

GEO 3427

PLANTS, HEALTH, AND SPIRITUALITY SYLLABUS

GEO 3427- PLANTS, HEALTH, AND SPIRITUALITY

3 CREDIT HOURS

SUMMER B 2025

ONLINE ASYNCHRONOUS

INSTRUCTOR: Donal Bissainte, dbissainte@ufl.edu, please reach out for all correspondence through Canvas emailing.

OFFICE HOURS: Available via email at all times, please give at least 24 hours for a response and 48 hours on weekends. Office hours will be every Monday from 10am-12pm via Zoom and in person at Turlington Hall 1215. Can schedule office hours at other times if needed, please reach out to schedule.

COURSE WEBSITE: <https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/540388>

COURSE COMMUNICATIONS: General course questions can be posted to the discussion board or sent to me via Canvas email. *Please give at least 24 hours for a response and 48 on weekends.*

COURSE MATERIALS / RECOMMENDED TEXTBOOKS:

Schultes, R. (2001). Plants of the Gods. Inner Tradition. ISBN: 0892819790

Winne, M. (2008). Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty. Beacon Press. ISBN: 0807047317

Other articles and videos will be posted on canvas under the module sections.

TEXTBOOK INSTRUCTOR STATEMENT AND ATTESTATION:

Instructional materials for this course consist of those materials and others provided on canvas that are reviewed, selected, and assigned by the instructor. The instructor is only responsible for these instructional materials.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This interdisciplinary course delves into the multifaceted roles of plants, particularly psychoactive species, in historical, legal, therapeutic, and cultural contexts. We begin by exploring the legal history of drugs in the United States, tracing the evolution of drug policies and their social implications. This sets the stage for a comprehensive examination of the therapeutic uses of psychedelics, integrating modern research with traditional practices to understand their potential in mental health treatment.

Expanding our focus globally, we will explore the phenomena of spiritual and consumptive tourism, examining how these practices influence and are influenced by local cultures and economies. Students will investigate how these interactions affect plant conservation and indigenous rights, as well as the ethical considerations involved.

A unique component of the course will be the study of the Tree of Life, a symbol that appears in various cultural mythologies and is deeply entwined with human understanding of the world. The course will also cover therapeutic horticulture, exploring the psychological and physical benefits of interacting with plants.

Throughout the course, we will engage with a variety of interdisciplinary materials, including case studies, guest lectures, and experiential learning opportunities. This will enable students to critically assess the role of plants in shaping economic, environmental, and social landscapes.

By the end of this course, students will have a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between humans and psychoactive plants in contemporary and historical perspectives, equipped to discuss and analyze the ethical, environmental, and therapeutic dimensions of ethnobotany.

COURSE GOALS AND/OR OBJECTIVES:

Understand the Legal Landscape: Examine the historical development of drug laws in the United States, understanding their social and cultural impacts.

Explore Therapeutic Applications: Investigate the contemporary and historical uses of psychedelics for therapeutic purposes, examining clinical research and traditional practices.

Analyze Spiritual and Consumptive Tourism: Analyze the global phenomena of spiritual and consumptive tourism, exploring their effects on local cultures, economies, and plant conservation.

Study Symbolic and Literal Use of Plants: Delve into the cultural significance of the Tree of Life and other symbolic representations of plants in various traditions.

Engage with Therapeutic Horticulture: Explore the benefits of therapeutic horticulture, understanding its role in mental and physical health.

Critically Assess Cultural and Environmental Impacts: Engage with interdisciplinary materials to critically assess how plants influence and are influenced by economic, environmental, and social landscapes.

Address Ethical Considerations: Evaluate the ethical issues surrounding the use of plants in spiritual practices, tourism, and therapy, particularly concerning indigenous rights and conservation.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS: This course is an online course; it is your responsibility to keep up with the material and get the work submitted on time. Each week will be structured with a lecture and/or required readings alongside an assignment, discussion post, and/or a quiz.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Through successful completion of the course, students will:

- Identify and describe key historical and contemporary relationships between plants, health practices, and cultural knowledge systems.
- Analyze the social, environmental, and economic dimensions of plant-based medicines and health interventions across different societies.
- Compare and contrast traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) with modern pharmaceutical practices regarding plant use.
- Apply interdisciplinary perspectives (e.g., geographic, ecological, sociocultural) to examine plant-human interactions related to health and disease.
- Interpret case studies of plant use in healing systems from diverse cultural contexts using a human-environment framework.
- Evaluate the ethical, legal, and conservation issues involved in the commodification and globalization of medicinal plants.
- Produce a research-based project that investigates a culturally significant plant or plant-based healing tradition and its contemporary relevance.

GRADED COMPONENTS

QUIZ/EXAM DATES/POLICIES: Quiz/exam dates are set in the syllabus, if there is a conflict it is on the student to reach out and schedule an alternative submission timeline with the instructor. A quiz/exam missed due to an excused reason can be made up. The

instructor will develop a make-up plan and schedule upon receipt of appropriate evidence.

MAKE-UP POLICY:

Late Submissions: Students are expected to submit all assignments, quizzes, and exams by the specified due date. If a student is unable to meet a deadline, the following late submission policy will apply:

- Assignments submitted within two days after the due date will be accepted for partial credit. The grade for these assignments will be reduced by one letter grade for each day late.

Locked Assignments: Once the assignment submission period has passed (two days after the due date), the assignment portal will lock. The portal will only be reopened for students who experience extenuating circumstances preventing timely submission. Examples of reasonable issues include, but are not limited to, severe illness, family emergencies, or significant technical failures.

Addressing Failures Due to Technology: Students are responsible for ensuring they have a reliable internet connection and computer access to complete their coursework. In the event of a technology failure, students should take the following steps:

1. **Attempt to Resolve:** Quickly attempt to resolve any minor technical issues that can be managed independently (e.g., restarting the device, checking internet connectivity).
2. **Notify Instructor:** If significant technical issues prevent assignment submission, notify the instructor immediately via email. Provide a detailed explanation of the issue and any evidence of the problem (e.g., error messages, screenshots).
3. **Documentation:** For major technical failures, such as prolonged internet outages or hardware malfunctions, obtain documentation from a service provider or a technician, when possible.
4. **Alternative Submission:** In consultation with the instructor, seek alternative methods for submitting the assignment, such as using a different device or sending the assignment directly via email within the allowed time frame.

Special Considerations: The instructor retains the discretion to provide extensions or alternative arrangements for students facing genuine and verifiable difficulties. Students are encouraged to communicate openly and promptly with the instructor about any challenges that may affect their ability to complete coursework on time.

Grade disputes: Should a student wish to dispute any grade received in this class (other than simple addition errors), the dispute must be in writing and be submitted to the instructor within a week of receiving the grade (except the ;last week of the class). The dispute should set out very clearly, the grade that the student believes the assignment should have received as well as why they believe they should have received such a grade.

GRADING POLICIES:

ASSIGNMENT POLICY:

There will be a combination of assignments and discussion posts each week along with a midterm exam and final project. These are outlined below.

METHODS BY WHICH STUDENTS WILL BE EVALUATED AND THEIR GRADE DETERMINED

Discussion Posts (5 points each – 15%)

- Discussion posts will be administered throughout the course via canvas. These will pertain to various topics covered each week—4 points for writing your own post (Due Sundays @ 11:59 PM) and 1 point for replying to at least one classmate (Due Sundays @ 11:59 PM).

Assignments (10 points each – 20%)

- Different homework assignments will be given each week to help students further explore lecture materials. Assignments will open when the course module opens (usually Mondays @ 8:00 AM) and will be due Fridays @ 11:59 PM.

Quizzes (10 points each – 20%)

- Quizzes will be used throughout the course to promote active learning, enhance learning outcomes, and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the material. This also includes the syllabus quiz.

Mid-term exam (100 points – 20%)

- An open-book or take-home exam (TBD), covering all course contents by the day of the test, will be administered via canvas. The exam can be comprised of a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and short essay responses.

Final project (100 points – 25%)

- **Students have two options to produce a final project:**
 - **Option 1:** You will select TWO of the module topics covered in the course. You will curate the lesson for the week surrounding the module topics. This includes creating lecture(s)/slides, providing supplemental readings or videos, creating the discussion topic for the week, and creating the assignment for the week. You will need to complete a lesson plan for

TWO modules covered in the class, in total you should have two weeks' worth of materials including lectures, 2 discussion topics, and 2 assignments minimum.

OR

- **Option 2:** You will create two new modules on material we did NOT cover in this course. This includes creating lecture(s) slides, providing supplemental readings or videos, creating the discussion topic for the week, and creating the assignment for the week. You will need to complete a lesson plan for TWO modules NOT covered in the class, in total you should have two weeks' worth of materials including lectures, 2 discussion topics, and 2 assignments minimum. This option will allow students to add in material they feel like was lacking from the course and could provide additional information that is added into future courses.

The final project is due on July 29th by 11:59 PM. Late submissions for the final project will be accepted but will receive a 25%-point reduction and can be submitted no later than July 31st @ 11:59 PM.

NO assignments will be accepted after July 31st.

GRADING SCALE

Letter Grade	Range	GPA
A	94%–100%	4.00
A-	90%–93%	3.67
B+	87%–89%	3.33
B	84%–86%	3.00
B-	80%–83%	2.67

Letter Grade	Range	GPA
C+	77%–79%	2.33
C	74%–76%	2.00
C-	70%–73%	1.67
D+	67%–69%	1.33
D	64%–66%	1.00
D-	61%–63%	0.67
E	0%–60%	0.00

Note: A grade of C- is not a qualifying grade for major, minor, Gen Ed, or College Basic distribution credit. For further information see [UF's Grading Policy](#).

INFORMATION ON CURRENT UF GRADING POLICIES FOR ASSIGNING GRADE POINTS:

[HTTPS://CATALOG.UFL.EDU/UGRAD/CURRENT/REGULATIONS/INFO/GRADDES.ASPX](https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx)

SUGGESTED COURSE SCHEDULE:

CRITICAL DATES:

Assignments are due Fridays @ 11:59 PM

Discussion Posts and replies due Sundays @ 11:59 PM

Midterm exam: July 25th, by 11:59 PM

Final Project: July 29th by 11:59 PM

Final Project Late Submission: July 31st by 11:59 PM (25% penalty per day late)

A WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

Week	Module Content
1	Legality of Drugs in the United States
2	Therapeutic uses of Psychedelics: Classic vs. Non-clasic Mescaline and Psilocybin Ibogaine and Ketamine
3	Spiritual and Consumptive Tourism, Indigenous Commodification. Case studies of: Ayahuasca, Peyote, and Devil's Claw Midterm Exam
4	The Tree of Life Drs. Doug and Pam Soltis
5	Therapeutic Horticulture at UF
6	Course Material TBD Final Project Due

COURSE POLICIES:

ATTENDANCE POLICY: Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

COURSE TECHNOLOGY: Students need to have access to a personal computer or laptop with a working webcam and microphone to access all features of the course Canvas site, and to participate in online office hours and optional live Q&A sessions. Broadband internet access is required. If students need support, please contact the UF help desk.

- <http://helpdesk.ufl.edu>
- (352) 392-HELP - select option 2

ONLINE COURSE EVALUATION (REQUIRED): Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email received from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

UF POLICIES:

UNIVERSITY POLICY ON ACCOMMODATING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

UNIVERSITY POLICY ON ACADEMIC CONDUCT: UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

CLASS DEMEANOR OR NETIQUETTE: All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions, and chats. It is important to recognize that the online classroom is in fact a classroom, and certain behavior are expected when you communicate with your peers and your instructors and TAs. These guidelines for online behavior and interaction are known as netiquette.

General Guidelines

When communicating online, you should always:

- Treat your instructor with respect, even in email or in any other online communication.
- Always use your professors' proper title: Dr. or Prof., or if you in doubt use Mr. or Ms.
- Unless specifically invited, do not refer to them by first name.
 - Use clear and concise language.
 - Remember that all college level communication should have correct spelling and grammar.
 - Avoid slang terms such as “wassup?” and texting abbreviations such as “u” instead of “you”.
 - Be cautious when using humor or sarcasm as tone is sometimes lost in an email or discussion post and your message might be taken seriously or offensive.
 - Be aware of the time you are sending emails, while you might be working late others might not. Do not expect an immediate response to an email sent outside of working hours.

CONTROVERSIAL MATERIAL STATEMENT:

People learn best when they are encouraged to ask questions and express their diverse opinions on course content, which may include images, texts, data, and theories from across the disciplines. This is especially true in courses that deal with provocative or contemporary issues. UF offers many such courses, in which students encounter concepts of race, color, sex, and/or national origin. We teach these important issues because understanding them is essential for anyone who seeks to make economic, cultural, and societal contributions to today's complex world. With this in mind, we do not limit access to, or classroom discussion of, facts, ideas, and opinions—including those that some may find uncomfortable, unwelcome, disagreeable, or even offensive. In response to challenging material, students and instructors are encouraged to ask honest questions and thoughtfully engage one another's ideas. But hostility, disruptive and disrespectful behavior, and provocation for provocation's sake have no place in a classroom; reasonable people disagree reasonably. These guidelines can help instructors and students

as they work together to fulfill the mission of the University of Florida, which includes the exploration of intellectual boundaries, the creation of new knowledge and the pursuit of new ideas.

GETTING HELP:

For issues with technical difficulties for Canvas, please contact the UF Help Desk at:

- <http://helpdesk.ufl.edu>
- (352) 392-HELP (4357)
- Walk-in: HUB 132

Any requests for make-ups due to technical issues MUST be accompanied by the ticket number received from the Help Desk when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You MUST e-mail your instructor within 24 hours of the technical difficulty if you wish to request a make-up.

Other resources are available at <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/getting-help> for:

- Counseling and Wellness resources
- Disability resources
- Resources for handling student concerns and complaints
- Library Help Desk support

Counseling and mental health resources: Students facing difficulties completing the course or who need counseling or urgent help should contact the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center(Links to an external site.) (352-392-1575)

Should you have any complaints with your experience in this course please visit <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaints> to submit a complaint.

Disclaimer: This syllabus represents current plans and objectives. As we go through the semester, those plans may need to change to enhance the class learning opportunity. Such changes, communicated clearly, are not unusual and should be expected.