

## Biology 4920G – Seminar in Biology – Winter 2025

### 1. General Course Information

**Class time and location:** See registrar's site

**Antirequisite(s):** Biology 4944F/G/Z, Biology 4950F/G.

**Prerequisite(s):** Completion of the 2000-level 'core' courses in Biology modules (Biochemistry 2280A, Biology 2244A/B or Statistical Sciences 2244A/B, Biology 2290F/G, Biology 2382A/B, Biology 2483A/B, Biology 2581A/B, Biology 2601A/B, Chemistry 2210A/B or Chemistry 2213A/B); at least 1.5 Biology courses at the 3000-level or above; and registration in Year 4 of an Honours Specialization module offered by the Department of Biology.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean's Designate (Department/Program Counsellors and Science Academic Advisors) to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

### 2. Instructor Information

**Instructor:** Sheila Macfie, PhD (she/her)

**Office Hours:** On demand. Contact Dr. Macfie to request and schedule a meeting.

**Contact information:** [smacfie@uwo.ca](mailto:smacfie@uwo.ca). Messages will normally be answered within 24 hours, excluding weekends and holidays. Please include Bio 4920 in the subject line and use your @uwo.ca e-mail. E-mails from non-Western e-mail accounts are likely to receive very slow responses because they may be buried among other non-urgent requests.

### 3. Course Syllabus, Schedule, Delivery Mode

**Course description:** Current research in biology will be critically reviewed and discussed through a combination of oral presentations and written assignments. The course also offers students an opportunity to explore the culture of scientific publication.

**Learning Outcomes:**

- 1) Critically evaluate news stories through the lens of biological science.
- 2) Independently synthesize information on a biological topic that is presented in the current news.
- 3) Communicate scientific knowledge in written and oral forms.
- 4) Gain awareness of the policies and politics of scientific publication.

**Schedule:** The weekly list of topics (class schedule) is posted on <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>. Meetings will be in-person unless the university determines that courses must go on-line.

**Course regulations:** Active and engaged in-class participation by all students is an essential part of this course. In that spirit, class attendance and participation will be monitored. Respectful behavior is expected. Recording (audio or camera) of presentations and discussions is not permitted.

**Contingency plan:** Although the intent is for this course to be delivered in-person, should any university-declared emergency require some or all of the course to be delivered online, synchronously or asynchronously, the course will adapt accordingly. The grading scheme will **not** change. Any affected assessments will be conducted on-line as determined by the course instructor.

## 4. Course Materials

All course materials will be posted to OWL: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>. Students are responsible for checking the course site regularly for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

OWL Brightspace is supported on Apple Safari, Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox and Microsoft Edge; please update your browsers frequently. If students need assistance with the course OWL site, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk, which can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

**Technical Requirements:** Students must have a reliable internet connection and computer that are compatible with access to **Brightspace and Office 365**. Students must bring a laptop computer to class to access on-line materials and to prepare and submit their reflection pieces. Students must bring a pen or pencil on the days on which oral presentations are given.

Dr. Macfie owns the intellectual property of the course content, including slides, activities and assignment instructions, even when such materials have been posted on-line. Students must not post course content to any other websites or platforms or use these materials for any other purpose without written consent from the instructor. The recording, copying and/or distribution of course materials is prohibited.

## 5. Methods of Evaluation

### Grading Scheme and Assessment Dates:

Item	Value	Due dates and times
Oral Presentation #1	20%	Tues Feb 4 or Feb 11, in-class (by random draw)
The Science Behind the News	40%	Mon Mar 3, 11:55 PM
Oral Presentation #2	20%	Tues Mar 18 or 25, in-class (by random draw)
Participation	10%	Tues during class, on-going
Reflections	10%	Tues during class, on-going

As per the policy for all F/G courses, students must demonstrate competency in the writing components of the course. For Bio 4920G, this means achieving an average of 60% or more for the 'Science Behind the News' assignment.

The participation grade will be assigned by the instructor at the end of term, and will be based on attendance and characteristics including, but not limited to, professionalism, integrity, attitude, independence, cooperation and contribution. Ten in-class written reflection pieces, one each in weeks 3 to 6 and weeks 8 to 13, are worth 1% each.

## 6. Student absences and missed coursework

### General information about missed coursework

Students must familiarize themselves with the *University Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs* posted on the Academic Calendar: [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/academic\\_consideration\\_Sep24.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf),

This policy does not apply to requests for Academic Consideration submitted for attempted or completed work, whether online or in person. This includes (but is not limited to) term tests, performances, presentations, and laboratory/tutorial sessions to which the student has reported. Requests for retroactive relief are addressed in the Undergraduate Student Academic Appeals policy: [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/appealsundergrad.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/appealsundergrad.pdf).

The policy also does not apply to students experiencing longer-term impacts on their academic responsibilities. These students should consult [Accessible Education](#).

For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar's webpage: [https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic\\_considerations/](https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/) All requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline.

It is the student's responsibility to contact the instructor as soon as possible so that the student can find out the date of the extended deadline for the written assignment or so that the instructor can schedule the oral presentation into the following week's in-class activities.

All Academic Consideration requests normally must include supporting documentation; however, recognizing that formal documentation may not be available in some extenuating circumstances, the policy allows students to make one Academic Consideration request without supporting documentation in this course. However, the following assessment is excluded from this, and therefore requires formal supporting documentation:

- Oral presentation #2

According to the new policy, when a student mistakenly submits their one allowed Academic Consideration request without supporting documentation for the assessment listed above or those in the Coursework with Assessment Flexibility section below, the request cannot be recalled and reapplied. This privilege is forfeited.

### Evaluation Scheme for Missed Assessments

**The Science Behind the News:** Students who are unable to submit the written assignment before the end of the No-Late-Penalty Period must receive Academic Consideration to avoid the 10% per day late penalty. Please read the section "Course Work with Assessment Flexibility" on page 4 to learn about the No-Late-Penalty Period. For this assignment, requests for Academic Consideration will be denied if the extenuating circumstances started after the assignment deadline or were resolved within the No-Late-Penalty Period.

**Oral presentations #1 and #2:** Students who are unable to deliver their oral presentation on the assigned date must receive Academic Consideration to avoid the 10% per week late penalty. Students who miss their scheduled date will deliver their presentation during the next time the class meets.

**Participation and reflections:** This grade will be based on attendance as well as each student's contributions to in-class activities, including reflection pieces. It is not possible to make-up a missed in-class activity. Students with approved Academic Consideration for missing a class will have their other reflection pieces re-weighted.

**What if you miss many classes?** In-class attendance, participation, and submission of reflection pieces will be monitored. Students who have a medical condition or other circumstance that prevents them from regular attendance must register with [Accessible Education \(AE\)](#) and accommodations may be arranged in consultation with the student's AE counsellor and the course instructor.

### **Coursework with Assessment Flexibility**

By policy, instructors may deny Academic Consideration requests for the following assessments with built-in flexibility:

**Deadline with a No-Late-Penalty Period Assignments:** Students are expected to submit the Science Behind the News assignment by the deadline listed above in section 5. Should short-term extenuating circumstances arise, students do not need to request Academic Consideration and they are permitted to submit their assignment up to 72 hours past the deadline without a late penalty. Should students submit their assessment beyond 72 hours past the deadline, a late penalty of 10% per day (including weekends and holidays) will be applied. Academic Consideration requests may be granted only for extenuating circumstances that started before the deadline and lasted longer than the 72-hour No-Late-Penalty Period. Students with Academic Consideration for missing the assignment deadline must contact the instructor as soon as possible to find out the date of the extended deadline.

### **Essential Learning Requirements**

Even when Academic Considerations are granted for missed coursework, the following are deemed essential to earn a passing grade, and must be completed before the last class (April 1, 2025).

**Written assignments:** University policy states that students must demonstrate competency on the written components of an E, F, G, or Z course (i.e., an essay course) to pass the course. The full policy is at [www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/registration\\_progression\\_grad/coursenumbering.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/coursenumbering.pdf). For this course, this means that students must achieve at least 24/40 (60%) for the Science Behind the News assignment. Students with a score of less than 24/40 will be given a course grade of 45 out of 100, no matter what grades are earned for the other components of the course.

**Oral presentations:** Students must deliver two oral presentations to pass this course. Students who have not given two presentations will be given a course grade of 45 out of 100, no matter what grades are earned for the other components of the course.

## **7. Land Acknowledgement**

Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous peoples (e.g., First Nations, Métis and Inuit) whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land and vital contributors of our society.

More information about Indigenous Services (<https://indigenous.uwo.ca/>) and this Land Acknowledgement (<https://communications.uwo.ca/comms/land-acknowledgement/>) are available.

## 8. Additional Statements

**Religious Accommodation:** When a religious holiday that requires an absence from the University or prohibits certain activities conflicts with a course requirement, students should request an accommodation for their absence in writing to the course instructor and/or the Academic Advising office of their Faculty of Registration. This notice should be made as early as possible but not later than two weeks prior to the holiday. Please visit the Diversity Calendars posted on our university's EDID website for the recognized religious holidays: <https://www.edi.uwo.ca>. Please familiarize yourself with Western's policies on accommodation for religious holidays: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_religious.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf).

**Accommodation Policies:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Accessible Education, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities can be found at: [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/Academic\\_Accommodation\\_disabilities.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic_Accommodation_disabilities.pdf).

### **Academic Policies**

**Registrar Services:** University-wide policies can be found at <https://www.registrar.uwo.ca/>.

**E-mail:** the centrally administered e-mail account provided to students will be considered the individual's official university e-mail address. It is the responsibility of the account holder to ensure that e-mail received from the University at their official university address is attended to in a timely manner. The full policy is here: [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies\\_procedures/section1/mapp113.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section1/mapp113.pdf),

**Scholastic offences** are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf).

**Plagiarism:** Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever ideas or passages from another author are taken, they must be acknowledged using proper citations.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

**Generative AI policy:** Students must write their assignments in their own words. Generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) is a useful tool for many tasks, much as Wikipedia is a useful starting point when learning a new topic. However, the misuse of AI undermines the academic values of this course. You may use AI for improving grammar, but relying on AI to generate text, generate sources or avoid critical thinking is prohibited. The purpose of a written assignment is to develop the student's thinking process – not just to produce an item to be graded. Especially in an F/G (aka "essay") course, written assignments should not simply summarize existing information on a particular topic. The iterative acts of thinking, writing, synthesizing, and editing are fundamental to creating deep learning and promoting cognitive development. For these reasons, violation of this policy will be handled according to Western's scholastic offense policies.

**Grading policy:** Students must demonstrate competency on the written components of an 'F/G' course (i.e.,  $\geq 24/40$  for the Science Behind the News assignment) to pass the course. The full policy is here: [www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/registration\\_progression\\_grad/coursenumbering.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/coursenumbering.pdf).

The Senate-approved, university-wide grade descriptors will be used in this class:

Grade	% Range	Description
A+	90-100	One could hardly expect better from a student at this level
A	80-89	Superior work, which is clearly above average
B	70-79	Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
C	60-69	Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50-59	Fair work, minimally acceptable
F	below 50	Fail

According to university policy, a final grade ending in .45 or above will be rounded to the next highest number (e.g., 78.45 becomes 79, while 78.44 becomes 78). Grades will not be rounded up beyond this policy for any reason. Grades for course components will be posted on the course website. Appeals of specific graded items must be submitted in writing to the instructor within two weeks of the grade posting with a clear explanation of the reason for the appeal. The instructor may re-grade all of the assignment, which may lower or raise the grade for that assignment.

**Support Services:** Please visit the Science & Basic Medical Sciences Academic Advising webpage for information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic-related matters: <https://www.uwo.ca/sci/counselling/>.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at [https://www.uwo.ca/health/student\\_support/survivor\\_support/get-help.html](https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html).

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact [support@uwo.ca](mailto:support@uwo.ca).

Please contact the course instructor if you require course material in an alternate format or if any other arrangements can make this course more accessible to you. If you have any questions regarding accommodations, you may contact Accessible Education at [http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible\\_education/index.html](http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html)

Learning-skills counsellors at Learning Development and Success (<https://learning.uwo.ca>) are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

Western University is committed to a thriving campus as we deliver our courses in the mixed model of both virtual and face-to-face formats. We encourage you to check out the Digital Student Experience website to manage your academics and well-being: <https://www.uwo.ca/se/digital/>.

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC <https://westernusc.ca/services/>.