

Herpetology
Biology 512, 512L, 592E
 (4 Units)

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Meeting Times

Lecture: T/TH: 1–2 PM in LO 1317; *Laboratory/Field:* T/TH: 2–5 PM in LO 1317 or TBA

Text & Field Guide

Pough et al. 2004. *Herpetology*, 3rd Edition. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ. (*required*)

Stebbins. 2003. *A Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians*, 3rd Edition. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA. (*required*)

Additional readings from the primary literature will be made available for download from my website or as a photocopy.

Course Objectives

This course provides a general overview of the biology of amphibians and reptiles including aspects of their evolutionary history, taxonomy, anatomy, physiology, ecology, behavior, conservation, and natural history. The emphasis is on adaptive breakthroughs within each major lineage as studied in a phylogenetic context. Laboratory and field experiences will complement and expand upon topics introduced in lecture. Students must be concurrently enrolled in the Lecture, Lab, and Field components.

Course Requirements

Lecture Exams	100 points X 2 = 200
Laboratory Practicals	75 points X 2 = 150
Pop Quizzes	25 points X 3* = 75
Short Literature Reviews	25 points X 2 = 50
Synthetic Review Paper <i>or</i> Research Project	100 points = 100
Lab Report <i>or</i> Group Presentation	75 points = 75
Field Notebook	50 points = 50
Participation	50 points = 50
	Total points 750

* Four quizzes are given, but the lowest score is dropped.

Grading

Grades will be distributed as follows: $\geq 90\%$ = **A**; 80–89% = **B**; 70–79% = **C**; 60–69% = **D**; $\leq 59\%$ = **F**. Plus and minus grades will be assigned as follows: percentages ending with 8 or 9 will be given a plus (e.g., 88–89% = B+); percentages ending with 0 or 1 will be given a minus (e.g., 80–81% = B-). Grades will not be curved.

Attendance & Department Withdrawal Policy

This is an intellectually challenging and time-demanding course. Students with other time-consuming responsibilities (heavy course loads, jobs > 20 h/wk, athletics, music groups, etc.) should seriously consider their ability to meet these demands. You are expected to attend and actively participate in every lecture, lab, and field experience. Ten points will be deducted for unexcused absences and five points will be deducted for each tardy or for leaving class/lab early. Class withdrawals are permitted until the end of the third week. Thereafter, requests to drop a class will be honored only when a verifiable serious and compelling reason exists and when there is no viable alternative to withdrawal. Poor performance is **not** an acceptable reason for dropping a class. Students with borderline grades (e.g., A- or B+) at the end of the semester will receive the higher grade if they have attended and actively participated in all or nearly all class activities.

Field Trips

Throughout the semester we will go into the field during regularly scheduled class hours and on one Sunday and one full-weekend trip (see Syllabus). These experiences will provide you with the important opportunity to watch live amphibians and reptiles in nature, note where and how they live, and practice field identification. Please come prepared (appropriate clothing, shoes, hat, water, sunscreen, etc.) *every* Tuesday and Thursday for possible field trips. **All field trips are a mandatory part of the course and no make-ups are possible.** Students who miss a field trip will be required to do an independent assignment (e.g., keying out a specimen, working on the herpetology collection, etc.) or 25–50 points will be deducted from their final point score.

Lecture Exams

There will be two lecture exams. The second exam will only include topics discussed after the first exam (i.e., non-comprehensive). The format will be a combination of matching, fill-in, multiple choice, short answer, and essay. Be prepared to synthesize ideas rather than just regurgitate information. **There are no make-up exams.**

Laboratory Practicals

There will be two, non-comprehensive lab practicals. During these exams, you will be required to know amphibians and reptiles (or their parts) on sight and **without keys or notes**. Because of the substantial amount of time required to set up lab practicals, there will be **no make-ups**.

Pop Quizzes

Four short quizzes will be given at the end of lecture. These will be short-answer format and should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. **No make-up quizzes** will be offered; however, your lowest score will be dropped prior to calculation of your grade.

Short Papers

Students will review current (≤ 3 years old) papers from the herpetological literature. The topic of the paper is your choice, so long as it concerns the biology of amphibians and/or reptiles and was published in a professional journal (i.e., no magazines or internet sources). The review should be **typed, double-spaced, 1–2 page** (2.5-cm margins and 12-point font) synopsis of the entire article written in **layperson terms** so the information is accessible to a general audience (as if you were a science reporter writing for a newspaper). Please include a photocopy of the abstract from the paper you review.

Synthetic Review Paper or Research Project

Students will either write a paper or develop a project on a personally selected topic (with instructor approval) in herpetology. The paper should be a well-researched and up-to-date critical review (with appropriate citations) of the topic. The paper should be typed, double-spaced, with 2.5-cm margins, and **not exceed seven pages** excluding tables, figures, and the literature cited section. Papers that synthesize information into new ideas will be given higher grades than those that simply summarize what is known on a particular subject. Papers will be reviewed first by your fellow students, rewritten to incorporate their criticisms, and then resubmitted for final evaluation. Alternatively, a project may be developed with the help of the instructor. Such projects may include, but are not limited to (1) a scientific investigation using live or preserved specimens in the CSUN collections; (2) a field study that conducts non-invasive (no harm is done to the animals) research on local amphibians or reptiles. Papers must be the work of a single student, whereas projects may be conducted by up to two students.

Laboratory Report Option

Students will write reports for the one of two laboratory exercises (see Syllabus). The reports will require a brief review of the literature relevant to the topic of the study and will follow a standard format (introduction, methods, results, discussion, etc.). A detailed handout will be provided to guide in preparation of this report.

Group Presentation Option

Small groups of students (2–3) will develop a project **outside of class time** on a **pre-approved** herpetology-related topic of their interest, synthesize gathered information, and present their information in oral format using appropriate visual aides. The topic may not be the same as someone's synthetic paper or project. Grades will be highest for groups that present well-researched topics in a clear, concise, and aesthetically pleasing manner. Presentations will be evaluated by your fellow students as well as the instructor.

Policies on Assignment Due Dates, Cheating, & Plagiarism

In **exceptional** cases, *and* if arrangements have been made with the instructor **in advance**, exams (but not pop quizzes or lab practicals) may be taken at a mutually agreed upon time (usually before the rest of the class). All other assignments must be turned at the **beginning of class** on the predetermined date. Late assignments will be docked **one full grade** for each day they are late. There are **no 'extra credit'** assignments. As per CSUN policy, cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing, you will receive a **failing grade** for the assignment and be reported to the university for appropriate disciplinary action.

Disabilities

Any student with a documented disability who feels they may need academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with the instructor by the second week of class. All discussions of these matters will remain confidential.

