

# BIOL 5105-001 Seminar Spring 2025

Biology Program, Department of Natural Sciences

## Instructor information

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

**Office:** Science & Technology Building (Sci. & Tech) 311L

**Preferred contact method:** [jvaldezb@tamusa.edu](mailto:jvaldezb@tamusa.edu)

**Office hours:** in Sci. & Tech. 311L or by appointment via Microsoft Teams

**Class meeting format:** Face to face, Friday 11-11:50 am in Sci & Tech Building, Room 179

## Course Description

This course is structured to familiarize students with diverse topics and perspectives through discussions of scholarly articles facilitated by a guest speaker or a student who selects an article pertinent to their thesis projects. These activities will enhance the student's comprehension of the scientific principles underlying a research project by engaging in discourse with the author of a scientific article. Students will refine their critiquing skills and discussion facilitation while receiving feedback from peers.

## Course Objectives

1. Exposure to Diversity: Gain exposure to broad topics, industries, and intellectual fields through weekly guest speakers.
2. Critical Thinking: Develop critical thinking and analytical skills by engaging with complex and multidisciplinary ideas presented by experts and peers.
3. Interdisciplinary Exploration: Foster an appreciation for interdisciplinary connections and the interplay between various fields of knowledge.
4. Networking: Build connections with guest speakers and fellow students motivated by intellectual curiosity.
5. Communication Skills: Improve listening skills, and ability to engage in meaningful discussions during Q&A sessions.

## Course Policies

**Attendance:** You are required to attend **every class**.

**Participation:** I expect that you will review the course material for the week and review material from previous lectures, so you come to class ready with questions.

**Course Changes:** This course syllabus and lecture schedule are subject to change at any time; however, I will notify you of any changes through announcements in Blackboard or during the seminar.

**Late assignments submission:** I will deduct 10% of the assignment's possible points for each day after the due date.

## **Course Evaluation**

**Guest Speaker's Article Critique:** Commencing in the third week of the course, students will convene with a guest speaker biweekly. The guest speaker will submit a written article they have authored one week before their engagement with the students. You will be required to print the article provided by the guest speaker, annotate, and underline pertinent content within each section of the scientific article. Following the guidelines provided, each student will prepare and submit a critique of 1.5 pages.

**Student-led article discussion:** Each student will be asked to lead the discussion of an article related to their thesis project. Each student will moderate for 10 to 20 minutes, depending on the number of students presenting and course enrollment. The moderator will provide a summary of the article and prepare questions that promote peer participation. The student will post the article on Blackboard a week before moderating the article. The student leading the article discussion will write a one-page summary and post it on the blackboard discussion board the day they moderate their article. Except for the moderators, students are not required to write a summary, just to read the article in advance, to actively participate in the peer-led discussion, and to complete a peer evaluation at the end of each discussion. The peer evaluation will include 4 questions that rate the moderator's performance on a scale from 1-5, where 1 is I strongly agree and 5 is strongly disagree.

Week	Activity	Moderator
1/24	How to critique and moderate an article	Faculty
1/31	Student-led discussion	Sarah P. & Bridget
2/07	Guest speaker-led discussion	Speaker 1
2/14	Student-led discussion	Infinity & Dennis
2/21	Guest speaker-led discussion	Speaker 2
2/28	Student-led discussion	Angela & Iliana
3/07	Guest speaker-led discussion	Speaker 3
3/14	<b>Spring Break</b>	
3/21	Student-led discussion	Robert & Bernard
3/28	Guest speaker-led discussion	Speaker 4
4/04	Student-led discussion	Tori & Sarah F.
4/11	Guest speaker-led discussion	Speaker 5
4/18	<b>No class-study day</b>	
4/25	Student-led discussion	Students 11 & 12
5/02	Guest speaker-led discussion	Speaker 6

## 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 following 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 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](mailto: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 and their instructors as soon as possible.

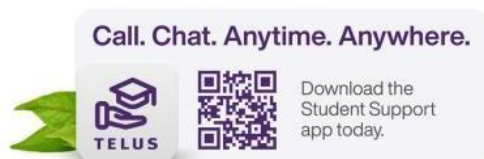
Academic Learning Center: The Academic Learning Center provides free course-based tutoring to all students currently enrolled at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Students wishing to work with a tutor can make appointments through the **Brainfuse** online tutoring platform. **Brainfuse** can be accessed 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.

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 the SCC provides are free and confidential (as the law allows). The Student Counseling Center offers brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services. For more information on SCC services visit [tamusa.edu/studentcounseling](http://tamusa.edu/studentcounseling)

*Crisis support is available 24/7 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331 (after-hours select option '2').*

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



Emergency Preparedness: JagE Alert is Texas A&M University-San Antonio's mass notification. In an emergency, such as inclement weather, students, staff, and faculty, who are registered, will have the option to receive a text message, or email with instructions and updates. To register or update your information visit: <https://tamusa.bbcportal.com/>. More information about the 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. The faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended the first week of class. Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend the first week of class will have their aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending 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 including 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 e-portfolios, 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.

Military Affairs: Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed 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](mailto: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 allowed 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 within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees should be based on applicable law and individual merit. Texas A&M University-San Antonio, under applicable federal and state law, prohibits discrimination, including harassment, based on race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the appropriate offices within their respective units.

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, 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 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 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](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.

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 are 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 outlined 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, based on race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and pregnancy/parenting or veteran status following 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 the 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>).

**Use of Generative AI Permitted Under Some Circumstances or With Explicit Permission** 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 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 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.

Important Dates:

January 21	First day of class
January 28	Last day to register
February 24-March 7	Midterm grading period
March 10-15	Spring Break
April 12	Study day- No Classes
April 21	Last day to drop with an automatic "W"
April 28	Last day to withdraw from the University
May 5	Last day of Classes
May 6	Study day- No Classes
May 7-13	Final Exams
May 19	Grades available in JagWire

*The complete academic calendar is available online:*

<https://www.tamusa.edu/academics/academic-calendar/index.html>.