

Animal Behavior: Course Syllabus

Biol 862 Online

Spring 2025

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NOTE: Email is my preferred method of contact if you inquire about a personal issue. General questions about the course can be posted on the Frequently Asked Questions Discussion Board in Canvas.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is an introduction to the science of ethology. The course will examine behavior, genetics, physiology of behavior, ecology of behavior, and the evolution of behavior. Assigned readings from the scientific literature, exams, inquiry based activities/assignments, and online discussions will be used to explore these topics. Plan to spend several hours each week on reading, writing, responding to topic discussions, and participating in activities.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. The general proximal mechanisms underlying animal behavior, including basic neuroethology and endocrinology.
2. The evolutionary forces that have shaped animal behavior (behavioral ecology and sociobiology).
3. The methods and techniques used to study animal behavior.
4. The reasons for studying animal behavior, including its application to understanding human behavior.

INSTRUCTOR ROLE: As your instructor I will provide feedback to students in two ways. First, students will receive individual feedback for specific assignments/activities (e.g., written assignments, simulations, and/or or data analysis activities). Second, I will read and may comment on group class discussions, and provide clarification or summary information for student questions. Any general comments or observations that would be helpful to the class as a whole will be made available to all students via announcement. I will respond to every email sent from student UNKlopermail accounts, you can expect a response to your emails within 24

hours of sending, Monday-Friday. However emails sent on the weekends (or late on Friday) will not be seen until Monday morning.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. *Animal Behavior* (12th Edition) by Dustin Rubenstein: ISBN 978-0197564912

Required Equipment/Hardware/Software:

1. Webcam (e.g., built-in to your personal computer or as an external plugin)
2. Students should refer to the following UNK Online website to make sure you meet the minimum hardware/software and internet connection speed required by all UNK Online students.

UNK Online requirements: https://canvas.unk.edu/courses/25822/pages/minimum-computer-requirements?module_item_id=525687

NOTE: Microsoft Office Word is the only acceptable word processing software for this course (All other file formats are unacceptable for submitting online documents). This software is available for download with your Office365 account. Please go to the following link to learn more about getting setup with appropriate software.

http://www.unk.edu/offices/its/instructional_technology/office365_unk_email/index.php

WEBSITE: General information for this course, including this syllabus, and other materials can be found on the UNK Canvas website. Log on to Canvas using your UNK Username and password. **Students are expected to log into the course website often to regularly check for course announcements.**

CLASS PARTICIPATION: Regular participation each week is important for successful completion of this course. The student is expected to complete coursework by the assignment deadlines. Reasons for not completing assigned work on time may include: illness, hospitalization, injury, family emergency, or other situations that cannot be avoided; however, documentation for incomplete work must be provided to the instructor. Negotiations may be made at time of occurrence, if the reason for missing an assignment deadline is acceptable in the opinion of the instructor. **Students must contact the instructor prior to missing scheduled coursework!**

GRADING: Grades are based on performance on lecture exams, assignments, and group discussion. Final grades will be calculated from the average of all assignments.

Course Evaluation	Points
Personal Introduction	10
Lecture Exams (2 Exams, 100pts each)	200
Assignments/Activities (10-50pts per assign.)	310
Group Discussions	40
Cumulative Final Exam	125
Total Points Possible	685

GRADING SCALE

98 – 100 % = A+	80 – 82 % = B-	63 – 67 % = D
93 – 97 % = A	78 – 79 % = C+	60 – 62 % = D-
90 – 92 % = A-	73 – 77 % = C	59% or less = F
88 – 89 % = B+	70 – 72 % = C-	
83 – 87 % = B	68 – 69 % = D	

Students with Disabilities: It is the policy of the University of Nebraska at Kearney to provide flexible and individualized reasonable accommodation to students with documented disabilities. To receive accommodation services for a disability, students must be registered with the UNK Disabilities Services for Students (DSS) office, 175 Memorial Student Affairs Building, 308-865-8214 or by email unkdso@unk.edu

UNK Statement of Diversity & Inclusion: UNK stands in solidarity and unity with our students of color, our LatinX and international students, our LGBTQIA+ students and students from other marginalized groups in opposition to racism and prejudice in any form, wherever it may exist. It is the job of institutions of higher education, indeed their duty, to provide a haven for the safe and meaningful exchange of ideas and to support peaceful disagreement and discussion. In our classes, we strive to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication and mutual respect. UNK does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or political affiliation. Respect for the

diversity of our backgrounds and varied life experiences is essential to learning from our similarities as well as our differences. The following link provides resources and other information regarding D&I: <https://www.unk.edu/about/equity-access-diversity.php>

Students Who are Pregnant: It is the policy of the University of Nebraska at Kearney to provide flexible and individualized reasonable accommodation to students who are pregnant. To receive accommodation services due to pregnancy, students must contact the Student Health office at 308-865-8218. The following links provide information for students and faculty regarding pregnancy rights. <https://thepregnantscholar.org/title-ix-basics/>

<https://nwlc.org/resource/faq-pregnant-and-parenting-college-graduate-students-rights/>

Reporting Student Sexual Harassment, Sexual Violence or Sexual Assault: Reporting allegations of rape, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and stalking enables the University to promptly provide support to the impacted student(s), and to take appropriate action to prevent a recurrence of such sexual misconduct and protect the campus community. Confidentiality will be respected to the greatest degree possible. Any student who believes she or he may be the victim of sexual misconduct is encouraged to report to one or more of the following resources: **Local Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault Advocacy Agency** 308-237-2599; **Campus Police (or Security)** 308-865-8911; **Title IX Coordinator** 308-865-8655

Retaliation against the student making the report, whether by students or University employees, will not be tolerated.

Veterans Services: UNK works diligently to support UNK's military community by providing military and veteran students and families with resources and services to help them succeed. Veterans Services assists with the GI Bill process and acts as a liaison between the student and the Veterans Administration. If you need assistance or would like more information, please contact Lori Weed Skarka at 308-865-8520 or unkveterans@unk.edu.

Plagiarism or Cheating: Plagiarism or cheating will not be allowed under any circumstances! Never copy the exact words of any author (from book, newspaper, journal, or website) without giving the author the proper credit. To claim another person's work as your own work is PLAGIARISM! Cases of plagiarism will be dealt with at the time of the occurrence. Please see student code of conduct for comments on the consequences of plagiarism, available at the following url: <http://www.unk.edu/offices/reslife/documents/university-of-nebraska-at-kearney-student-code-of-conduct.pdf>

Learning Commons:

UNK provides assistance to help you improve your academic performance. The UNK Learning Commons offers support for this course! The Learning Commons, located on the 2nd floor of the Calvin T. Ryan Library, offers Subject Tutoring, the Writing Center, Success Coaching, and Language Support. These services are available to all UNK students in-person and on Zoom. The Learning Commons can help you with course content for select subjects, time-management skills, getting organized for class, and any type of writing project. To get the most out of your time with the Learning Commons, visit early and often! Contact the Learning Commons at 308-865-8905, unklearningcommons@unk.edu, or stop by in person.

Website: www.unk.edu/lc

CLASS SCHEDULE & ASSIGNMENTS: A general class schedule and reading assignments can be found below. There will be recorded video lectures each week, for general lecture topics. In addition, readings from the textbooks will be assigned each week. Some weeks a discussion topic will be provided that examines the general topic with respect to assigned reading. You will be assigned a group to record a live group discussion via Zoom at least four times throughout the course. Exams will be essay and will cover topics discussed during the semester. Assignments include written assignments, data analysis, and/or simulation activities. Due dates must be followed, and assignments are due by **midnight CST** on the date given, specific dates will be specified when the assignment is posted. For assignments turned in late a penalty of 5 points per day will be deducted.

NOTE: The instructor reserves the right to modify the class schedule and assignments if necessary; however, students will be informed of minor modifications via Canvas announcements.

EXPECTATIONS: Students are expected to keep up with assigned course material and are responsible for checking announcements and assignments each week. All grades will be based on participation and the quality of the assignment or discussion comments. I expect students to use appropriate language (e.g., profanity and derogatory comments are unacceptable), to respect differences in opinion, and to show evidence of knowledge on the subject matter (i.e., gleaned from assigned readings).

Following is a tentative lecture schedule with assigned readings from the Rubenstein text. I reserve the right to modify as I see fit. For lectures, I may rearrange topics to coincide with specific interests of the class. There will also be multiple assignments and at least four live small group discussions throughout the semester. The schedule for assigned discussion weeks and assignments will be provided during the first week of classes.

Note: Scheduled exams will NOT change

Lecture Schedule

Date	Week	Lecture Topic	Alcock (12 th ed)
21-Jan	1	Introduction to the study of animal behavior	1
		Approaches to studying animal behavior	1
27-Jan	2	Communication & Animal Signals	8
		Evolution of Animal Signals	8
3-Feb	3	Function of Animal Signals	8
		Behavior Requires Genes & the Environment	3
10-Feb	4	Learning and Cognition	3
		Evolutionary Development of Behavior	3
17-Feb	5	Early Life Development of Behavior	3
		Neural Basis of Behavior	4
24-Feb	6	Neural Basis of Behavior	4
		Neural Basis of Behavior	4
3-Mar	7	EXAM 1	
		Territoriality & Migration	7
10-Mar	8	Territoriality & Migration	7
		Physiological Basis of Behavior	5
17-Mar	9	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS	
24-Mar	10	Physiological Basis of Behavior	5
		Avoiding Predators & Finding Food	6
31-Mar	11	Avoiding Predators & Finding Food	6
		Reproductive Behavior	9
7-Apr	12	EXAM 2	
		Mating I: courtship and mate choice	9
14-Apr	13	Mating II: mate competition and alternative tactics	9, 10
		Mating III: mating systems	10
21-Apr	14	Sex roles and parental care	11
		Sex roles and parental care	11
28-Apr	15	Sociality I: altruism and levels of selection	12
		Sociality II: kin selection and inclusive fitness theory	12
5 & 12-May	16 & 17	CUMULATIVE FINAL EXAM – DUE Monday, May 12th, midnight CST	