

## Instructor

Abby Conover, M.A. - [aconover@umn.edu](mailto:aconover@umn.edu) – Office: 5-220 Moos Tower; office hours available by appointment

## Course Questions

General questions about the course should be submitted to the Course Questions Forum on the Moodle site.

Course Website: University of Minnesota Moodle (<https://ay17.moodle.umn.edu/>)

Course Meeting Time: Online, with occasional in-person events as selected by individual students

## Learning Objectives

The Nature of Life course series is designed to promote the success of each student who enters CBS. Self-awareness and the ability to course-correct based on your self-knowledge equips you to overcome challenges during college and beyond, and are desirable characteristics sought by professional schools and employers alike. Your work in the Nature of Life courses helps you build those skills.

Nature of Life is designed to aid the success of each student entering CBS. Throughout this four-semester course series, you will:

- Engage with questions of identity, motivation, and aspiration (Who do I want to become? How will I get there?);
- Develop skills in critical reflection and metacognition;
- Develop social and professional networks at the U; and
- Explore your interests by utilizing resources and experiencing events at the U that align with your goals.

During BIOL 2906, in particular, you will:

- Access resources strategically in support of your goals and refine your personal picture of success through structured reflection; and
- Connect with peers around a shared interest to provide accountability and motivation as you work to achieve an individual goal related to that theme.

## Course Workload

This course has been designed to align with the University's workload formula of 2 hours of outside-class work for every hour in lecture. **To earn an 'S' in this .5 credit class, you should expect to spend a total of 25 hours (an average of 1.5 hours/week) on course activities throughout the semester.**

## Academic Integrity in the Nature of Life courses

As in all your academic courses at the University, your work in BIOL 2905/2906 is governed by the Student Conduct Code. Much of the work in this course relies on you to self-report your completion of specified tasks, e.g. meeting with a campus resource, attending a particular workshop, etc. Your honesty and academic integrity is expected and subject to the terms of the Scholastic Dishonesty code below (full conduct code available [here](#)):

*Code Subd. 1. Scholastic Dishonesty. Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarism; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, misrepresenting, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.*

## Course Components and Structure

You are the architect of your BIOL 2905/2906 experience. You will select the content that you want to cover during the semester within this structure:

- You will complete two Individual-Choice Modules of your choosing. Each module should take you 3-4 hours in total to complete and both steps of the module must be completed by the specified deadlines.
- You will also complete the Progress Project, a semester-long endeavor that combines personal goal-setting with small group accountability and support.

## Grading Criteria

### How is my grade calculated in this class, i.e. how do I earn an S in BIOL 2906?

Each time you complete a required course element, e.g. an Individual-Choice Module or Progress Project Update (and earn a Satisfactory mark), you will earn its corresponding **badge**.

There are 10 badges available in BIOL 2906:

- 4 for Individual-Choice Modules (2 for each Individual-Choice Module)
- 5 for Progress Project elements (1 for the Progress Project Focus Selection and 4 for Progress Project Updates)
- 1 for the CBS Knowledge Assessment (required to complete)

**Because the CBS Knowledge Assessment badge is required for all students, to pass BIOL 2906, you must earn at least seven (7) of the nine (9) remaining badges.**

### How do I earn a badge?

When you submit an Individual-Choice Module Step or Progress Project Update assignment through Moodle, the NOL Peer Mentor who is grading your work in the course will review it and add their comments. If your grader determines that you have completed the work fully and with a good faith effort, you will be awarded the badge that corresponds to that particular course element, e.g. Individual Choice Module Step 1: Select and Prepare, Progress Project Update #3, etc.

**Regarding late work:** Part of completing BIOL 2906 in good faith means managing the course deadlines. Work submitted after the 11:59pm posted deadline will be considered "Not Satisfactory" and unable to earn a badge.

### What constitutes a "good faith effort?"

In the context of this course, a good faith effort is defined as thoughtful and complete work, (e.g. answering all prompts in a given assignment, writing a response that observes the recommended word limit, etc.) which has been submitted by the deadline (11:59pm on the specified date).

---

## Individual-Choice Modules

- You will choose two modules from the options listed on the Moodle (Individual-Choice Modules tab). All modules are available during fall semester (BIOL 2905) and during spring semester (BIOL 2906), to give you maximum flexibility to design your experience in Nature of Life, year two the way that will best benefit you.
- Each module will take 3-4 hours in total to complete. Some modules require you to meet with campus resources or complete tasks that might not be entirely on your schedule. Plan appropriately and budget your time to ensure that you are able to complete each set of tasks before deadlines.
- Each module includes two steps:
  - Select and Prepare: work that will help you build a strong foundation for your module experience through reflection and writing
  - Connect and Reflect: the expectation to connect with a relevant campus or community resource and reflection to help you make meaning of your experience and solidify your learning

### How should I choose my modules?

Your curriculum in BIOL 2905/2906 is tailored to your specific interests, goals, and needs, because you are the driver of your experience. If you have specific goals in mind, we encourage you to adopt a strategic approach to module selection. At the beginning of each semester, spend some time thinking about what you want to accomplish during the term and choose modules related to those areas. Using BIOL 2905/2906 in this way propels you through your goals for the semester.

If you feel more open, you could use an exploratory approach and choose modules on topics you haven't really yet considered. One strength of this approach is that your work in BIOL 2905/2906 could expand your horizons and challenge you to think of new possibilities for your experiences at the U and beyond.

## Progress Project

In this final semester of the Nature of Life sequence, you will complement your Individual-Choice modules with the Progress Project, a semester-long endeavor that asks you to synthesize and put into practice the skills and habits you have been cultivating throughout the NOL courses: metacognition, intentional engagement in your activities, and purposeful progress toward your individual goals.

The Progress Project works by pairing your individual goals with the power of peer accountability to help you build momentum, catalyze new networks, and reinforce motivation in an area of self-identified need. In the Progress Project, you will choose an area of focus and articulate one personal goal aligned with that focus.

- Academic Accountability
- Career Curiosity
- Engagement Expansion
- Research Reflection

You will then be matched with two or three other students in your Guild who have also chosen that focus area and meet with your group members in person (preferred) or online four times during the semester to reflect on your own individual progress and provide accountability and support for your group members.

## How do I earn Progress Project badges?

1. Your first step is submitting the Progress Project focus selection by Sunday, January 28 at 11:59pm. In this proposal, you will select your focus area and explain the goal you have set. (You will receive your group member match email by Wednesday, January 31 at 5:00pm.)
2. At four points during the semester, you will meet with your Progress Project group members and submit a Progress Project Update. Each update has a different theme to help you structure your in-person meeting, and the Progress Project Update that follows. In submitting each Update reflection, you should follow the directions carefully, answering all of the prompts and following any writing or format requirements. Your grader will read your check-in reflection and assign you either a Satisfactory or Not Satisfactory grade based on course grading criteria. Satisfactory grades will receive the corresponding Progress Project badge.

## CBS Knowledge Assessment

*A message from Dr. David Kirkpatrick, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Genetics, Cell Biology and Development and Interim Department Head, Biology, Teaching and Learning, and Dr. John Ward, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education*

CBS is undertaking a college-wide effort to make our biology instruction as effective as possible and thus CBS undergraduates are being asked to take a standardized knowledge assessment at three points during their time in CBS: just before NOL at Itasca (incoming), at the end of their second year (midpoint), and just before their graduation (exiting). We are asking each of you, as second-year students, to take the ~30-minute biology knowledge assessment as your final requirement in Nature of Life. You will register on Moodle for a date and time between Monday, April 24 and Thursday, May 4 to complete the assessment.

The questions in this **non-graded** assessment cover topics that span all of the majors that CBS offers - Biochemistry, Genetics, Ecology, Evolution, etc. At the end of your studies in CBS, we hope that you will be able to answer most or all of these questions correctly. We want to compare what students know when they leave CBS to what they know when they enter CBS, so that we can find out how much our students actually learn as a result of our teaching. The college will use the information we get from the assessment to make improvements to our courses and the topics that we teach.

**Important note:** there is no grade associated with this knowledge assessment, so there's no need to stress about how well you do on it, and no need to study for it. The purpose of this assessment is to see how much your class knows as a group, not how much you personally know. No student is ever expected to know all the answers, excel in all areas, or prove to the college that they have learned the full scope of biology during their CBS career.

## Course and University Policies

### Academic Integrity in Nature of Life Courses:

As in all your academic courses at the University, your work in BIOL 2905 is governed by the Student Conduct Code. Your honesty and academic integrity is expected and subject to the terms of the Scholastic Dishonesty code below.

*Code Subd. 1. Scholastic Dishonesty. Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarism; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, misrepresenting, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.*

### Student Conduct Code:

The University seeks an environment that promotes academic achievement and integrity, that is protective of free inquiry, and that serves the educational mission of the University. Similarly, the University seeks a community that is free from violence, threats, and intimidation; that is respectful of the rights, opportunities, and welfare of students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University; and that does not threaten the physical or mental health or safety of members of the University community.

As a student at the University you are expected adhere to Board of Regents Policy: Student Conduct Code. To review the full Student Conduct Code, please see: [http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Student\\_Conduct\\_Code.pdf](http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Student_Conduct_Code.pdf).

### Disability Accommodations:

The University of Minnesota views disability as an important aspect of diversity, and is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations.

- If you have, or think you have, a disability in any area such as, mental health, attention, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical, please contact the DRC office on your campus (UM Twin Cities - 612.626.1333) to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.
- **If you are registered with the DRC and have a disability accommodation letter dated for this semester or this year, please contact your instructor early in the semester to review how the accommodations will be applied in this course.**
- Students with short-term disabilities, such as a broken arm, can often work with instructors to minimize classroom barriers. In situations where additional assistance is needed, students should contact the DRC as noted above.
- If you are registered with the DRC and have questions or concerns about your accommodations please contact your access consultant/disability specialist.

### Mental Health and Stress Management:

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. University of Minnesota services are available to assist you. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Student Mental Health Website:

<http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu>.