

GEOG 514
Geography of the United States and Canada
Fall 2008

MWF 1:10-2 p.m., G02 Murkland Hall
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Office hours: MW 2:15-3, R 1-2

Purpose of the course

This course will introduce students to the physical and human geography of the United States and Canada. Roughly equal attention will be devoted to landforms, climate and biogeography, environmental issues, population and settlement, culture and identity, political geography, urban patterns, natural resources, and economic development.

Because the subject of this course is broad, the specific topics covered will be selective. Course content will alternate between topics that are large in scope and scale, and others that are more narrowly focused. Students should acquire a general understanding of the geographic characteristics of the U.S. and Canada, but also more in-depth knowledge about numerous topics that are representative of the diversity of the two countries.

Approach and organization

The course will be lecture-based because I believe that is the best approach for providing students an introductory knowledge about the geography of the United States and Canada. But I also hope to make students active learners by regularly asking the class questions and seeking student comments. Students are also encouraged to contribute on their own.

The course will be divided into nine sections. The first three sections will focus on physical geography. The middle three sections will focus on human and cultural topics. The final three sections will focus on urban and economic themes. Each section will be four or five class periods in length. Each class will be devoted to a single topic. The course will give greater attention to the United States than Canada because most of you are U.S. citizens, but also because the United States is larger in population and more diverse than its northern neighbor. Nevertheless, a strong effort will be made to present Canadian perspectives throughout the course.

Although this course is not officially designated as a writing-intensive course, student grades will be based entirely on written work because I believe that the ability to write clearly and effectively is one of the most important skills you should possess by the time you graduate. Although this is not an English class, the quality of your writing does count in grading because it will likely count in whatever you do after college.

Examinations

There will be three exams, each covering one-third of the course. The last exam will be given during the final exam period, but will not be comprehensive and will have the same format and length as the other exams. Exams will be composed of short answer and essay questions, and are intended to measure your general understanding of key course themes, concepts, and issues. Students are required to bring an unmarked blue book to class on exam days.

Electoral geography project

Each student must produce a 2,500-word (excluding citations and other supplementary materials) paper in which they analyze and explain the geography of the vote in the 2008 presidential election for a state of their choice. Papers are due in class on Monday, December 8. Late papers and electronic submissions will not be accepted. More detailed instructions and lists of potential information sources for this project will be provided separately.

Grading

Each of the exams will be worth 25 percent of your semester grade. The electoral geography paper will also be worth 25 percent. Final grades will be assigned based on the traditional scale in which an A represents work of exceptional quality (90 percent or better), a B is considered good (80-89 percent), a C is satisfactory (70-79 percent), a D is poor (60-69 percent), and an F is unsatisfactory (below 60 percent). I may modify that scale downward if the class as a whole performs below expectations. Plus grades will be awarded to any student in the B, C, or D ranges whose semester average is within two percentage points of the minimum score for the next highest letter grade. Minus grades will be awarded to any student in the A, B, C, or D ranges whose semester average is within two percentage points of the next lowest letter grade. Extra credit is not available.

Grading in a course such as this where all grades are based on written work is inherently subjective. I strive to be fair to all students and provide explanations for why I graded you as I did. Please keep in mind that grading is an assessment of quality, not a measure of effort. I encourage you to come see me to discuss concerns and questions.

Attendance and missed exams

Attendance will not be taken, but students are responsible for obtaining notes from classmates for any classes missed. I will not re-teach material or provide notes to individual students. Students are responsible for obtaining information about any announcements made during class periods they miss.

Makeup exams will rarely be permitted and will only be considered when circumstances beyond a student's control prevent them from taking the exam during the scheduled class period. If you think you have a legitimate excuse, you must notify me by e-mail or telephone *before the exam begins*, or, when that is logistically impossible, very soon afterwards on the same day. You must also be able to prove your excuse in writing. Conflicts with jobs, other classes, and your personal life are not satisfactory excuses. Exams cannot be taken early for any reason.

Textbook

There is no textbook or required reading for this course.

Blackboard

The university's Blackboard computer system (<http://blackboard.unh.edu/>) will serve as an archive for course materials, will provide students access to their grades, and may be used as a method for distributing information between class meetings. I will assume that the e-mail address linked to your Blackboard account is your primary e-mail address and that you check it regularly.

Academic honesty

Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated and will be severely punished when discovered. I will review the university's academic honesty policy in class and will provide examples of behavior that would be considered violations of that policy. If you have questions about what constitutes academic misconduct, ask me or see UNH's *Students Rights, Rules and Responsibilities* handbook, available at <http://www.unh.edu/student/rights/srrr0809.pdf>

Academic assistance

UNH's Center for Academic Resources in Wolff House (862-3698; <http://www.cfar.unh.edu/>) offers study skills assistance, help with computer applications, drop-in tutoring for specific courses, and other resources to help undergraduates fulfill their academic potential.

Connors Writing Center in Hamilton Smith Hall (862-3272; <http://www.unh.edu/writing/connors.html>) provides students assistance with any kind of writing and offers individual writing conferences. Center staff can help you understand assignments, develop topics, create research plans, organize your work, improve clarity, and learn grammar, punctuation, and formal writing conventions.

Students with disabilities

Students with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course should register with Disability Services for Students in the Memorial Union Building, Room 118 (862-2607), for assistance in developing a plan to address their academic needs.

Tentative course schedule

September 3: Introduction to the course.

September 5-September 15: Landforms (5 classes).

September 15: Deadline for approval of state choice for electoral geography project.

Possible topics: Landform regions, making the Appalachians, glaciation and its impacts, California's earthquake risk, landmaking in Boston.

September 17-24: Climate and biogeography (4 classes).

Possible topics: Climate influences, severe weather, ecological regions, clearing the forests.

September 26-October 3: Environmental issues (4 classes).

Possible topics: Global warming, municipal solid waste, dam removal, soil erosion.

October 6: Exam 1.

October 8-15: Population and settlement (4 classes).

Possible topics: Settlement and migration, peopling of the United States and Canada, geography of African-Americans, immigration from Mexico.

October 17: Fall break; no class.

October 20-29: Culture and identity (5 classes).

Possible topics: Comparing U.S. and Canadian national cultures, geography of religion, Mormon culture region, geography of gays and lesbians, North American foodways.

October 31-November 7: Political framework (4 classes).

Possible topics: U.S.-Canada relations, beyond red and blue states, Canada's French-English fault line, Washington D.C. voting rights.

November 10: Exam 2.

November 12-21: Urban patterns (5 classes).

Possible topics: Development of the U.S. and Canadian urban systems, suburbanization in the United States, Montreal v. Toronto, green Manhattan, American college town.

November 24-December 3: Natural resources (4 classes).

November 27-28: Thanksgiving break; no classes.

Possible topics: Land that feeds us, energy resources, decline of North Atlantic fisheries, rise of organic farming.

December 5-12: Economic development (4 classes).

December 8: Research paper due in class.

Possible topics: Sectoral transformation, evolution of American retailing, poverty in the U.S. and Canada, geography of high-tech.

December 15, 3:30-5 p.m.: Exam 3.