

2025 Tree Care Advisor Core Course

Syllabus

Updated 2/18/2025

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About the course

Course title: 2025 Tree Care Advisor Core Course

Number of credits: n/a

Semester, year: Spring 2025

Days, time, and location of class meetings:

- Online courses on Zoom at 5:00 - 7:00 pm on Tuesdays from March 25 through May 13 (8 Tuesdays; All online classes will be recorded and available to view on the course site.)
- In-person skills training Field Day on Saturday, May 3 (Alternate weather date is Saturday, May 10).

Teaching staff

Program coordinator and instructor

Instructor: Sonja Tosteson

Email: toste016@umn.edu

Phone: n/a

Preferred method of contact: email

Office hours: Email instructor to propose a day and time.

Secondary contact person

Instructor: Ryan Murphy

Email: murph523@umn.edu

Phone: n/a

Preferred method of contact: email

Office hours: n/a

Course description

Prerequisites

None

Course introduction

Welcome to the Tree Care Advisor Core Course! This 9-part series led by UMN staff provides research- and science-based training in a variety of tree-centered theories and practices. Participants build a strong foundation of knowledge through a mixture of presentations, discussions, assignments, and hands-on learning opportunities. Once trained and certified, Tree Care Advisor volunteers partner with local organizations and groups to fulfill roles as educators, advocates, and facilitators to more effectively help others help themselves.

Course goals

Learning outcomes

- You will understand the importance of trees and forestry and be able to communicate this information with your peers.
- You will have strong foundational knowledge in trees and tree care as related to the Minnesota environment.
- You will actively use your knowledge, skills, and training to create avenues for positive change in your community.

Learning objectives

- *You will understand the importance of trees and forestry and be able to communicate this information with your peers.*
 - You will understand the role that trees can play within ecological systems.
 - You will understand the impacts of trees and tree canopy cover (or lack thereof) on human health, especially in built environments like towns and cities.
 - You will understand the basics of how trees play a role in economics.
 - You will be able to relay this information in pared down, everyday language.
- *You will have strong foundational knowledge in trees and tree care as related to the Minnesota environment.*
 - You will know the fundamentals of: tree biology, site elements for tree growth, tree morphology, tree identification, tree stressors, common MN diseases and pests, invasive woody plants, best planting and maintenance strategies, basic pruning techniques for young shade trees, climate change, and tree and shrub selection.
 - You will be able to give practical advice on tree selection, planting, and care strategies for a variety of settings.
 - You will be able to perform research-based skills, including planting of bareroot and containerized trees, mulching, watering, pruning for structural development of young trees, and pruning using the three-cut method.
- *You will actively use your knowledge, skills, and training to create avenues for positive change in your community.*
 - You will know the status of local tree care policies, contacts, and resources in your area.
 - You will know how and where to look for research-based, science-backed information.
 - You will understand the basics of advocacy and how it can apply to your role as a volunteer.
 - You will understand specific advocacy skills, such as how to write a letter to the editor, how to engage with elected officials, and/or how to testify at local meetings.
 - You will understand various ways to volunteer and explore and evaluate which one(s) to engage with first in your community.
 - You will understand the requirements and expectations of what it means to be an active UMN Tree Care Advisor.

*Disclaimer: 1) Students may vary in their competency level of these outcomes 2) They can expect to achieve these outcomes only if you honor all course policies, complete all assigned work in good faith and on time, prepare adequately for quizzes and exams, and meet all other course expectations of them as students.

Course format and organization

The Tree Care Advisor Core Course is taught through a blended model, consisting of 8 online classes taught via Zoom (one per week) and 1 in-person Field Day for skills training at the UFOR Nursery on the St. Paul UMN Campus. Online classes are recorded and posted on their Canvas class page for students to rewatch and/or view later if they cannot attend the class live.

Classes are arranged by subject matter. It is recommended for students to attend/view classes in order, as each week builds on the previous week's knowledge.

Each class page includes a class recording (uploaded after live presentation), as well as links to recommended resources for extended learning. The resources section aims to include a combination of formats (text, audio, video) to complement different learning styles.

Course materials

Canvas site

- The link to the Canvas site will be sent to students the week before Class 1.
- [Canvas browser and computer requirements](#)
- [Canvas help resources](#)
- [Canvas mobile apps](#)

Required and optional materials

Optional books - These are not required or expected but can be great additions to your knowledge base if a topic is of particular interest to you. Check to see if they are carried by your library if you would like to assess them before purchase.

- *An Illustrated Guide to Pruning, 3rd edition* by Edward Gilman (ISBN: 9781111307301)
- *Textbook of Dendrology, 9th edition* by Ellwood S. Harrar, William M. Harlow, Fred M. White, et al. (ISBN: 0073661716)

Learning technologies

Online classes will take place on Zoom. The Zoom licensing purchased by the UMN allows for increased functionality for managers, presenters, and students. If you are not familiar with Zoom, please take time before the first class to review Zoom's "Getting started guide for new users" site. Make sure you are able to:

- [Connect to a Zoom meeting](#)
- Use your microphone (to speak during class)
- Use your camera (to be on camera during class)
- Use the [chat function](#) to ask questions and interact during class
- Update [your name](#) for how you would like to be addressed
- Use Zoom on multiple device platforms, such as a computer vs. tablet vs. phone (if you plan on needing to switch between devices during the course).

Once certified as a MN Tree Care Advisor, you will also have access to the Tree Care Advisor Program Hub and set up an account with MyImpact (to track hours).

Assessment and grading

Assignment descriptions

The Core Course includes 2 assignments required for certification. In Assignment 1 (“Act Locally”), students delve into the current status of trees and tree care in their community from both municipal and social perspectives. For Assignment 2 (“Tree Recommendations”), students synthesize the knowledge they have gained over the 9 classes and apply it to real-life scenarios of questions they may encounter as a volunteer.

Full assignment descriptions are available on the Canvas site.

Grading policies

Both assignments must be completed and submitted via Canvas or email (to the Program Coordinator) to receive certification. Assignments are graded either as complete or incomplete. If marked complete, no further action is needed. If marked incomplete, you must make the necessary corrections and resubmit the assignment.

Assignment 1 is due at the start of Class 9. The due date for Assignment 2 is May 31. Extensions are available upon request. Contact the Program Coordinator.

Help and support

- [UMN technology support](#)
- Contact the Program Coordinator to request accommodations.

Process and policy statements*

Student success	
Attendance	Students are expected to attend the classes live and/or watch the class recording each week. It is recommended for students to attend/view them in order. The in-person Field Day is highly recommended (but not required) for learning foundational skills in a hands-on format.
Expectations for instructor/teaching staff	The Program Coordinator is the main contact for the Core Course. They are available via email or you may schedule a Zoom or phone chat.

	<p>If you have questions for a specific instructor on content, please contact them directly, as appropriate.</p>
<p>Academic workload</p>	<p>Workload For this course, it is recommended that students spend a minimum of 3 hours per week completing coursework (2 hours for instructional time and 1 hour for coursework/research).</p> <p>The in-person Field Day is highly recommended (but not required) for learning foundational skills in a hands-on format. This class is approximately 4.5 hours (plus travel time) and takes place outdoors.</p> <p>Academic credit This course is for certification in a volunteer program. It does not count toward academic credit.</p>
<p>Academic integrity</p>	<p>Students are expected to act with academic integrity.</p> <p>Examples of <i>dishonest</i> practices in papers and assignment include, but are not limited to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using someone else’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement; 2. Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor; 3. Making up sources or facts; 4. Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment.* <p>“If students have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, they are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from their instructors or from other institutional resources.”*</p> <p>*Adapted from University of Toronto’s Academic Integrity office</p>
<p>Accessibility and accommodations</p>	<p>We strive to serve all learners as well as we can. Contact the Program Coordinator with accessibility and accommodation requests.</p> <p>Additional resources: UMN Accessibility services</p>

<p>Academic discourse</p>	
<p>Netiquette</p>	<p>Core Rules of Netiquette (adapted from Colorado State and Netiquette by Virginia Shea.)</p> <p>Netiquette, or network etiquette, is concerned with the "proper" way to communicate in an online environment. Consider the following "rules," adapted from Virginia Shea's The Core Rules of Netiquette, whenever you communicate in the virtual world.</p> <p>Commitment 1: Remember the Human</p> <p>When communicating electronically, whether through email, instant message, discussion post, text, or some other method, practice the Platinum Rule: Treat others as they would like to be treated. Remember, your written words are read by real people, all deserving of respectful communication. Before you press "send" or "submit," ask yourself, "Would I be okay with this if someone else had written it?"</p> <p>Commitment 2: Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life</p> <p>While it can be argued that standards of behavior may be different in the virtual world, they certainly should not be lower. You should do your best to act within the laws and ethical manners of society whenever you inhabit "cyberspace." Would you behave rudely to someone face-to-face? On most occasions, no. Neither should you behave this way in the virtual world.</p> <p>Commitment 3: Know where you are in cyberspace</p> <p>"Netiquette varies from domain to domain." (Shea, 1994) Depending on where you are in the virtual world, the same written communication can be acceptable in one area, where it might be considered inappropriate in another. What you text to a friend may not be appropriate in an email to a classmate or colleague. Can you think of another example?</p> <p>Commitment 4: Respect other people's time and bandwidth</p> <p>Electronic communication takes time: time to read and time in which to respond. Most people today lead busy lives, just like you do, and don't have time to read or respond to frivolous emails or discussion posts. As a virtual world communicator, it is your responsibility to make sure that</p>

the time spent reading your words isn't wasted. Make your written communication meaningful and to the point, without extraneous text or superfluous graphics or attachments that may take forever to download.

Commitment 5: Make yourself look good online

Keep the following tips in mind:

- Always check for spelling and grammar errors
- Know what you're talking about and state it clearly
- Be pleasant and polite

Commitment 6: Share expert knowledge

The Internet offers its users many benefits; one is the ease in which information can be shared or accessed and in fact, this "information sharing" capability is one of the reasons the Internet was founded. So in the spirit of the Internet's "founding fathers," share what you know! When you post a question and receive intelligent answers, share the results with others. Are you an expert at something? Post resources and references about your subject matter. Recently expanded your knowledge about a subject that might be of interest to others? Share that as well.

Commitment 7: Help keep flame wars under control

What is meant by "flaming" and "flame wars?" "Flaming is what people do when they express a strongly held opinion without holding back any emotion." (Shea, 1994). As an example, think of the kinds of passionate comments you might read on a sports blog. While "flaming" is not necessarily forbidden in virtual communication, "flame wars," when two or three people exchange angry posts between one another, must be controlled or the camaraderie of the group could be compromised. Don't feed the flames; extinguish them by guiding the discussion back to a more productive direction.

Commitment 8: Respect other people's privacy

Depending on what you are reading in the virtual world, be it an online class discussion forum, Facebook page, or an email, you may be exposed to some private or personal information that needs to be handled with care. Perhaps someone is sharing some medical news about a loved one or discussing a situation at work. What do you think

	<p>would happen if this information "got into the wrong hands?" Embarrassment? Hurt feelings? Loss of a job? Just as you expect others to respect your privacy, so should you respect the privacy of others. Be sure to err on the side of caution when deciding to discuss or not to discuss virtual communication.</p> <p>Commitment 9: Don't abuse your power</p> <p>Just like in face-to-face situations, there are people in cyberspace who have more "power" than others. They have more expertise in technology or they have years of experience in a particular skill or subject matter. Maybe it's you who possesses all of this knowledge and power! Just remember: Knowing more than others do or having more power than others may have does not give you the right to take advantage of anyone. Think of Rule 1: Remember the human.</p> <p>Commitment 10: Be forgiving of other people's mistakes</p> <p>Not everyone has the same amount of experience working in the virtual world. And not everyone knows the rules of netiquette. At some point, you will see a stupid question, read an unnecessarily long response, or encounter misspelled words; when this happens, practice kindness and forgiveness as you would hope someone would do if you had committed the same offense. If it's a minor "offense," you might want to let it slide. If you feel compelled to respond to a mistake, do so in a private email rather than a public forum.</p>
Groups or teamwork (and conflict resolution)	<p>Although group discussion and collaboration is encouraged, there are no formalized group work requirements.</p> <p>Reported and/or witnessed conflict will be addressed in a prompt and appropriate manner.</p>
Communication plan	<p>Communication between classes will take place via email. Contact the Program Coordinator with questions and comments.</p>

*The above schedule, policies, procedures, and assignments in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances, by mutual agreements and/or to ensure better student learning.

Course schedule*

Class	Date of live presentation	Topic(s)	Assignments (w/due dates)
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1	3/25/2025	Introduction to the Core Course & Tree Care Advisor Program (Zoom)	Introduce Assignment 1: Act Locally – due at the start of class on 5/13/2025
2	4/1/2025	Tree biology, soils, & site elements (Zoom)	
3	4/8/2025	Tree morphology & tree identification (Zoom)	
4	4/15/2025	Basic diagnostics & introduction to tree stressors (Zoom)	
5	4/22/2025	Invasive plants & common pests and diseases (Zoom)	
6	4/29/2025	Best planting and maintenance practices & structural pruning for young shade trees (Zoom)	Introduce Assignment 2: Tree Recommendations (due 5/31/2025)
7	5/3/2025 (Saturday)	Field Day at the UFOR Nursery on the St. Paul Campus	
8	5/5/2025	Climate change & tree and shrub selection (Zoom)	
9	5/13/2025	Applied volunteerism & course wrap-up (Zoom)	

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Required university policies

- [Link to UMN Policies](#) (Twin Cities, Crookston, Morris, Rochester)
- [Link to UMD Syllabus Policies](#)