**Decolonizing Conservation: Communities, Wildlife, and Conservation in South Africa**

Department of Forest Resources Management

University of British Columbia

**Course syllabus**

# Course information

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| Title | **Decolonizing Conservation: Communities, Wildlife, and Conservation in South Africa** |
| Code (section): |  |
| Term: | 2023S1 (Apr – May 202\3) |
| Credits: | 6 |
| Schedule: | Background lectures lectures in Vancouver in weeks 1 and 5, and field experience in South Africa in weeks 2-4. |
| Pre-requisites: | None |
| Co-requisites: | None |
| Syllabus version: |  |

1. **Teaching team**

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| **Dr. David Bunn**  Department of Forest Resources Management  Email: [david.bunn@ubc.ca](mailto:david.bunn@ubc.ca)  **Dr. Melissa McHale**  Department of Forest Resources Management  Email: [melissa.mchale@ubc.ca](mailto:melissa.mchale@ubc.ca) | *Teaching Assistant*: TBD  TBD  Office: TBD  Email: [tbd@ubc.ca](mailto:tbd@ubc.ca) |

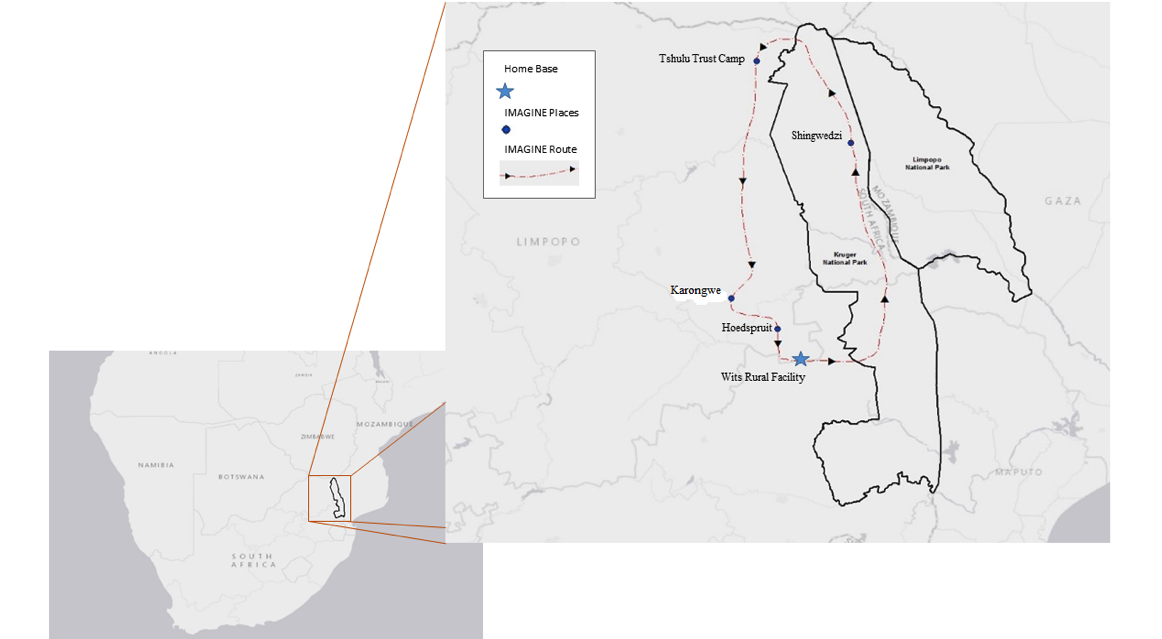
The course is supported by the contribution of several guest speakers, both during the lecture phase in Vancouver and field visits in South Africa. Forestry faculty members Dr. John Innes and Dr. Lorien Nesbitt have expressed willingness to contribute to the field teaching in South Africa. In South Africa, leading local savanna scientists and community leaders will join the course as guest presenters. This team includes, amongst others, Dr. Navashni Govender [Senior Manager, Conservation Services South African National Parks], Nicholas Funda [Chief Ranger, Kruger National Park], Paul Allin [Research Director, Balule Nature Reserve], Dr. Wayne Twine [Wits Rural Facility], Dr. Rhian Twine [Wits Rural Facility], Dr. Tony Swemmer [SAEON], Dr. Danny Govender [General Manager, Scientific Services KNP], Dr. Louise Swemmer [Social and Economic Sciences, SANParks], Dr. Laurence Kruger [Head: OTS South Africa], Dr. Cleo Graf [Senior Scientist, Southern African Wildlife College]

# Course description

This program takes students into the heart of the African savanna biome to learn from rural community members. It will offer insights into the innovative forms of community-based natural resource management emerging in South Africa. Our goal will be to understand the evolving landscapes of conservation in post-apartheid South Africa, and to explore the wicked problems faced by the millions of people living in poverty on the edge of protected areas. Unlike most study-abroad programs in the region, this is not a tour. It combines adventurous travel with immersive field experience, data gathering, and long-term partnerships with rural South African communities.

The main focus is on social-ecological issues facing the 2 million people living on the edge of one of the world’s great game reserves: the Kruger National Park. We’ll spend time interacting with community leaders in Kruger’s southern border villages, studying land use/land cover change in the Greater Kruger National Park region, post-apartheid land restitution, rural resource harvesting, and human-wildlife conflict. Moving through Kruger itself, travelling in open safari vehicles, we’ll experience the reserve’s remarkable biodiversity. Working with South African National Parks scientists, we’ll examine issues around elephant and lion management, and the racial and economic complexities surrounding rhino poaching.

The course offers an intimate experience of different models of “decolonized” conservation management: innovative adaptive management in a national park; work with unarmed anti-poaching teams of black women; an emergent community-conservation project on land returned to tribal authorities in the post-apartheid land claims process; a community-managed research base; and a high end safari tourism lodge. A highlight will be a week of fieldwork in the villages of Hamakuya, close to Zimbabwe. Staying in tents and rural huts, we’ll work with an energetic young team of African environmentalists associated with the Tshulu Trust, helping to support their resource management program.



**Figure 1: Course location in north eastern South Africa**

# Learning outcomes

Pre-South Africa

A successful student will be able to:

* Identify travel requirements and protocols for traveling to South Africa on this program
* Describe in broad terms the pre-colonial, colonial, and pre-apartheid history and culture of South Africa
* Discuss the relationships among politics, culture and the environment in post 1945 South Africa
* Debate the differences between epochs of post-apartheid conservation policy after Mandela
* Have a more nuanced understanding of race, gender, culture, language, and lifestyle in rural South Africa

South Africa

A successful student will be able to:

* Describe the social, political, and cultural history of South Africa in the pre- and post-apartheid years, and the impact of this history on present-day environmental management, land restitution policy, and justice
* Have a broad understanding of the links between colonial fortress-conservation methods, and current forms of neo-colonial green militarism, continuing displacements of rural people, and transboundary protected area management
* Be able to compare and contrast different emergent forms of collaborative conservation management, in South Africa and elsewhere
* Explain how ethnographic methods can be implemented in communities in South Africa to share their stories of place, people, and the environment
* Evaluate community-based natural resource programs in Africa, considering a range of success stories, failures, and lessons learned
* Interact with a variety of interdisciplinary scientists, managers, non-profits, and communities while researching complex natural resource challenges in the Greater Kruger National Park Social-Ecological System
* Collect and analyze wildlife camera data along an urban gradient, showing the complex relationships between people and wildlife along the border of Kruger National Park
* Analyze the specific challenges faced by the people of HaMakuya, Limpopo Province, and work with the Tshulu Trust to contemplate integrative long-term sustainable solutions in the region
* Describe the relationship between rural household metabolism (including resource harvesting) and pressures on biodiversity in protected areas

Post-South Africa

A successful student will be able to:

* Reflect on the overall learning experience in South Africa and evaluate lessons learned in the context of Canadian environmental policies and cultural norms
* Communicate complex social-ecological challenges and insights to a broader audience
* Develop the critical thinking skills for (1) reading, analyzing, and interpreting readings and (2) articulating and defending one’s positions in writing, in-class discussions, and oral presentations.
* Participate in class discussions while respecting the views of others.
* Have a greater appreciation of diversity, inclusion, and cultural awareness in the seminar topic.

# Course structure and Calendar

## 5. 1. Main Program Field and Residential Sites

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| **Greater Kruger National Park [GKNP]** | This is the general geographical context for the programme. The GKNP is an integrated network of reserves encompassing 22,686 km2 of low-lying savannas in eastern South Africa. At its core is the internationally renowned Kruger National Park [KNP] covering 20 000 km2, with rich savanna biodiversity, including 147 mammal species, 500 species of birds, 116 reptiles, 34 amphibians, 49 fish, 457 types of trees and shrubs, and 1 500 smaller plants. It has a long history of world-class research on savanna ecology and, in particular, adaptive management of ecosystems. |
| **Skukuza Science Leadership Initiative [SSLI] research base** | The SSLI research base in the Kruger National Park is a partnership of South African National Parks (SANParks), the Organization for Tropical Studies, and the Nsasani Trust, with additional funding from the US National Science Foundation. It accommodates 40 researchers/students, with dining halls, a substantial laboratory equipped to support biodiversity research generally, including, amongst others, avian and small mammal haemo- and ectoparasites, plant life history traits, and pollination and dispersal ecology. Specialist equipment includes: camera traps, licor leaf area and photosynthesis meters, rodent trapping equipment, bat acoustic monitoring equipment, and research vehicles. |
| **Wits Rural Facility (University of the Witwatersrand)** | Wits Rural Facility (WRF) is the rural campus of the University of the Witwatersrand. It supports a wide range of research, student training and community engagement, and is situated in the far north-east of South Africa, in the central lowveld of Limpopo Province, close to the Kruger National Park.  Infrastructure includes extensive accommodation, conference facilities, a restaurant, offices, and laboratory space.  The facilities are situated on a 350-hectare game reserve, flanked by commercial private game reserves and the rural communities of Bushbuckridge local municipality. *UBC professor Dr. David Bunn was the previous research director of this facility.* |
| **Olifants Camp, Kruger National Park** | This KNP tourist camp is on a hilltop overlooking the river. Thatched bungalows fitted with en-suite facilities and kitchenettes **afford panoramic views.** 3 distinct ecotypes are found here: mopane woodland in the north; in the south, basalt plains with buffalo, giraffe kudu, plains game and all the major carnivores; and the riparian vegetation of the Olifants River which is rich in wildlife such as leopard and lion, crocodiles and hippos, with prolific birdlife. |
| **Shingwedzi Research Camp, Kruger National Park** | The programme will have exclusive access to this small SANParks research camp, with fixed tents and bungalows for accommodation. There is a small laboratory, and kitchens and an outdoor dining boma. The nearby Shingwedzi river and Kanniedood dam offer excellent game viewing and the opportunity to study water provision complexities. |
| **Tshulu Camp, Hamakuya** | The Tshulu Wilderness Camp is managed and run by the local community through the Tshulu Trust. Situated on the banks of the Mutale River near the village of Tshianzwane, the camp is in a pristine natural area surrounded by lebombo ironwood groves, baobabs, and mopane woodlands. Tshulu Camp is a sustainable ecotourism venture: the camp is solar-powered, with spacious ‘meru-style’ tents on raised platforms. The camp offers vital employment for nearby villagers. It is staffed by local community members and provides income for more than 60 impoverished households annually through hosted homestays for visiting students. *Dr. David Bunn was the co-founder of this camp, with local leaders, and he and Dr. Melissa McHale have worked here for decades.* |
| **Lekgalameetse** | Lekgalameetse Provincial Park is a conserved mountain wilderness area in the northern [Drakensberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drakensberg) mountains of [Limpopo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limpopo) Province, South Africa. Current amenities include self-catering accommodation, a bush camp with log cabins beside a stream, farmhouses serving as guest houses, and a camp for school outings. Crucially, the reserve was returned to local community control in the post-apartheid land claims process. |
| **Olifants West Private Reserve and Black Mambas anti-poaching unit** | Olifants West is part of the Associated Private Nature Reserves network. The Black Mambas Anti-Poaching Unit is a world famous, unarmed women’s anti-poaching unit founded by Transfrontier Africa NPC and popularized by *National Geographic* documentaries. The UBC programme will spend a full day here, joining in foot patrols and wire snare collection. |
| **Thornybush Nature Reserve** | This exclusive nature reserve in the APNR, close to Wits Rural, exemplifies the high end and most luxurious aspects of safari tourism, with all of its attendant problems. |

**5.2. Schedule: Lectures and Activities**

Pre-Trip (gray): 9 contact hours (6 X 1.5 hour meetings)

Trip (green): 4 weeks

Post-Trip (blue): 8 online or in-person contact hours

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| **Approximate Dates** | **Location** | **Activities and Content** | **Assignments and Reading** |
| **Week 1,2**: April/May 2023 [TBD] | UBC Campus | 1. Preparation, health and safety, course overview and deliverables 2. UBC Global presentation 3. Lectures: precolonial and colonial environmental history of South Africa; post 1945 politics, culture, environment [Bunn] 4. Ethics of data collecting and field work [McHale] 5. tshiVenda and Shangaan language phrase book 6. Workshop on rural southern Africa: race, gender, household metabolism [Bunn/McHale] | Review pre-trip portion of syllabus and be prepared to schedule class and meeting times Explore ideas on keeping journals:  https://penzu.com/travel-journal-guide  <https://www.tripsavvy.com/writing-a-travel-journal-like-a-pro-4059287>  Assignment – Read Gupta and Ferguson (1997), “The Field as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology”  Assignment – Read Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* |
| **Week 3** : May 9-10 | Vancouver to Johannesburg, SA | Overnight accommodation in Johannesburg; next day flight to Skukuza research base |  |
| May 11-13 | Skukuza Science Leadership Initiative base [SSLI], Kruger National Park [KNP] | Course overview; intro to Kruger Park; bushwalks in open savanna (savanna ecosystems, catena sequence, basic plant and animal ID); morning and evening game drives; camera trap installation, data practice. **Lectures**: Dr. Navashni Govender (chief fire scientist, KNP), Nicholas Funda (head, anti-poaching), Dr. Laurence Kruger (head, OTS South Africa); Dr. Melissa McHale (UBC) **Field visits**: Jongilanga Tribal Authority; granite and basalt long-term KNP exclosure sites; rhino enclosure camps |  |
| **Week 4**: May 14-16 | Wits Rural Facility [WRF] Research Base | **Focus**: Conservation and people, urbanization and wildlife, rural livelihoods, public health.  Field camera trap installation, WRF and neighboring tribal communal lands. Field walks WRF.  **Lectures**: Dr. Wayne Twine – Rural livelihoods and resource harvesting; Dr. Rhian Twine: rural public health; Dr. Louise Swemmer (KNP beneficiation programmes); Dr Tony Swemmer (SAEON); Dr. Cleo Graf (termites as landscape engineers); camera trap installation Welverdiend village.  **Field trips**: Lekgalameetse community nature reserve (land claims and reparation, sustainable ecotourism); Moholoholo wildlife rehab centre; | Reading – Hunter et al 2011; Shackleton et al. 2004; Swemmer 2011; Swemmer et al. 2015; Award 2007; Laituri and Sternlieb 2012  Assignments – Reflection, Write in journals |
| May 17 | Wits Rural | **Focus –** People and conservation, urbanization and wildlife, the rhino wars, community policing  **All-Day Field Trip** – Balule Nature Reserve: patrolling and wire snare removal with Black Mambas, women’s anti-poaching team  **Lecture**: Paul Allin (Research Manager, Olifants West Private Nature Reserve) | Reading – Cousins et al 2012 Ramutsindela 2002; Robins et al 2008; Child & Barnes 2010; Kreuter et al 2011  Reading – Funston et al 2013; Koot 2010; Mossaz et al 2015 |
| May 18-19 | Olifants Camp, Kruger National Park | **Focus** – basalt plains and plains game; strategic adaptive management in Kruger National Park; waterhole closures and tourist viewing economies; the savanna by night  **Travel** - All Day Game Drive Through Kruger National Park  **Evening bush barbecue**: Olifants river remote site  **Lecture**: Kruger National Park, policies and conservation, history, policies apartheid legacies | Assignments – Reflection, Write in journals |
| May 20 | Olifants Camp, Kruger National Park | **Morning bush walk:** riparian systems  **Lecture:** Megaherbivores and Major Problems (Bunn) | \*Group discussion: research paper topics |
| **Week 5**: May 20-May 23 | Shingwedzi Research Camp, Kruger National Park | **Focus:** Social-ecological analyses, the urban continuum, ecosystem services, communities and natural resource challenges, politics and ethnicity, mixed-methods  **Afternoon Lectures** – Social-ecological systems, and urbanization around Kruger National Park; Democratization of ecosystem services (McHale);  New wildlife economy (Bunn and McHale); anthropological perspectives on wildlife and witchcraft beliefs (Bunn);  Social-ecological methods, interviews, surveys, focus groups (McHale); the Rhino Wars(Bunn, Nicholas Funda).  **Fireside Discussion** – Race and conservation: my life as a black game ranger (Thomas Ngobeni) | Reading – Bunn 2008; Carruthers 2007; Israel 2009;  Assignments – Reflection, Write in journals  \*2 blogs submitted for website  Reading – Bunn *et al*. 2022; Biggs et al. 2013; Rademeyer 2016; Duffy et al 2015  Assignments – Reflection, Write in journals  Reading – McHale et al. 2013; McHale et al. 2015; McHale et al. in review; Hunter et al. 2010; Steelman et al. 2014; Reitveld et al. 2008; Collins et al. 2011  Assignments – Reflection, Write in journals |
| **Week 6**: May 24-May 27 | HaMakuya, Tshulu Research Base | **Travel** – Full day drive through Kruger National Park and up into HaMakuya region  **Fireside Discussion –** HaMakuya, homestays; mixed methods interviewing, focus group, and Photovoice methodologies. | \*Practice and discuss interview methods with local translators |
| May 25,26 | HaMakuya,  Homestays | **Focus** – Community development, cultural immersion experience, rural household metabolism, energy use, water use, and resource harvesting, indigenous plant use, sustainable tourism, politics and ethnicity  **Family Homestay** – live in village with a homestay family, participate in daily life, conduct interviews, record experiences | Assignments – Reflection, Write in journals  \*Household interviews: mixed method, and focus group; Photovoice |
| May 27 | HaMakuya, Tshulu Research Base | Reflection on and discussion of homestay experience and interviews; models of community based natural resource management; tribal authorities and tourists | **Group presentations**: photovoice record of homestay |
| May 28, May 29 | ThornybushPrivate Game Reserve | **Focus** – High-end wildlife tourism experiences; black bodies, neocolonialism and the “safari” experience  **Lecture**: Robin van den Berg, and Claudia Schnell, private guiding, bush safety, and international tourist expectations  **Morning Travel**  **Set up camera traps on arrival**  **Afternoon Game Drives** | Reading: Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Snyman 2012 –  Assignments – Reflection, Write in journals Reading: Selections from Gardiner et al, *Selling the Serengeti* (online access) |
| **Week 6**: May 30, May 31 | SSLI Skukuza [KNP] | **Focus –** Land claims and communities, co-management, stakeholders and stakeholder forums; mitigation of human-wildlife conflict; analysis of camera trap data | Reading: Swemmer and Anthony 2015; Biggs et al 2015;  **Debate**: models of mitigation (illegal rhino horn, ivory, lion bone trafficking, versus community ownership and “farming”)  Assignments – Reflection, Write in journals; Reading – Morton et al 2016, Reihl et al 2015  \*Peer review: research paper drafts |
| May 30 |  | **Afternoon**: collect camera traps, data analysis  **Final Dinner**: barbecue on banks of Sabi river | Final reflection - blogs due |
| May 31 | UBC campus and online TBD -  Students and Professors will schedule 8 hours of online consulting time over the next 2 weeks | Fly out of Skukuza, to Johannesburg, arriving Canada May 31 |  |
| June 15 |  |  | **Final research paper due** |
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# Course website

All the updated and official information relevant to the course is available via the course’s website, hosted by the Canvas system. All the teaching material, relevant announcements and detailed information not covered in this sylla- bus will be delivered via Canvas.

# Learning materials

## Supplies

Many interactive activities during lecture time and in the field in South Africa, will require the use of a **smartphone**, **tablet** or **laptop** with wireless data connection. Please bring them to all sessions. Students must have access to computers with Word and Excel installed, as well as Acrobat Reader or equivalent for viewing lecture presentations. Students must bring their own laptop to South Africa.

## Textbook and reading

There is no mandatory textbook for the course. (See 5 above for assigned readings).

## Learning analytics

*Learning analytics* includes the collection and analysis of data about learners to improve teaching and learning. Many of these tools capture data about your activity and provide information that can be used to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This course will mostly use **Canvas** as the main learning analytics resource (see course website section above).

# Assessment of learning

The course is evaluated through the following deliverables:

**Journals**: Students will keep **an extensive field journal** to record all aspects of their South Africa experience. Journals must include pre-trip plans, summaries of readings and research on organizations, notes on lectures, and daily reflections.

All journals should have a broad range of entries with a minimum of 30 formal and dated reflections. Each student should include at least: 2 detailed entries covering field observations of animal or bird behavior; 2 detailed entries of social-ecological processes; 2 entries with ethnographic field notes (family structure, household metabolism, organizational and kin structures); 1 interview with a ranger or community conservation member; 10 personal reflections and narratives; quotations and records of sensory experience.

**Blogs**

Students will write **two publicly available blogs** to be posted on our website. Each student will write these two blogs at differing times along their learning journey. These are to be thoughtful reflections on specific learning experiences. Each blog should be submitted with two pictures. Each student will have blogs peer-edited before submitting the final drafts.

**Participation, Leadership, and Fireside Discussions**: Throughout the program we will engage with a host of researchers, managers, rangers, communities, and organizations. Students are expected to be active learners during these experiences, take notes, interact with the guests, and reflect on the lessons from each activity. Further, there are usually times in which each student may find some difficulty with the material we are learning, or may find a particular experience challenging. Students are expected to provide support for their peers having difficulty during these times.

Fireside discussions will be held throughout the program in South Africa. This group reflection time is needed to casually and intimately address some of the course content and experiences. All students are expected to be present and engage fully in these conversations. Sometimes these exercises can elicit strong opinions and emotions, and students will be expected to express kindness and respect to their peers and professors at all times.

Students will be expected to formally keep track of their participation and leadership in their journals. They will be asked to summarize their contributions before leaving South Africa and self-assess their contribution. The professors will formally assess their contributions for a grade.

**Research - Data Collection and Analysis**: As part of this program we collectively contribute to the collection of social and ecological datasets. All students will participate in interviews (and sometimes surveys) with the communities and partners we work with on the border of Kruger. We also focus on group data collection in our travels. In the past we have focused specifically on water and ecosystem services – and students learn about these data and their analysis and impacts in this program. Now, however, our focus is on new models of conservation and human-wildlife interactions along an urbanization gradient. Camera traps will be used to assess presence and absence of indicator species, in specific guilds. Students will be expected to contribute to the collection of these data, the recording and cleaning of these datasets, and to participate in the analyses.

**Photovoice paper: (6-8 pages**) Learning how to communicate across cultural norms and overcome language barriers is a main component of this field experience. Before leaving for South Africa, each student will choose one person from “home” and ask them to take pictures of the significant aspects of their daily life, including especially interactions with animals, wildlife, and rural environments. Students will practice sharing someone else’s story in writing, based on these images. They will present these stories to the homestay families, in South Africa. Then someone in the homestay family will also take pictures (we provide the cameras), focusing on household activities, animals, and objects and events of local interest. These families will then present a story for the students to write about. The final assignment to be graded will include both stories and a reflection on the photovoice project.

**Research Paper: (8-10 pages or 2500 words plus references)** At the conclusion of the course, students will be asked to submit a research paper on a topic that analyzes, interprets, and evaluates an aspect of the course content. Three major topics will be available: 1) a paper that focuses on rural household metabolism and resource harvesting, and the implications of these local practices for collaborative conservation management designs; 2) a life history of a local black ranger, tour guide, or conservation field worker, with respect to the persistence of neo-colonial obstacles to equitable employment in the new wildlife economies of post-apartheid South Africa; 3) a comparative analysis of two contrasting and emergent models of participatory protected area governance that students encountered while in South Africa. Each essay will have a substantial bibliography with a minimum of 20 scientific paper references, and each will make use of data or quotations from interviewing or focus group work earlier in the course. Drafts will be peer edited and discussed by student collaborators before final submission.

**EVALUATION AND GRADING**

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| **Assignment** | **Percentage** |
| Field Journal | 20% |
| Blogs X 2 | 20% |
| Photovoice project | 10% |
| Participation, leadership, fireside discussions | 10% |
| Data collection, analysis, and reflection on methods | 10% |
| Final research paper | 30% |

# University policies

## Code of conduct

The academic enterprise is founded on honesty, civility, and integrity. As members of this enterprise, all students are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work.

Violations of academic integrity lead to the breakdown of the academic enterprise, and therefore serious consequences arise and harsh sanctions are imposed. For example, incidences of plagiarism or cheating may result in total loss of points in an assignment, exam or entire course, and will be referred to the President’s Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences.

To fully understand what plagiarism means and avoid it please visit:

<http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/resource-guides/avoid-plagiarism/>

For a broader guide on general student conduct, go to:

<https://students.ubc.ca/campus-life/student-code-conduct>

## Support

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise, so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community.

Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and stu- dents are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions.

Details of the policies and how to access support are available on the UBC Senate website:

<https://senate.ubc.ca/policies-resources-support-student-success>

## Copyright

All materials of this course (course handouts, lecture slides, assessments, course readings, etc.) are the intellectual property of the Course Instructor or licensed to be used in this course by the copyright owner. Redistribution of these materials by any means without permission of the copyright holder(s) constitutes a breach of copyright and may lead to academic discipline. Recording of any event within our class or field activities is not allowed without the consent of the instructor.