INSTRUCTOR:
Dr. Eva Top
Office: Life Sciences South, Rm. 258
Email: evatop@uidaho.edu; Phone: 885-5015
OFFICE HOURS: Wednesday and Thursdays 1:30 - 2:30pm

TIME AND PLACE:
Mondays and Wednesdays 12:30 – 1:20 pm
First Monday 8-20-'12: Room 447C Life Sciences South.
First Wednesday 8-22-'12: Library classroom (Library Room 212A)!!!!
From Week 2 on: Room 447C

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course is offered to Biology majors as a "capstone" to their undergraduate studies. You have spent four or more years gaining knowledge of biology, but have probably spent little time considering how this knowledge is (or isn't) used in the "real world" that you will enter upon graduation. The primary objective of the course is to provide you with an opportunity to do so. In this course you will critically read, consider, discuss, and write about specific critical issues that society is facing today.

We live in exciting yet challenging times. For example, technological advances have a tremendous positive impact on our society and hold promise for a brighter future for humanity, but at the same time they come with ethical questions we are poorly prepared for, our environment is being degraded, our climate is changing more rapidly than expected, and our resources are being used unsustainably. These threats to our very existence are real and can no longer be ignored and should be dealt with today. Therefore college graduates should be ready to debate and decide such important issues, using their knowledge and ability to critically think through a problem.

As you well know, few issues pertaining to scientific policies and practices are "black and white", and almost all are complex. Conflicting data are not uncommon. Moreover, few of the decisions made by individuals and governments to address these problems are based purely on scientific criteria. In fact, personal, political, economic, and ethical considerations often play a greater role than scientific ones, and various preconceptions and the momentum of past practices may limit the solution that are considered. As scientists you should be able to separate facts from opinions.

The goal of the course is to expose you to the complexity of major issues we are encountering today, and provide an opportunity to wrestle with how the knowledge you have gained can be used to arrive at recommendations and decisions.

COURSE INFORMATION:
This syllabus is available on BbLearn and on http://people.ibest.uidaho.edu/~etop/courses/biol411.html. This syllabus is advisory, not exhaustive. Details may change, and probably will. Other materials and information about the course will be posted regularly.
BOOKS to read:

I. Required reading during first weeks of semester:

We will first read and discuss one book available in the Vandal Bookstore ("The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks", by Henrietta Skloot, 2010) (UI’s 2012 Common Read). Required reading, book is available in the Vandal Book store or other places. Start reading now...

We will also discuss cases and regulations related to the Henrietta Lacks book (with some first links to information, more for you to look up later):

- Tuskegee syphilis experiment (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuskegee_syphilis_experiment)

II. Possible additional discussion topics to choose from:

Later in the semester we’ll read from books and articles that are available on-line. In the first weeks of the class you will collectively decide which topics to discuss. Based on the outcome, additional reading materials will be posted during the semester. A list of possible topics is available separately (see BbLearn).

ATTENDANCE:

Since this class is heavily based on in-class discussions and presentations attendance is mandatory, except for when an absence is excused for medical reasons or when authorized by the University. Excuses for University related responsibilities (such as athletic events) must be arranged in writing in advance of any missed lab or exam. Illness or other emergency must be documented in writing (for example, through Student Health) within three school days. One unexpected absence will be tolerated but not more.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY:

Each student is individually responsible for learning the subject material covered in the course. What you get out of the course will be proportional to what you invest in it.

PARTICIPATION:

Students are required to complete the assigned reading before the scheduled class period and should be prepared to participate in classroom discussions or to answer questions when called upon to do so.

Participation of students in classroom discussion will be judged by the instructor and will account for 30% of the final grade. It will be evaluated according to quality of thought and articulation of expression rather than quantity of words spoken. Full credit will require: 1) regular attendance; 2) evidence that you read the assignments as judged from your ability to answer questions from the assigned reading; 3) regular and substantive contribution to the discussion; and 4) conduct in class that is respectful of others.

Any behavior that is disruptive to the class, or deemed by the instructor to be disrespectful to fellow students or the instructor, will not be tolerated. This includes side conversations with fellow students,
texting and using your phone, inappropriate laptop use (e.g., surfing the web), sleeping in class, and so on. Students that violate this rule may be summarily dismissed from class, and repeated violation may result in expulsion from the course with the student receiving a failing grade.

**PRESENTATIONS:**

You will work in pairs to make a presentation of 15-20 minutes on a specific topic, followed by discussion and assessment. To avoid overlap between presentations the specific questions or facts to be addressed should be approved by the instructor by October 1. The grade for the presentation will be determined by the instructor, and based on the clarity and substance of the presentation as well as the manner in which the presentation is made.

More information and advice on these presentations will be given in class.

**WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:**

Now and then you'll be asked to express your opinion about a specific question in writing or report on specific facts that you were asked to look up (5 points).

In addition, students will also be expected to prepare one shorter essay that constitutes a critical analysis of scientific and social issues that pertain to a particular topic (25 points). The text of the paper should reflect the original thoughts, interpretations, and conclusions of the student. As far as possible, the student should attempt to objectively address conflicting scientific and public viewpoints.

You will critically analyze a topic that is related to biology and has social and ethical implications that are controversial and need discussion. The exact topic of the final paper will be chosen by the student but must be approved by the instructor. Suggestions for topics are due no later than September 19. The paper should be a focused, thorough analysis of claims and facts, with a personal proposal/opinion/recommendation. Examples of topics will be given in class. This essay will be minimum 3 and maximum 4 pages of single-spaced text, use font size 12, 1” margin. This page requirement does not include references or figures/tables. There is no lower or upper limit to the space for references, figures, tables, but there should be at least three references, and no more than 30% of the references can be websites. Peer-reviewed journal articles and books are preferred (Nature, Science, any science journal); popular press articles can be included as references too but should not form the majority (more about that later).

Grades will be based on both content and writing mechanics (grammar, syntax, spelling, flow of ideas). Primary sources of information and data should be properly cited. Students are encouraged to periodically consult with the instructor about the topic and formulation of the paper as it is being prepared. The draft and final paper should be turned in at the beginning of class on the due dates as printed hard copy AND email that same day as text file (.doc, .docx or .rtf).

Additional information about the organization and format will be provided in class.

**DEBATE:**

We'll end with two debates on topics of choice, based on the students' interests - to be determined later.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:**

Academic honesty is governed by Article II of the University of Idaho’s Student Code of Conduct (http://www.webs.uidaho.edu/fsh/2300.html). All students are expected to uphold the highest
standards of academic honesty. This includes but is not limited to: not using the ideas of others without giving appropriate credit (including Wikipedia!), and not giving false excuses for missed classes or exams. To facilitate enforcement of University policies, we will ask that electronic versions of major writing assignments be submitted along with printed versions. All incidents of academic dishonesty will be reported to the dean of students. Individuals guilty of academic dishonesty will be expelled from the course and receive a failing grade. All students should be aware that even one incident of academic dishonesty may also merit expulsion from the University.

**ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES:** See Class Schedule

**GRADING:**

A student’s grade will be based on the following:

- Participation: 30 points
- Group presentation: 20 points
- Writing: 30 points
- Debate: 20 points

Grades will be determined by evaluation of quality, not by quantity alone. Your written work and group presentations will be evaluated using rubrics (which will be supplied to you before you begin working on your projects). There will be no final exam.

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**University of Idaho Classroom Learning Civility Clause:**
In any environment in which people gather to learn, it is essential that all members feel as free and safe as possible in their participation. To this end, it is expected that everyone in this course will be treated with mutual respect and civility, with an understanding that all of us (students, instructors, professors, guests, and teaching assistants) will be respectful and civil to one another in discussion, in action, in teaching, and in learning. Should you feel our classroom interactions do not reflect an environment of civility and respect, you are encouraged to meet with your instructor during office hours to discuss your concern. Additional resources for expression of concern or requesting support include the Dean of Students office and staff (5-6757), the UI Counseling & Testing Center’s confidential services (5-6716), or the UI Office of Human Rights, Access, & Inclusion (5-4285).

**Disability Support Services Reasonable Accommodations Statement:**
Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have documented temporary or permanent disabilities. All accommodations must be approved through Disability Support Services located in the Idaho Commons Building, Room 306 in order to notify your instructor(s) as soon as possible regarding accommodation(s) needed for the course.

- 885-6307
- email at dss@uidaho.edu
- see also http://www.uidaho.edu/studentaffairs/taap/dss