

Biology 62S: The Natural History of the Islands of California

Spring 2018 Syllabus

Course #28358 Tuesday Lecture: S203, 6-7:50 PM



“Islands are havens and breeding grounds for the unique and anomalous. They are natural laboratories of extravagant evolutionary experimentation.”

*-David Quammen, from *Song of the Dodo**

Instructor

Brad Balukjian, Ph.D. (call me Brad, Dr. B, or Dr. Balukjian)

Email: bbalukjian@peralta.edu (I will do my best to reply to email promptly, but please keep in mind that even your professors have lives (!), and so in the evenings and on weekends it may take a bit to get back to you.)

Website: bradbalkukjian.com

Office Hour: Tuesdays, 5-6 pm in S422. If you are never able to make this time due to a standing conflict such as work or watching Game of Thrones, E-mail me and we can figure out a time to meet.

Why is this class important?

There are two main components of this class, as written into its name—natural history and islands. The former is the study of nature, specifically the flora, fauna, and geology of our planet and the interactions between them. Famed 19th century writer and naturalist Henry David Thoreau once said, “we need the tonic of wilderness,” which I think sums up the importance of natural history in only six words. We need nature because we are a part of it, we evolved within it, and we are sustained by it. Our species, *Homo sapiens*, first appeared about 200,000 years ago in Africa, but it’s only been in the past couple of hundred years that our lives have become disconnected from the outdoors (especially so in the past 20 years, since the spread of the Internet). Research shows that direct exposure to nature—through hiking, walking, even just sitting and staring at a tree (seriously, the Japanese love this and call it “forest bathing”)—lowers stress levels and improves mental and physical health in multiple ways. This class reconnects us with nature by telling the stories of the other 8.7 million species that call Earth home and how our species fits in with them.

The islands part of the class narrows our interest to the unique ecosystems of islands, those chunks of land surrounded by water. As the above quote from science writer David Quammen states, islands are special places where weird things happen, and are microcosms of the bigger world. Because of their discrete and usually small size, they make for ideal sites for studying ecology and evolution.

Who am I, and why am I teaching this class?

A huge nerd who is too old to use emojis. This is my fifth year teaching at the Peralta Colleges (I moved from Laney to Merritt last year) and my path to get here has been a windy and colorful one. At different times, I’ve worked in journalism, public relations, and science, but the common denominator has always been my lifelong passion for islands, which is why this class is truly a dream class. Ever since I was ten, I’ve told people I wanted to be an “islandologist” when I grew up; while the growing up part may be debatable, I have definitely fulfilled the other part of that goal.

What is your approach to teaching?

“We are what they grow beyond.”
-Yoda

I love this quote from the recent Star Wars movie *The Last Jedi*, when the wise old Jedi master Yoda reminds Luke Skywalker that as the older generation, their duty is to help the younger generation grow and to ultimately surpass them. This is how I look at teaching—I want you to go out there and achieve more success than I ever have, to “grow beyond” what I have accomplished.

My teaching philosophy is called **PARE** (Personalized, Active, Relevant, Equitable). It means that I want to get to know how each of you as people and as learners (Personalized); it means I use a lot of interactive activities besides a straight lecture, not because I want to use gimmicks, but because research shows that students generally learn best when they are actively engaged in their own learning process (Active); it means I believe the question “why do I have to know this?” is a fair one, which I will answer throughout the course (Relevant); and it means that I try to create as fair a classroom environment as I can, ensuring that everybody has the opportunity to succeed (Equitable).

Required materials

1. Textbook, “Natural History of the Islands of California,” by Allan Schoenherr, C. Robert Feldmeth, and Michael J. Emerson. You can buy this from our bookstore (\$37 new, \$28 used) or try to get a copy online.
2. A Green Book, for in-class activities, available at the bookstore (super cheap, I promise).
3. Comfortable walking shoes and outdoor clothes—we’ll be hiking outside on our field trips, so be sure to dress appropriately and bring plenty of water and sunscreen!

Highly suggested materials

- 1) Colored pens or pencils for note-taking (I will occasionally write on the board in multiple colors).
- 2) Breath mints. We do a lot of group and partner work. Just sayin.’

What are the goals of this class? Official student learning outcomes (things you should be able to do by the end of the class)

1. Demonstrate a solid understanding of the definition and relevance of natural history to human society, with a specific focus on the relevance to California residents.
2. Explain the uniqueness of island ecosystems, and how the geographic features of islands affect the biodiversity that lives and evolves on them.
3. Describe, compare, and contrast the ecosystems of the Farallon, Channel, and San Francisco Bay Islands, and how their differences can (or cannot) be explained by island biogeography theory.
4. Articulate the importance and vulnerability of California’s islands to the state’s population.

Field Trips

Time spent immersed in the field is essential to natural history, and as such, we have three weekend field trips planned. Below are the basic dates, with many more details to come:

1. Sunday, April 1: Visit to East Bay Regional Parks District’s Regional Botanical Garden, 10 AM-12:50 PM.

2. Sunday, April 22: Visit to Prisoners' Harbor, Santa Cruz Island, Channel Islands. Our ferry leaves from the Island Packers dock in Ventura at 9 AM and returns to the dock the same day at 6 PM. I suggest arriving in the Ventura/Santa Barbara area the night before; lodging accommodations are on your own. Boat ticket is \$54.

3. Saturday, May 12: Visit to Angel Island State Park. Approximately 10 AM-4 PM (more details on this soon).

Web Reference Material

Additional course readings and supplemental material will be available at the course website: Bradbalukjian.com/islands2018.html

To check your grade in the course, log in to the course site on Moodle: eperalta.org/spring2018

Grade Policy

Your grade in the course is out of a possible 400 points. You can keep track of your grade in the class through the Gradebook section of Moodle. Your final grade will be based on your number of total points at the end of the semester as follows:

- A 360-400 points (90-100%)
- B 320-359 points (80-89%)
- C 280-319 points (70-79%)
- D 240-279 points (60-69%)
- F Below 240 points (0-60%)

Your final grade is determined by the total number of points you earn out of a possible total of 400 (with extra credit you could exceed 650). If you are taking the class pass/no pass, you need to earn at least 280 points to pass.

Please note that I do not grade on a curve. Why? Because I think using a curve pits you against each other and encourages unhealthy competition; I think a better model is that each of you gets the grade you earned, regardless of how your peers performed.

Also, please note that I do not “give” grades; you earn them. If you come to me asking me to change your grade simply because you think you have worked hard or asking for extra credit assignments to improve your grade, I will say no and refer you to this part of the syllabus.

Points Breakdown (see FAQ for more details)

1 term paper @ 100 points	100 points
7 Green Book lecture activities @ 10 points each	70 points

8 homework question sets @ 10 points each
 3 field trip assignments @50 points each

80 points
 150 points

Total

400 points

Class Schedule (subject to change)

Date	Lecture Topic	Textbook Reading (due the following class)	Due Dates (all assignments due at the start of lecture)
Week 1: 3/13	Natural history and island biogeography	p. 5-46	
Week 2: 3/20	Island evolution	p. 47-58; 196-243	Homework 1 due
Week 3: 3/27	N. Channel Islands geology and flora	p. 121-146; p. 243-261	Homework 2 due; field trip on 4/1
Week 4: 4/3	Spring Break		
Week 5: 4/10	N. Channel Islands animals	p. 59-69; 285-313	Homework 3 due
Week 6: 4/17	N. Channel Islands anthropology	P. 366-376	Homework 4 due; field trip on 4/22
Week 7: 4/24	Farallon Islands	P. 377-406	Homework 5 due
Week 8: 5/1	San Francisco Bay Islands I	p. 406-440	Homework 6 due
Week 9: 5/8	San Francisco Bay Islands II		Homework 7 due
Week 10: 5/15	Island Jeopardy		Term paper due

Cheating/Plagiarism

My biggest pet peeve is cheating. As a student at Merritt, you are expected to abide by the honor code. If I catch you cheating, the consequences will depend on the situation and could result in a referral to the Dean.

Dropping the Class

I'd hate to see you go, but if you decide to drop the class you need to do so by March 18 to avoid getting a W (withdrawal) on your transcript. It is your responsibility to drop yourself from the class. The deadline to drop with a W is April 27.

For Students with Disabilities

I want to make this course as accessible as possible to students with disabilities that may affect any aspect of course assignments or participation. I encourage you to let me know by the second week of the course regarding any accommodations that will improve your experience in (or access to) this course. You can also contact Student Accessibility Services at 510-436-2429 for assistance.

A Note on Punctuality

While I don't take off points for being late to class (this isn't high school, and I don't see my role as that of hall monitor), I expect you to come to class on time. This is both a matter of respect to me and your fellow classmates (coming in late is disruptive) and for your own good in the class.

A Note on Excused Absences and Making Up Work

In general, if you do not attend class or complete work on time, you will not receive any credit. However, I am a reasonable person and understand that sometimes life throws us some curveballs and you have a legitimate reason to miss class. If this is the case, please let me know as soon as possible so I can consider making an accommodation. I retain the right as your instructor to make any exceptions to my policies on a case-by-case basis, but you have no guarantee or right of receiving an exception.

Extra Credit

Throughout the course, we will be competing in teams in the Crayola War to review content, culminating in an Island Jeopardy game on the last day of class. The winning team will have 10 points of extra credit added to their grade; the second-place team will have 5 points added.