nuts and Bolts:

I. Student participation is mandatory

This is a graduate level class; therefore students must attend and participate in every class meeting. If you miss or skip 3 class meetings, you will drop an entire letter grade for the course; for a fourth skip you will drop another letter grade and so on. **If you can’t meet this restriction, PLEASE see me as soon as possible.**

Students are expected to read the assignments prior to class and come prepared to engage in lively and spirited discussion of the material. This means that you must read the weekly chapter in Morin (1999) and the assigned discussion paper(s) for the week. (see below). **To encourage this behavior I will ask you to write a 200 word summary of each of the assigned primary literature reading each week and turn them in to me.** These will be in your own words (ie not cutting and pasting the abstract) and will be included in your participation grade.

II. Student Lecture/Discussion of Chapter Topics

The presentation/lectures are intended to accomplish a number of things.

1. give students a chance to delve deeply into a particular subject area and become very familiar with the material
2. provide a guided tutorial to the rest of the students in the class (you don’t know a subject until you have to clearly explain it to others)
3. provide students with a chance to enhance their presentation, organization and public speaking skills through peer evaluation
4. provide points for discussion by the class

In order to meet these goals, the presentations will not be a laundry-list of facts from the papers you read or a recitation of the main points of the chapter. Instead, students are encouraged to dig into a topic and present a lecture/discussion that enlightens rather than recites the material. **This means you will have to do more work than just reading one or two papers on a subject.** The additional readings for each chapter provided on the schedule.
may be a place to start. A host of others can be found in the references within each chapter and from the J-STOR search engine or from Google Scholar. It's your job to seek them out. If you need suggestions come talk to me.

Graduate level classes are categorically different from upper division classes; they require more work, thought and synthesis. It follows that the presentations in this class will be of a higher character also. I want to see that you can think and wrestle and reason with the ideas. [Are they reasonable? What are the limitations of this line of thought? Is this only for select taxa or situations? How does this compare or contrast with other ideas?] This is what I expect the presentations to do, indicate to me and your peers that you can take a subject, wrestle with it, take ownership of it and make it intelligible to the class.

The presentations will be 25min long with time for discussion and questions afterward and they will be evaluated by me and informally by the students in the class. Each student will evaluate the presentations based on the following areas: 1. Organization/Clarity, 2. Familiarity with material, and 3. Style. This means that when you are not presenting, you must all read the Morin (1999) chapter prior to class in order to intelligently evaluate the other student's presentations effectively. All students will make constructive written comments to the presenter, designed to help them improve their presentations. These will be turned in to me at the end of class and I will distribute them to the presenter at the next meeting. A presentation grade based my comments and loosely informed by student comments will be assigned for each presenter.

III. Student papers

Again, this is a graduate level course and therefore the quality and scope of the work will be different from a lower division class. Papers will present a synthesis of a topic. They must show original and intelligent thought. Papers will not be a book report on a subject. I want to know what and how you think about a particular topic rather than what others think. You will need to use many references to back up your points. This requires that you read the primary literature widely and then take that body of knowledge and create synthetic arguments/observations from the material. This is very different from what you are used to and it is sometimes difficult and generally very time consuming. Papers are also expected to be well written and composed. I do not want to spend my time correcting syntax, spelling and grammar errors.

The first paper will be on a topic/question that I distribute within the first four weeks of class. A draft can be turned in a week before it is due for comments from me, the final paper will be due three weeks from when it's handed out. The text should be no more than 1500 words (about 6 double spaced pages). The bibliography, figures, tables etc. are additional and may be as long as you choose. The question(s) will be open-ended enough to encourage creativity. Drafts will be treated as a working document and receive no penalty. Final papers will be graded on Organization, Clarity, Content, Thought and Style.

The second paper (same length) will be due on the day scheduled for final exams and may be on any topic related to community ecology that you find interesting or you can choose to answer your choice of questions I hand out. You must submit your own topic for me to approve two weeks prior to the end of class.

IV Weekly Discussion

Each week one or more papers will be assigned reading (see schedule). These need to be read prior to class. Students will come prepared with a 200 word summary of each of the assigned primary literature reading each week. Note that some of the papers for discussion are significantly longer than others. This cannot be helped, it is the nature of the beast, some authors tend to write longer papers, others are pithier.

V. Grades

Grades will be determined based on the 5-P formula:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 2</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>500</td>
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(should be easy to get if you come to class, hand in summaries and participate)

If you get >95% of the points = A, 90-94%=A-, 85-89%=B+, 80-84%=B, 75-79%=C+, 70-74%=C 65-69% = D, <65% = F.