

Biology 3444F: Evolution of Plants Course Outline

1. Course Information

Course Information

Biology 3404F: Evolution of Plants, fall 2026

List of Prerequisites

A minimum mark of 60% in either Biology 1001A or Biology 1201A and a minimum mark of 60% in either Biology 1002B or Biology 1202B or Integrated Science 1001X

Unless students have either the prerequisites for this course or written special permission from the Department of Biology to enroll in it, they may be removed and withdrawn from this course in accordance with university policy. This may be done after the add/drop deadline of the academic term, and the course will be marked as withdrawn (WDN) on their academic record. This decision may not be appealed.

2. Instructor Information

Instructors	Email	Office	Office Hours

Students must use their Western (@uwo.ca) email addresses when contacting their instructors. Students are encouraged to use the Discussions tab on the Brightspace course website for questions whose answer would be of interest to other students in the course. We endeavour to provide answers within 48 weekday hours of your post or email.

3. Course Syllabus, Schedule, Delivery Mode

This course provides an introduction to the major groups of photosynthetic organisms - now classified in three Domains and numerous Kingdoms. These organisms feed the world, produce many of today's medicines, and provide numerous ecosystem functions. Lectures emphasize diversity, evolutionary relationships and importance, and labs emphasize morphology and recognition.

1. Demonstrate an understanding of phylogenetic analysis (estimation of evolutionary relationships) by recognizing monophyletic and nonmonophyletic groups and interpreting the relationships shown in exemplar phylogenetic trees.
2. Demonstrate a working knowledge of phylogenetic analyses based on DNA sequence by selecting and obtaining taxon and data sets from online sources, constructing sequence alignments, creating

phylogenetic trees from these data using a variety of suitable algorithms, and interpreting and evaluating the trees produced.

3. Create and apply dichotomous keys to identify plants based on morphological features.
4. Demonstrate familiarity with the major groups (phyla) of photosynthetic organisms by recognizing, describing, and illustrating their characteristic morphological features.
5. Describe the major ecological roles and economic value, including food and industrial uses, of different plant groups.
6. Describe and differentiate various types of symbioses between plants and other organisms, including fungi, microbes, and animals.
7. Identify characteristic reproductive parts of different plant groups in illustrations provided, obtained using a dissecting microscope.
8. Synthesize information on a plant or plant group or topic of their choice in writing, creating an essay that interprets and evaluates elements of the scientific literature to a general audience.

The following is a tentative schedule of the course. The specific topics of labs are included in a separate table below.

Topic	Date	Lecture	Labs
Introduction to course: what is a plant?		1	No lab
Evolution and world history		2	
Prokaryotes as symbionts of plants		3	Campus hike
Fungi as symbionts of plants		4	
Plant systematics (historical)		5	Classification exercise
Plant systematics (molecular)		6	
No class for Truth and Reconciliation Day			
Algae I		7	
Algae II		8	Molecular phylogeny
Reading week			
Bryophytes I		9	
Bryophytes II		10	Bryophytes
Midterm to end of Bryophytes (20%)			
Seedless vascular plants		11	No lab
Gymnosperms I		12	
Gymnosperms II		13	
Basal angiosperms		14	
Angiosperms: monocots		15	
Angiosperm dicots I		16	
Angiosperm dicots II		17	
Angiosperm diversity worldwide		18	
Adaptations in plants		19	
Case studies in plant conservation		20	
Climate change and plant evolution		21	
Review session		22	
No class			

Lab schedule

Note that each lab has an assignment associated with it, worth 5% for a total of 30% (count 4 of 6).

Week	Date	Labs
1		No lab
2		Lab 1 - Campus hike
3		Lab 2 – Classification Exercise
No labs (Truth and Reconciliation Day)		
5		Lab 3 – Molecular phylogeny
Reading Week		
7		Lab 4 - Bryophytes
8		No lab (midterm week)
9		Lab 5 – Gymnosperms and ferns
10		No lab
11		Lab 6 – Flowering Plants
12		No lab
13		No lab – essay writing

4. Course Materials

There is no required textbook.

All lab and lecture material will be posted to OWL Brightspace: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL Brightspace site regularly for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

If students need assistance with the course OWL Brightspace site, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

Technical Requirements

This course requires the following:

- Laptop or computer

5. Methods of Evaluation

Grading Scheme and Assessment Dates

The overall course grade will be calculated as listed below:

Laboratories (best 4 out of 6)	30%
Midterm Test	20%
Essay	20%
Final Exam	30%

Tentative List of Topics

The midterm will cover material up to the end of Bryophytes II. The final exam is cumulative.

Essential Learning Requirements

Even when Academic Consideration is granted for missed coursework, the following are essential to earn a passing grade in this course:

- a minimum number of 4 completed labs, with a passing grade (15/30) on the laboratory component to ensure that students demonstrate sufficient mastery of those technical skills to progress,
- a passing grade on the final essay to satisfy the Senate requirement that students must demonstrate “some minimal competence in essay writing” to pass the course,

When a student has not demonstrated proficiency in an essential learning requirement listed above, and when the shortfall results from a granted Academic Consideration, they will be withdrawn (WDN) from the course. The student may appeal to the Associate Dean (Academic) for reinstatement with an Incomplete (INC) standing. Where an appeal for INC is granted, their maximum course load may be reduced during the term in which they complete the outstanding course requirements.

Use of Generative AI Tools

The use of generative AI tools is permitted, but students are expected to include a statement on their use of AI on all written assignments – whether they used it or not. This statement should explain how AI was used and in what sections of the written work.

Information about Missed Coursework

Students must familiarize themselves with the *University Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs*, posted on the Academic Calendar:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf,

This policy does not apply to requests for Academic Consideration submitted for **attempted or completed work**, whether online or in person. The policy also does not apply to students experiencing longer-term impacts on their academic responsibilities. These students should consult [Accessible Education](#).

For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar’s webpage: https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/. All requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline.

Midterms and Tests

This course has a midterm test and a **cumulative** final exam. There is no makeup test for a missed midterm. If a student misses a midterm, its weight will shift automatically to their final exam grade. If their final exam grade is higher than their midterm grade, their final exam grade will replace the midterm's weight in their overall grade. They do not need to request Academic Consideration for a missed midterm; the reweighing will be done automatically.

The only exception is an early sitting, offered solely for a university-sanctioned schedule conflict (e.g., conflict of two midterms, Varsity competitions) or a religious accommodation that prevents a student from writing the midterm at its scheduled time. If a student requires this accommodation, they must notify their instructor in writing no later than one week before the test. No other circumstance, including illness, qualifies for an early sitting or makeup; these are addressed through the automatic reweighing described above.

A student is entitled to **one** makeup midterm. If a student misses the makeup midterm and is approved for Academic Consideration, they will be withdrawn from the course without academic penalty, following the same process that applies to a missed Special Examination (see Special Examination, below). A student may appeal to the Associate Dean (Academic), on a case-by-case basis, for the opportunity to write the midterm the next time the course is offered. If a student misses the makeup midterm and Academic Consideration is not approved, or was not requested, they will receive a grade of zero on the makeup midterm.

Labs

This course has 6 labs. Students are expected to complete 4/6 to receive full credit for this component. If they miss up to 2 of these, they do not need to request Academic Consideration; the missing item(s) will not count against them, and their grade for this component will be calculated from their best 4 submissions.

The skills assessed in the lab component are essential to this course. They cannot be assessed through tests or the final exam. If a student completes fewer than 4, they will not meet the requirements of the course. See Essential Learning Requirements above for what happens in that case.

Deadlines: The 48-Hour No-Late-Penalty Period

All take-home assignments, quizzes, and labs with a stated due date include an automatic 48-hour period after the deadline during which students may still submit without a late penalty. For example, if an assignment is due on November 5, they may submit it until November 7 without penalty. After this 48-hour period, no further submissions will be accepted, and students do not need to request Academic Consideration for a missed deadline; their grade for this component will be calculated as described above.

Special Examination

Per university policy, Academic Consideration requests with supporting documentation are required for the final examinations scheduled during official examination periods by the Registrar's Office.

If the student has been approved by the Academic Advising Office to write a Special Examination (SPC) and the final exam is their only outstanding course component, an SPC will be assigned to them and scheduled by the instructor per university policy.

If the student misses their SPC exam and is approved for Academic Consideration, they will be withdrawn from the course without academic penalty. If they experienced extenuating circumstances such as prolonged illness, they may appeal to the Associate Dean (Academic), on a case-by-case basis, for the opportunity to write the final exam the next time the course is offered. An outstanding SPC will reduce their course load for the term in which the exam is deferred, as outlined in the [Definitions of Types of Examinations](#) policy.

If the student misses their SPC exam and Academic Consideration is not approved, or was not requested, they will receive a grade of zero on the exam.

6. Additional Statements

6.1 Religious Accommodation

When a recognized religious holiday either requires a student to be absent from the University, or requires or prohibits an activity that makes it impossible for them to complete an academic requirement scheduled that day, they are entitled to accommodation. No student will be penalized for an absence for religious reasons, and an alternative means of satisfying the requirement will be arranged. This accommodation is provided in accordance with the University's policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf

The student should submit their requests through the Student Absence Portal (SAP), identifying the conflict and the specific course component(s) affected (e.g., test, midterm, exam).

Midterms and Tests: If a religious observance conflicts with a midterm test, they must submit their request no later than **one week** before the test. Their instructor will arrange an early sitting of the test. As set out above, no makeup test is offered for any other reason; this early sitting is available specifically for this accommodation.

Final Examinations: If a religious observance conflicts with the final exam, the student must submit their request no later than **two weeks** before the exam. Their instructor will arrange a Special Examination to take place no later than one month after the end of the examination period.

Students are responsible for finding out what was covered in any class they miss due to a religious observance, and for taking the appropriate steps to keep up with the course.

If a suitable arrangement cannot be reached between a student and their instructor, they should consult the Undergraduate Chair of the department offering the course, and if necessary, the Associate Dean (Academic) of the Faculty of Science.

For a list of recognized religious observances, please visit the calendars posted on the Equity, Diversity & Inclusion website - <https://www.edi.uwo.ca> (About Us – Resources – Additional Resources – Calendars).

6.2 Academic Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Accessible Education, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities can be found at:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic_Accommodation_disabilities.pdf.

6.3 General Academic Policies

The website for Registrar Services is <https://www.registrar.uwo.ca/>.

Use of @uwo.ca email: In accordance with policy, https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section1/mapp113.pdf, the centrally administered e-mail account provided to students will be considered the individual's official university email address.

It is the responsibility of the account holder to ensure that emails received from the University at their official university address are attended to in a timely manner.

Requests for Relief (formally known as “appeals”)

Policy on Request for Relief from Academic Decision:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/requests_for_relief_from_academic_decisions.pdf

Procedures on Request for Relief from Academic Decision (Undergraduate):

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/undergrad_requests_for_relief_procedure.pdf

6.4 Scholastic Offences

Policy on Scholastic Offences:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.pdf

Procedures on Scholastic Offences (Undergraduate):

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/undergrad_scholastic_offence_procedure.pdf

Use of Electronic Devices During Assessments

In courses offered by the Faculty of Science, the **possession** of unauthorized electronic devices during any in-person assessment (such as tests, midterms, and final examinations) is strictly prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to: mobile phones, smart watches, smart glasses, hidden cameras and wireless earbuds.

Unless explicitly stated otherwise in advance by the instructor, the presence of any such device at a student’s desk, on their person, or within reach during an assessment will be treated as a scholastic offence, **even if the device is not in use**.

Effective September 2026, the typical penalty for this offence is a failing grade in the course AND a 12-month prohibition on retaking the course.

Only devices expressly permitted by the instructor (e.g., non-programmable calculators) may be brought into the assessment room. It is their responsibility to review and comply with these expectations.

Use of Generative AI Tools

The use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, or similar platforms) is **not permitted** in the completion of tests and final examinations.

Using such tools for content generation, code writing, problem solving, translation, or summarization—when not explicitly allowed—will be treated as a **scholastic offence**.

If the use of generative AI is permitted for a particular assessment, the conditions of use will be specified by the instructor in advance. If no such permission is granted, students must assume that use is prohibited. It is the student’s responsibility to seek clarification before using any AI tools in academic work.

Use of Software for Assessments

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the

purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

6.5 Support Services

Academic Advising. Please visit the Science & Basic Medical Sciences Academic Advising webpage for information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, requests for relief, exam conflicts, and many other academic-related matters: <https://www.uwo.ca/sci/advising/>.

Mental Health Support. Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence. Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If a student has experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), they can find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, at:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html.

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Accessibility for Coursework. A student may contact the course instructor if they require lecture or printed material in an alternate format or if any other arrangements can make this course more accessible to them. If they have any questions regarding accommodations, they may also contact Accessible Education at http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html

Learning Development and Success. Learning-skills counsellors at Learning Development and Success (<https://learning.uwo.ca>) are ready to help students improve their learning skills. The facility offers strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

Student Councils.

Student-run support services are offered by the University Students' Council (<https://westernusc.ca>) and the Science Students' Council (<https://www.westernssc.ca>).

This course is supported by the Science Student Donation Fund. Students registered in the Faculty of Science or the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry contribute a Science Student Donation Fee. This fee contributes to the Science Student Donation Fund, which is administered by the Science Students' Council (SSC). One or more grants from the Fund have allowed for the purchase of equipment integral to teaching this course. Students may opt out of the Fee by the end of September of each academic year by completing the online form linked from the Faculty of Science's Academic Advising site. For further information on the process of awarding grants from the Fund or how these grants have benefitted undergraduate education in this course, consult the Chair of the Department or email the Science Students' Council at info@westernssc.ca.