**Syllabus Excerpts – Student Led Discussion**

Biology 162: Genetic Analysis

Professor Jon Moore

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**Grading**

Participation: 21%

Discussion leader preparation and discussions: 30%

Final paper, intermediate paper deadlines, and final presentation: 49%

**Class Format**

Students tend to learn – and especially retain – material better when they need to engage with it actively instead of having it presented passively. Effective student-led discussions are about as active a form of learning as there is. All classes except the first and last will be student-led discussions of the previously chosen papers.

In most classes, there will be three discussion leaders, one for each paper. Usually discussion leaders will go in the order of the papers.

- Discussion leaders -

Usually as a discussion leader, you will want to read the paper well ahead of time. Then Prof Moore would love to discuss your thoughts, questions, and plans for leading discussion. He might suggest visual aids or other sources that might help. Later, you might not feel the need to discuss. That is fine if you can prepare on your own; still, let Prof Moore know that you do not wish to confer. Regardless, you must be able to clearly discuss the papers, their methods, and the experimental design.

The evening before each discussion, I will send you the reactions of your peers to your paper from your classmates, hopefully by 7:00. Please use these at your discretion in forming your discussion plan. As part of that plan and to stimulate our thinking, the discussion leader will email questions for discussion to the class by noon on the day of the discussion. You can do this through Sakai if you check the box asking for the message to be emailed.

While leading discussion, try to promote conversation, though you may organize that conversation. Some of those conversations might be amongst smaller groups, which is especially valuable for those shyer students. Utilize active learning approaches that you might have had in classes as much as possible, or invent some of your own. PowerPoint-style presentations tend to suppress conversation and are generally discouraged.

Occasionally, you will want to provide background not found in the paper, especially if the understanding of a technique is vital. This is the only case in which I expect that the leader might want to move into a presenter mode. Visual aids are useful at these times. These might include things written on the board, props, or photocopies. If you would like things photocopied for this purpose, please let me know.

As much as possible, Prof Moore does not want to be the authority in the room, and if anyone is, it should be the discussion leader. However, the best discussions are those in which detailed analysis is clear, but there is no clear authority.

One of the best ways to promote that dynamic is to remain egalitarian and positive. Some parts of these papers are difficult; people will at times be confused and give misleading or wrong responses; praise what is right and ask for other answers. Don’t let any one student dominate the discussion.

Please note that as a discussion leader, as exhausting as that might be, you are still responsible for the role of the non-discussion leader for the papers you do not present.

- Discussers -

Each class has a discussion leader but all students need to be prepared to thoroughly discuss the experimental procedures and results in the paper assigned. Read the papers well ahead of time. If you have questions about them and want to discuss it with Prof Moore, he welcomes that.

On a day when reading has been assigned, you should email Prof Moore by 5:00 the afternoon before with a brief reaction to each paper. Your reaction might include a short summary of the main points (Don’t try and get this from the abstract.), things you found interesting and why, and/or a set of questions highlighting things you didn’t entirely understand. Please separate your reactions to each paper with three blank lines and group them in the order of the papers. If you are a presenter, please put “PRESENTER” in the place your reactions would go.

At noon the day of class, you should receive emails with questions for discussion. Please look over those before coming to class.

When in class, be an active participant. Help the conversation to flow, but do not dominate the conversation. Remember, if you’re confused about something, probably someone else is, too. Go ahead and ask.