



GEOS204

Life, the Universe and Everything

S1 Day 2016

Dept of Earth and Planetary Sciences

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Disclaimer

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General Information

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Credit points

3

Prerequisites

12cp

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description

This is a broad-based interdisciplinary science unit which aims to present a non-technical overview of recent ideas in astrobiology, which is about the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the universe. The presentation is suitable for students without any science background. The unit presents an integrated view of science across a broad range of disciplines (geoscience, biology, astronomy, cosmology and organic chemistry); looks at some of the 'big questions' (such as the origin of the Universe; what is life?; are we alone?; early Earth; and the search for life on Mars and outer solar system moons); and presents science as it is actually done, not just as a set of facts.

Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at <https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates>

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe
- Understanding of scientific methodology
- Competence in accessing, using and synthesising appropriate information
- Understanding that scientific knowledge is always advancing and changing
- Distinguishing between complex and sometimes mutually exclusive hypotheses
- Application of knowledge to solving problems and evaluating ideas and information
- Capacity to present ideas clearly with supporting evidence

General Assessment Information

See unit handout

Assessment Tasks

| Name | Weighting | Due |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| On-line quizzes | 30% | various |
| Assignment 1 | 15% | 24/3/16 |
| Assignment 2 | 25% | 20/5/16 |
| Unit exam | 30% | Session 1 Exam period |

On-line quizzes

Due: **various**

Weighting: **30%**

On-line quizzes on lectures and practicals/tutorials

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe
- Understanding of scientific methodology
- Competence in accessing, using and synthesising appropriate information
- Understanding that scientific knowledge is always advancing and changing
- Application of knowledge to solving problems and evaluating ideas and information

Assignment 1

Due: **24/3/16**

Weighting: **15%**

Assignment 1: Paper Review (800 words approx.)

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe
- Understanding of scientific methodology
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- Understanding that scientific knowledge is always advancing and changing
- Distinguishing between complex and sometimes mutually exclusive hypotheses
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- Capacity to present ideas clearly with supporting evidence

Assignment 2

Due: **20/5/16**

Weighting: **25%**

Assignment 2: Lander project (1,500 words min., maximum 3000)

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe

- Understanding of scientific methodology
- Competence in accessing, using and synthesising appropriate information
- Understanding that scientific knowledge is always advancing and changing
- Distinguishing between complex and sometimes mutually exclusive hypotheses
- Application of knowledge to solving problems and evaluating ideas and information
- Capacity to present ideas clearly with supporting evidence

Unit exam

Due: **Session 1 Exam period**

Weighting: **30%**

Unit exam

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe
- Understanding of scientific methodology
- Competence in accessing, using and synthesising appropriate information
- Understanding that scientific knowledge is always advancing and changing
- Distinguishing between complex and sometimes mutually exclusive hypotheses
- Application of knowledge to solving problems and evaluating ideas and information
- Capacity to present ideas clearly with supporting evidence

Delivery and Resources

The Unit will be presented in 4 broad themes:

1. Life and The Universe: (*cosmology, Astronomy and space, Geoscience*). What is life?

Concepts about the origin of life; Origin of life; Origin of the Universe; Formation of the Solar System; What meteorites tell us.

2. Life and Rocks on Early Earth and Mars: (*Astronomy, Geoscience*). Formation of the Earth; Early Earth and Mars environments; The first billion years of life.

3. Biology of Life and Habitability (*Biology, Astronomy, Chemistry*). The environments of the planets; Molecular biology and predictions about the earliest organisms; Biomarkers as proxies for life.

4. Life Elsewhere, SETI: (*Astronomy, Chemistry, Astrobiology*). The diverse places that life can live (Extremophiles); The chemistry of space; Extra-solar planets; Are we alone (SETI)?

Classes:

Attend one two hour lecture, and a one hour practical/tutorial each week.

Lecture: **W5A Price Theatre (W5A 230)**, Monday 12:00-13:00 and 13:00-14:00. This will usually be two separate lectures, stopping for a 10 min break approximately half way.

Practicals/tutorials: **E5A 220**, 7 classes:

Practicals and lectures start in Week 1 (29th February to 4th March), please come along, it is important to start straight away! Note that this first week of study is also termed O-week.

Late enrolments

If you enrol late in the unit, you will have already missed one or more lectures. It is your responsibility to catch up. Also, you will still be expected to submit all two assignments within the remaining time.

Lectures, availability of lecture material and attendance requirements

It is the policy in this unit that students will normally attend the two hours of lectures per week, and one practical/tutorial, and make their own notes from the lectures. It is expected that many of the lectures will be interactive, with questions and answers throughout. Lectures will be recorded using Echo 360, and files of the lecture graphics will also be made available through iLearn. These will be particularly useful for revision purposes. Many of the practicals/tutorials are assessed, it is important that you attend one of these each week.

Hours

This is a 3 credit point unit. It is anticipated that you will spend >9 hours per week involved with the unit, including the 3-hour class contact time per week. It is particularly important that you spend plenty of time preparing the two major assignments.

Contacts and communication

Convenor: Professor Simon George

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EPS Admin (if Simon George is not available): 2nd Floor, AHH, phone 02 9850 8426 or 02 9850 8373

If sending email, please include GEOS204 in the subject line. We will communicate to you mainly

through your student email account/iLearn at Macquarie University. Please make sure you check this email at least weekly.

Set textbook and background reading

Bennett, J, and Shostak, S (2011). Life in the Universe (3rd Ed). San Francisco, Pearson/ Addison Wesley. ISBN-10: 0-321-68767-1

- This book should be purchased from the Co-op Bookshop or on the web. It is essential that you purchase this book by the end of the second week of semester. Lectures and some practicals refer to sections of this book, many sections of which it will be necessary to read.
- There may be some second hand copies of the 2nd edition (2007) available from past students; apart from different page numbers the content is only slightly out of date, so this is an acceptable alternative.
- Also see the booklist in the unit handout (available in class and on iLearn) for other places to obtain information. Note that this is not a "reading list" (i.e. you are certainly not expected to read all these books), nor are most of these books on reserve. The booklist is a resource to help you find information in the library.
- Some individual readings to complement the textbook will be suggested in some lectures.
- Astrobiology is an interdisciplinary subject involving aspects of astronomy, cosmology, geoscience, biology and chemistry. Few students (or indeed staff!) have a background in all of these areas, so even if you have done some science units before you must expect to do a lot of extra reading and research to be able to understand all the information that will be presented in the unit. For those students without a science background (e.g. those doing it for "Planet" purposes), this breadth provides you the opportunity to become familiar with several aspects of science over the course of the unit. No prior knowledge of any science will be assumed.

Technologies used and required

Text book (see above)

Access to iLearn for quizzes and unit resources

You will use computers in some practicals/ tutorials

You will need to be able to access books and journal papers in the library

You will be exposed to a variety of materials and concepts in practicals

Unit Schedule

GEOS204: Life, the Universe and Everything (2016): Schedule: see unit handout.

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central](#). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

Academic Honesty Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html

New Assessment Policy in effect from Session 2 2016 http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy_2016.html. For more information visit http://students.mq.edu.au/events/2016/07/19/new_assessment_policy_in_place_from_session_2/

Assessment Policy prior to Session 2 2016 <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy.html>

Grading Policy prior to Session 2 2016 <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grading/policy.html>

Grade Appeal Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/gradeappeal/policy.html>

Complaint Management Procedure for Students and Members of the Public http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/complaint_management/procedure.html

Disruption to Studies Policy http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/disruption_studies/policy.html *The Disruption to Studies Policy is effective from March 3 2014 and replaces the Special Consideration Policy.*

In addition, a number of other policies can be found in the [Learning and Teaching Category](#) of Policy Central.

Student Code of Conduct

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: https://students.mq.edu.au/support/student_conduct/

Results

Results shown in *iLearn*, or released directly by your Unit Convenor, are not confirmed as they are subject to final approval by the University. Once approved, final results will be sent to your student email address and will be made available in [eStudent](#). For more information visit ask.mq.edu.au.

Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of support services for students. For details, visit <http://students.mq.edu.au/support/>

Learning Skills

Learning Skills (mq.edu.au/learningskills) provides academic writing resources and study strategies to improve your marks and take control of your study.

- [Workshops](#)
- [StudyWise](#)
- [Academic Integrity Module for Students](#)
- [Ask a Learning Adviser](#)

Student Services and Support

Students with a disability are encouraged to contact the [Disability Service](#) who can provide appropriate help with any issues that arise during their studies.

Student Enquiries

For all student enquiries, visit Student Connect at ask.mq.edu.au

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit http://www.mq.edu.au/about_us/offices_and_units/information_technology/help/.

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use of IT Resources Policy](#). The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.

Graduate Capabilities

Creative and Innovative

Our graduates will also be capable of creative thinking and of creating knowledge. They will be imaginative and open to experience and capable of innovation at work and in the community. We want them to be engaged in applying their critical, creative thinking.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe
- Competence in accessing, using and synthesising appropriate information
- Distinguishing between complex and sometimes mutually exclusive hypotheses
- Application of knowledge to solving problems and evaluating ideas and information
- Capacity to present ideas clearly with supporting evidence

Assessment tasks

- Assignment 1
- Assignment 2
- Unit exam

Capable of Professional and Personal Judgement and Initiative

We want our graduates to have emotional intelligence and sound interpersonal skills and to demonstrate discernment and common sense in their professional and personal judgement. They will exercise initiative as needed. They will be capable of risk assessment, and be able to handle ambiguity and complexity, enabling them to be adaptable in diverse and changing environments.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe
- Understanding of scientific methodology
- Competence in accessing, using and synthesising appropriate information
- Understanding that scientific knowledge is always advancing and changing
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Assessment tasks

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- Unit exam

Commitment to Continuous Learning

Our graduates will have enquiring minds and a literate curiosity which will lead them to pursue knowledge for its own sake. They will continue to pursue learning in their careers and as they participate in the world. They will be capable of reflecting on their experiences and relationships with others and the environment, learning from them, and growing - personally, professionally and socially.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe
- Understanding that scientific knowledge is always advancing and changing
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Assessment tasks

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- Unit exam

Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills

Our graduates will take with them the intellectual development, depth and breadth of knowledge, scholarly understanding, and specific subject content in their chosen fields to make them competent and confident in their subject or profession. They will be able to demonstrate, where relevant, professional technical competence and meet professional standards. They will be able to articulate the structure of knowledge of their discipline, be able to adapt discipline-specific knowledge to novel situations, and be able to contribute from their discipline to inter-disciplinary solutions to problems.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe
- Understanding of scientific methodology
- Competence in accessing, using and synthesising appropriate information
- Understanding that scientific knowledge is always advancing and changing
- Distinguishing between complex and sometimes mutually exclusive hypotheses

Assessment tasks

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- Assignment 1
- Assignment 2
- Unit exam

Critical, Analytical and Integrative Thinking

We want our graduates to be capable of reasoning, questioning and analysing, and to integrate and synthesise learning and knowledge from a range of sources and environments; to be able to critique constraints, assumptions and limitations; to be able to think independently and systemically in relation to scholarly activity, in the workplace, and in the world. We want them to have a level of scientific and information technology literacy.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe
- Understanding of scientific methodology
- Competence in accessing, using and synthesising appropriate information
- Understanding that scientific knowledge is always advancing and changing
- Distinguishing between complex and sometimes mutually exclusive hypotheses
- Application of knowledge to solving problems and evaluating ideas and information
- Capacity to present ideas clearly with supporting evidence

Assessment tasks

- On-line quizzes
- Assignment 1
- Assignment 2
- Unit exam

Problem Solving and Research Capability

Our graduates should be capable of researching; of analysing, and interpreting and assessing data and information in various forms; of drawing connections across fields of knowledge; and they should be able to relate their knowledge to complex situations at work or in the world, in order to diagnose and solve problems. We want them to have the confidence to take the initiative in doing so, within an awareness of their own limitations.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe
- Understanding of scientific methodology
- Competence in accessing, using and synthesising appropriate information
- Distinguishing between complex and sometimes mutually exclusive hypotheses
- Application of knowledge to solving problems and evaluating ideas and information

Assessment tasks

- On-line quizzes
- Assignment 1
- Assignment 2
- Unit exam

Effective Communication

We want to develop in our students the ability to communicate and convey their views in forms effective with different audiences. We want our graduates to take with them the capability to read, listen, question, gather and evaluate information resources in a variety of formats, assess, write clearly, speak effectively, and to use visual communication and communication technologies as appropriate.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe
- Understanding that scientific knowledge is always advancing and changing
- Application of knowledge to solving problems and evaluating ideas and information
- Capacity to present ideas clearly with supporting evidence

Assessment tasks

- On-line quizzes
- Assignment 1
- Assignment 2
- Unit exam

Engaged and Ethical Local and Global citizens

As local citizens our graduates will be aware of indigenous perspectives and of the nation's historical context. They will be engaged with the challenges of contemporary society and with knowledge and ideas. We want our graduates to have respect for diversity, to be open-minded, sensitive to others and inclusive, and to be open to other cultures and perspectives: they should have a level of cultural literacy. Our graduates should be aware of disadvantage and social justice, and be willing to participate to help create a wiser and better society.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe
- Competence in accessing, using and synthesising appropriate information
- Understanding that scientific knowledge is always advancing and changing

Assessment tasks

- Assignment 1
- Assignment 2

- Unit exam

Socially and Environmentally Active and Responsible

We want our graduates to be aware of and have respect for self and others; to be able to work with others as a leader and a team player; to have a sense of connectedness with others and country; and to have a sense of mutual obligation. Our graduates should be informed and active participants in moving society towards sustainability.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understanding the origin of life on Earth and the possibility of finding life elsewhere in the Universe
- Understanding that scientific knowledge is always advancing and changing

Assessment tasks

- Assignment 1
- Assignment 2
- Unit exam

Changes from Previous Offering

Lectures and practicals/tutorials have been re-ordered.

Two Mondays in Session 1 2016 are lost due to public holidays, so 1 lecture is on-line only.

One assignment has been removed, so the weighting of assessed work has been modified:

Assignment 1 used to be worth 11%, is now 15%.

Assignment 2 used to be worth 20%, is now 25%.

Previously separate quizzes on lectures and practicals/tutorials have been merged into 1 set of quizzes.

Convening has reverted to Prof. Simon George, who started this unit in 2008 (for the last 2 years it was done by Dr Ed Saunders).