

United States and Canada

Catalog description: *An introductory course that surveys the patterns, connections, and evolution of environments, cultures, and economies of the US and Canada, with an emphasis on maps, regions, and images.*

G&ES 202 (3 credits)

Spring 2012

Instructor Information

- Jim Hathaway, member of Association of PA State College & University Faculties (APSCUF). APSCUF is the faculty and coaches union and is committed to promoting excellence in all that we do to ensure that our students receive the highest quality education.
- office location and phone: 325 ATS (go through 319 ATS), 724-738-2391
- office hours: M: 2:00-2:45, T: 2:15-4:15; Th, 2:15-4:30; feel free to see me at other times
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When and Where

- Section 01: 9:30-10:45, 152 ATS; Section 02: TTh, 11:00-12:15, 152 ATS

Required Texts

- This syllabus serves as a miniature textbook that we will refer to from time to time
- Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* (Harper Perennial, 2005)

US and Canada, the Liberal Studies Program, and University Outcomes for Student Learning and Development

As suggested by the course description at the top of this page, in this class you will learn about the cultural, economic, and political heritage of the US and Canada. The understanding you will gain about the US and Canada, as well as your ability to use the geographer's toolkit, will enable you to better evaluate the news, data, and maps that you come across in your everyday lives as citizens. In this way the goals of US and Canada dovetail with the idea of citizenship essential to the US portion of the "Global Community" category of SRU's Liberal Studies Program. In turn, the Liberal Studies Program is an integral part of the eight University Outcomes for Student Learning and Development. Three University Outcomes in particular are important in this course, and they are Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Oral and Written Communication, and Social Awareness and Civic Responsibility. These three outcomes are also part of the mission of the Department of Geography, Geology, and the Environment.

Student Learning Outcomes (or goals)

Goals and outcomes are two sides of the same coin. Both involve reaching a desired level of achievement, with goals referring to a level of accomplishment you are trying to reach, while outcomes refer to a level of accomplishment that you have reached at the end of a process of striving. The overall goal of this class is for you to use spatial thinking to gain knowledge of the US and Canada that will help explain why Americans and Canadians live the way they do. At the end of the course, you should achieve the outcomes listed in the table below.

Learning Outcome	Outcome in Brief
Apply to the US and Canada the distinctive skills of the discipline of geography, beginning with primary elements of spatial thinking, such as location, place, links, and regions; and including more advanced elements such as analysis of spatial patterns across space and time and accounting for spatial correlations	Geographic skills
See improvement in your ability to apply the skills common to all academic disciplines, including writing, speaking, collaborative work, and critical thinking (see list of critical thinking skills on page 7 below)	Academic skills
Locate important natural, political, and cultural features in the US and Canada on blank maps; perform map analysis	Mapping
Describe the natural regions of the US and Canada and the physical and human processes that have affected those regions	Environments
Describe how the environments, cultures, and economies of the US and Canada are alike and how they differ, and how these similarities and differences came about	Cultures
Explain why some places are rich, why some places are poor, and what can be done about it	Economies

Introduction to the Field of Geography

The geographer Phil Gersmehl¹ notes that geography, history, the humanities and science frequently deal with the same topics, but they look at the world from different perspectives:

- Scientists are concerned with process. The focus is on causes and effects that occur regardless of time or place. The key questions often begin with “how.”
- Historians are concerned with time. The focus is on the time of events and what happens before and after them. The key questions often begin with “when.”
- Humanists in disciplines such as philosophy or art deal with ethics and aesthetics. The focus is on how to judge things like morality and beauty. The key questions often begin with “should” or “how important.”
- Geographers are concerned with space. For geographers, space refers to the surface of the earth, as opposed, for example, to Star Trek’s “final frontier.” The focus is on locations of things, conditions in a particular place, and connections among places. The key questions often begin with “where.”

A geographer may borrow knowledge from other disciplines, but the focus is always on the location of things or the connections between locations. Geography’s main concept is location, and three other important concepts are place, links or connections, and regions. They are defined as follows:

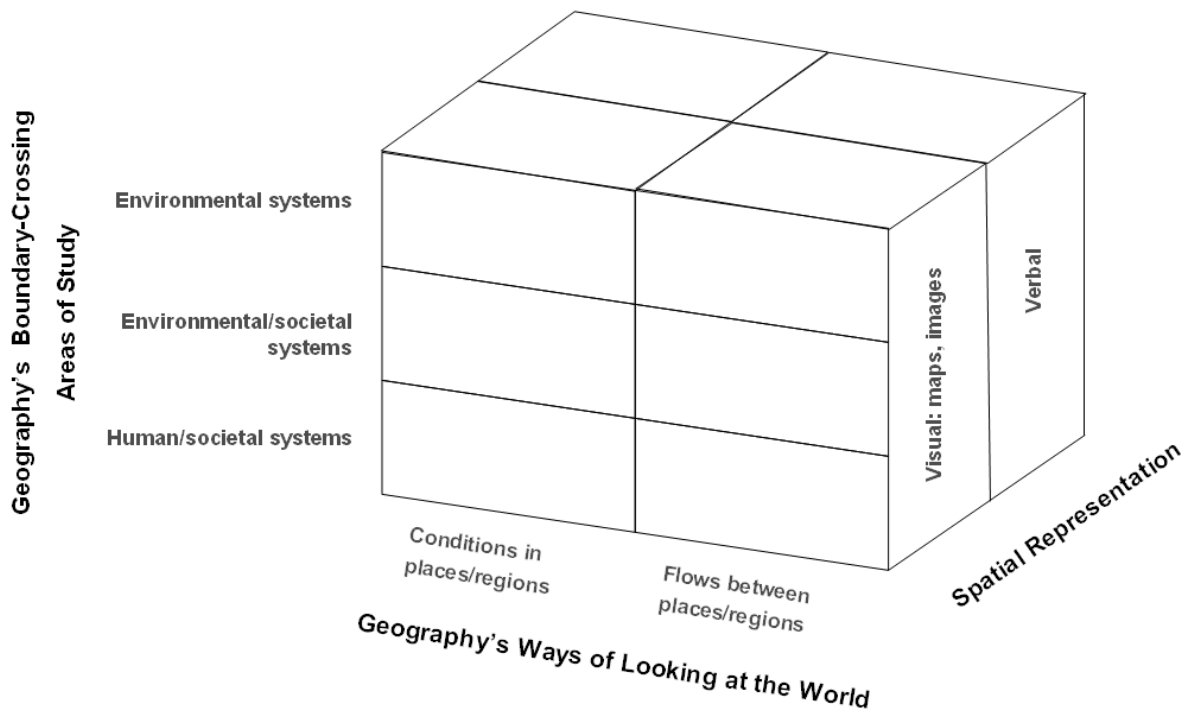
- Location refers to position in space
- Place is the mix of natural and artificial features that give meaning to a location
- Links are the connections between places

¹ *Teaching Geography* (Guilford, 2005)

- A region is a sizable area with generally similar appearance or internal links that tie it together

As a way to comprehend the concepts and three perspectives of geography, I have produced the matrix shown below. The horizontal axis labeled “ways of looking” incorporates the ideas of place and space mentioned above. The vertical axis labeled “areas of study” shows that geographers often attempt to transcend the boundaries traditionally separating the various natural sciences (e.g., environment), social sciences (e.g., economics, cultures), and humanities disciplines (e.g., cultures, music) in order to provide a broad ranging analysis of selected phenomena. Spatial representation is the third dimension; it’s about how we portray different parts of the earth. The matrix simplifies reality and is therefore limited in what it can depict. For example, the time dimension is not shown. To understand conditions or flows in places or regions we need to ask how they got that way. Furthermore, we can ask ethical questions; for example, should a place be that way and can we change it?

The Matrix of Geographic Perspectives: How Things Are Connected²



At this point, let’s define geography. The word comes from the Greek *geo*, the earth, and *graphein*, to write. Here are four definitions of geography:

- the study of place
- a scholarly discipline that focuses on spatial patterns and links
- the study of the earth’s surface as the environment and space within which human beings live

² Adapted from *Rediscovering Geography* (National Academy Press, 1997)

- an integrative discipline that brings together the physical and human dimensions of the world in the study of peoples, places and, environments

Another way to get a handle on the field is to see how scholars have classified its educational and research traditions, as shown in the table below.

William Pattison, “The Four Traditions of Geography,” from <i>J of Geography</i> (1963)	Categories used by the main journal in US geography (<i>Annals of the American Association of Geographers</i>)
an earth science tradition	environmental sciences
a spatial tradition of mapping and location	methods, models, and geographic information systems
a people/environment tradition	nature and society
an area studies or regional tradition	people, place, and region

Grading

The table below shows the eleven ways in which your learning is evaluated, and the weight given to each.

Methods of evaluation	Point total	Dates/comments
Map quiz	50	February 7; see sheppardsoftware.com web games
6 quizzes (50 pts each)	300	February 9; March 20, 22, 29; April 10, 24; you write a paragraph on some aspect of the reading assignment
Midterm exam	250	March 8; one essay, multiple choice and map questions
Mini project	50	March 28; county research project
Class participation	100	See the second bullet below
Final exam	250	section 01: 8:00-10:00, May 10; section 02: 10:30-12:30, May 8; one essay, multiple choice and map questions
Total	1000 points	900-1000 = A, 800-899 = B, 700-799 = C, 600-699 = D, below 600 = F.

Here is some further information on the components of your final grade.

- The midterm exam and final exam will each consist of an essay question and a small number of multiple choice and map questions. Essay questions will only come from two study guides. You may use one 8.5 x 11.5-inch page (both sides) of handwritten, but not photocopied, notes for the midterm exam and for the final exam. The minimum length for a satisfactory essay is five paragraphs. Longer essays usually get higher grades. Your essay grade will rely in part on critical thinking and on connections you can make from one question to another. The course is a system of interconnected ideas and your essays should reflect this.
- I grade class participation mostly on oral participation, but I include several exercises in the participation grade. Several of these exercises involve working in small groups. Class participation is especially important on days with reading assignments, and I expect you to bring written discussion questions to class so that if called upon you can make a contribution. I may ask for your written questions and then grade them as part of your participation score.
- There will be six quizzes. For most quizzes, you have about eight minutes to write a five- or six-

sentence paragraph on some general topic from the reading assignment. The quizzes are open notes but not open book. In grading the quizzes I look to see if the paragraph; i.e., a sequence of lucid sentences that are all related to a single topic; has

- a topic sentence that states the main or controlling idea,
- three or four supporting sentences—they develop the controlling idea, using facts, arguments, analysis, examples, and other information,
- and a concluding sentence—it establishes the connections between the information discussed in the body of the paragraph and the paragraph's controlling idea.

Here's another way to think about the three conditions above: the topic sentence makes a claim; the supporting sentences provide data to support the claim; and the concluding sentence is where you show your creativity, because here you link the data to the claim. Thus the concluding statement should not be a restatement of the topic sentence. If these three conditions are met, you will receive an A for five or six quality sentences, a B for three or four quality sentences, and a C for one or two.

- Attendance affects your grade. Students with excellent attendance (one or no unexcused absences) will receive 10 bonus points. On the other hand, each unexcused absence in excess of two will result in a 15-point loss (e.g., a student with four unexcused absences will have 30 points deducted from his or her course total). An excused absence requires some form of written documentation. If you miss a class, you are responsible for getting the homework assignment from another student or me and for completing it by the due date. Students who are late to class should see me afterwards to ensure that they were not marked absent. SRU's faculty and administration "strongly encourage students to attend every class session, to spend at least two hours in review and preparation for each hour in class and to participate fully in all aspects of the class" (SRU Catalog).

The class will not be graded on a curve. It is possible for every student in the class to get an A. You will not be competing against each other and there will be every incentive to help each other improve.

Academic Integrity

Having just said that you should help each other, the work (e.g., exam notes) that you submit must be your own, for both moral and legal reasons. Academic dishonesty is a major violation against the University's Code of Conduct. Plagiarism is representing the work of others as your own (e.g., an exam that has two sentences that are similar to those of another student). The academic integrity section of the undergraduate catalog goes into more detail about what academic dishonesty is and its consequences

http://catalog.sru.edu/content.php?catoid=2&navoid=202#acad_inte.

Withdrawal

The deadline for course withdrawal (grade of W) is Friday, April 6.

Course Outline	quiz	date	week
1. Introduction			1
i. Lecture: The basics		1/24	
ii. Discussion: North America, the rich continent		1/26	
iii. Exercise: where Americans live		1/31	2
2. The Natural Environment			
a. The Natural Landscape: Geologic Processes			
i. Lecture and slide presentation: landforms of US and Canada		2/2	3
ditto	Map Qz.	2/7	
b. The Natural Landscape: The Human Factor			
i. Environmental issues in Montana	Quiz	2/9	4
c. The Natural Landscape: Climatic Processes			
i. Lecture and slide presentation: climates of US and Canada		2/14	
ii. Exercise: climatic conditions in the US		2/16	5
3. Making a Living: US and Canadian Economic Geography			
a. The effect of the past on today's economies			
i. 🎵 ³ Lecture and slide presentation: New York City		2/21	6
ditto		2/23	
[Mini project: The top employers in your county]			
ii. Film: Video Visits--Canada		2/28	7
iii. 🎵 Lecture and slide presentation: Atlantic Canada		3/1	
iv. 🎵 Exercise: plantations and population		3/6	
<i>Midterm Exam</i>	Exam	3/8	8
	Break	3/13, 3/15	
b. Food and the economic landscape The big picture			
i. Discussion: <i>Fast Food Nation</i> (intro, ch 1-4; ch 5-8)	Quiz (2)	3/20, 3/22	9
ii. Film: Food Inc		3/27	
iii. Discussion: <i>Fast Food Nation</i> (ch 9-10, epilogue, afterword)	Quiz	3/29	
c. The big picture			10
i. 🎵 Lecture and discussion: The US and Canadian economies		4/3, 4/5	
4. Diverse Peoples and National Unity: The US and Canada			
a. The Processes and Patterns of US and Canadian Cultural Dev.			11
i. Discussion: the processes, with US examples	Quiz	4/10	
ii. 🎵 Discussion and slide presentation: southern Louisiana		4/12	
b. US and Can. National Character and Their Spatial Expression			12
i. 🎵 Discussion: individualism, mobility and change, mechanistic world vision, and messianic perfectionism		4/17	
ii. 🎵 Lecture and slide presentation: LA		4/19	
iii. US and Canadian cultural patterns	Quiz	4/24	13
iv. 🎵 Lecture and slide presentation: New Mexico		4/26	
ditto		5/1	
5. Conclusion: Closing comments, review		5/3	14

³ 🎵 denotes that regional or topical musical selections will be played before or during class.

Critical Thinking Skills

We don't need no thought control, The Wall, Roger Waters

Critical thinking comprises a number of overlapping abilities or strategies. I've listed some below (for another set of definitions, see this web site: http://www.criticalthinking.org/aboutCT/define_critical_thinking.cfm).

1. **Observes.** One must both look closely and remain open to hidden or unexpected explanations to think critically. Gathering information in a systematic manner can increase one's willingness to accept evidence even if it contradicts one's previous opinions. The recall and comprehension (putting what is recalled in one's own words) of what one sees are important steps in critical thinking.
2. **Analyzes.** In order to truly understand one must break down material into its component parts so that its organizational structure may be understood. In other words, analysis involves knowing the relationships between parts and recognizing the organizational principles that connect them.
3. **Recognizes ambiguity.** Ambiguity means having two or more meanings. Issues are often complex, and that complexity only emerges from confusion if one is able to recognize ambiguity.
4. **Comes to grips with complexity.** Here one recognizes that there are usually no easy answers to important issues or questions. Complex issues do not lend themselves to simple single-cause explanations.
5. **Identifies assumptions.** All reasoning is based on assumptions. An assumption is something taken for granted, i.e., accepted as true without proof, by a thinker but often left unstated. Since assumptions are not mentioned and thus not backed up with evidence, they offer insight into the validity of our own arguments as well as those of others.
6. **Assumes perspective of another.** You may have heard the phrase "walk a mile in their shoes." This saying implies a willingness to explore ideas contrary to one's own beliefs and the ability to see problems and issues in a broader perspective than one's own culture or interest group.
7. **Adopts multiple perspectives.** To adopt multiple perspectives means to see a problem from many angles. There are as many perspectives as there are people, but several important categories include race, class, and gender. Adopting multiple perspectives allows one to anticipate counterarguments and to address them even before one's position is questioned. Multiple perspectives can also lead one to reconsider one's own position.
8. **Synthesizes.** Synthesis puts parts together to form a new whole. It is the opposite of analysis. Synthesis involves seeing connections among various and seemingly unrelated facts and experiences (e.g., different texts, different courses, different personal experiences, or current events, etc.) Creativity is an important part of synthesis, since the connections one finds may be original.
9. **Recognizes bias.** A goal of critical thinking is fair mindedness. One tests one's own impressions in all ways possible. Recognizing bias helps one to see their own assumptions and thus to reduce personal prejudice and to recognize it in others.
10. **Evaluates.** To evaluate one must judge the worth or significance of something and to judge one must have definite criteria. Such criteria may be internal (e.g., how effectively is the purpose carried out?) or external (e.g., why might this work be of interest to someone? How does it compare to other works in its field?)