PLBI 327 Course Profile

The course description and Winter 2019 syllabus of PLBI 327, **Systematics and Diversity of Plants**, can be found here.

Generally offered in: Winter semesters

Prerequisite(s): Biology 371 or 233 (formerly Botany 327)

Antirequisite(s): None

Dr. Jana Vamosi

In your own words, can you give a brief summary about what this course is about?

This course covers the **broad topic of plant and algae diversity**. We cover ground spanning from how you can identify plants in your backyard to how you can determine the evolutionary age of a group of related plant species to how the climate may have played a role in causing extinction of certain groups of plants.

What is the main skill you want students to take away from this course?

Because there are so many plant and algae species (>400,000) we can't possibly cover them all. Therefore, the best skill to have is how to find and decipher information on any species when you need it. To do this, the class takes a conceptual approach and covers methods that can be applied to any group of plants of interest.

What aspect of the course do you think students struggle the most with?

As far as plant classification, students need to know how to distinguish between major groups of plants (e.g., knowing the difference between mosses and ferns) and to do this **requires knowledge of botanical terminology.** I think students struggle the most with this because it starts to add up as the course proceeds.

Besides attending lectures and doing any readings, what can a student do to be successful in the course?

I provide practice questions prior to all the exams and they give a good idea of what the actual test is going to be like so I definitely recommend doing those. I also encourage students to ask questions and start discussions in lecture and that provides a good opportunity to solidify concepts

Is there a lab or tutorial component of this course?

Yes there is a lab. The lab provides a great way to see representative members of the groups of plants and algae we've covered in lecture. It's one thing to see images on slides but seeing it in lab gives a much

better idea of the size and shape. Also, students can review concepts and this allows for their understanding to become more concrete.

What do you think is the most effective way that students can prepare for an examination in the course?

As I mentioned above, do the practice exam and spot where any trouble is occurring. I know it's difficult but do try to keep up with the material so it doesn't come all at once right before an exam.

Do you have any other advice for incoming students taking this class?

Take a moment now and then and ask yourself why what you're reading or studying might be important. Get in the practice of making connections between material in your different courses. How does plant biology connect with biochemistry, for example? **Find ways to maintain the interest and curiosity you had when you wanted to enter the field of biology.** At least, that's what helps me when I'm getting bogged down with information overload.

Do you have any stand-out memories or anything while teaching this course?

Well, I've never had a celebrity visit or anything. However, I've always been encouraged by the number of students who took the course thinking that plants would be very dull and have been pleasantly surprised by how fascinating plants really are. They aren't always flashy but plants are often quietly awesome.