

## Semester Project - Final guidelines

The following pages of this document are divided into **Three Sections**.

- [Section 1](#) describes the three components of the Semester Project.
- [Section 2](#) is a Self-Evaluation Template that you will fill out and submit along with your Project Description/Self Reflection essay.
- [Section 3](#) provides detailed guidelines to help you fill out the self-evaluation in Section 2.

As always, your grade will be determined from your self-evaluation of the semester project. Also as always, I reserve the right to alter your self-evaluated points either up or down, if I feel that your evaluation does not accurately align with my interpretation of the project as a whole.

## Three components of the Semester project

The final Semester Project involves three components:

1. Completing your project itself (To be completed by Tues Dec 5th)
2. Sharing your project at the course “project fair” (on Tues Dec 5th)
3. Writing a project description and reflective essay (To be completed by Weds Dec 6th)

The three components are detailed below. The grading process is described in the [Evaluation](#) section.

### **Component 1: Completing the project itself (this has to be completed by Tuesday Dec. 5th)**

This component should be quite self-evident. Throughout the semester, you have been learning about your focal ecological community and project format; now it is time to implement your proposal.

### **Component 2: Participating in the course Project Fair**

This component should also be quite self-evident. During the allotted Finals time for this course (Tuesday, Dec 5th, 5.30-7.30pm), you are asked to share your project with classmates, and to engage with your peers’ projects.

### **Component 3: Accompanying project description and reflective essay (this has to be completed by Wednesday Dec. 6th)**

Each student will write a Project Description and Reflective Essay accompanying their project. You can think of this as a final, refined, revised version of your formal proposal. (In fact, for most students, I suggest that you can use your Formal Proposal as a first draft of this essay).

This essay should address the following themes:

#### ***Part 1: Ecological or environmental description of your focal ecological community***

- This section should provide a detailed overview of your system, including descriptions of the abiotic and biotic environment, the major ecological players, and major environmental challenges.
  - E.g. address some of the following questions: *(i)* What is the ecological landscape around this region (e.g. what is the temperature and precipitation regime)? *(ii)* What is the social landscape around this region? *(iii)* Are there particular species that are key to the functioning or stability of this system? *(iv)* What are some of the key environmental challenges this system faces?
- All information in this section should be supported with citations to the primary scientific literature or to other reliable sources online.
  - Each essay should cite a minimum of 5 primary sources (published scientific papers, book chapters, or dissertations) that you read to learn about your system

- Beyond the 5 sources, you are welcome to draw on other references, but please ensure that you vet this information. For example, avoid commercial websites whose main purpose is to sell you on something.

***Part 2: Based on what you learned about your focal community, what is the message you want to share with your audience?***

- What are some things about your ecological community that you want your audience to learn and take away beyond this class?
- Please explain how you came to the conclusion about what message you wanted to convey.
- Did you learn anything through your research process that helped you refine your message, or details that you think the audience should take away?

***Part 3: Your creative process***

- How did you synthesize the scientific information and messages into your un-essay?
  - For example, if you made a painting, what are some elements in the painting that reflect something you learned through your literature search?
  - Or if, for example, you wrote poetry, how did you choose your perspective or words based on what you learned through your research?
- On a practical level, what was your process for completing this project?
  - What are some skills that you needed to draw on that you weren't expecting to use for this project?
  - What was the hardest aspect of the creative process?

***Part 4: Self-reflection***

- What have you learned through this Un-essay semester project that you were surprised by?
  - This can be something you learned about your ecological community, about your project format, or about yourself as a person
- What have you learned through this Un-essay semester project that you think you might find valuable in your future life or career?
- If you were to have another UnEssay project in a different class, what are some things you would hope are done differently?

***Part 5: Semester project self-evaluation***

As the final Part of the Accompanying Essay component, you are asked to evaluate your own performance on the semester project using the [evaluation template](#) below

## Self Evaluation Template

Please complete your final project self-evaluation with the following template. The [self-evaluation guidelines](#) provides benchmarks to help you complete this self-evaluation. This template is also available as a blank PDF or as a blank Word document on the course Moodle page.

### Component 1: The final project (15 points total)

- **Scientific accuracy and specificity of the message conveyed**

- Grade out of 4 points: \_\_\_\_\_
- Justification:

- **Effort and creative process**

- Grade out of 4 points: \_\_\_\_\_
- Justification:

- **Aesthetic quality**

- Grade out of 4 points: \_\_\_\_\_
- Justification:

- **Professionalism and engagement**

- Grade out of 3 points: \_\_\_\_\_
- Justification:

**Component 2: Participation at the Project Fair (5 points total)**

- **Sharing your project with other students**

- Grade out of 2.5 points: \_\_\_\_\_
- Justification:

- **Engagement with other students' projects**

- Grade out of 2.5 points: \_\_\_\_\_
- Justification:

**Component 3: Project description and reflection essay (15 points total)**

- **Quality of research, information, and message**

- Grade out of 6 points: \_\_\_\_\_
- Justification:

- **Creative process**

- Grade out of 3 points: \_\_\_\_\_
- Justification:

- **Self-reflection on the semester project experience**

- Grade out of 3 points: \_\_\_\_\_
- Justification:

- **Quality of writing**

- Grade out of 3 points: \_\_\_\_\_
- Justification:

## Self evaluation guidelines

### Component 1: The final project (15 points total)

#### ***Scientific accuracy and specificity of the message conveyed***

This section is to be graded out of 4 points.

- A score of 4 indicates that your project conveys scientifically accurate information about the focal ecological community, and that the message you are conveying is supported by the scientific literature. There are specific aspects of the system you have learned that are represented in the project.
- A score of 3 indicates that your project conveys generally correct information, but that the message can't be traced back specifically to the scientific literature (e.g. instead it comes from general purpose web-resources, documentaries, etc., where it has already been 'translated' once).
- A score of 2 indicates that your project conveys generally correct information about your focal ecological community, but the information is vague (e.g. just a general impression of ecological degradation, but hard to point to specifics).
- A score of 1 indicates that your project conveys incomplete or misleading information about your focal community, and the information is largely based on material from unreliable sources.

#### ***Effort and creative process***

This section is to be graded out of 4 points.

- A score of 4 indicates that your project pushed you to explore new media (or new techniques in media that you were previously familiar with), and that you invested considerable time and energy learning or refining new skills to pull it together.
- A score of 3 indicates that you learned a few new things and pushed your creative horizons to develop this project, but that you did not hold yourself to learn the skills to a high standard.
- A score of 2 indicates that you largely applied previous skills to develop your project, but learned a few things at the margins.
- A score of 1 indicates that you did not push your creative horizons as part of this project, and that your project submission had the feel of a rough draft that you did not spend time on refining.

#### ***Aesthetic quality***

This section is to be graded out of 4 points.

- A score of 4 indicates that you feel your project *should* be publicly displayed (e.g. aired on a podcast feed, hung up in a gallery, included in a poetry collection, etc.) because it conveys an important message and is likely to grab the attention of a wide audience
- A score of 3 indicates that you feel your project *could* be displayed publicly because it conveys an important message, but needs some more work before it is likely to grab the attention of a wide audience
- A score of 2 indicates that you feel your project is a long way away from being displayed publicly to a wide audience

- A score of 1 indicates that you feel that even with substantial effort, your work is unlikely to be fit for public display.

### ***Professionalism and engagement***

This section is to be graded out of 3 points.

- A score of 3 indicates that you treated this Semester Project as you would a professional project, by sticking to the stated deadlines, completing all requirements, asking clarifying questions as needed, requesting accommodations (e.g. deadline extensions) when the need arose, and engaging with feedback.
  - A score of 2 indicates that you were largely professional with the semester project, but were sloppy with some of the requirements, deadlines, etc.
  - A score of 1 indicates that you were unprofessional with aspects of the semester project.
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### **Component 2: Participation at the Project Fair**

*Note:* If you have a scheduling conflict that keeps you from attending the Project Fair, please email Gaurav before Nov. 30th to arrange for accommodations.

#### ***Sharing your project with other students***

This section is to be graded out of 2.5 points.

- A score of 2.5 means that you were present at the Project Fair and engaged with classmates to get them excited about your work

#### ***Engagement with other students' projects***

This section is to be graded out of 2.5 points.

- A score of 2.5 means that you were present at the Project Fair and engaged with your classmates to learn about their focal ecological communities and creative process.
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### **Component 3: Project description and reflection essay (15 points total)**

#### ***Quality of research, information, and message***

This section is to be graded out of 6 points.

- A score of 6 indicates that the Ecological/Environmental description of the focal community provides meaningful and accurate information that is well-cited, including at least 5 sources from the primary literature.
- A score of 4 indicates that the Ecological/Environmental description of the focal community largely provides useful information, but misses out on important biotic or abiotic factors. Or, the information is largely accurate but vague and sourced primarily from secondary sources.
- A score of 2 indicates that the Ecological/Environmental description of the focal community provides insufficient information and does not give adequate context for the final project. Or, the information in this section is misleading or inaccurate.

#### ***Creative process***

This section is to be graded out of 3 points.

- A score of 3 indicates that the Accompanying Essay *(i)* thoroughly explains how you approached the challenge of synthesizing scientific information into your final project (e.g. how did you go from reading a paper about a particular predator-prey interaction, to writing about it in a poem?); and *(ii)* explains some of the lessons learned from this creative exercise.
- A score of 2 indicates that the Accompanying Essay partially addresses the process of synthesizing scientific information into a creative project, and/or does not present any reflection about the creative medium chosen for this project.
- A score of 1 indicates that the Accompanying Essay does not provide any meaningful insight into converting information about the scientific literature into a creative medium, and provides no reflection on the medium as a whole.

#### ***Self-reflection on the semester project experience***

This section is to be graded out of 3 points.

- A score of 3 indicates that the Self Reflective portion of the essay thoroughly addresses the questions listed in Part 4 of the essay guidelines (some reflection on what you learned about through the project, reflection on what you can take away from this project to your future lives, and reflections on the UnEssay format generally). *Remember that for a self-reflection to be meaningful, it should represent more than just the first thoughts that entered your mind about the central question.*
- A score of 2 indicates that the Self Reflective portion of the essay addresses some of the questions listed in Part 4 of the essay guidelines (some reflection on what you learned about through the project, reflection on what you can take away from this project to your future lives, and reflections on the UnEssay format generally), or addresses each of the questions but only at a surface-level
- A score of 1 indicates that there is no meaningful self-reflection on the questions raised in this topic.

### ***Quality of writing***

This section is to be graded out of 3 points.

- A score of 3 indicates that the writing in your Accompanying Essay is clear, concise, well-cited, and edited.
- A score of 2 indicates that the writing in your Accompanying Essay largely has a coherent structure, but some sentences are sloppy (e.g. run-ons, fragments, other issues that complicate comprehension) or repetitive.
- A score of 1 indicates that the writing is of poor quality, akin to submitting a first-draft without revisions.