Seminar topic

Understanding the ecology of forest ecosystems is central to understanding and addressing many contemporary environmental issues. In this graduate-level seminar we will read the primary literature, which provides the foundation for contemporary ecological understanding, as well as recent primary literature, which illustrates recent trends in forest ecology research.

Course structure

Most class meetings will have two parts: a literature discussion and a presentation/discussion on ongoing research. The literature discussion will focus on seminal papers that have formed the foundations or that form important current themes of forest ecology. An important goal will be to refine our understanding of important concepts in this field. Specific readings will be assigned the week before they will be discussed and will be made available on Cicada.

The second part of class meetings will be centered on the concept of problem-based learning. Here, the emphasis will be placed on the process of inquiry as opposed to the reading and synthesizing of a body of literature. During the first several weeks of class, students will work on developing specific goals for the semester. These goals may include developing a research proposal, a scientific article, a review paper, etc. The next several weeks of class, students will work on these projects. While developing goals and working on projects, students will present their progress (which may include the review of several articles, data analysis, etc.) on a regular basis in 15-30 minute presentations that will be followed by discussion periods during which the rest of the class offers input, answers questions that the presenter has posed, or asks their own questions of the presenter. The goal of the presentations will be (1) to educate your colleagues about the progress you have made – they will not have done the same readings, analysis, etc. that you have done; remember that the presentations should be geared to the class as a whole and not only the professor, (2) to give you an opportunity to clearly present the material on which you are working to an audience with varied backgrounds – remember that effective teaching and presenting require clear understanding of the subject, (3) to give you an incentive to maintain consistent progress on your work, and (4) to seek feedback and get ideas from your colleagues. The goal of the discussions is not to arrive at correct answers per se, but rather (1) to give the class an opportunity to learn about the various approaches that are being applied in ongoing research, (2) to creatively and openly engage in the process of inquiry, and (3) to offer constructive input to your colleagues. The discussion period should involve the entire group and not only the presenter and professor. The final one-third of the semester will consist of 1-hour long student-led presentations of their final term projects.
Grading: The final course grade will be based on the following:

- 20% weekly presentations
- 30% Participation in discussions and contribution to the seminar
- 25% Oral presentation of term project
- 25% Term project