

BISC 493
Biology Honors Seminar
Units: 1
Fall 2023, Wed, Time: 12-12:50PM
Section 13493D

Location: RRI (Ray R. Irani Hall), room 221

Instructor: John Tower, PhD
Office: RRI 219C
Office Hours: by appointment
Contact Info: Email (preferred method for contact)
jtower@usc.edu
Emails typically returned within 48hr.
Phone 213-740-5384

Instructor: Suzanne Edmands, PhD
Office: AHF 130
Office Hours: by appointment
Contact Info: Email (preferred method for contact)
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Emails typically returned within 48hr.
Phone: (213) 740-5548

Course Description

The goal of this seminar is for students to gain exposure to experimental biological research and to develop the ability to communicate scientific ideas effectively. Students in BISC493 are expected to attend at least one biology-related research seminar each week, choosing from the many available at USC each week, including the weekly seminar series listed below. Students are expected to take notes at the seminar, conduct additional background readings on the topic, and then present a summary of the research seminar as a “chalk talk” presentation to the class. Each student will make two presentations.

Marine & Environmental Biology	12 noon Tuesday	AHF Torrey Webb Rm
Molecular & Computational Biology	12 noon Friday	RRI Auditorium
Neuroscience	12:30 PM Tuesday	HNB Auditorium
Gerontology	12 noon Thursday	GER 224
QCB	2-3 PM Thursday	RRI Auditorium
Population Biology	3:30 PM Wednesday	AHF Torrey Webb Rm

Biology seminars are listed at <https://dornsife.usc.edu/bisc>. Choose a section of the Biological Sciences department (e.g. Molecular and Computational Biology) and then choose Seminars and Symposia. Gerontology seminars are listed at <https://gero.usc.edu/colloquium/>. There are also numerous seminars in departments on the USC Health Sciences Campus. Neighboring institutions (UCLA, Caltech, City of Hope) offer a wide selection of research seminars. All BISC493 students should be able to find at least one interesting seminar to attend each week. It is also possible to access seminars that have been recorded and archived electronically with advance permission from the instructors.

Learning Objectives

Students are expected to gain practical experience in understanding a research seminar, taking notes, conducting background literature research, and making an oral research presentation.

Prerequisite: BISC 120Lg or BISC 121Lg; BISC 220Lg or BISC 221Lg.

Course Notes

Course materials (syllabus and presentation schedule) will be available on Blackboard and/or Google Drive. Please check these sites frequently for course information and announcements.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

There are no specific required readings for this course. However, students are required to conduct background reading on the topic of the seminar they will present to the class. Any supplementary class materials will be posted on Blackboard and/or Google Drive.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Class participation (15%): is based on asking questions and participating in discussion during presentations. Presentations (two at 40% each): will be graded on Introduction/literature review, Methods, Results, Discussion, Future Directions, overall clarity, and ability of the student to answer questions from the class. Final exam (5%):

students are required to provide one written question or informed comment regarding the thesis presentations.

Grading Breakdown

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>% of Grade</u>
Class participation	15	15
Presentation 1	40	40
Presentation 2	40	40
Final exam	5	5
Total	100	100

Grading Scale (Example)

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Assignment Submission Policy

Students will sign up for two presentations at the first class meeting.

Grading Timeline

Grades for presentations will be available on Blackboard by the next class meeting.

Additional Policies

Attendance at each class is expected. Missed classes will result in loss of class participation points for that class meeting. It may be necessary to make changes to the syllabus during the semester.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 1 Aug 23	Sign-up for presentation dates	None	None
Week 2 Aug 30	Student presentations	None	None
Week 3 Sept 6	Student Presentations	None	None
Week 4 Sept 13	Student presentations	None	None
Week 5 Sept 20	Student presentations	None	None
Week 6 Sept 27	Student presentations	None	None
Week 7 Oct 4	Student presentations	None	None
Week 8 Oct 11	Student presentations	None	None
Week 9 Oct 18	Student presentations	None	None
Week 10 Oct 25	Student presentations	None	None

Week 11 Nov 1	Student presentations	None	None
Week 12 Nov 8	Student presentations	None	None
Week 13 Nov 15	Student presentations	None	None
Week 14 Nov 22	HOLIDAY	None	None
Week 15 Nov 29	Student presentations	None	None
Week 16 Dec 8 11am – 1pm	Final exam	Students are required to provide two written questions regarding the presentations.	None

Helpful Hints for “Chalk Talk” Presentations in BISC 493

Plan on giving a presentation lasting ~20 minutes, so there will be plenty of time for questions. Start by introducing yourself and giving the name of your advisor.

1. **Keep your mind on the big picture! Remember to give an overview at the beginning. Give a brief introduction to the topic, including why the question being investigated is interesting and important. This will help to pique the interest of your listeners at the start.**
2. **Aim for a crisp, well-organized, succinct presentation. You cannot possibly cover all the material that was given in a 1-hr seminar or in a research paper, so you have to decide what sub-section is most critical and interesting.**
3. **Frequently, speakers forget that people in the audience don’t know much about the topic. Unless you are presenting a talk at a specialized scientific conference, you should**

remember that you're explaining complicated material to people who don't already know much about it. Put yourself in the listeners' place and try to anticipate what will confuse them.

4. Do a practice talk at least 1 day before your class presentation. If possible, practice in the same room where you will be presenting your talk. Since you'll be giving a chalk talk, it is important that you rehearse what you'll write on the board. We have created a forum for you to practice being professional, so please take advantage of it.

5. Try not to read extensively from notes or to spend lots of time looking down; people will be a lot more interested if you look up and make eye contact with the audience.

6. Remember to take a giant step **BACK** at the end of your presentation and return to the big picture. Ask yourself: what is the main take-home message I want to convey?

7. It's a performance! Even if you don't feel particularly energetic and confident, you have to **ACT AS IF YOU ARE**, just for 30 minutes.

8. Try not to say "um" or "like" or "basically" multiple times during your talk. If you fall into the habit of repeating such words, it can be a difficult habit to break. It is very distracting to the audience to hear multiple repetitions of a single word, especially one that has little or no informational content.

9. The better you are at giving your 493 presentations, the better you'll be at communicating in general, so this is great practice! No matter what your career goals, the ability to communicate verbally, in both formal and informal settings, will be an important skill for your professional success. Good luck, and have fun!

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421

studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.