

Earth Sciences 1086F: Origin and Geology of the Solar System

Instructor

Tony Withers, Department of Earth Sciences.

To contact the instructor use the OWL messaging tool, not email.

Please read the syllabus before asking or posting a question.

TAs

Each course participant will be assigned a TA soon after the start of the course. TA assignments will be announced after the add-drop deadline.

Communication with the TAs and course instructor will take place through the on-line portal (using the OWL 'messages' tool).

Course Description

This half-course will explore the Solar System; we will look at our star (the Sun), the planets and their satellites, and other bodies such as asteroids and comets. We will consider the hypotheses and theories that attempt to explain their origins. We will see how our knowledge of Earth's geology applies to other planetary bodies in the Solar System. We will end the course with a discussion of potential extraterrestrial life. As technology improves and as more and more space vehicles probe beyond Earth, knowledge expands dramatically. We will note new hypotheses and new exploration data with postings on the course forum.

This half-course emphasizes qualitative approaches to the topics included, thus is appropriate for all students, irrespective of backgrounds. The course is offered *online only*. Course content is available *online only*. It is your responsibility to maintain access to the internet for the duration of the course.

Course Objectives

- The primary goal of the course is to gain an appreciation of what we know about the Solar System, and how we know what we know.
- We will learn to recognise the processes of evolution of a star-planet system, and we will see that the evolution we know best – that of Earth – may not apply well elsewhere.
- We need to understand the logic of a scientific study: from observation and gathering of evidence to hypothesis and, eventually, refined theory.
- We will learn to write scientific reports; an assigned topic will be researched and presented in scientific format.
- We will take part in online discussions about new developments in planetary exploration.

Grading

- Mid-term examination: 35%
- Final examination: 35%
- Written assignment: 20% (10% for first submission of essay and 10% for revised version)
- Graded quizzes: 5%
- Participation in forum: 5%
- The written assignment must be completed to pass the course

Exams

- The mid-term exam will cover the first half of the course (Chapters 1-9), and the final exam will cover the second half of the course (Chapters 10-19).
- Both the mid-term and final exams may include fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, and longer format written answer questions.

Quizzes

- There are 8 graded quizzes. The first three quizzes (1-3a) and the remaining five quizzes (3b-7) have different due dates - see "Important Dates" below. You can take these at any time between the release date and the relevant deadline, but it is recommended that you take them as you read through the chapters. There are also 8 self-tests; these are not graded, and are available to you as practice quizzes.
- Spelling and grammar count on the quizzes! These are online quizzes, so misspelled words will not be recognized.
- The quizzes are automatically administered through the OWL system. **Don't wait to submit your quizzes until the last minute!** Last minute computer problems will not be accepted as grounds for accommodation. Quizzes submitted after the deadline will be penalised **one mark per day**.

Essay

- The essay may be submitted any time up to 5 minutes before midnight of the due date for first submission (see "Important Dates" below); after the due date a penalty of **minus 5 marks per day** will be applied. Late penalties may be reduced only upon the recommendation of an academic counsellor. Questions about the essay should be posted to the forum or communicated to your TA in an OWL message.
- A revised version of the essay may be submitted at any time up to the final submission deadline. If no revisions are made, the grade for the final version will be the same as that for the first version. **Even if you decide not to make any revisions, you must resubmit your essay before the second deadline.**
- When you submit your report, you will get a Turnitin score. Scores of up to 30% are not unusual in this kind of writing, but scores in excess of 40% could indicate a problem. Your TA will use the Turnitin report to check for originality in the written content. **If evidence of plagiarism is found, you will get an automatic zero, and you will be reported to the Dean.** Plagiarism is a serious offense (see note on plagiarism below), and is treated seriously in this class.
- All essay submissions must be made through the OWL submission system. Mail attachments will not be graded.
- Submission problems must be communicated to the instructor and TA before the deadline.
- Revising your essay to improve its content, based on feedback from your TA, is an opportunity both to improve your writing and to increase your grade.
- Every effort will be made to complete the grading of the essay in a timely fashion. Grades and feedback will be released online, in most cases within four weeks following submission.

- Completion of the essay assignment is required to pass the course.

Online Forums

The OWL website has a forum feature that you can use to discuss topics related to class material with your classmates. Feel free to ask each other questions, answer other people's questions, and make comments. I will be monitoring the forum at least three times per week, and all class participants are required to read and contribute to the forum. If you have any questions, you can message me directly (using the OWL message system) and I will respond. Before sending a message, consider posting your query to the forum where you may get a quicker response and allow other students to benefit from the discussion. Some information may be communicated only through the forum, so **be sure to check regularly for new forum posts**. Please keep your comments clean, respectful, and on-topic.

- You are required to make at least one original post in the **Space Exploration in the News** topic before **November 15**. **Your contributions to this topic will be graded.**

Important dates

- Essay submission deadline: **Sunday, October 11**
- Quizzes 1-3a: **Sunday, October 18**
- Mid-term test: to be confirmed, provisionally **Saturday, October 24**
- Graded forum post deadline: **Sunday, November 15**
- Revised essay final deadline: **Sunday, November 22**
- Quizzes 3b-7: **Sunday, November 29**

Final exam date will be set by the Registrar's office (UWO's exam period runs **December 11 to 22**, but exams for distance courses such as this may fall outside of this period). Please check the exam period on the [distance studies web page](#) before making any travel arrangements!

Academic offences

Electronic devices are not permitted during either the mid-term or end-of-term examinations. These include cell-phones, iPads, tablets, and iPods. They must be turned off and put in your bags. **They are not allowed in your pocket.**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

<http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/pdf/academicintegrity.pdf>

Plagiarism is a **serious academic offence**. The UWO Senate Academic Handbook defines plagiarism as "The act of appropriating the literary composition of another, or parts or passages of his writings, or the ideas or language of the same, and passing them off as the product of one's own mind." Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt by using proper referencing. For more information see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar.

Please note: When you write your essay, you are **not** allowed to copy and paste **ANYTHING** (even if it's just a sentence!) from **ANYWHERE**. This includes text from websites, papers, books, other students, etc.

You are not allowed to copy and paste paragraphs and then change several words. You must gather ideas for your report then **write the entire paper in your own words**. If *any* part of your paper is determined to be plagiarized, that part of your paper will **NOT** be marked. **NO EXCEPTIONS!**

Plagiarism-checking software will be used for the essay assignment. Papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between Western University and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Students' responsibilities in the event of a medical issue

If you are unable to meet a course requirement due to illness or other serious circumstances, you must provide valid medical or other supporting documentation to an academic counsellor as soon as possible *and* contact your instructor immediately. It is the student's responsibility to make alternative arrangements with their instructor once the accommodation has been approved and the instructor has been informed. In the event of a missed final exam, a "Recommendation of Special Examination" form must be obtained immediately. A list of forms can be found here:

http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/general-information/forms_listing.html

No accommodations will be given without documentation, and you must contact the instructor before the deadline or exam, unless you are physically unable to do so.

A student requiring academic accommodation due to illness should use the Student Medical Certificate when visiting an off-campus medical facility or request a Records Release Form for visits to Student Health Services. The form can be found here:

https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/medical_document.pdf

Exam conflicts

If you have an examination conflict you must contact an academic counsellor to determine how the conflict should be resolved. If a make-up exam is offered for the midterm, the date of the make-up may be determined after the date of the missed exam.

Support Services

The course is available (upon registration) at <https://owl.uwo.ca/portal>.

Help with computer problems encountered either during initial setup or during the course should be addressed to ITS: <http://www.uwo.ca/its/>

General information about Distance Studies courses, including viewing exam schedules, is available at: http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/applying/distance_studies/

The Web site for Registrarial Services is found at: <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services provided by the USC are listed here: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Instructions for how to contact the Student Development Centre are given here: <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Accessibility Statement

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 661-2111 x82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

Course Outline

Each Unit contains an Introduction, a Self-Test and a Graded Quiz. The study guides in the Unit Introductions are a starting off point for you to begin your studies. Remember that ALL material is testable; it is not limited to that which is in the study guide.

1. Unit 1: Basic concepts
 - Chapter 1 – Scientific Theory and the Big Bang
 - Chapter 2 – Time and Space
 - Chapter 3 – Matter and the Nebular Hypothesis

2. Unit 2: The Solar System
 - Chapter 4 – A Star called Sun
 - Chapter 5 – Geometry of the Solar System

3. Unit 3: The Terrestrial Planets
 - Chapter 6 – When two planets collide
 - Chapter 7 – Earth
 - Chapter 8 – The Moon
 - Chapter 9 – Mercury
 - Chapter 10 – Venus
 - Chapter 11 – Mars

* the Mid-term exam covers up to the end of Chapter 9 *

4. Unit 4: From Asteroids to Meteorites
 - Chapter 12 – Asteroids
 - Chapter 13 – Meteorites

5. Unit 5: The Gas Giant Planets
 - Chapter 14 – Jupiter and family
 - Chapter 15 – Saturn and family
 - Chapter 16 – Uranus and Neptune

6. Unit 6: Plutoids, TNOs and Comets
 - Chapter 17 – Plutoids and TNOs
 - Chapter 18 – Comets

7. Unit 7: Extraterrestrial Life

- Chapter 19 – Life in the Universe

Suggested weekly schedule

Classes start September 10

Introductory materials and familiarise yourself with course site on OWL

* start work on the essay as soon as your schedule will allow *

Week 1, starts September 14

Chapter 1

Week 2, starts September 21

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Quiz 1

Week 3, starts September 28

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Quiz 2

Week 4, starts October 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

* Deadline for essay submission: **Sunday, October 11** *

Week 5, starts October 12

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Quiz 3a

* Deadline for Quizzes 1-3a: **Sunday, October 18** *

Week 6, starts October 19

Chapter 10

Prepare for midterm test (content from Chapters 1-9)

Week 7, starts October 26

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Quiz 3b

Week 8, starts November 2

Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Quiz 4

Week 9, starts November 9

Chapter 15
Chapter 16
Quiz 5

* deadline for posting to Space Exploration forum topic: **Sunday, November 15***

Week 10, starts November 16

Chapter 17
Chapter 18
Quiz 6

* Deadline for revised essay: **Sunday, November 22***

Week 11, starts November 23

Chapter 19
Quiz 7

Week 12, starts November 30

Prepare for final exam

* Deadline for Quizzes 3b-7: **Sunday, November 29***

Exam period:

Provisionally **December 11-22**. * Please check the exam period on the [distance studies web page](#) before making any travel arrangements! Note that the exam period for distance courses may differ from the exam period in the academic calendar.