



Overview
Zol 415, Spring 2007

[Link to the Schedule](#)
[Link to Disc. Leaders](#)

Behavioral Ecology

Lect: tu & th 10:20-11:10am, room 304 Natural Sciences Bldg.

Disc: Sec 1: tu 11:30-12:20pm, “ 304 “
Sec 2: th 11:30-12:20pm, “ 304 “
Sec 3: tu 12:40- 1:30pm, “ 140 “

Professor: [Tom Getty](#), Department of Zoology & Kellogg Biological Station
e-mail: getty@kbs.msu.edu (e-mail is much better than phone)
KBS phone: 199-2229 (campus line), 1-269-671-2229 (outside line)
Office hours: Before or after class & by arrangement

GSA: Lindsey Walters, Department of Zoology, KBS & EEBB Program
e-mail: walte138@sign.msu.edu (email is much better than phone)
Office Location: 142 Giltner; Office hours: th 12:30-1:30

The **goals** of this class are to introduce students to the research literature in behavioral ecology and to practice important skills: critically reading research papers and analyzing their strengths, weakness and contributions, participating in and leading group discussions, and effectively communicating ideas, both verbally and in writing. I would like the discussion to be as much like a graduate seminar as possible. ZOL313 is a prerequisite and I assume you mastered the basics in that course. There is no text.

The **discussion** sections will analyze recent research papers related to the lectures. Most of the research papers will be available from the MSU Library's Electronic Resources and through links on the class schedule page. Please note: if you want to access these resources from your personal computer you will need to follow the instructions for using the library's Proxy Server (<http://www.lib.msu.edu/proxy/>)

You must come to **discussions** prepared to contribute to a critical evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each paper. You might find [Ann McNeal's advice on How to Read a Scientific Research Paper](#) useful. We are looking for verbal discussion that will benefit everyone in the class. However, as an aid to preparing for class, and a safety net for grading, at the beginning of each discussion you will turn in a brief synopsis (one or two paragraphs, less than a page) of

- (1) the goals of the paper,
- (2) the strengths & weakness of the paper,
- (3) what the paper actually accomplishes (relative to the goals), and
- (4) the topics/issues/questions you would like to explore and clarify in the discussion.

You may discuss these things with classmates but the synopsis must be your own. Your contribution to each discussion will be scored as 0, 1 or 2.

30% of your grade is based on your actual or intended contributions to discussions.

Each **discussion** will be led by one or two students. Discussion leaders are not expected to lecture. Rather, they will help orchestrate the discussion to help us get the most out of each paper. Lindsey and I will lead the first discussion and help out with other discussions as needed. Each student will be involved in leading one discussion.

10% of your grade is based on your effectiveness at leading the discussion.

In the **lectures**, guest lecturers and I will introduce current research topics. I will present my lectures using PowerPoint. I will post a skeletonized draft of the lecture in acrobat.pdf format the evening before lecture. There will be a link on the class schedule page. Many students like to print this out and take notes on it. You will need a recent version of the acrobat reader, available free from Adobe.com.

Before each lecture we will have an opportunity for a brief **quiz** on the preceding lecture or film. Each quiz will be scored as 0, 1 or 2. Missed quizzes cannot be made up later unless you have a valid (medical) excuse for missing class. Here is [an example quiz](#).

20% of your grade is based on random pop quizzes on the preceding lectures.

The **term paper** will be a short (~1000-1500 words) News & Views style overview and analysis of a target paper on a topic in behavioral ecology that is of interest to you. You should identify two or three prospective papers and then choose one in consultation with us. The target paper must be a recent (within the last year or two) research report (with original results, not a review) from a refereed journal, (and it cannot have been reviewed already in another publication). The goals for our N&V paper are similar to the goals for each discussion (above). I will provide examples of target articles and [N&V-style reviews](#). Here is an example of [an excellent student N&V paper](#). Here is a useful little guide to better [scientific writing](#). Here is the [grading rubric](#).

20% of your grade is based on your News & Views paper.

The **final exam (20%)** will be an essay question that I will choose from a list of study questions distributed in advance. A good answer will require you to use the information provided in the lectures and developed in the discussions. Here are [the final exam study questions for 2006](#).

It is important that you participate and contribute to class activities.

Test your understanding by trying to explain things.

If you can't explain it you don't understand it.

You will learn a lot by asking questions and helping to answer others' questions.

Grades: (1) 30% Contributing to Discussions,
(2) 10% Leading a discussion,
(3) 20% Quizzes
(3) 20% News & Views paper,
(4) 20% Final exam.

Here is [a link to last year's grades](#).

**If you have any difficulty with any aspect of the class,
please talk to us so we can help you.**