

GEO 3427

Plants, health, and spirituality syllabus

3 | credits

NOTE: This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see UF's "[Academic Policies and Resources](#)" web page.

I. General Information

Meeting days and times: *self-paced online course*

Class location: *online asynchronous*

Instructor(s):

Name: Donal Bissainte

Office Building/Number: TUR1215: The Ryan Poehling Graduate Student Lab

Email: dbissainte@ufl.edu

Office Hours: Thursday from 10am-12pm at TUR1215: The Ryan Poehling Graduate Student Lab and via Zoom.

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.

Prerequisites

Sophomore standing or higher

General Education Designation: none.

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

Materials will be available through the following means: these materials are recommended but they are not required. Other course materials will be available on canvas. Students can purchase the recommended textbook anywhere.

Materials Fee: N/A

II. Course Goals/Objectives**Course Objectives**

In this course we will:

- **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

Student Learning Outcomes

A student who successfully completes this course will be able to:

- **Analyze the legal and cultural contexts of psychoactive plants** by explaining the historical development of U.S. drug laws and their social implications.
- **Evaluate therapeutic applications of psychedelics** through comparison of clinical research findings and traditional practices involving classic and non-classic psychoactive plants.
- **Interpret the symbolic and cultural significance of plants** by examining examples such as the Tree of Life across diverse traditions.
- **Assess the role of therapeutic horticulture** in promoting mental and physical health, using contemporary case studies and research.
- **Critically examine the global impacts of spiritual and consumptive tourism** by analyzing case studies on Ayahuasca, Peyote, and Devil's Claw in relation to indigenous rights, plant conservation, and cultural commodification.
- **Apply ethnobotanical perspectives** to evaluate the interactions between human societies and plants across environmental, cultural, and spiritual dimensions.
- **Identify and discuss ethical issues** surrounding the use of plants in spiritual practices, therapy, and tourism, particularly with respect to conservation and indigenous sovereignty.
- **Synthesize interdisciplinary knowledge** of plants, health, and spirituality by producing a final project that integrates course materials into an original analysis or module design.

III. Graded Work

III. Graded Work

Graded Components

Discussion Posts (5 points each – 15%) (15%): o 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%) (20%): o 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%) (20%): o 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%) (20%): An open-book or take-home exam.

Final project (100 points – 25%) (25%): o Students have two options to produce a final project: o 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 o 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 December 5th 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 December 7th @ 11:59 PM. NO assignments will be accepted after December 7th.

TOTAL: 100%

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Number Grade
A	100-94
A-	93-90
B+	89-87
B	86-84
B-	83-80
C+	79-77
C	76-74
C-	73-70
D+	69-67
D	66-64
D-	63-61
E	60-0

Note: A grade of C- is not a qualifying grade for major, minor, Gen Ed, or College Basic

distribution credit. For further information on UF's Grading Policy, see:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx#hgrades>
<http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html>

IV. Calendar

NOTE: the syllabus is a guideline and there may be changes to the class schedule.

Date	Topic	Readings/Preparation	Work Due
August 21, 2025	Welcome to the course! Review the syllabus page for an introduction to the material.	Syllabus	
August 25, 2025	Welcome to the course! Review the syllabus page for an introduction to the material.	Syllabus	Introduction discussion post & Syllabus quiz
September 1, 2025	Introduction to Legality of Drugs in the United States	-White opioids: Pharmaceutical race and the war on drugs that wasn't. - Oregon's pioneering drug decriminalization experiment is now facing the hard test	Controversies in Pharmacology Assignment & Discussion on Lectures
September 8, 2025	Introduction to Therapeutic uses of Psychedelics: Classic vs. Non-classic	-Psychedelics (Entheogens) and Spirituality - Naturalistic Use of Mescaline Is Associated with Self-Reported Psychiatric Improvements and Enduring Positive Life Changes	Discussion on Psychedelics
September 15, 2025	Non-classic Psychedelics: Ibogaine and Ketamine	Ibogaine and Ketamine	Classic and Non-classic Psychedelics Quiz
September 22, 2025	The Tree of Life		Tree of Life Assignment Discussion on The Tree of Life
September 29, 2025	Horticultural Therapy	About Therapeutic Horticulture at UF Human Health & Plants Research: Does Gardening Modify Brain Activity and Impact Emotion?	Horticultural Therapy Quiz Discussion on Horticultural Therapy
October 6, 2025	Midterm Preparation	Guide to APA citation style	Understanding Scholarly Sources and Proper Citation
October 13, 2025	Midterm		Take Home Mid-term

Date	Topic	Readings/Preparation	Work Due
October 20, 2025	Spiritual and Consumptive Tourism, Indigenous Commodification	Case Study Topics: Ayahuasca & Devil's Claw	Discussion on Consumptive Tourism and Indigenous Commodification Note Submission Assignment
October 27, 2025	Spiritual and Consumptive Tourism, Indigenous Commodification		Indigenous Commodification Assignment
November 3, 2025	Ethnobotany	The 'How' and 'Why' of Including Gender and Age in Ethnobotanical Research and Community-Based Resource Management"	Ethnobotany Quiz on Reading Demographics in Ethnobotany
November 10, 2025	Final Project Planning and Preparation		Final Project Planning Quiz
November 17, 2025	Sugar Cane In Florida	Tell Me About Sugarcane Burning in Florida The Annual Sugarcane Burning in Florida Involves Stark Injustices	Sugar Cane Burning in Florida assignment
November 24, 2025	Holiday		
December 1, 2025	Final project		Final project
December 8, 2025	No course	No course	No course

V. Procedure for Conflict Resolution

Any classroom issues, disagreements or grade disputes should be discussed first between the instructor and the student. If the problem cannot be resolved, please contact Gabriela Hamerlinck (ghamerlinck@ufl.edu, N/A). Be prepared to provide documentation of the problem, as well as all graded materials for the semester. Issues that cannot be resolved departmentally will be referred to the University Ombuds Office (<http://www.ombuds.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1308) or the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1261).

VI. Course Policies & Class Environment

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: [Attendance Policies < University of Florida](#)

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. 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.

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: 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 / HONESTY POLICY: 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/scer/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 demographic. 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.

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.