

BIOL 210 Perspectives in Science

Course Plan

Welcome to BIOL 210 for the Fall 2020 semester. We are writing this in the spring of 2020 while the world is shut down because of a pandemic that is impacting nearly everyone on earth. Has there ever been a time when Science has been such an urgent and important topic? What better time than now to be preparing to teach a course focusing on “Perspectives in Science”? What better time for you, as a student, to take a course that focuses on deepening your understanding about how modern science works. You will not forget your Fall 2020 semester. We will not have an in-class learning environment. Rather, this class, like all McGill classes, will be offered virtually. We are committed to giving you the best possible virtual learning experience that we can. We are excited about the innovations that we will be implementing, and about the BIOL 210 course content, which we are adapting to our present situation.

BIOL 210 will provide an in-depth explanation of how science works in society today. It will arm students with the tools to evaluate science both in society and in their own lives. Students will learn how science works and how we communicate about science, who does science, and how it is funded. We will cover topics like: Who owns science, and how do science and politics intersect? We will understand the creative process involved in scientific discovery, and how science builds upon previous knowledge, using relevant, real-world examples. Students will gain an appreciation of so-called “basic science”, which provides the foundation upon which applied science is built. These lessons will be taught through an engaging combination of pre-recorded lectures, and virtual discussions.

We understand that students are worried about course evaluations. Rest assured that we plan to use several different learning evaluations strategies that will be staggered throughout the term, and that will be both fair and interesting. Students will work together in small teams for one assignment, when they will make a virtual presentation. Students will also participate in peer-evaluation, echoing the peer-evaluation upon which science is built. We also plan to employ written assignments and open-book tests. Both professors and TAs will be regularly available for review sessions and office hours.

McGill has made the decision to go to online courses in the Fall of 2020 to ensure that we do all we can to keep you, your friends, and your family safe. By the end of this class, we hope you will have a deeper understanding of the reasons why McGill made this decision, and more broadly, be better able to evaluate science, and how it impacts the world around you. We expect that the Fall 2020 semester of BIOL 210 will be especially poignant, as we deepen our understanding of science, what it is, how it is done, and why it matters. Although right now in the midst of this global pandemic, the answer to “why it matters” has never been clearer.