

The Anthropology of Biodiversity

(ANG 6930—26080, LAS 6938—27874, ANT 4930—28382)

Spring Semester, 2026

Mondays, 8:30-11:30am, In-person

Location: Matherly 113

Instructors:

Michelle LeFebvre: Archaeologist, Natural History Museum Curator; Department of Natural History

- Office: Dickinson Hall 106
- Telephone: (352) 273-1917
- Email: mlefebvre@floridamuseum.ufl.edu
- Office Hours: Mondays, 12-3pm, In-person or Zoom BY APPOINTMENT

Rick Stepp: Cultural Anthropologist; Department of Anthropology

- Office: CSE 356
- Email: stepp@ufl.edu
- Office Hours: Fridays, 12-3pm, In-person or Zoom BY APPOINTMENT

Kim Valenta: Biological Anthropologist/Primate Biologist; Department of Anthropology

- Office: Turlington Hall B123
- Email: kimvalenta@ufl.edu
- Office Hours: Mondays 11:30-2:30, In-person, or Zoom BY APPOINTMENT

Course Description:

ANT 4930 Special Topics in Anthropology 3-5 Credits

Grading Scheme: Letter Grade

Rotating content in anthropology.

Prerequisite: 10 credits in anthropology or instructor permission. With permission, can be repeated with change in content up to 9 credits.

ANG 6930 Special Topics in Anthropology 1-3 Credits, Max 21 Credits

Grading Scheme: Letter Grade

Special Topics in Anthropology

Prerequisite: consent of instructor.

Course Learning Objectives:

- Critically examine biodiversity as a biocultural concept.
- Assess archaeological perspectives and evidence of human-environment engagements and impacts on biodiversity through time, across space, and among groups of people.
- Evaluate cultural knowledge systems, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), and political ecologies of conservation.
- Assess human biological diversity and evolutionary processes within ecological contexts.
- Understand primate ecological strategies and conservation challenges.
- Identify “grand” challenges to biodiversity through an anthropological lens.
- Develop interdisciplinary research approaches to biodiversity questions.

Course Overview and Purpose:

“Biodiversity” is fundamental to life on Earth. But what is biodiversity? How do we study it? Why does it matter? In this interdisciplinary seminar, we take on these questions and investigate “biodiversity” through an anthropological lens, integrating archaeological, cultural, linguistic, biological, and primatological perspectives and approaches. We explore how human societies—past and present—have shaped and been shaped by biological diversity; how biodiversity is conceptualized and valued cross-culturally; how extinction, conservation, and domestication are embedded in cultural and ecological systems; and how human and non-human primate biology and behavior contribute to long-term ecological dynamics.

This course is team-taught across domain experts, providing a unique learning opportunity for students to interact closely with three professors throughout the semester. However, the primary goal is to facilitate student informed discussion and leadership, as well as critical and collegial debate. The course is organized across three complimentary thematic blocks: 1) Archaeology and Historical Ecology, 2) Biological Anthropology and Primatology, and 3) Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics. Within each thematic block, students will read both seminal and cutting-edge works, allowing them to explore “biodiversity” in concept and its study in anthropology and beyond (e.g., biology, ecology, philosophy, geography, etc.).

Course at a glance:

Introduction and foundation(s): January 12, 26

1st block, Archaeology and Historical Ecology perspectives: February 2, 9, 16

2nd block, Biological Anthropology and Primatology perspectives: February 23, March 2, 9

Spring Break: March 16-20

3rd block: Cultural Anthropology and Linguistic perspectives: March 23, 30, April 6

Project presentations: April 13, 20

Term paper due: April 27

Course Prerequisites:

ANT 4930 Special Topics in Anthropology

Prerequisite: 10 credits in anthropology or instructor permission. With permission, can be repeated with change in content up to 9 credits.

ANG 6930 Special Topics in Anthropology Credits

Prerequisite: consent of instructor.



Textbooks, Learning Materials, and Supply Fees:

All course learning and reading materials will be provided by the instructors and available via course Canvas page. There are not supply fees for this course.

Communication Guidelines:

Course Content:

You are responsible for materials posted on E-Learning (Canvas) at <https://elearning.ufl.edu/>, including required readings, announcements, details on assignments, and other supplementary material. Canvas technical support available at <https://elearning.ufl.edu/student-help-faqs/>.

The instructor and the TAs may use email to make general class announcements or to contact you directly about your work. You are responsible for checking your official UF email regularly to be aware of communication from your instructors. There are no allowances for students who fail to read their email announcements or whose inboxes are full at the time an announcement is sent.

Canvas Notifications: In your Canvas “Account,” click on “Notifications.” Set the notification for “Submission Comment” to either “Notify Immediately” or “Daily Summary.” The instructors communicate with you regarding your assignments through Submission Comments more so than e-mail. We expect every student to read their submission comments within 24 hours. Many of them may require immediate action on your part.

Technical Support

UF Computing Help Desk & Ticket Number: All technical issues require a UF Helpdesk Ticket Number. The UF Helpdesk is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <https://helpdesk.ufl.edu/> | 352-392-4357

Weekly Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Readings	Due Dates and Notes
1: Jan 12	Course Introduction, Policies, Expectations	Class discussion: What is biodiversity? Why an anthropological lens?	Common themes: nature/wild versus culture, conservation, knowledge, science, change and sustainability
2: Jan 19	No class (MLK Day)		
3: Jan 26	Foundations: Anthropology of Biodiversity	Escobar 2006; Lovejoy 2013 (pp. 35-44); Moran et al. 2001; Orlove and Brush 1996; Nobles 2025; Sakar 2002; Wilson 1988 (Ch. 1)	Themes: Finding enduring and cutting-edge connections within anthropology and beyond; what is biodiversity?
4: Feb 2	Archaeology, Historical Ecology, and Biodiversity	Balée 2006; Crumley 2021; Hofman 2015; Navarro et al. 2025; Rick 2023; Stahl 1996	Themes: “deep” time perspectives, baselines Please read at least four of the assigned papers. Campus trip: Florida Museum of Natural History Archaeology Collections
5: Feb 9	People and biodiversity in the past	Boivin et al. 2016; Ellis et al. 2021; Hayashida 2005; Knapp et al. 2021; Rosen 2023; Zeder 2015	Themes: translocations, invasions, management, domestication, extinction and persistence Please read at least four of the assigned papers. Brief lecture and Student discussion seminar

Week	Topic	Readings	Due Dates and Notes
6: Feb 16	Long-term/legacy impacts in the present and interdisciplinary connections	Balbo et al. 2017; Cevasco et al. 2015; Collar 2025; Fossile et al. 2023; Hjelle 2012; Jennings et al. 2025; Millhauser and Earle 2022	Themes: conservation paleobiology, relevance to the present, ethics Please read at least four of the assigned papers. Brief lecture and Student discussion seminar
7: Feb 23	Concepts of biodiversity in biodiversity hotspots and the global south	Diaz and Malhey 2022; Cerdá and Bidegain 2018; Novick and Doolittle 2021; Wu 2022	Themes: variation in conceptualizing biodiversity; species concepts Brief lecture and Student discussion seminar
8: Mar 2	Conserving biodiversity – how do you do it?	Valenta et al. 2025; Frankham et al 2012; Panfil and Harvey 2015; Humphries et al 1995	Themes: approaches to conservation; the human element of conservation biology Brief lecture and Student discussion seminar
9: Mar 9	Human-animal interactions and how they shape concepts of biodiversity	TBD	Themes: humans as interacting species; domestication and human-wildlife interactions Brief lecture and Student discussion seminar
10: Mar 16	No class (UF Spring Break)		Term project topic due to instructors 5pm, no exceptions.
11: Mar 23	Knowing Biodiversity	Berlin 1992 Ch. 1, Ch. 7; Anderson et al. 2011	Themes: ethnobiological classification, cognized environment Brief lecture and Student discussion seminar
12: Mar 30	Biocultural Diversity	Maffi 2005; Ottamendi-Urroz 2025; Posey 1999	Themes: relationship between biological diversity and socio-linguistic diversity, patterns Brief lecture and Student discussion seminar
13: Apr 6	Conservation Revisited: Biocultural Conservation	Gavin et al. 2015; Pretty et al. 2009; York 2025	Themes: new approaches to conservation, critiques of the concept

Week	Topic	Readings	Due Dates and Notes
			Brief lecture and Student discussion seminar
14: Apr 13	Final paper presentations		
15: Apr 20	Final paper presentations and course wrap up		
16: Apr 27	Final paper		Paper due 8AM, no exceptions

Student Discussion Seminar and Term Paper:

Seminar Facilitation (30%)

Graduate students are expected to lead at least one instructor assigned Monday seminar session in the latter part of the semester. **The Wednesday PRIOR, each student leader will share via Canvas 3 seminar questions for all students to have as a foundation for preparing for seminar discussion the following Monday.** Questions are expected to encourage critical thinking, likely including multiple points of consideration e.g., sub-questions, and be substantial enough to form the basis of a seminar discussion. A good approach would be to connect the questions and expected answers or reactions to broader topics in the class, previous readings and discussion, and research interests shared throughout the semester. Seminar leaders are welcome to share additional readings via Canvas, although they will not be mandatory for discussion participation.

- 0 pts. – did not prepare questions or lead seminar
- 15 pts. – prepared questions, but did not demonstrate mastery of the articles to lead a compelling and critical discussion
- 30 pts – prepared thoughtful questions, and facilitated engaging and critical seminar discussion
- Students will receive full credit for January 19th and March 16th.

Attendance and Participation (20%)

All students, graduate and undergraduate, are expected to be prepared to participate in seminar discussions and demonstrate their engagement with the assigned readings and seminar questions provided by the seminar leader. All students will earn points by participating in article discussions that they are not facilitating. Each student should come to class prepared and able to contribute. Participation is graded for EACH day in the following manner:

- 0 pts – absent or did not pay attention during discussion
- .5 pt. - listened and followed along, but did not demonstrate mastery of the articles during discussion
- .75 pt. – prepared for discussion, and asked or answered a thoughtful question
- 1 pt. – contributed in multiple ways to the discussion and demonstrated mastery of readings

Term Project (50% total)

Drawing on course readings as well as additional literature, students will write a critical essay characterizing, critiquing, and/or assessing “biodiversity” from an anthropological perspective. *For undergraduate essays, a minimum of four assigned course readings and four outside readings are required.* Students are encouraged to focus on 1-2 themes from the course, engage case studies and examples, relate to their interests or research, and provide a well-referenced opinion about the value and/or relevance of the anthropology of biodiversity as concept and/or practice.

Topic (10 pt)

Well-developed written description of paper topic uploaded to Canvas no later than **March 16th, 5 pm.**

Presentation (20 pt)

Each student will give a 15-minute presentation of their term paper topic, findings, and conclusions. Following each presentation, there will be 5-minutes for questions and discussion. These will be scheduled across April 13th and 20th.

Paper (20 pt)

Each student will produce a well written academic paper with complete sentences and logical presentation of content.

- 11 or 12 point Times New Roman font; standard 1-inch page margins; double spaced; pages numbered
- 2500 word minimum ~10 pages, 3500 word maximum ~14 pages
- References cited not included in total word count; must use standard in text and bibliographic academic citation style
- Final papers uploaded to Canvas by **April 27, 8 am.** No exceptions.

Grading Policy

Course grading is consistent with [UF grading policies](#).

Course Grading Structure

Assignment Type	Total Point Value	Percent of Final Grade
Seminar facilitation	30	30
Attendance and participation	20	20
Term Project	50	50

Grading Scale

Grade	Percentage
A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
S	na

Academic Policies and Resources:

“This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [this link](#).” (The direct link is <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>.)

Policies include:

Attendance and Makeup Work
Academic Accommodations
Grading Policies
Course Evaluation and Feedback
Honesty Policy
In-Class Recording Policy
Academic Resources
Campus Health and Wellness

Campus Health and Wellness Resources:

Visit <https://one.uf.edu/whole-gator/topics> for resources that are designed to help you thrive physically, mentally, and emotionally at UF.

- *Matter, We Care:* If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress. <http://www.umatter.ufl.edu/>
- *Counseling and Wellness Center:* Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
<https://counseling.ufl.edu>
- *Student Health Care Center:* Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website.

- *University Police Department*: Visit UF Police Department website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center*: For immediate medical care call 352- 733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website.
- *GatorWell Health Promotion Services*: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website or call 352- 273-4450.

Software Use:

All faculty, staff and students of the university are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against university policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate.

Privacy and Accessibility Policies:

- Instructure (Canvas)
 - [Instructure Privacy Policy](#)
 - [Instructure Accessibility](#)
- Zoom
 - [Zoom Privacy Policy](#)
 - [Zoom Accessibility](#)

Important Additional Information:

Attendance:

Since attendance is fundamental to the learning goals of this course, it is required. Of course, life may sometimes intervene, in which case you are expected to notify the instructor ahead of time or as soon as practical afterwards. More than two absences will already constitute >10% of the course, and you should consult with the instructor about appropriate make-up activity.

Excused absences must be consistent with university policies in the [Graduate Catalog](#) and require appropriate documentation. Requirements for class attendance and make-up assignments are consistent with university policies. Additional information can be found in [Attendance Policies](#).

Late Assignments:

No late assignments will be accepted outside of [UF Attendance Policies](#) accompanied by appropriate documentation.

Writing, honesty, cheating:

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 honor 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 Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. See the [UF Conduct Code website](#) for more information. If you have any questions or

concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Writing assignments will be subject to and in accordance with the student conduct code and academic honesty. Assignments will use the tool Turnitin to assess plagiarism and are subject to [ChatGPT/AI](#) detection. Assignments will be checked by the instructional team if more than 20% of the assignment suggests the content did not come from the student or is not properly cited. If there is any evidence of violation of the [Student Honor Code](#), that suggests the student *has not written the majority of the content on their own and is egregiously plagiarized*, the instructor may do one or more of the following: ask the student to redo the assignment, deduct major points from the score, or receive a *grade of zero* for the assignment. The instructor may offer a make-up assignment, but multiple offenses will be reported to the Anthropology department administration for review and could result in a report to the [Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution](#) Office.

Religious observances:

Students seeking modification of due dates for class participation, assignments, and exams for religious reasons should contact the instructor well in advance to request this modification, which will then be granted.

Procedure for conflict resolution:

Any issues, disagreements or grade disputes should be discussed first between the instructor and the student. If the problem cannot be resolved, please contact Prof. John Krigbaum (krigbaum@ufl.edu, [\(352\) 294-7540](#)), Chair of Anthropology. 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>[Links to an external site.](#); [352-392-1308](#)) or the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu>[Links to an external site.](#); [352-392-1261](#)).

Library Resources:

Please add either of these statements to your course syllabus. You may customize the suggested language to suit the needs of your class; find more [services](#), [subject specialists](#), and [research guides](#) to add to your syllabus. Sample syllabi along with UF's syllabus policy can be found [here](#).

- **Library Resources (General Courses):** The [UF Libraries](#) provide access to numerous resources and services that will help you succeed in this course. Access thousands of [online databases, books, and articles](#) or visit one of the [branch locations](#) for additional [resources, services, and study spaces](#). Can't find what you are looking for? You can [Ask A Librarian](#) for help by email, chat, text, or phone.
- **Library Resources (Courses with Researching/Writing Component, Grad Courses):** The [UF Libraries](#) provide access to numerous resources and services that will help you succeed in this course. Access thousands of [online databases, books, and articles](#) or visit one of the [branch locations](#) for additional [resources, services, and study spaces](#). Further, as this class requires students to complete a bibliography, research paper, or project, both the [Anthropology Library Guide](#) and the [Anthropology Assignment Guide](#) may be of assistance. You can also contact the [Anthropology Librarian](#) directly for help with developing your research topic/question, searching for sources, and evaluating information. And you can also [Ask A Librarian](#) for help by email, chat, text, or phone.
- **Ginessa Mahar (Anthropology Librarian):** gjmahar@ufl.edu, office: Library West Room 500