Biochemistry 495 Senior Seminar, Spring 2015
Course Syllabus and Schedule

Tuesdays, 10:20am - 12:20pm. All class sessions will begin in room 101 Biochemistry.

Course Instructors:
Prof. Leslie Kuhn (section 2, room 101) Dr. Carol Wilkins (section 1, room 111)
502C Biochemistry Building 502B Biochemistry Building
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Teaching Assistant (for writing assignments and questions on Angel content):
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Objectives:
This 2-credit seminar course is designed to acquaint senior Biochemistry majors with a range of current topics in biochemistry research. Students will become familiar with the scientific method: posing a hypothesis, developing methods or experiments to test the hypothesis, interpreting the results of the experiments, and placing those results in context of current knowledge in the field. Students will also gain experience in clear and compelling scientific writing, public speaking, and informed discussion of current biochemical topics, as invaluable career and public relations skills.

Prerequisites:
BMB462, or BMB462 concurrently with BMB495. Open only to Biochemistry majors.

Required text:
None. Materials for the course will be posted on http://angel.msu.edu
Log in using your MSU net ID and select BMB495 to access the materials.

Course Summary:
The course begins with workshops on biochemistry careers, identifying well-validated biochemical information online, and communicating effectively in reports and talks. Other weeks of the course will be organized as mini-symposia on current research topics spanning the breadth of biochemistry. The first week on each research topic will feature a short (20 minute) introductory talk by a professor who is an expert in that research field, placing the topic into context, followed by a question and answer session with the class members. Students who choose to write a report on that topic may also ask questions about the report paper (provided under the professor’s folder on the Angel website). Student presenters on the topic are welcome to ask questions about the papers they will present the following week. Each presenter will give a 15 minute talk on his topic, followed by five minutes of questions and discussion after each talk. Students will also have an opportunity to prepare and present a poster covering alternative sides to a controversial societal topic involving biochemistry.

Grade Components:
• An oral presentation on a research topic each student selects during the first class session (which can be a talk prepared on the student’s own research for the undergraduate research forum, UURAF; if so, sign up to present during the last week of class); 16% of the grade
• A poster presentation by each student. working with another student to cover both sides of a controversial topic in biochemistry; 16% of grade
• Resume/cover letter peer-review assignment; 8% of grade
• 6 written reports on professors’ topics other than the topic of your oral presentation (8% of grade for each report; 48% of course grade altogether). There are 10 topics from which to choose; reports may be on any topic other than the topic of your oral presentation.
• Class participation (12% of grade)
  o 6% of grade for turning in 11 evaluations of student oral presentations (one/week)
  o 6% of grade for asking at least 6 questions following professor and student talks throughout the semester
• Pre-review and report improvement bonus: up to 1 pt bonus per report for having up to 5 of your reports peer-reviewed or critically reviewed by Writing Center personnel and using that feedback to improve your report prior to submitting it in class. Prof. Wilkins will cover the details in class. Learn how to benefit from the Writing Center at http://writing.msu.edu

Reports and oral presentations on research topics
Each professor leading a research topic has chosen a particular style for your oral presentation (which should be 15 minutes long with PowerPoint slides, plus 5 minutes for questions) or report writing (no more than 3 pages in length, typed in double spacing). The professor will provide literature for you to review in his folder on Angel, with one document designated as the basis for your report writing (for debate format, this will involve several documents covering the pro/con sides), and three documents designated for coverage by different students giving oral presentations. Students giving oral presentations on the same professor’s topic in a given class section (Dr. Kuhn’s or Dr. Wilkins’) should coordinate with one another on which student will cover each paper, so that no paper is presented twice in the same classroom. Your presentation grade from Dr. Wilkins or Dr. Kuhn will reflect your ability to convey the scientific information accurately and clearly, as well as the logical flow, grammar, formatting, and correct citation of the images/data shown in your slides.

The style to use for each professor for his reports and presentations is defined in the professor's folder on Angel. Which paper to use for reports is also noted in the folder. Reports are due at the beginning of class one week after the professor’s introduction talk on that subject.

Whether you are submitting a report or presenting a talk, your primary reference should be cited in full detail, including title, at the beginning or your report/talk, using a format like:

The three report styles are Debate, Layperson, and Technical, as described below:
• Debate, focusing on controversial issues. Example: “Is it in the public’s best interest for a diagnostic test to be patented?” If writing a debate style report, you will primarily address the pro or con side of the debate, based on peer-reviewed or scientifically validated technical reading provided in the professor’s folder. For oral presentations in debate style, one speaker will present each side of the issue. An additional student will present the background context at the beginning of the session if there are three speakers. As with the other talk formats, PowerPoint slides with graphics should be designed to accompany your debate. On the title slide, cite the complete primary peer-reviewed reference you are covering. On the other slides, cite the references for all the data and figures you include from other sources, using footnotes to give the complete literature reference in a consistent format, such as shown in the preceding paragraph.

Your debate-style report or talk should be 2-3 pages long, and include the following labeled sections:

Introduction and Background: Introduce the topic that is being debated, document how it
came to be an important issue, and state the two main opposing sides. For talks, provide the full reference for the primary paper(s) you are presenting as part of your title slide.

**Pro or Con:** Clearly state which side of the debate you are defending, and summarize the key points supporting your position. (Your detailed arguments will be presented in the next section.) Your grade will *not* depend upon which side you choose. Nor do you have to choose a side of the debate with which you personally agree. It can be challenging and interesting to try and defend the other side. You may end up changing your own opinion on the matter, or strengthening your original position.

**Main Points and Scientific Validation:** These are the key points that will sway the reader to believe your position. You should support your arguments with scientific examples, including references to peer-reviewed/high-quality scientific literature. Also address and try to discredit the opposing view of the debated issue. Your position should be clearly documented by data and figures.

**Conclusions:** Summarize your views and the arguments used to validate your position on the debated topic. If you are successful, the reader has now been convinced that your position is the correct one to take on this issue.

- **Layperson**, where you explain scientific information in terms that are interesting and clear for a non-scientist. **Layperson style may be designated for reports but will not be used for student talks.**

  Layperson reports should be 2-3 pages long, in the style of a *Science News* article and summarize the assigned peer-reviewed paper. See [http://www.sciencenews.org/](http://www.sciencenews.org/) or access its articles through MSU's subscription at er.lib.msu.edu. A sample article is provided in the Writing Pointers folder on Angel. See another article in the same folder on why writing for the layperson is so important for scientists to make a difference in society! In your report, include complete references for all the literature you cover, using footnotes or lists in a format such as that shown in the middle of the previous page.

- **Technical** format, the standard style for formally presenting a study to other scientists. Here, consider the audience of your talk or report to be senior undergraduate biochemistry students. The talk or report should be clear to students with no specialized background in the topic you are presenting and presented in your own words. Therefore, avoid unfamiliar technical terminology and minimize the use of abbreviations. Instead focus on the clarity of your explanation as though you are teaching about the subject, and back up your statements with appropriate data and figures from the paper. Cite peer-reviewed references for the literature you cover and figures you include. You only need to cite the paper you are summarizing once, at the beginning of the report or talk. Any material (including figures) from other sources should be fully cited where used. **For original research papers presenting new results**, discuss each of the following in a labeled section of your report or talk:
  1. **Title and full journal reference** for the paper, including authors’ names (see format, middle of pg. 2)
  2. **Hypothesis** (being tested by the research) or **Question addressed**
  3. **Background and significance**
  4. **Methods**
  5. **Experimental results** (summary of the objective data, and observed trends)
6. **Conclusions** (based on interpretation of the results, and relating back to the original hypothesis)

7. **Your perspective** on particular weaknesses or strengths of the paper

If, alternatively, the paper you are reporting on is a **review paper** summarizing several recent advances in the area rather than a paper that is the first publication of new (original) results, cover the following points in separate, **labeled** sections:

1. **Title and full journal reference** for the paper, including authors’ names (see format, mid-pg. 2)
2. **Topic** being reviewed
3. **Background and significance**
4. **Summary of methods and results** discussed in the paper
5. **Conclusions** (what these approaches and results tell us about the state of the art, and the remaining challenges to be solved)
6. **Your perspective** on particular weaknesses or strengths of the paper

**Late work.** The professors are not required to grade late reports. If accepted, 30% of the points will be deducted. This is because students turning in reports after hearing the presentations would have an unfair advantage over students who turned in their reports on time. Oral presentations will not be rescheduled unless an MSU physician-signed medical excuse has been provided before class.

**Poster presentation.** During the third week of class, you will sign up with a partner of your choice to present two sides of a current controversial topic in biochemistry on a later date in the course. The details of this assignment will be handed out in class and follow the debate format listed above. The information should be presented in debate style while being formatted as an up to 36” tall X 48” wide conference poster using PowerPoint or a similar tool, with the presenters’ names listed on the poster according to the side of the question each presents (pro or con). Use large fonts so the poster will be easy to read from a few feet away when printed in full size. An example template will be provided. The poster should be printed on paper the week before it is due to be shown in class, by several days’ advance arrangement with Computer Specialist Pappan in room 202 Biochemistry (Dr. Kaillathe Padmanabhan; padmanab@msu.edu; 353-0814). Posters cannot be printed by Pappan the day before (or of) class. Bring the poster to class the day you are scheduled to present.

**Point scale for written reports** (same grading scale, but double the points, for poster or oral presentations), with roughly equal weight for logical presentation of scientific content and quality of writing (grammar, clarity, and format):

8 excellent  
7 very good  
6 good  
5 reasonable  
4 some effort  
3 poor  
0=nothing submitted or evidence of plagiarism

**Plagiarism.** Copying sentences from a paper, website, or other source, or using another’s writing as part of your report or presentation is considered plagiarism and will result in a grade of zero for that assignment. In the real world, it constitutes a crime. Short quotes (within quotation marks and with full citation for the source) can occasionally be used, but this is neither
typical nor encouraged in scientific writing. Writing or speaking in your own words is important to convey that you understand and can explain the material to others. Please consult Dr. Wilkins’ presentation in the third class session to understand what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it, and Health Sciences Librarian Susan Kendall will also discuss how to correctly cite others’ work.

**Ensuring effective talks and posters.** Successful presentations emphasize data and figures from the paper (and other peer-reviewed/validated scientific sources), accompanied by clear explanations of how they address the research question. Minimize the number of words and the complexity of your panels/slides; bullet points work well. Presenting the ramifications of those results for science, technology, health, or the environment will make your talk more interesting. Visual aids (images, data, schematic diagrams) are essential. PowerPoint slides with a computer are the standard for professional presentations in all fields.

It is recommended to bring the talk on your own laptop to use with the classroom video projector, so you won’t have to worry about formatting in your presentation appearing incorrectly due to PowerPoint version differences with the classroom computer. If you have an Apple computer, you will need to bring a video adaptor plug to connect to the video projector. In any case, it is recommended to bring a USB flash drive that also contains your talk, which can be loaded onto the classroom computer if needed. Load and test your talk with the video projector at least 10 minutes before class. Better yet, check your talk with the classroom projector during your practice talk the preceding week. Rooms 101 and 111 are often available late in the day. You are strongly encouraged to do several practice runs of your talk including once with the session professor (schedule this in advance), and to time your talk to ensure it is 15 minutes in length without rushing. Working with the professor to review and practice your talk will enhance its quality! This is a great opportunity to practice speaking to others about science for a job or graduate school interview, too.

**Student and professor evaluation of presentations.** All students, including the speakers, will provide anonymous written feedback to one of the student speakers each week, using an evaluation form provided in class. This counts towards the participation part of the course grade. Talks will be graded by the section instructors, for consistency. Each speaker will receive an email from his instructor with feedback on strong points and areas that would benefit from improvement, typically within a week of his presentation.

**Credit for class discussion.** Students are encouraged to ask questions after the presentations, as part of their participation points (6 pts for 6 questions). Much of what makes the class successful and fun is active participation by the audience, through discussion. As we discuss each topic, consider:

- What is the importance of this topic in biochemistry and technology?
- What are the ethical or political issues in this area?
- Are there parts that are confusing, contradictory, error-prone or incomplete?

Participate vigorously! This is much more interesting than being passive and encourages your neurons to keep up the good battle. Discussion also improves your professional network and provides the speaker with thoughtful feedback and ideas.


**BMB495 Session Schedule for 2015**

1/13 **Orientation and Career Workshop** in 101 Biochemistry

(A) Course organization and how it relates to career preparation (10 min, Prof. Leslie Kuhn)

(B) Biochemistry career workshop, led by Brian Telfor, Career Services Coordinator (telfor@csp.msu.edu), in 101 Biochemistry (40 min) – Career options for Biochemistry graduates

(5 minute break)

(C) Resources for finding appropriate positions, and science resume and cover letter preparation, led by Brian Telfor (35 minutes)

(D) First assignment handed out: select a job ad and prepare a resume and cover letter, to be turned in at the beginning of class next Tuesday for peer review (Prof. Leslie Kuhn)

(E) Sign up for oral presentation topic and date (Profs. Leslie Kuhn and Carol Wilkins)

1/20 **Writing workshop** in 101 Biochemistry

(A) Effective use of online scientific resources, to advance your ability to discern well-validated information on the web and do literature/web research on biochemical topics to enhance your understanding and presentations (50 min, Health Sciences Librarian Susan Kendall (skendall@msu.edu))

(5 minute break)

(B) Peer review workshop on student resumes and cover letters by Prof. Carol Wilkins (mindockc@msu.edu) - Students will turn in their resume/cover letter assignments at the beginning of class, and then learn how to peer review each other’s work (50 min). For peer review throughout the course, we will only give you credit if the review includes several specific comments on how to improve the paper (cajole or change your reviewer, as necessary!), which you then act on to provide an enhanced version of your writing. Every piece of writing can be improved, and we should all work on becoming more effective communicators!

1/27 **Biochemistry communication and research** in 101 Biochemistry

(A) Overview on writing good reports, giving good presentations, and avoiding plagiarism (30 min, Carol Wilkins); Evaluation of PowerPoint slides (10 min, Leslie Kuhn)

(5 minute break)

(B) 11:00am in 101 Biochemistry. **Prof. Michael Feig** (feig@msu.edu) Cellular Models from Structural to Systems Biology

Student reports on this topic are to be in layperson style and talks will be in technical format.

(C) 12:00pm in 101 Biochemistry. **Poster assignment sheet** is handed out (Leslie Kuhn), and **sign up for your poster partner**. For this, be sure to know the section of the course in which you are registered!

2/3 10:20am in 101 Biochemistry. **Prof. Beronda Montgomery** (montg133@msu.edu) 

**Competition and Developmental Plasticity in Photosynthetic Organisms**

Student reports and presentations on this topic are to be in technical format.
At 11am, class sections will divide between rooms 101 and 111 for student presentations on the topic of Cellular Models from Structural to Systems Biology

2/10 10:20am in 101 Biochemistry. Prof. John LaPres (lapres@msu.edu)
Hypoxia, Metabolism, and Cancer
Student reports and presentations on this topic are to be in debate format.

At 11am, class sections will divide between rooms 101 and 111 for student presentations on Competition and Developmental Plasticity in Photosynthetic Organisms

2/17 10:20am in 101 Biochemistry. Prof. Monique Floer (floer@msu.edu)
Chromatin and Gene Expression
Student reports/presentations on this topic are to be in technical format.

At 11am, class sections will divide between rooms 101 and 111 for student presentations on Hypoxia, Metabolism, and Cancer

2/24 10:20am in 101 Biochemistry: Dr. Tom Deits (tdeits@gmail.com)
BRCA1 and Gene Patenting: Beyond the Supreme Court
See Dr. Deits’ folder on Angel for details on report (layperson) and oral (debate) formats.

At 11am, class sections will divide between rooms 101 and 111 for student presentations on Chromatin and Gene Expression

3/3 10:20am in 101 Biochemistry Prof. Brian Haab (brian.haab@vai.org)
Protein-Glycan Interactions in Infection and Immunity
Student reports on this topic are to be in layperson format, and presentations in technical format.

At 11am, class sections will divide between rooms 101 and 111 for student presentations on BRCA1 and Gene Patenting: Beyond the Supreme Court

3/10 Spring break – no class

3/17 10:20am in 101 Biochemistry. Prof. Justin McCormick (mccormi1@msu.edu)
Chronic Myelogenous Leukemia, a Cancer One Can Live With
Student reports/presentations on this topic are to be in technical format.

At 11am, class sections will divide between rooms 101 and 111 for student presentations on the topic Protein-Glycan Interactions in Infection and Immunity

3/24 10:20am in 101 Biochemistry. Prof. Erik Martinez-Hackert (emh@msu.edu)
TGF-beta Signaling
Student reports on this topic are to be in layperson format, and presentations are to be in technical format.

At 11am, class sections will divide between rooms 101 and 111 for student presentations on the topic Chronic Myelogenous Leukemia, a Cancer One Can Live With

3/31 10:20am, 101 Biochem.: Prof. Susanne Hoffmann-Benning (hoffma16@cns.msu.edu)
Lipid Signaling in Plants
Student reports/presentations on this topic are to be in technical format.

At 11am, class sections will divide between rooms 101 and 111 for student presentations on the topic TGF-beta Signaling
4/7 10:20am, 101 Biochemistry: Dr. Kaillathe (Pappan) Padmanabhan (padmanab@msu.edu)

Blood Coagulation
Student reports on this topic are to be in layperson format, and presentations are to be in technical format.

At 11am, class sections will divide between rooms 101 and 111 for student presentations on Lipid Signaling in Plants.


4/21 10:20am Section 1 (Prof. Wilkins) Poster Session 1, in hallway near room 111
10:20am Section 2 (Prof. Kuhn) Poster Session 1, inside 101 Biochemistry

All students will participate in the poster session discussions.

4/28 10:20am Section 1 (Prof. Wilkins) Poster Session 2, in hallway near room 111
10:20am Section 2 (Prof. Kuhn) Poster Session 2, inside 101 Biochemistry

All students will participate in the poster session discussions.

5/7 7:45-9:45am (Special day and time due to final exam week; likely meeting in room 101)

Student presentations on their undergraduate research, following same format as other technical talks in the course.