

# Class Syllabus: Rigor and Reproducibility (Fall 2021) (Mol Bio 235)

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## Purpose and Format:

Two of the cornerstones of science advancement are rigor in designing and performing scientific research and the ability to reproduce biomedical research findings. The application of rigor ensures robust and unbiased experimental design, methodology, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of results. When a result can be reproduced by multiple scientists, it validates the original results and readiness to progress to the next phase of research. Scientific rigor is the strict application of the scientific method to ensure unbiased and well-controlled experimental design, methodology, analysis, interpretation and reporting of results. This is an 8 hour course covering literature and videos on Rigor and Reproducibility in biomedical research. Course sessions combine lectures by the instructor with breakout sessions where trainees discuss issues raised by the lecture or case studies.

## Learning Objectives:

Trainees will learn that reproducibility is a common problem in biomedical research and will learn approaches to improve reproducibility and ensure unbiased experimental design.

## Learning Outcomes:

- Learn aspects of rigor and reproducibility such as lack of transparency, blinding and randomization, bias, biological and technical replicates and exclusion criteria
- Evaluate scientific premise
- Learn about record keeping and lab notebooks, authentication of reagents, and application of statistical tests for data analysis

<b>Class Sessions: Boyer 130, Wednesdays, 10-11 AM</b>
<b>Course Web Site:</b> <a href="https://ccle.ucla.edu/course/view/21W-MOLBIO-TBD">https://ccle.ucla.edu/course/view/21W-MOLBIO-TBD</a>
<b>Office Hours:</b> By appointment
<b>Grading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>For graduate students:</b> Grading is Pass/Fail. To earn a Pass, students must attend and participate in at least seven out of eight sessions.</li><li>• <b>For postdoctoral scholars:</b> In lieu of a grade, postdoctoral scholars will receive a certificate of completion if they attend and participate in at least seven out of eight sessions.</li></ul>
<b>Where to find course reading materials:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>PubMed:</b> <a href="http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed">http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed</a></li><li>• Routing through the UCLA library system offers increased accessibility to e-publications: <a href="http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?tool=cdl&amp;holding=uclalib&amp;otool=cdlotool">http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?tool=cdl&amp;holding=uclalib&amp;otool=cdlotool</a></li><li>• If you are using an off campus computer you will need to set up a proxy server - follow instructions on the UCLA IT Services site: <a href="https://www.it.ucla.edu/it-support-center/services/proxy-server">https://www.it.ucla.edu/it-support-center/services/proxy-server</a>.</li><li>• Recent papers from <b>Elsevier (Cell, Molecular Cell)</b> must be ordered from the library well ahead of your need for them due to the dispute between UC and the publisher. Go to: <a href="https://ucelinks.cdlib.org/sfx_local/cqi/core/citation-linker.cqi">https://ucelinks.cdlib.org/sfx_local/cqi/core/citation-linker.cqi</a>.</li></ul>
<b>Course Format:</b> <p>Class will include a combination of didactic presentations, examples and best practices from the literature, and small group discussions. Course materials will include articles and video modules from NIH and the NIGMS Clearinghouse for training in Rigor and Reproducibility.</p>

## Grading:



## Where to find course reading materials:



## Course Format:

## Session 1 – September 29, 2021

### Introduction: Is Reproducibility a Problem in Biological Research?

There has been a growing awareness in recent years that many biomedical research studies are not reproducible. Scientists need to rethink how they perform and teach research methodology to enhance rigor. In this class, we will discuss evidence for a problem with reproducibility and strategies to improve research quality and rigor.

### Reading Assignment:

- **Baker.** *Is There a Reproducibility Crisis?* Nature 533, 452-454 (2016).
- **Collins and Tabak.** *NIH Plans to Enhance Reproducibility.* Nature 505, 612-613 (2014).

### Small-Group Discussion:

In the group discussion, trainees will present challenges of “Rigor and Reproducibility” from their research. This could include critical procedures to ensure reproducibility in their own experiments/lab, or reasons for non-reproducibility of their experiments. Discussion points should include bias in analysis, blinding, randomization, etc.

## Session 2 – October 6, 2021

### Introduction: Transparency

In order to reproduce another’s findings adequately, the experimental methods, rationale, and other pertinent information must be accessible and understandable. What are strategies to enhance the transparency of research?

### Evaluating the Scientific Premise

Evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of prior research from the literature. Factors that make prior research reliable include results obtained by several laboratories independently, findings supported by independent approaches (Western blot and microscopy, knockout/siRNA and rescue, same effect in different cell lines/mouse/fly/yeast).

### Rigorous Experimental Design

We will cover approaches to improve reproducibility and to ensure unbiased experimental design (with appropriate controls), methodology, analysis, interpretation and transparent reporting of methods and results.

### Video Module:

- **NIH: Lack of Transparency** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4A-ZSTUEUo>

### Reading Assignment:

**Sudhof.** *Truth in Science Publishing: A Personal Perspective.* Plos Biology 14(8):e1002547 (2016).

### Small Group Discussion:

The group discussion will use a video from Module 1, “Lack of Transparency”, of the NIH Rigor and Reproducibility Training Modules as a starting point. Key questions are why the results in the video were not reproducible, what helped the researchers to identify the reason for this, and how trainees might deal with a similar situation.

## Session 3 – October 13, 2021

### Introduction: Bias, Blinding, Randomization

Blinding and randomization are experimental methods that reduce bias and minimize the likelihood of chance altering the results of an experiment by keeping the investigators unaware of assigned sample designations (e.g., wild-type vs. mutant, untreated vs. treated) until after completion of the experiment and, if possible, analysis of the results.

### Reading Assignment:

- **Nuzzo.** *Fooling Ourselves*. Nature 526, 182-185 (2015).

### Video Modules:

- **NIH:** *Blinding and Randomization* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NEcErxoOVm0>
- **NIGMS Clearinghouse:** *Be Aware of Measurement Bias and Blind Yourself* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ac65JLrjLfs>
- **NIGMS Clearinghouse:** *Don't Be Wed to Your Hypothesis* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kndxCnD6a7c>

### Small-Group Discussion:

The discussion will also use the video modules, “Blinding and Randomization”, “Be Aware of Measurement Bias and Blind Yourself” and “Don’t Be Wed to Your Hypothesis.” Trainees will discuss what suggestions are made to reduce bias, if bias affects their experiments and if they ever have blinded or randomized samples in their own experiments. Are they aware of the distinction between two types of experimental approaches, hypothesis-driven or discovery-driven? Is one better? What are the advantages and pitfalls of each?

## Session 4 – October 20, 2021

### Introduction: Biological and Technical Replicates

Biological replicates are parallel measurements of biologically distinct samples that capture random biological variation. Technical replicates are repeated measurements of the same sample that represent independent measures of the random noise associated with protocols or equipment.

### Video Modules:

- **NIH:** *Biological and Technical Replicates* [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSWunBYzl8c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSWunBYzl8c)
- **NIGMS Clearinghouse:** *Replication in Research: How To Think About Replication* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0Q9uci2QDQ>

### Small Group Discussion:

The group will view the videos “Biological and Technical Replicates” and “Replication in Research: How to think about replication” and discuss whether it is common to report data from a single experiment to generate an “exciting” finding. Is it appropriate to leave out information about the type of replicates? How would you have portrayed the data? Should grant applications/papers delineate the use of biological vs. technical replicates in the figure legends? In your field is there a standard for how many times one should repeat an experiment, or does it depend on the experiment that you're doing?

## Session 5 – October 27, 2021

### Record Keeping and Lab Notebooks

Record keeping is a critical component for ensuring that experiments are reproducible, and to help being thoughtful about the experimental process, clarifying what you are expecting from the experiment, and being observant.

### Reading Assignment:

- Baker. *Quality Time*. Nature 529, 456-458 (2016).

### Video Modules:

- NIGMS: *Research Tips: Lab Notebook* <https://youtu.be/G4mRm6iyLnI>
- NIGMS Clearinghouse: *Experimental Design Case Study: A Useful Approach to Record Keeping* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSFYWayYtDg>

### Small-Group Discussion:

The discussion will also use two videos, “Research Tips: Lab Notebook” and “Experimental Design Case Study: A Useful Approach to Record Keeping” and showcase an accompanying lab notebook template. The presented approaches to notebook keeping and favorite alternative ways will be discussed.

## Session 6 – November 3, 2021

### Introduction: Sample Size / Outliers and Authentication

Sample size is the optimal number of samples that should be used to reach sufficient statistical power. Outliers and exclusion criteria are standards set out before a study to determine whether a sample should be included or excluded. Characterization of “normal” for a specific experiment is an important component to identifying outliers and determining exclusion criteria. Biological and/or chemical resources such as cell lines, antibodies, and specialty chemicals need to be authenticated, and the basic methods to authenticate the most common biological and chemical resources.

### Reading Assignment:

- Lorsch et al. *Fixing Problems with Cell Lines*. Science 346, 1452-1453 (2014).
- Lithgow et al. *A Long Journey to Reproducible Results*. Nature 548, 387-388 (2017).
- Bandrowski. *How a Typo in a Catalog Number Led to the Correction of a Scientific Paper — and What We Can Learn from It*. Retraction Watch (2018).

### Video Modules:

- NIH: *Sample Size, Outliers and Exclusion Criteria* [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pc0h-GOcBLE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pc0h-GOcBLE)
- NIGMS Clearinghouse: *Replicates in an Experiment: Account For Variability with Replicates* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TubzzXYN6X8>

### Small-Group Discussion:

The discussion will center the videos “Sample Size, Outliers, and Exclusion Criteria and “Replicates in an Experiment: Account For Variability with Replicates.” Questions for discussion include the following. Do you have a standard approach to determining the appropriate sample size? Are you authenticating reagents in your lab, and how?

## Sessions 7 and 8 – November 10 & 17, 2021

### **Introduction: Application of statistical tests for data analysis.**

These two sessions will be lectures by Dr. Janet Sinsheimer. They will cover common statistical concepts, and potential problems with their application.

### **Reading Assignment:**

- **Ioannidis.** *Why most published research findings are false.* PLoS Medicine 2, 696-701 (2005).

## Student Resources

**UCLA policies that support tolerance:** All students are asked to treat one another with kindness and respect. Harassment and discrimination based on: **race, ethnicity, ancestry, color; sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation; national origin, citizenship status; religion; disability, pregnancy, medical condition, genetic predisposition; domestic partnership/marital status; age; or veteran status** may violate UCLA regulations and lead to serious consequences. Information on how to obtain redress or counseling if you are subjected to such harassment or discrimination can be found at <https://equity.ucla.edu/report-an-incident/>.

**UCLA is bound by Title IX**, a federal law that applies to any education program receiving federal assistance. Title IX prohibits gender discrimination, including sexual harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Students who have experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence can receive confidential support and advocacy at the CARE Advocacy Office for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Wooden Center West, [CAREadvocate@caps.ucla.edu](mailto:CAREadvocate@caps.ucla.edu), (310) 206-2465. You can also report sexual violence or sexual harassment directly to the University's Title IX Coordinator, 2241 Murphy Hall, [titleix@conet.ucla.edu](mailto:titleix@conet.ucla.edu), (310) 206-3417.

### Student Resources:

It is normal for students to feel stress about assignments, exams and life in general and there are many resources on campus for students in need of various types of counseling. These include:

#### For Graduate Students:

- **UCLA Behavioral Wellness Center For Graduate Students**  
A student mental wellness center open to GPB graduate students, medical students, and medical residents. <https://medschool.ucla.edu/bwc>
- **The Bruin Resource Center** With the mission of supporting students' development, well-being, and academic success, and fostering an inclusive and socially just campus community. <https://www.brc.ucla.edu/>
- **Support for Undocumented Students:** UCLA provides many resources to support undocumented students and links to many of them can be found on the following web site: <https://equity.ucla.edu/know/immigration/>.
- **Graduate and Postdoctoral Case Manager:** A case manager can help with any issues affecting academic progress, mentoring issues, or challenges with lab or training. Case managers connect students with resources and suggest options. [casemanagers@grad.ucla.edu](mailto:casemanagers@grad.ucla.edu)

#### For Postdoctoral Scholars:

- **UCLA Staff and Faculty Counseling Center** UCLA provides counseling, assessment and referral services to faculty and staff and their immediate family members as well as management consultations and coaching to department managers. <https://www.chr.ucla.edu/employee-counseling/counseling-consultation>
- **Graduate and Postdoctoral Case Manager:** A case manager can help with any issues affecting academic progress, mentoring issues, or challenges with lab or training. Case managers connect postdocs with resources and suggest options. [casemanagers@grad.ucla.edu](mailto:casemanagers@grad.ucla.edu)