

Course outline | Ngā Whakamārama 2026

BIOL412-26S1

Research Proposal

0.125 EFTS 15 Points

Course description | Whakamahuki

The course aims to prepare postgraduate students for research by developing a research proposal and delivering an oral presentation. Designed as a compulsory component for BScHons, MSc Part I, and PGDipSci students, it comprises seminars and assessments that build science communication skills. These skills will benefit students progressing to research projects or pursuing other career paths.

Course Coordinator and Teacher | Kairuruku Akoranga me Pūkenga

Professor Tammy Steeves, Room 533 Julius von Haast tammy.steeves@canterbury.ac.nz

Graduate Profile | Āhutatanga Tāura

As a student in this course, I will develop the following [UC Graduate Attributes](#):

- Critically competent in a core academic discipline.
- Employable, innovative and enterprising.
- Biculturally competent and confident: K1 A process of self-reflection on the nature of 'knowledge' and 'norms'; K2 The nature of contemporary Māori organisational structures; K3 Traditional and contemporary realities of Māori society; K4 The Treaty of Waitangi and Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural history; K5 The process of colonisation and globalization; K6 Other indigenous models of development, knowledge, and behaviours; K7 Application of bicultural competence and confidence in a chosen discipline or career.
- Globally aware.

Course Learning Outcomes and Associated Assessment | Hua Akoranga me Aromatawai

As a student in this course, I will develop the ability to:

- Communicate a scientific research proposal for a scientifically-literate audience (*assessment task: oral presentation*).
- Synthesise primary scientific literature to generate a clear and concise argument in support of a perspective (*assessment task: research proposal*).
- Critically evaluate a colleague's work and generate constructive feedback (*assessment task: peer-assessment of draft research proposal draft*).
- Synthesise primary scientific literature to provide in-depth background and context for understanding and critical evaluation of topics in biological sciences (*assessment task: research proposal*).
- Apply an understanding of scientific practice in a bicultural context to the generation of testable hypotheses and to the development of advanced methodologies (*assessment tasks: modules and research proposal*).

Transferable Skills | Pūkenga Ngaio

As a student in this course, I will develop the following skills:

- **Writing a literature review to focus ideas for research proposals.** This is essential for BScHons students and for MSc Pt I students to be fully prepared for Pt II. Beyond University this skill is important for any research-related career, where you will need to write convincing applications for increasingly-limited funding. *We will have in-person tutorials and online modules to provide instruction on the elements of successful research proposals and develop your abilities to identify these elements in group and peer-to-peer activities.*
- **Critical synthesis of information.** In everyday life and in many job situations you will be required to read information from different sources, construct your own understanding and shape your own viewpoint. *In BIOL412, we develop your abilities to identify the essential elements of research outputs and you will use these skills to develop your research proposal.*
- **Research design.** Important for research and in governmental and non-governmental organisations. *We will provide discipline-specific advice on the major elements involved in developing testable questions and designing research projects.*
- **Writing critical summaries of other work.** Clear and constructive written criticism is essential in most professional careers. *In a tutorial, we will provide instruction on the elements of successful critical assessment and help you identify these elements with clear marking rubrics – you will use these in your peer-review of a colleague’s work.*
- **Verbal presentation.** In most careers in science the ability to present findings clearly in verbal form is likely to be critical. *In BIOL412, we provide clear guidance on what makes a good presentation and you will test these skills in your proposal presentation.*

Course Expectations | Mahi ā-Ākonga

Seminar attendance is mandatory, except in exceptional circumstances. If a significant, unavoidable conflict arises, please contact the course coordinator. Students who do not attend all seminars (or obtain a waiver) will not receive a grade.

You will also be held to the same expectations across all 4th year courses, which are:

- Read all assigned materials prior to coming to the session, and come prepared with answers to any guiding questions and further discussion questions
- During seminars, be actively engaged! For example:
 - Ask questions, contribute to the discussion
 - Take notes, acknowledge or emphasise other students’ questions or points
 - Turn camera on if you are on zoom when possible

You are required to allocate 150hrs to this course outside of exams. These hours should include:

- Attending class
- Learning course materials, preparing presentations, reading assigned materials
- Reading additional materials beyond the ones assigned.
- Refreshing yourself on core knowledge
- Working with classmates outside of class

You are now leading your own learning: grow your knowledge, expand your skills, and ask questions!

Assessment | Aromatawai

See *LEARN for details*. Briefly, there are four mandatory assessment items:

1. **Research modules** due end term 1 (**10%**).
2. **Draft research proposal** due end term 1 (**0%**). **Peer-review** of fellow student's draft research proposal due beginning term 2 (**10%**).
3. **Oral presentation** on your research proposal in a mini-conference setting due middle term 2. Brief reflection of four research seminars (attended or recordings) with an emphasis on science communication also due middle term 2. (**20%**).
4. **Final research proposal** due end term 2 (**60%**).

Seminar schedule

See *LEARN for details*. Briefly, there are four mandatory seminars all of which require preparation:

1. **Seminar 1: Building relationships and connections.** Led by Tammy Steeves.
2. **Seminar 2: Preparing a research proposal.** Led by Tammy Steeves.
3. **Seminar 3: Developing culturally responsive research practice.** Led by Tammy Steeves.
4. **Seminar 4: Oral presentation.** Student led.

RULES, REGULATIONS, AND WHAT TO DO WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

[updated January 2026]

If in doubt: ASK! The course coordinator is happy to answer questions. All staff involved in the course are available for advice on specific issues.

What do I do if I have to miss a test/exam or if my performance was impaired?

In Biological Sciences, we require a satisfactory level of achievement in both the theoretical aspects of the discipline and in practical activities. **This means you must attend all class activities (labs, tutorials, fieldtrips)** and submit all items of assessment unless you have a very good reason not to (e.g. medical reasons) and if this has been approved by your course coordinator.

If you feel that **illness, injury, bereavement or other extenuating circumstances beyond your control** prevented you from completing a **test/exam** worth 10% or more of the total course assessment, or if these circumstances affected your performance in such assessments, you should apply for Special Consideration. Applications for Special Consideration should be submitted via the Special Consideration website <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/study/special-consideration/> *within five working days* of the assessment or its due date. You should also notify the course coordinator. If you apply for Special Consideration because of medical reasons, you should visit a doctor within a reasonable timeframe (application form available on the website above or from the Student Health Centre).

The Special Consideration provisions are intended to assist students who have covered the work of a course but have been prevented by illness or other critical circumstances from demonstrating their mastery of the material or skills at the time of a test/exam – **they do not excuse you from doing the test/exam** within a reasonable time agreed with the course coordinator.

What do I do if I have to miss a quiz or assignment or if I need an extension?

You cannot apply for Special Consideration if you miss an assessment that is not a test/exam, such as a quiz, lab report, essay, literature review or other assignment, or if the test/exam is worth less than 10% or more of the total course assessment. If this happens or if you need an extension because of **illness, injury, bereavement or other extenuating circumstances beyond your control**, please contact the course coordinator and arrange an alternate activity and/or submission date. You should also do this if you have to miss a laboratory, tutorial or field trip.

What are other valid reasons to miss an assessment or mandatory course activity?

The Special Considerations policy

(<https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/about/governance/ucpolicy/student/special-consideration-procedures-and-guidelines/>) outlines only a few kinds of activities that UC considers valid reasons for missing an assessment or mandatory course activity other than those outlined above. These include **involvement in international or national representative sport or cultural groups**. Holiday trips, birthday parties, weddings, work-related commitments etc. are not given special status in this University policy. Please contact your course coordinator to ask for an alternate activity and/or submission date if you are eligible.

Special Consideration for late discontinuation of a course

Students prevented by **extenuating circumstances** from completing the course after the final date for withdrawing, may apply for Special Consideration for late discontinuation of the course. Applications must be submitted via <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/study/special-consideration/> no later than five working days after the examination period has finished.

Academic Integrity

It is the responsibility of each student to be familiar with the definitions, policies and procedures concerning academic misconduct/dishonest behaviour. Instances of academic misconduct will be dealt with in a serious and appropriate manner. Students should refer to:

<https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/about/ako/academic-quality/academic-integrity/>

Plagiarism

It is essential that you are aware that plagiarism is considered a very serious offence by the academic community, the University and the School of Biological Sciences. Plagiarism is defined as taking content from another work or author and presenting it, without attribution, as if it is your own work. Content here includes text (sentences or major parts of sentences), display items (graphs and tables), and overall structure (the detailed sequence of ideas). Plagiarism includes:

- re-use of previous assignments (even if each individual sentence has been rephrased to say the same thing in different words, if the overall structure is re-used).
- copying of another student's work (with or without their consent).
- the unreferenced use of published material or material from the internet, e.g. cutting and pasting of paragraphs or pages into an essay.

For most pieces of in-term assessment you will be given information concerning the use of direct and indirect quotes from previously published work. If you have any doubt about the appropriate use of published material, please speak with an academic staff member. If you are unsure what plagiarism is, seek advice.

Generative AI tools cannot be used for writing assessments

In the assessments for this course, you are strictly prohibited from using generative artificial intelligence (AI) to generate any content related to the assessment. Although you may use AI to help search for and generate references, the use of AI-generated content in the text of an assessment is not permitted and may be considered a breach of academic integrity. Please ensure that all work submitted is the result of your own knowledge, skills, and efforts.

It is a School policy that you submit work electronically for subsequent analysis of originality using *Turnitin*. Students agree that by taking courses in BIOL, assessments may be submitted to Turnitin.com for textual similarity review. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Terms and Conditions of Use as posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Where do I hand in assignments and then collect them once marked?

All assignments should be submitted as directed by the course coordinator. Typically, this will be electronically via Learn for on-line grading and for analysis in *Turnitin*. If a hard copy is requested, assignments should be placed in the designated collection boxes in the foyer of the 2nd floor of the School of Biological Sciences (Julius von Haast building, at the top of the stairs). All assignments must be accompanied by a cover sheet signed by you stating that the submitted work is not plagiarised. Cover sheets are available on top of the collection boxes.

Marked assignments will be returned through Learn or, if in hard copy, can be collected from the School of Biological Sciences reception, unless directed otherwise by the course coordinator. Teaching staff will endeavour to return work as soon as possible, and should contact you if there are likely to be any delays that will prevent return within the maximum 4-week timeframe.

What if I can't get it finished in time?

Reports and assignments should be handed in on time. Extensions may be granted if you have a valid reason (see above). **If you require an extension, you should request one from the course coordinator** (or the lecturer responsible for marking the work), with as much notice as possible. Please do this BEFORE the deadline for the assignment. **If you have been given an extension and you have been asked to submit a hard-copy of your work, you should hand the work DIRECTLY to the course coordinator** (do not put it in the drop box as it may not be cleared after the due date).

If an extension has not been granted:

- work handed in within 1 hour of the deadline: penalty of up to 5 percentage points of the mark for the assignment (e.g., a mark of 75% might be reduced to 70%).
- work handed in 1 – 24 hours after the deadline: penalty of 10 percentage points of the mark for the assignment (e.g., a mark of 75% is reduced to 65%).
- work handed in 1 – 7 days after the deadline: penalty of 15 percentage points of the mark for the assignment (e.g., a mark of 75% is reduced to 60%).
- work handed in more than 7 days after the deadline will not be marked or earn credit.

What if I have written more than the word or page limit?

If there is a word limit on an assignment, it is usually there to stop you doing too much work and to encourage you to write succinctly. You can be up to 10% over without too much worry, but if the length increases beyond that your mark may suffer due to failure to follow the requirements. If you find yourself way over the word limit talk to the lecturer concerned about how to get your assignment to an acceptable length. Unless specifically advised that there is flexibility, you must adhere to the word limit indicated.

What if I fail part of the course?

In Biological Sciences, we require a satisfactory level of achievement in both the theoretical aspects of the discipline and in practical activities. This means you must attend all class activities and submit all items of assessment unless you have a very good reason not to (e.g. medical reasons). **A student must attain an average score of at least 40% for in-course assessments (e.g. assignments, reports, quizzes) and an average score of at least 40% in the exam and/or tests, AND score at least 50% overall for the course, to be awarded a passing grade. See the course outlines for clarification of the assessment items included in each category and ask the coordinator if you are still unsure.**

What's the best way to give feedback?

We welcome constructive feedback at all times – help us to make this a valuable course for you. We endeavour to remain approachable at all times. If you would rather give feedback anonymously, please use the online course survey or talk to lab demonstrators, or your class rep (who will all report back to the staff-student liaison committee that includes a representative from each of the undergraduate classes). Class representatives will be selected from each class at the start of course.

What's the best way to complain?

If you feel you have not been fairly treated during this course, please raise the issue with the lecturer or course coordinator in the first instance. Other avenues include your class rep., who can raise issues anonymously, or the UCSA education coordinator.

Grading

A+	90% or above
A	85 – 90
A-	80 – 84
B+	75 – 79
B	70 – 74
B-	65 – 69
C+	60 – 64
C	55 – 59
C-	50 – 54

A restricted pass (R) **may** be awarded to those who are close to a pass (i.e. an overall score of 48-49.9%) AND who have achieved at least a 40% overall score in both in-course assessment and tests/exams. If an R grade is awarded you gain credit for the course but **cannot continue into papers that require this course as a pre-requisite**. NB. The R grade is only available at 100 and 200 level - it cannot be awarded for third year papers.

Failing grades: D 40-49 E 0-39