

GEOG 303 CONSERVATION AND ECOLOGY OF WHALES
FALL 2026

Instructor: Dr. Christopher D. Malcolm

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Office hours: By [Zoom](#), by appointment arranged through email

Lecture format: online, through [Zoom](#)*, Wednesdays, 9:00am to 11:50am PDT

* This is a different Zoom link than my Office Hours

This course will introduce and examine the role cetaceans play in marine ecosystems and their relationship with humans. We will begin with the evolution of whales and then proceed through their biology and ecology. In addition, we will address the important relationship between humans and cetaceans, as well as the impacts humans have had on their habitats and populations. Thus, we will critically explore how we have (or have not) and must continue to conserve them.

In this class, we:

acknowledge and respect the Lək'wəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the University of Victoria stands, and the Lək'wəŋən and WSÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day,

and

acknowledge that Brandon University is located on Treaty 2, a traditional gathering place for diverse Indigenous peoples, including the Dakota, Anishanabek, Oji-Cree, Cree, Dene and Metis peoples. Teaching and learning at Brandon University is possible because of the treaties and the continued contributions of Indigenous people to this place. In acknowledging the treaties and the many Indigenous peoples that share this territory with Brandon University, we respect the teachings of these lands and their influence on the health of the environment and the people who inhabit this place.

These land acknowledgements are especially important to consider when we are discussing the management of natural resources such as wild cetaceans, their prey, and habitats, which may hold traditional values. Acknowledging Indigenous relationships with the land and water, and committing to learning about Indigenous ways of knowing, is a critical first step in reconciliation.

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed through two short assignments (instructions below) and two tests.

The assignments are due October 14 and November 18, by 11:59pm. Each assignment is worth 15%.

Test #1 is scheduled for October 21 and will be administered online during class time, earning 35% of the total grade. Test #1 will cover Topics 1 through 3.

Test #2 will be online during the exam period after lectures end and is also worth 35%. Test #2 will cover Topics 4 through 6.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Zoom lectures will be recorded in case you miss one for some reason. The recordings will be available on the course Brightspace page.

PDF files of lecture slides will be available on Brightspace before the class in which they are presented, so you can add notes beyond what is contained on the slides

Students are expected to attend lectures to obtain the material required for the tests.

As the lecture material varies far and wide, there is no textbook for this course.

Topic 1: What is a whale?

- What makes a whale a whale?
- Evolution of whales
- Taxonomy, physiology, and anatomy

Topic 2: Behaviour and Communication

- Ranges & migration
- Social behaviour and communication

Topic 3: Feeding Ecology and Ecological Niche

- Diet, foraging, and feeding
- Ecological roles in marine ecosystems and niche

Test #1: October 21, online during class time

- **Coverage:** Topics 1 through 3.

Topic 4: Human Impacts on Whales

- Ancient to modern whaling
- Impacts of pollution
- Ship strikes and entanglement
- Prey loss
- Potential impacts of climate change
- Cetaceans in captivity

Topic 5: Conservation Strategies and Management

- Save the Whales, IWC
- Protected areas

Topic 6: Whale Watching Ecotourism

- Research on the effects of whale watching on whale behaviour
- Research on human dimensions of whale watching

Test #2: Online during exam period. Date, time, and location TBA

- **Coverage:** Topics 4 through 6.

ASSIGNMENTS

Please submit your assignment as a Word or PDF document. Late assignments receive an automatic reduction of 10% per day the assignment is late. Weekends are counted as one day.

Please submit both assignments through Brightspace. Name your file in the following manner: MalcolmCGEOG303Asst#1, using your last name and first initial, and either 1 or 2 for the assignment number.

Assignment 1: Cetacean Species Profile (Due October 17 by 11:59 pm)

Create a two-page profile of any cetacean species, including its range, habitat, diet, behaviour, and conservation status.

- Include a range map that takes up no more than ¼ of the page; you can find one on the web, but be sure to reference it.
- Include in-text citations from at least three peer-reviewed sources (aside from the map), using APA reference format

Assignment 2: Human Impact Analysis (Due November 18 by 11:59 pm)

Write a two-page analysis detailing the impact(s) of a specific human activity (e.g., shipping, pollution, whale watching) on a particular cetacean species/population and present two conservation strategies (your own or ones you find recommended in literature). If the species has multiple populations in different ranges (e.g., killer whales, humpback whales), then choose one population in one range only.

- Include in-text citations from at least three peer-reviewed sources, using APA reference format

IMPORTANT STUFF

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

It is every student's responsibility to be aware of the university's policies on academic integrity, including policies on **cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized use of an editor, multiple submission, and aiding others to cheat.**

Policy on Academic Integrity: web.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html

If you have any questions or doubts, talk to me, your course instructor. For more information, see uvic.ca/learningandteaching/cac/index.php.

Plagiarism

Academic dishonesty (plagiarism, cheating) is a very serious matter in any academic institution and is dealt with severely at the University of Victoria.

The responsibility of the institution: Instructors and academic units have the responsibility to ensure that standards of academic honesty are met. By doing so, the institution recognizes students for their hard work and assures them that other students do not have an unfair advantage through cheating on essays, exams, and projects.

The responsibility of the student: Plagiarism sometimes occurs due to a misunderstanding regarding the rules of academic integrity, but it is the responsibility of the student to know them. If you are unsure about the standards for citations or for referencing your sources, ask me, your instructor.

Plagiarism includes students submitting an assignment produced through an AI platform (e.g. ChatGPT) as their own creation.

Infractions will be dealt with in accordance with University policy. Commonly, the penalty for any form of cheating/plagiarism is a grade of F on the tests or assignments, or a final grade of F

in the course. However, depending on the severity of the case, other penalties may include a record on the student's transcript or expulsion.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

ACCESSIBILITY

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a documented disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) as soon as possible (uvic.ca/services/cal/). The CAL staff is available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

POSITIVITY AND SAFETY

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing and protecting a positive and safe learning and working environment for all its members.

SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE RESOURCE OFFICE (SVRO)

If you have been directly or indirectly impacted by sexualized violence, reach out to the SVRO for information, advice, resolution options (restorative and disciplinary) as well as support options and referrals. The SVRO is both survivor-centred and trauma-informed in their approach.

eqhr01@uvic.ca

Sedgewick C Wing

www.uvic.ca/svp

EQUITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS (EQHR)

UVic Equity and Human Rights is a resource for students, staff and faculty who have experienced discrimination and harassment and are looking for informal and formal resolution options as well as advice, coaching and/or education. We are available for confidential consultations so that you can ask questions and learn your options.

eqhr01@uvic.ca

Sedgewick C Wing

www.uvic.ca/equity

RESOURCES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The University of Victoria offers a number of resources to support international students as they pursue their studies. UVic's [International Centre for Students](#) is the primary office supporting international students on campus at the university-wide level and provides various supportive program through the [UVic Global Community Initiative](#), including a Mentorship Program and Conversation Partner Program. For academic advising-related questions, students in the Geography Department are also encouraged to meet with the Geography Undergraduate Advisor (geogadvising@uvic.ca) as well as an academic advisor in the [Academic Advising Centre](#) early in their studies to help map out a plan to declare a major and complete university program requirements. Other resources include the [Centre for Academic Communication](#) and the [Math and Stats Assistance Centre](#). International students are also encouraged to contact the International Student Liaison in Geography (Prof. CindyAnn Rose-Redwood, cindyann@uvic.ca), who can assist in making connections with other international and domestic students in the Geography Department and share opportunities for getting involved in departmental activities more broadly.