GMS 6920 Syllabus for Genetics Journal Club

Course Director: Dr. Margaret (Peggy) Wallace (peggyw@ufl.edu, 392-3055)

Credits: 1 per semester

Course Description: At each course meeting, one student will present one scientific paper in detail, using a powerpoint format, referring to other literature to provide background and support/refute data in the main paper. The audience (other students and faculty) should ask questions, help discuss the science, and provide feedback.

Prerequisite: Enrolled in a biology- or biomedical-based Ph.D. program at UF, or permission of instructor.

Course Objectives: For students to improve their seminar presentation skills, to learn and be able to teach a new topic, and participate in open discussion of a paper from the literature.

Format: One 50-minute meeting once a week (Wednesdays at 4:00 in ARB room R2-265). Occasionally we will have a different type of presentation (e.g. 1st year student Rotation Talks, Genetics Medical Guild competition) or required attendance at an alternative event instead (e.g. Florida Genetics conference in late October). The Fall 2010 schedule for this journal club will be set up at the student meeting on August 17, with the most senior students to fill these slots. IDP Genetics students may choose another journal club for the spring, or take this one again, but regardless every student must present at a journal club at least once during the year.

Grading: Grades are based on attendance, so you must sign in on the attendance sheet each time. Do not sign up for anyone else—that is fraudulent. If you can’t attend due to reasonable circumstances, please contact Dr. Wallace or one of the mentors ahead of time. Missing journal club because you are doing experiments is not an acceptable excuse—you can plan your lab work around that hour. If you miss a meeting, and haven’t contacted Dr. Wallace about it, it is considered an unexcused absence. You are allowed three such absences per semester without penalty. If you have more than three, you will receive a “U” grade at the end of the semester (calculated as “failing” for GPA). You may also be subject to a “U” grade or other penalty (such as having to present a second journal club that year or the next) if your own presentation is missed or is considered to be very poor. Also, you MUST stay for the entire time.

General Guidelines:
Feedback: We have designated journal club faculty “mentors”, who will attend the journal clubs during assigned weeks, help generate discussion, and provide helpful feedback after the presentation. Dr. Wallace will be one of the mentors, and you will be informed of who the others are during the year. Other faculty and students are welcome to provide individual feedback to the speaker as well.

Choosing the paper: choose papers in relatively high impact journals, with a subject that is of interest to you and is likely to be of interest to other students. It can be in your field of research but not from your own laboratory. The topic should involve genetics in some manner. It may be more difficult to prepare short papers that contain a lot of data with short explanations and fewer
figures (e.g. Science), so it is best to aim for articles with at least 4 figures and is straightforward to follow (often, the Supplementary Material is very useful).

Getting the paper approved: please ask Dr. Wallace or one of your faculty mentors to approve your paper choice, at least 2 weeks ahead, and then send the paper (pdf) to the other faculty mentors too. Send Dr. Wallace the internet link for the paper.

Your talk: You are telling a story, teaching about a topic using this paper as culmination of the story. You should present a good background and introduction to the field/topic, followed by discussion of the paper and overall conclusions about the importance of this field and the paper in particular. It isn’t necessary to go into enormous detail about the paper, unless you want to point out a flaw or something particularly interesting. Make your points clear (putting the conclusion of an experiment as the title of your slide is very useful). If you use figures from other papers in your background, please remember to put the reference below it. Use Powerpoint, and feel free to be creative (e.g. animation to show a model, inoffensive humor, etc). Make sure you have a pointer, and practice with it so you don’t over-use it (don’t circle with it too much!). Ideally, practice the talk at least once for a few colleagues or mentors to get feedback and practice answering questions. Engage the audience (use speaking skills such as surveying the audience, or pausing to ask if there are any questions occasionally). Have some fun with it-- a relaxed atmosphere helps stimulate discussion and interest. Aim for a 40 minute talk, to allow time for discussion. Arrive early to set up, to be ready to start at 4:00. Remind your own mentor about the talk. You won’t know everything about the topic, so be prepared to acknowledge that, if you can’t answer some questions, but try to think on your feet to come up with logical guesses. Or ask the audience if anyone else knows that answer. Afterward: please meet briefly with the journal club mentors for informal feedback. Also, make a note to bring snacks for the next week (see below).

Audience:
● Please read the paper ahead so you are prepared to ask questions about the topic, methods, the paper, or ideas related to it. Or provide extra insight from your own knowledge or thoughts. Senior students often have useful contributions—don’t be bashful. We want to generate open discussion about the topics and papers.
● Any negative feedback during the meeting should be directed at the science (e.g. pointing out flaws in controls or interpretation, etc), not the speaker or audience. Feedback to the speaker about his/her presentation skills should wait until after the meeting.

Snacks: Presenting students need to bring snacks for the next regular journal club meeting. (snacks will be provided on the first day). Soft drinks will be provided by our program every time—you do not have to bring them. If you can’t attend the next regular journal club, make arrangements to send your snacks in with another student. (Rotation talks are not regular journal club meetings; pizza is provided at those events, so you (as the last regular speaker) would bring snacks to the next regular journal club after that).

Accomodations for Students with Disabilities: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodations.