

# **DRAFT (11/1/23) Course Syllabus**

## **Ecosocial Crossroads: Lower Mississippi River (ENVS 623 / BIOL 692)**

**Instructors: Dr. Micah Russell and Dr. Pat! Magee**

**Trip dates: April 11-25, in addition to 1-2 pre-trip meetings**

The Mississippi River is the third longest river in the United States and is the lifeblood, economically, ecologically, and culturally, for a great swath of the country. This course offers a two-week immersive expedition on and along the Lower Mississippi River this spring, from Memphis to New Orleans to the Gulf of Mexico. We will be learning about big river management, natural history and ecology, environmental justice, and ecosystem restoration. Along the way, we'll also have the opportunity to experience southern culture through its history, music, food and literature. Activities include, but are not limited to, a 4-day canoe camping trip, visits to national monuments and memorials, conversations with national wildlife refuge managers and conservation scientists, dialogue with environmental advocates and industry leaders, and more.

This trip is scheduled for April 11-25, 2024 during the April 5-week block. The course is open to first year and second year students, regardless of graduate program. It is the responsibility of the student to negotiate the absence with instructors of other concurrent courses. In addition to regular tuition, a \$2000 course fee covers ground transportation, 50% of meals, guided excursions, and activity entrance tickets. While a van will be traveling from Western, some students may opt to book airline tickets at their own expense. Details on which flights to book will be provided by the instructors.

Please bear in mind that a portion of this trip requires “roughing it”, that is camping, paddling, dealing with mosquitoes and flies, etc. Also, please bear in mind that this is an intensely full two-week itinerary in close quarters with a small group of people, which can present its own challenges.

***An application to the Western Center for Learning and Innovation is due November 28<sup>th</sup>, along with the initial deposit of \$1000. The balance of \$1000 is due on February 9<sup>th</sup>.***

### **Overall learning objectives**

- Students learn about the natural and environmental history of the Lower Mississippi River watershed, engaging in informed critique and conversation on the issues.
- Students identify and assess environmental management challenges and apply skills and tools to analyze and effectively address them.
- Students propose strategic and well-considered solutions to environmental management challenges.
- Students engage with guest speakers and guides on a variety of topics, including conservation, ecosystem restoration and environmental justice, offering insightful questions and commentary.

- Students are able to effectively communicate their ideas in written and oral forms to their instructors and peers through leading discussions on relevant literature, daily journal reflections, and a final report.
- Students practice cultural humility when speaking with people from different backgrounds, modeling integrity and respect even when challenged by perceived biases.

### **Western MEM Mission, Vision and Values alignment**

This course contributes to Western’s mission and vision by providing an exceptional educational experience to all students who attend, while championing intellectual exploration, critical thinking and integrity. This course contributes to the goal of the Clark School of Environment and Sustainability to empower students to foster community transitions to ecologically resilient, economically sustainable and socially-just energy, food, water and land-use systems.

### **Assessment**

As graduate students, we expect your critical engagement in this learning journey. This will entail your active and engaged participation throughout the trip, your application of course material to your job, your project, and real-world environmental issues, and your ability to work effectively in teams. We will assess these learning objectives through the assignments below and your participation, professionalism, and engagement. At a graduate level, we expect assignments to be well written and free of grammatical and spelling errors. These errors may result in lower grades (up to 50% of the assignment). We encourage you to seek out assistance to edit first drafts of papers including assistance from the writing center tutors. Due dates for assignments are in Canvas.

**The Writing Center** offers in-person and online assistance for writers of all ability levels, majors, and types of assignments at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to finalizing drafts. The Writing Center is also a quiet, comfortable place to work on class assignments. Stop by TAY 112D for more information or visit our website for schedules and to make appointments (walk-ins are also welcome!): [https://western.edu/academics/academic-resource-center/writing-center/Links to an external site..](https://western.edu/academics/academic-resource-center/writing-center/Links%20to%20an%20external%20site..)

**A word about writing with AI (Artificial Intelligence):** Students are permitted to use generative AI tools in this course in so far as the use aligns with course objectives or is specified for an assignment. Students are responsible for the information submitted using AI tools as a source (e.g. you are responsible for ensuring accuracy, avoiding misinformation, etc.) as well as correctly citing AI usage to ensure your academic integrity. Violations of academic integrity may result in the following: a grade of “F” or “0” for the assignment, a grade of “F” for the course, withdrawal from the course, or suspension or expulsion from Western. Serious violations of academic integrity are reported to the Office of Academic Affairs.

### **Point Distribution (450 total)**

#### **Pre-trip Reading Quizzes (4) – 100 points total**

Reading materials, quizzes, and due dates provided through Canvas.

#### **Literature Discussion and Report (1) – 100 points**

Choose a relevant book to read and schedule a 20 minute discussion with your peers during the trip. Read an excerpt, provide prompting questions, and facilitate dialogue. Book ideas provided through Canvas. Next, provide a 3-page (single spaced, 12-point font) report reflecting on your experience and relating the themes of the selected book to your journey (due Friday May 3<sup>rd</sup>).

### **Trip Journal (1) – 50 points**

Make daily entries in a water-resistant notebook throughout the trip, taking notes on all activities and conversations, and reflecting on what you are learning.

### **Participation – 200 points**

In addition to attending pre-trip meetings and the entirety of the trip, you will be assessed on your participation in all activities and conversations, including literature discussions. High-level participation means you meet challenges with positivity, approach conversations with non-confrontational cultural humility, and look to assist your instructors and peers whenever possible.

### **Course Materials**

The website (<https://canvas.western.edu/>) is the portal for all course materials, including readings, videos, discussion boards, and assignments. Our IT staff encourages you to use Firefox as your web browser for Canvas. All materials are organized by unit and week. If you have problems accessing Canvas or with its features, please contact Western IT. If you have any problems understanding course materials and assignments, please let us know as soon as you can so that we can resolve the issue.

### **Tentative Course Schedule**

1-2 pre-trip meetings during winter, 2024 (TBA)

April 11: arrive in Memphis, TN

April 12: civil rights museum and riverboat tour

April 13: Juke Joint Festival (Clarksdale, MS)

April 14-17: canoe camping

April 18: Emmett Till National Monument and Winter Mounds St. Park (Greenville, MS)

April 19: Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge (Vicksburg, MS)

April 20: Mississippi River Museum

April 21: Old River Lock and Dam (Baton Rouge, LA)

April 22: Atchafalaya Basin tour

April 23: Cancer Alley and Port of NOLA (New Orleans, LA)

April 24: Birdsfoot boat tour (Port Eads, LA)

April 25: depart New Orleans

Optional: independent stay in New Orleans, returning no later than April 28

The course schedule is on Canvas and subject to change. We strive to finalize proposed content two weeks out so that you can access the assignments and content at least two weeks in advance. Please see the Canvas Assignments link for details and due dates.

### **University and Course Policies**

- **Inclusivity/Diversity/Disability**

Western Colorado University values diversity and inclusion and is committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation of all students. Our goal is to create a learning environment that is useable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or prevent an accurate assessment of your achievement, please meet with me privately to discuss your needs and concerns. Please contact the Center for Dis/Ability and Accommodation, located in Library 121, 970.943.2113, or visit their website at [https://western.edu/academics/academic-resource-center/disability-services/Links to an external site.](https://western.edu/academics/academic-resource-center/disability-services/Links%20to%20an%20external%20site) to initiate a request for accommodations.

### **Recording Course Materials**

**Students may not record class activity without** written permission from the instructor or pre-approved disability accommodations to record class activity. Recordings where students can be identified—from in-person sessions or remote instruction via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or any other videoconferencing application—are regulated by the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#)[Links to an external site.](#). Students may be considered identifiable on class activity recordings when they are participating verbally or visually, providing commentary, using a chat feature, or making a presentation.

Western respects the time and effort that our faculty and students invest in the classroom environment and we uphold academic integrity and FERPA privacy rights, and academic freedom of all class participants, both in-person and online. To this end, students may not record, reproduce, screenshot, photograph, or distribute any video, audio, or visual content from their in-person or online courses without prior written approval from their instructor. Some students may require a reasonable accommodation under the Americans With Disabilities Act that would allow them to record, reproduce, screenshot, photograph some course content, including video, audio, or other content. Contact Center for Dis/Ability and Accommodations at 970.943.2113 or [disability@western.edu](mailto:disability@western.edu). Recordings made for this purpose are to be used solely for group, individual, or TA-facilitated study, and may not be reproduced or shared in any way (including electronically or on the web) with those who are not in class this semester.

### **Academic Integrity/Plagiarism**

Presenting another person's work as one's own, including paraphrasing or summarizing of the work(s) of another person without acknowledgment and the submitting of another student's work as one's own is considered plagiarism. Plagiarism frequently involves a failure to acknowledge in the text, notes, or footnotes the quotation of paragraphs, sentences, or even a few phrases written or spoken by someone else. Submission for academic credit of a work

product, or a part thereof, represented as being one's own, which has been developed in substantial collaboration with assistance from another person or source, is a violation of academic honesty. It is also a violation of academic honesty to knowingly provide such assistance. Collaborative work specifically authorized by an instructor is allowed.

*“Violations of academic integrity may result in the following: an "F" grade or a zero for the assignment, an "F" for the course, withdrawal from the course, or suspension or expulsion from the University. Violations of academic integrity will be reported to the Office of Academic Affairs”* (Western Student Handbook).

### **Use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools and Academic Integrity**

Students are permitted to use generative AI tools in this course in so far as the use aligns with course objectives or is specified for an assignment. Students are responsible for the information submitted using AI tools as a source (e.g. you are responsible for ensuring accuracy, avoiding misinformation, etc.) as well as [correctly citing links to an external site](#). AI usage to ensure your academic integrity. Violations of academic integrity may result in the following: a grade of “F” or “0” for the assignment, a grade of “F” for the course, withdrawal from the course, or suspension or expulsion from Western. Serious violations of academic integrity are reported to the Office of Academic Affairs.

### **Attendance**

You are expected to take responsibility for your learning. There is often a significant relationship between class attendance and academic success (e.g., course grade). Regular class attendance is also important for developing professionalism. As a professional courtesy you should let me know if you plan to miss a class. You are responsible for all notes and assignments missed as a result of class absence. Absence from class **does not** excuse you from adhering to deadlines for assignments and projects. If you know you will be absent on a date that an assignment is due you are expected to submit the assignment **prior to** the due date. Some activities (such as in-class labs and activities) will not be able to be made up, which means that if you are absent you will not receive credit for that activity without a verified excuse from the Student Affairs Office.

### **Classroom Civility and Behavior:**

Western is committed to developing and actively protecting a classroom environment in which respect is shown to everyone in order to facilitate and encourage the expression, understanding, and creation of a variety of ideas and opinions. Rude, obscene, disrespectful, or prejudicial actions or words directed toward another person will not be tolerated in this class. If a student disrupts the class in these ways, the course instructor may ask the student to leave the class and has the prerogative to withdraw the disruptive person from the class. Should this happen, the student would receive a “W” or “F” as a final grade for the course.

### **Sexual Harassment**

Western Colorado University has no tolerance for sexual harassment. If you are aware of, or you have been subjected to, sexual harassment, please contact Patricia Hartshorn, Interim Director of Restorative Justice and Title IX Coordinator at 970-943-2122, [phartshorn@western.edu](mailto:phartshorn@western.edu), or in the Leslie J. Savage Library 122. You may also

contact the Gunnison Police Department at 970.641.8200. For access to confidential services you may contact the Campus Counseling Center, Crystal Hall 104, 970.648.7128 or the Campus Medical Clinic, Tomichi Hall 104, 970.943.2707. For more information about Western's Title IX policies, you can access the *Student Handbook* at [https://western.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/FINAL\\_Student\\_Handbook\\_2023-24\\_Accessible.pdf](https://western.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/FINAL_Student_Handbook_2023-24_Accessible.pdf) [Links to an external site.](#)

or visit the Restorative Justice and Title IX Office, Leslie J. Savage Library 122.

### **Email Communication & Etiquette**

Students are expected to demonstrate professionalism when communicating with instructors. Begin emails with a proper salutation and sign the email using your name. Please write in full sentences, avoid using text/internet slang, and proofread for grammatical errors prior to sending. This includes use of formal titles or first names as appropriate and use of appropriate salutation when sending emails (e.g., Dr. Smith, Professor Smith, Joan). It is not considered professional or respectful to address faculty members using just a last name (e.g., "Hey Smith,"). All emails will be sent to your Western email account and it is your responsibility to check this official account on a regular basis. I will make every effort to respond to your email within 48 hours..

### **Use of Electronic Devices in the Classroom**

A laptop or tablet can be useful for note-taking or other course related activities. The professor will initially assume that students are mature and respectful enough to use laptops appropriately in class. If a student is found to be using an electronic device for non-course related activities during class time, they will be asked to stop. If the student continues to violate the class policy concerning said usage, they will be no longer allowed to use their device in class, may be asked to leave the class and/or the instructor may remove the student from the class and the student will receive a "W" or "F."

### **Food Security**

Students who have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat at any time, and believe that this may affect their performance in any course, are urged to utilize food security resources on campus and in the Gunnison community. On campus, the Mountaineer Marketplace provides a variety of offerings and is located in the Pinnacles Hall Multipurpose Room. The Marketplace is open Monday and Wednesday, 4-7pm. If the pantry is not open and you are in need, College Student Emergency Food Bags are available in the Residence Life office. These grab bags are perfect for students who need a day's worth of food during a tough time and are specifically designed with college students in mind. Items in the bags may include: fruit cups, canned soups, pastas, snack bars, etc. Contact McKenzie Mathewson if you have questions (x2189 or [mmathewson@western.edu](mailto:mmathewson@western.edu)). Additionally, all students are welcome to harvest fresh produce as needed from Chipeta Gardens located on campus at the south entrance of Chipeta Hall.

### **Healthy Minds**

Western Colorado University is committed to supporting the mental health and well-being of

our students. Students may access mental health and health coaching resources both in-person and via telehealth options. If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health challenges, or if you just want to talk to someone about it, contact the University Counseling Center, located in Crystal Hall 104, 970.642.4615. For free, 24/7 mental health support or to schedule a counseling appointment, login to [timelycare.com/western](https://timelycare.com/western) [Links to an external site.](#) and follow the prompts.

## **Emergency Preparedness**

### **General**

The safety of students, faculty, and staff at Western is of the utmost importance. Western's emergency guide can be found at <https://www.western.edu/security-services/emergency-guide> [Links to an external site.](#). As a Western student, you are encouraged to enroll in the RAVE Emergency Notification System. RAVE is used in emergencies which pose an imminent threat to the campus community. To sign up for RAVE alerts, please go to: [www.getrave.com/login/western](http://www.getrave.com/login/western) [Links to an external site.](#) and use your Western log in to enter the site and sign up. If you need to contact the police in an emergency, call 911. This service is available 24/7. Non-emergency campus crimes may be reported to Campus Security at 970-943-3084 or 970-209-1020 (cell).

### **Violence/Active Shooter**

If an active shooter is in your vicinity, call 911 when it is safe to do so and provide information, including the location and number of shooter(s), description of shooter(s), weapons used and number of potential victims. Consider these three options recommended by Western Campus Security and the Gunnison Police Department:

**RUN:** If there is an accessible escape path, attempt to leave the premises; have an escape route and plan in mind; leave your belongings behind; follow instructions of police officers

**HIDE:** If running is not possible, find a place to hide where the active shooter is less likely to find you; hide in an area out of the shooter's view; provide protection; lock the doors; block entry into your hiding place; silence your phone, close window blinds if available, wait for law enforcement to send an "all clear" message.

**FIGHT:** As a last resort and only when your life is in imminent danger, attempt to disrupt and/or incapacitate the shooter by acting as aggressively as possible against her/him; yelling; throwing items and improvising weapons; and commit to your actions.