

BI328
CONSERVATION BIOLOGY
Fall 2020

EXAM GUIDELINES

The exams for this course will mainly consist of short answer and essay-style question – a format you may or may not be familiar with. The purpose of this document is to familiarize you with the format of the exams and give you some helpful information on how to best prepare for and take the exams.

BEFORE THE EXAM

We cover a lot of material very quickly in this class. Your best strategy is to stay organized and on top of the material. Readings from our textbook and other sources are intended for you to familiarize yourself with the material before class and to go to after the class to help “solidify” some of the major concepts and principles. Go over your notes/lectures slides after each lecture or set of lectures to make sure you have understood the material. Refer to your textbook, ask questions before/after class or come to my office with any open questions. Use the Re-cap/practice questions to test yourself. It can be very helpful to meet with a few of your classmates to go over the re-cap questions after you have tackled them yourself. Having a study group that meets once a week can be effective because it creates accountability (nobody wants to be that person that shows up unprepared).

I usually offer Q&A sessions right before the exam to go over questions that you are unsure of. These sessions are not review sessions – they are only helpful if you have already studied and are prepared to ask questions. If you cannot make the sessions, you are welcome to come by my office or make an appointment. Please do not email me with questions or for clarifications (especially not the night before the exam), I find that going over questions/concepts that are not clear in person is the most efficient option and you have ample opportunity to do so.

Make sure you are familiar with the topical vocabulary, keywords and definitions of the concepts that will be on the exam. Your textbook has a glossary in the back that will give you very helpful definitions for a lot of the keywords and concepts if you were not able to note definitions during class. You should have a good understanding of the main concepts and issues and be familiar with primary examples. Make sure you go beyond just memorizing facts and figures and you understand the relationships and cause and effects.

EXAM FORMAT

The questions will be very similar to those you will find in the re-cap/review questions. You will need to answer the questions using full sentences (not just keywords and bullet points) unless otherwise specified (e.g. you are instructed to use a table). You may use illustrations/flow charts/tables to support your answer, but you should always explain the figure. With this type of format you do not want to be trying to work out how to best formulate an answer during the exam itself, you should have thought through beforehand how you would define certain concepts or explain patterns and mechanisms.

You can use the number of points available for a question as a point of orientation to how detailed the answer needs to be. Some questions you can answer with 1-3 sentences some require a short

paragraph. Similarly, whenever the prompt is prefaced with “briefly” that is an indication that only a few sentences are required to answer the question.

TAKING THE EXAM

Here are some helpful pointers and strategies for taking the exam:

- Read through **all the questions** before starting with any of them.
- Start with questions you feel most comfortable with.
- Do not get hung up on a question – move on to the next and come back to it later.
- If you have options/choices choose the questions you feel most comfortable with.
- Allot your time for questions according to number of points available (points available for questions are usually proportional to how extensive the answers should be).
- Read each question carefully and in detail
 - o Identify what is being asked/keywords
 - o Identify aspect of topic asked for
 - o Identify type of activity required to answer (compare, contrast, evaluate, ...)
 - o Identify how much detail the question requires, make sure to answer the question and only describe the information necessary
- **Do not data dump:** Do not scan the question for a keyword and then list all the information relevant or tangential that you associate with that word.
- **Do not panic** if others finish before you do, try to finish early enough to have time to read over answers and check your answers.

ESSAY PROMPTS

Last but not least, some pointers to how you should answer essay questions using the following instructions (prompts). Frequently, I will modify an essay point with the word “briefly” to indicate that the answer need only be a few sentences long hitting the major points as opposed to a long-winded, detailed answer.

- **Argue/Justify/Prove:** write out a series of statements/reasons/arguments to logically support your main idea, “if... then” causal sentences can be helpful.
- **Analyze:** Determine the main idea(s) and demonstrate relationships between them (e.g. cause & effect).
- **Compare:** show similarities & differences (emphasize similarities), e.g. “they both are (or have)...” statements of similarity are abstract e.g. “they both have the same color” not “this one is green, and this one is green, too”.
- **Contrast:** emphasis on differences, find abstract categories, e.g. “they differ in color” not “this one is green and this one is blue”. Objects/Ideas maybe be similar but also different on the same continuum (e.g. both green but different shade of green).
- **Evaluate/criticize:** Show both pro and contra arguments to state your reasoned opinion/judgment on a subject. Compare and contrast arguments by stating similarities & differences in judgment terms, rank criteria in terms of importance.
- **Define:** Give a technical/formal meaning of a keyword/phrase/term to distinguish it from other terms. Prepare definitions ahead of time: use abstract categories, then describe exact functions, structures, appearances, settings,...

- **Describe:** Give a more detailed account of key concept/phrase/term than a definition. Draw a verbal picture.
- **Discuss:** Describe a key concept giving key details and explaining pros/cons: Define & describe relevant factors/issues as well as influences/effects related to topic, compare & contrast them, evaluate pros/cons.
- **Explain:** Describe how to do something or how or why something happens. Explain chronologically and/or ensure there is a logical sequence of your arguments.
- **Illustrate:** Give (describe/explain) examples to further clarify a key concept. Find an example that clearly demonstrates the point you are making and demonstrate how it illustrates this concept.
- **Name/List/Enumerate:** produce (numbered) list of terms, comments, examples, concepts, phrases
- **Summarize:** omit details/examples to produce brief/condensed account of main ideas/concepts, simplify, pick out main ideas, avoid being bogged down by details.
- **Trace/Sketch:** similar to summarize, put statements into chronological order, be thorough but give only highlights.