

## BIOL 4103.002 — Seminar in Zoology

Fall 2026

|            |                                    |             |                                   |
|------------|------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| Meeting    | Tue 11:00–11:50                    | Room        | Stem (Science and Technology) 145 |
| Instructor | Dr. Utpal Smart                    | Email       | usmart@tamusa.edu                 |
| Office     | Stem (Science and Technology) 311B | Office hrs  | Friday, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM       |
| Credit     | 1                                  | Course site | Blackboard                        |

### Course Description

Student-led reviews of current scientific literature on various topics in zoology, with critical class analyses.

**Prerequisites:** BIOL 3305 and (BIOL 3408 or BIOL 3405 or BIOL 3401) and (ENGL 2311 or ENGL 1302).

**Restrictions:** Graduate-level students may not enroll. TSI restrictions: Reading, Math, and Writing.

### How This Course Works — Read This First

The semester works up the animal tree — invertebrates, fishes, amphibians and reptiles, birds, and mammals — reading one shared paper each week. A student leader frames the study, and small groups analyze the data before we discuss it as a class. The emphasis is on reading the evidence (figures and data) rather than summarizing the text, and on building the confidence to critique a paper rather than just report it.

This is a discussion course, not a lecture course. It runs on a simple, predictable rhythm every week, built so that you always arrive prepared and no one ever sits in silence waiting to be called on:

1. **Before class** — read the paper and complete a one-page Figure Facts sheet (one row per figure: what they did, what the data show, what you conclude), plus one discussion question. Post it the night before. Marked done or not; you can miss up to two with no penalty. This habit guarantees you walk in with something to say.
2. **First ~10 minutes** — that week's leader frames the paper: the question it asks, the key figure, and why it matters.
3. **Rest of class** — you break into small groups of four to work through three or four questions on the screen. Each group reports one point, and we close as a whole class.

**Why Figure Facts?** Filling in the data figure-by-figure keeps our discussion anchored on evidence instead of drifting into summary — it is the single change that most reliably turns a quiet seminar into a real one. Some weeks I will add one lens to sharpen the critique (for example: every group finds one weakness in the methods).

### Leading a Session

Beginning in Week 4, one or two students lead each week (in pairs, a few weeks in threes, so all 24 lead once). Leaders act as **moderators, not lecturers**: choose the paper from that week's animal group (recent, figure-driven, accessible — or pick from the vetted Paper Bank), post it, give the short framing, and run the group discussion. A Leader Sheet on Blackboard walks you through it — it's a prep guide you keep, not something you submit.

### Grading

This is a one-credit seminar, and it's graded that way — on engagement and completion, not fine-point distinctions. If you turn in your weekly sheets, show up, lead your session, and give your final talk, you are comfortably in the A/B range.

| Component                  | Weight | How it's graded                                                               |
|----------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Figure Facts sheets & prep | 40%    | Done or not — a genuine attempt earns full credit. Up to two misses forgiven. |

| Component                  | Weight | How it's graded                                  |
|----------------------------|--------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Participation & attendance | 20%    | Three bands: Engaged / Coasting / Barely there.  |
| Leading your session       | 20%    | Three bands: Solid / Adequate / Weak.            |
| Final talk                 | 20%    | Three bands: Thoughtful / Complete / Incomplete. |

### What the bands mean

**Participation & attendance** — Engaged: prepared and contributes most weeks. Coasting: present but often quiet or underprepared. Barely there: frequently absent or disengaged.

**Leading your session** — Solid: good paper, clear framing, ran the discussion well. Adequate: got through it with some rough edges. Weak: unprepared or didn't run the process.

**Final talk** — Thoughtful: a clear point of view that connects ideas from the term. Complete: delivered but thin. Incomplete: missing or not presented.

**Grading scale:** A 90–100 · B 80–89 · C 70–79 · D 60–69 · F below 60. A genuine, engaged effort lands here comfortably.

### Final Talk

A short lightning talk (about 4 minutes, 3–4 slides) on a theme of your choice from the semester's topics — a question, a debate, or a paper you found compelling — presented at the end-of-term symposium (Weeks 14–15). Please clear your topic with me by Week 8, so no one arrives at the end without a direction.

### Weekly Schedule — Fall 2026

*Subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.*

| Wk                                          | Tuesday | Focus                                                                     | Notes                                 |
|---------------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1                                           | Aug 25  | Launch: how the seminar works; sign up for leader dates and animal groups | Set expectations                      |
| 2                                           | Sep 1   | How to read a paper + Figure Facts: class works one paper together        | Skills workshop (instructor-led)      |
| 3                                           | Sep 8   | Instructor models a full session                                          | Model session                         |
| <b>MODULE 1 · Invertebrates</b>             |         |                                                                           |                                       |
| 4                                           | Sep 15  | Student-led paper 1                                                       | First student-led session (3 leaders) |
| 5                                           | Sep 22  | Student-led paper 2                                                       |                                       |
| <b>MODULE 2 · Fishes</b>                    |         |                                                                           |                                       |
| 6                                           | Sep 29  | Student-led paper 3                                                       | (3 leaders)                           |
| 7                                           | Oct 6   | Student-led paper 4                                                       |                                       |
| <b>MODULE 3 · Amphibians &amp; Reptiles</b> |         |                                                                           |                                       |
| 8                                           | Oct 13  | Student-led paper 5 — reptile evolution                                   | (3 leaders) · Talk topic due          |
| 9                                           | Oct 20  | Student-led paper 6 — amphibian disease (+ its published critique)        | doubles as lab exposure               |
| <b>MODULE 4 · Birds</b>                     |         |                                                                           |                                       |
| 10                                          | Oct 27  | Student-led paper 7                                                       | (3 leaders)                           |
| 11                                          | Nov 3   | Student-led paper 8                                                       |                                       |
| <b>MODULE 5 · Mammals</b>                   |         |                                                                           |                                       |
| 12                                          | Nov 10  | Student-led paper 9                                                       |                                       |

| Wk | Tuesday | Focus                                                 | Notes             |
|----|---------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 13 | Nov 17  | Student-led paper 10                                  |                   |
| 14 | Nov 24  | Final symposium — presentations (session 1)           | Thanksgiving week |
| 15 | Dec 1   | Final symposium — presentations (session 2) + wrap-up | last Tuesday      |

*The spine tours the animal kingdom, two weeks per group. Module 3 does double duty — one reptile-evolution week and one amphibian-disease week (paired with its published critique). See the Paper Bank for vetted options in each group.*

## Course Policies

### Attendance & participation

In a discussion seminar, attendance and preparation *are* the course, so I take attendance every week.

Attendance is not scored as its own line — but make no mistake, missing class will cost you. Every session you skip is one you cannot contribute to, and repeated absences pull your participation grade from Engaged toward Barely there. Absences also add up quietly: you miss the discussion your final talk builds on, and if you are absent the week you are signed up to lead, you lose that chance for good. Come having read the paper and posted your Figure Facts sheet — show up prepared each week and the participation grade takes care of itself.

## Important Policies and Resources

### University Email Policy and Course Communications

All correspondence between professors and students must occur via university email accounts. You must have your Jaguar email account ready and working. If it is not working, contact the help desk at [helpdesk@tamusa.edu](mailto:helpdesk@tamusa.edu) or at 210-784-HELP (4357). If you don't hear back within 48 hours, contact them again. They have many requests during the first part of the semester, so you may need to follow up with them.

### 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 at the website or email us at [dss@tamusa.edu](mailto:dss@tamusa.edu). All students are encouraged to discuss their academic accommodation with Disability Support Services and their instructors as soon as possible.

### Academic Learning Center

All currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio can utilize the Academic Learning Center for subject-area tutoring. 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](mailto:tutoring@tamusa.edu), calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202. Online tutoring is also available for after hours and weekend assistance.

While tutoring hours may change based on tutor schedules and availability, the current tutoring hours for MATH in the ALC are as follows:

| Day       | Appointments available | Walk-in Tutoring (no appointment needed) |
|-----------|------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Monday    | 8 am – 6 pm            | 9 am – 5 pm                              |
| Tuesday   | 8 am – 6 pm            | 9 am – 5 pm                              |
| Wednesday | 8 am – 6 pm            | 9 am – 5 pm                              |
| Thursday  | 8 am – 6 pm            | 9 am – 5 pm                              |

| Day    | Appointments available | Walk-in Tutoring (no appointment needed) |
|--------|------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Friday | 8 am – 5 pm            | 11 am – 4 pm                             |

## 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, visit our website, call 210-784-1331 or visit Madla 120 between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM.

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. Crisis support is available 24/7/365 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331 or through the TELUS student support App.

The TELUS Student Support App provides a variety of mental health resources including 24/7/365 support for in-the-moment distress, crisis support, 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 system. 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 on emergency response may be found at: Emergency Operations Plan and the Emergency Action Plan. 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.

## Jaguar Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center (WLDCC)

The WLDCC provides support to graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Writing 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. The WLDCC offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. Students can schedule appointments with the WLDCC in JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on "Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center" to make your appointment. Students wanting to work in real time with a tutor can schedule an "Online Appointment." Students wishing to receive asynchronous, written feedback from a tutor can schedule an "eTutoring" appointment. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our website. The WLDCC can also be reached by emailing [wldcc@tamusa.edu](mailto:wldcc@tamusa.edu).

## 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 report for

support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to direct you to available resources. A food pantry is available on campus; click here for hours and contact information.

## **Military Affairs**

Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to visit the Office of Military Affairs for any question 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](mailto:military.va@tamusa.edu) or (210) 784-1397.

## **Religious Observances**

Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the wide variety of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or course work 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](mailto: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 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](mailto: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 accommodations to pregnant students as would be provided to a student with a temporary medical condition that are 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](mailto: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 if students meet this criteria: (1) must be enrolled in classes at Texas A&M-San Antonio in the current semester, (2) must be Pell eligible or a single parent, (3) child(ren) must be aged 3 to 12-years-old, and (4) child(ren) must be enrolled in Pre-K-3 through 6th grade. Hours of operation are Monday-Thursday 3:30pm-9:00pm. For more information, please contact Young Jaguars at [youngjaguars@tamusa.edu](mailto:youngjaguars@tamusa.edu) or call (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, 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 student 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, 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 or visit the resources available in the OSRR website.

## Important Fall 2026 Dates

| Date                      | Event                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| August 20                 | Tuition & Fee Payments deadline                                                                                 |
| August 24                 | First day of class                                                                                              |
| September 7               | Labor Day Holiday – No Classes / University Closed                                                              |
| September 9               | Census Date – Students not paid in full or enrolled in a payment plan by 4:59 pm may be dropped for non-payment |
| October 5 – October 16    | Midterm grading period                                                                                          |
| November 13               | Last day to drop with an automatic “W”                                                                          |
| November 25               | Study Day – No classes                                                                                          |
| November 26 – November 28 | Thanksgiving Holiday – No Classes / University Closed                                                           |
| November 30               | Last day to drop a course or withdraw from the University                                                       |
| December 4                | Last day of classes                                                                                             |
| December 5 – December 11  | Final exams                                                                                                     |
| December 15               | Commencement                                                                                                    |

*The complete academic calendar is available online.*

## No Use of Generative AI Permitted

BIOL 4103 assumes that all work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and/or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT. Use of any AI-generated content in this course qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.