



BIOL 3403 Plant Taxonomy Lecture

Biology Program, Department of Natural Sciences

Instructor information

Instructor: J. Rodolfo Valdez Barillas (Call me Dr. Valdez)

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Office hours: W & F 11-1:30 or e-mail appointment, to be conducted via TEAMS

Lecture format: F2F Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00 to 10:50 pm in Sci-Tech 269

Course Description

This course will introduce the student to plant classification using a Systematics (evolutionary origin and relation of plant groups) and a Taxonomic (naming plants based on hierarchical and categorical criteria) approach. The course mainly focuses on vascular and, more specifically, flowering plants, an important group that dominates most of Earth's terrestrial ecosystems and has provided many services to humans and many other life forms throughout our planet's history. During the course, students will be introduced to concepts and the construction of plant phylogenies, the diversification and evolution of plant species, and will be provided with an overview of important features used to identify and differentiate vascular plants. Students will develop an understanding of the phylogenetic arrangement of plant groups **from around the world**, and the main structural and biochemical characteristics, evolution, economic value, and ecological value for each group.

Course Objectives

1. Understand the mechanisms that explain the diversity of plants and how plants have adapted to different environments.
2. Understand differences among plants from a chemical, molecular, cellular, morphological, and ecological perspective.
3. Understand the links between plant uses, plant products, and both the economic and ecological value of each group.
4. Read and evaluate original literature (including peer-reviewed journals) to gain direct access to historical and modern developments in the field of Plant taxonomy and systematics.
5. Learn to appreciate plant diversity and the different roles that plants have played and could play in the life of humans.
6. Plan and execute a plant-related project throughout the semester that will help enhance your understanding of plant diversity, morphology, function, and importance.



Recommended resources

Plant Systematics: A Phylogenetic Approach 4th Ed. By Judd/ Campbell/ Kellogg/ Stevens/ Donoghue ISBN 97816053533890

Plant Taxonomy: The Systematic Evaluation of Comparative Data. 2nd Ed. By Tod F Stuessy ISBN 9780231147125

Plants & Society 8th Ed. By Estelle Levetin and Karen McMahon ISBN 9781259880049

Course policies

Attendance: You are required to attend every class.

Participation: You are expected to have reviewed the course material for the week and material from previous lectures, so you come to class ready with questions. You are also expected to actively contribute during class activities, group project activities, and laboratory activities.

Communication: All communication and inquiries to the instructor should be emailed to jvaldezb@tamusa.edu. This e-mail is intended for communication only. No late assignments will be accepted via e-mail unless the instructor has granted an accommodation. All assignments are submitted via Blackboard.

Course Changes: This course syllabus and lecture schedule are subject to change at any time; however, students will be notified via an e-mail message or during class should it change.

Make-up Exams: Make-up Exams are granted at the instructor's discretion and cannot be expected unless you have previously communicated your absence in written form or no later than 24 hours from your absence.

Late assignments: for each day passed the due date, 10% will be deducted from the total possible points.



Course Evaluation

Exams: The First half of the Exam will be taken individually using a scantron and will include multiple-choice, true/false questions. The second half of the Exam will include short answers and essay-type questions. Exams will take place on the Tuesday of Exam week. (See schedule)

- Exams are closed book, and most questions will come from or will be like the quiz questions.
- The Exam may include figures, tables, diagrams, or articles that will be provided on the day of the Exam
- Each exam will include the material covered up until the week before the day of the exam.
- You will have 20 minutes to complete the first half and 30 minutes to complete the second half. If all group members complete the first part within 20 minutes, the group may start the second half.
- The exam will include 20-25 multiple-choice questions that will be answered individually using a scantron and 2-3 short-answer questions that will be answered as a group.

Quizzes: Quizzes will be available weekly

- Regular quizzes will be available via Blackboard and completed outside of lecture time. You will have 5 days to complete the quiz and submit it before the Due date and time.
- However, on the week of the Exam, a quiz will be submitted on Wednesday, and you will have 48 hours to complete and submit it before the end of the day
- Your quiz can be taken three times, and the highest score will be added to your gradebook.
- Questions will be presented one at a time, and no backtracking will be possible; the number of questions may range from 5-10.
- Length of quiz may range from 5 to 10 minutes.

Assignments: This may include a scientific article summary and critiques, or in-class activities

- Please read the instructions provided on how to write an article summary and critique.
- Depending on the assignment, submission may be during the lecture or after the lecture.
- Most class assignments will be conducted as a group. So only one draft per group will need to be submitted. If you are absent, you may not make up the assignment unless you provide a reasonable excuse for your absence.

Plant buddy: A plant of your choice that you will observe throughout the semester

- You can bring it during class
- You may bring it during an Exam
- You may use it to study with emotional support
- You will be provided with questionnaires or asked to write a one-page essay about your plant buddy

Plant Book Club: You will select a book title to read throughout the semester.

- You will be asked to meet every other week in the library or via Zoom to talk about your book
- Guidelines will be provided, and you will do journal entries on Blackboard based on your book discussion and reflection

Grading: (Number of quizzes and assignments may be adjusted based on student course load.) The extra credit earned is added to the 560 total points when calculating your final grade over 100 points. The Lecture portion of the course represents 70% of your final grade. The lab portion of the course represents 30% of your final grade.

Instruction	Assessment	Cumulative pts
Lecture	Exams (3+final) 100pts/each	400
	Quizzes (10) 10pts/each	100
	Assignments (3) 10pts each	60
	Total	560

A = 90 – 100 points

B = 80 – 89.9 points

C = 70 – 79.9 points

D = 60 – 69.9 points

F = <59.9 points

BIOL 3403 Plant Taxonomy & Systematics Schedule

wk.	Date	Lecture Topic	Quizzes (Q)
1	08/25/2025 08/27/2025 08/29/2025	Syllabus. The Science of Plant Systematics Methods and Principles of Biological Systematics	Syllabus Q0 Pre-Test
2	09/01/2025 09/03/2025 09/05/2025	History of Plant Classification Taxonomic Evidence of Structural Characters	Lecture Q1
3	09/08/2025 09/10/2025 09/12/2025	Taxonomic Evidence of Biochemical Characters Evolution of Plant Diversity	Lecture Q2
4	09/15/2025 09/17/2025 09/19/2025	Exam 1 Overview of Plant Phenology	
5	09/22/2025 09/24/2025 09/26/2025	Overview of plant Phenology (Algae and humans) Lycophytes and Ferns	Lecture Q3
6	09/29/2025 10/01/2025 10/03/2025	Evolution of Gymnosperms ANA-Grade and Magnolid Clade	Lecture Q4
7	10/06/2025 10/08/2025 10/10/2025	Mesangiospermae Monocots: Alismatales	Lecture Q5
8	10/13/2025 10/15/2025 10/17/2025	Exam 2 Monocots: Liliales	
9	10/20/2025 10/22/2025 10/24/2025	Monocots: Asparagales Monocots: Arecales, Commelinales, Poales and Zygiberales	
10	10/27/2025 10/29/2025 10/31/2025	Eudicots: Ranunculales and Proteales Eudicots: Saxifragales and Vitales	Lecture Q6
11	11/03/2025 11/05/2025 11/07/2025	Malvids: Geraniales, Myrtales, Brassicales , Malvales , Sapindales Superasterids: Caryophyllales and Santalales	Lecture Q7
12	11/10/2025 11/12/2025 11/14/2025	Asterids: Cornales and Ericales Lamiids: Garryales, Solanales and Gentianales	Lecture Q8
	11/17/2025 11/19/2025 11/21/2025	Exam 3 Lamiids: Lamiales	
13	11/24/2025 11/26/2025 11/28/2025	Campanulids: Aquifoliales, Apiales , Dipsacales, Asterales	Lecture Q9
14	12/01/2025 12/03/2025 12/05/2025	No Class-Study Day	Lecture Q 10
	4/1-7	Final (Cumulative)	

Lab Topics may be subject to change if more than one lecture is needed to complete the assignment.

Field activity may or may not be conducted depending on the weather.



IMPORTANT POLICIES AND RESOURCES

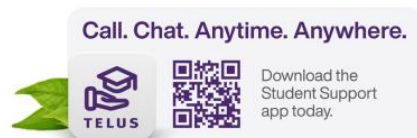
Academic Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to providing all students with reasonable access to learning opportunities and accommodations in accordance with The Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, Disability Support Services is located in the Central Academic Building, Suite 210. You can also contact us via phone at (210) 784-1335, visit us <https://www.tamusa.edu/Disability-Support-Services/index.html> or email us at dss@tamusa.edu. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to, attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability-related needs with Disability Support Services as soon as possible.

Academic Learning Center: The Academic Learning Center provides free course-based tutoring to all currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Students wishing to work with a tutor can make appointments through the Brainfuse online tutoring platform. Brainfuse can be accessed in the *Tools* section of Blackboard. You can contact the Academic Learning Center by emailing tutoring@tamusa.edu, calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202.

Counseling/Mental Health Resources: As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and negatively impact your daily functioning. If you are experiencing emotional difficulties or mental health concerns, support is available to you through the Student Counseling Center (SCC). To schedule an appointment, call 210-784-1331 or visit Madla 120. All mental health services provided by the SCC are **free and confidential** (as the law allows). The Student Counseling Center provides brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services. For more information on SCC services, visit <http://tamusa.edu/studentcounseling>

Crisis support is available 24/7 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331.

Additionally, the TELUS Student Support App provides a variety of mental health resources to including support for in-the-moment distress, an anonymous peer-to-peer support network, mental health screenings, podcasts, and articles to improve your mental wellbeing.



Emergency Preparedness: JagE Alert is Texas A&M University-San Antonio's mass notification. In the event of an emergency, such as inclement weather, students, staff and faculty, who are registered, will have the option to receive a text message, email with instructions and updates. To register or update your information visit: <https://tamusa.bbcportal.com>

More information about Emergency Operations Plan and the Emergency Action Plan can be found here: <https://www.tamusa.edu/about-us/emergency-management/>

Download the SafeZone App (<https://safezoneapp.com/>) for emergencies or call (210) 784-1911. Non-Emergency (210) 784-1900.

Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance: According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which include class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended by the published Census Date (the first week of class). Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend prior to the published Census Date (the first week of class) will have their aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may also need to return a portion of their federal aid.

Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center: The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center supports graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Our language tutors support students enrolled in Spanish courses and students composing in Spanish for any assignment. Our digital studio tutors support students working on digital projects such as eportfolios, class presentations, or other digital multimedia projects. Students can schedule appointments through JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on "Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center" to make your appointment. The Center offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our website at <https://www.tamusa.edu/academics>.

Meeting Basic Needs: Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to submit a CARE referral (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/Student-Rights-and-Responsibilities/file-a-report.html>) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to direct you to available resources.

Office Hours: All faculty with teaching assignments should include regularly scheduled office hours on each syllabus in addition to "by appointment." Please review your appointment letter for the number of weekly office hours you are expected to set. Regularly scheduled office hours should also be posted outside your office door (where applicable).

Military Affairs: Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcome and encouraged to visit the Office of Military Affairs for any questions involving federal or state VA Education Benefits. Visit the Patriots' Casa building, room 202, or contact the Office of Military Affairs with any questions at military.va@tamusa.edu or (210)784-1397.

Religious Observances: Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their traditions. Under the policy, students are provided with an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or coursework requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes.

The Six-Drop Rule: Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231, passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student's GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as "F" grades and will impact the student's GPA.

Statement of Harassment and Discrimination: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equal opportunity, and human dignity. To fulfill its

multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, A&M-San Antonio encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality and the uniqueness of the individual on our campus and within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees are to be based on applicable law and individual merit. Texas A&M University-San Antonio, in accordance with applicable federal and state law, prohibits discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the University's Civil Rights Officer at 210-784-2061 or titleix@tamusa.edu.

Texas A&M University-San Antonio faculty are committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sex- or gender-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence, or stalking based on sex, know that help and support are available. A&M-San Antonio's Title IX Coordinator can support those impacted by such conduct in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The university strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the Title IX Coordinator. Please be aware that all A&M-San Antonio employees (other than those designated as confidential resources, such as counselors and trained victim advocates) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the university. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment, sexual violence, or other related sex-based misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the university's Title IX Coordinator (titleix@tamusa.edu, 210-784-2061, CAB 439K). If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting requirement, you can contact the Student Counseling Center at (210) 784-1331 or visit them in Madla 120.

Pregnant/Parenting Students: Texas A&M-San Antonio does not require a pregnant or parenting student, solely because of that status or issues related to that status, to (1) take a leave of absence or withdraw from their degree or certificate program; (2) limit the student's studies; (3) participate in an alternative program; (4) change the student's major, degree, or certificate program; or (5) refrain from joining or cease participating in any course, activity, or program at the University. The university will provide such reasonable modifications to pregnant students as would be provided to a student with a temporary medical condition that is related to the health and safety of the student and the student's unborn child. These could include maintaining a safe distance from substances, areas, and activities known to be hazardous to pregnant individuals and their unborn child; excused absences because of illness or medical appointments; modified due dates for assignments; rescheduled tests/exams; taking a leave of absence; and being provided access to instructional materials and video recordings of lectures for excused absences, if these would be provided to any other student with an excused absence. Pregnant/parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator with any questions or concerns related to their status (titleix@tamusa.edu; 210-784-2061; CAB 439K). Texas A&M-San Antonio has also designated the Title IX Coordinator as the liaison officer for current or incoming students who are the parent or guardian of a child younger than 18 years of age. The Title IX Coordinator can provide students with information regarding support services and other resources.

Young Jaguars: can support parenting students with daycare who meet this criteria: Must be enrolled in classes at TAMUSA in the current semester. Must be Pell eligible or a single parent. They serve children ages 3 to 12 years old. Children must be enrolled in Pre-K-3 through 6th grade.

youngjaguars@tamusa.edu (210) 784-2636

Students' Rights and Responsibilities: The following statement of students' rights and responsibilities is intended to reflect the philosophical base upon which University Student Rules are built. This philosophy acknowledges the existence of both rights and responsibilities, which is inherent to an individual not

only as a student at Texas A&M University-San Antonio but also as a citizen of this country.

Students' Rights

1. A student shall have the right to participate in a free exchange of ideas, and there shall be no University rule or administrative rule that in any way abridges the rights of freedom of speech, expression, petition and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution.
2. Each student shall have the right to participate in all areas and activities of the University, free from any form of discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and pregnancy/parenting or veteran status in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.
3. A student has the right to personal privacy except as otherwise provided by law, and this will be observed by students and University authorities alike.
4. Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university students' rules shall be assured a fundamentally fair process.

Students' Responsibilities

1. A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty, and administration.
2. A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the published University Student Rules found in the Student Handbook, [Student Code of Conduct](#), on our website, and University Catalog, and to comply with them, as well as with federal, state, and local laws.
3. A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire University community.
4. A student has the responsibility to recognize the University's obligation to provide a safe environment for learning.
5. A student has the responsibility to check their university email for any updates or official university notifications.

We expect that students will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful, and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation, or disability. Conduct that infringes on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

Students are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education. Students engaging in an act that violates the standards of academic integrity will find themselves facing academic and/or disciplinary sanctions. Academic misconduct is any act, or attempt, which gives an unfair advantage to the student. Additionally, any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion may be considered as academic misconduct. For more information on academic misconduct policies and procedures, please review the Student Code of Conduct (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/student-rights-and-responsibilities/documents/Student-Handbook-2022-23.pdf>) or visit the resources available in the OSRR website (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/student-rights-and-responsibilities/academic-integrity.html>).

There are situations and contexts within this course where you may be asked to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools to explore how they can be used. Outside of those circumstances, you should not use AI tools to generate content (text, video, audio, images) that will end up in any student work (assignments, activities, discussion responses, etc.) that is part of your evaluation in this course. Any student work

submitted using AI tools should clearly indicate with attribution what work is the student's work and what part is generated by the AI. In such cases, no more than 25% of the student's work should be generated by AI. If any part of this is confusing or uncertain, students should reach out to their instructor for clarification before submitting work for grading. Use of AI-generated content without the instructor's permission and/or proper attribution in this course qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, including ChatGPT, is permitted in this course for students who wish to use them. To adhere to our scholarly values, students must cite any AI-generated material that informed their work (this includes in-text citations and/or use of quotations, and in your reference list). Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.

<https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>

Important Dates: Fall 2025 Regular 16-Week Session

August 25	First day of class
September 1	Labor Day Holiday – No classes
September 10	Census Date
November 14	Last day to drop with an automatic “W”
November 25	Last day to withdraw from the University
November 26	Study Day – No classes
November 27-29	Thanksgiving Holiday – No classes
December 4	Last day of classes
December 5	Study Day – No classes
December 6-12	Final exams
December 16	Commencement

The complete academic calendar is available online: <https://www.tamusa.edu/academics/academic-calendar/index.html>