

Syllabus for GEOG 3812

Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean

(<http://www.colorado.edu/geography/COGA/GEOG3812/>)

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T, R: 11-1215

Guggenheim 205

Regional geography seeks to understand the complex interrelationships of physical and human systems that characterize important parts of Earth's surface. This course deals with the regional geography of Middle America, which includes Mexico, Central America, and the islands of the Caribbean. Middle America, as defined here, is a subregion of the larger Latin America, which includes Middle America and South America. The other subregion of Latin America is covered in the follow-up course, GEOG 4812, Environment and Development in South America. The present course can also provide you with a background for more specialized courses on Latin American cultures, economics, politics, and arts. It can add a valuable multidisciplinary dimension to the program of the International Affairs major and a regional component in the program of the Geography major.

Despite the fact that Middle America is our Western Hemisphere neighbor, we North Americans know very little about it. Our images are often influenced by biases and stereotypes. For example, we overgeneralize about the poverty, "backwardness," and authoritarianism of the region. An important objective of this course is to have you learn that Middle America's regional unity is based largely upon cultural heritage and historical experience, but that in terms of environment, politics, and economic development, the region is highly diverse.

Another important objective is to have you appreciate and learn how to examine the geographical expressions of Middle American diversity and unity. Change over time and space, especially with regard to environments, economies, and societies, and internal and external geographic relationships are major elements of these expressions. Location, place, human-environment relations, spatial interaction, and region are prominent themes of the geographic perspective. This course can help you sharpen your abilities to use this perspective in order to assist you in your understanding of Middle American issues, from local to global scales, including development, urbanization, industrialization, migration, agricultural and environmental sustainability, and population change.

Other course objectives include the enhancement of your research, writing, oral communication, and critical thinking skills, which you can develop through a variety of assignments.

Because this course applies aspects of both human and physical geography, at least one introductory course in each of those areas are prerequisites. These courses can provide you with an adequate background to deal with the interrelationships of physical and human systems.

After a general view of Middle America's cultural and physical diversity and its relations to the rest of Latin America and the world, the course proceeds regionally beginning with the Caribbean (the West Indies), then takes up Mexico, and concludes with Central America. Since it is impossible to comprehensively cover all aspects of the geography of such a diverse area in only one semester, this course can examine only a limited selection of areas and topics. These are shown on the course calendar below, but that schedule may vary as opportunities arise. Topics will emphasize culture history and environmental, economic, social, cultural, and political change in geographical and historical contexts.

Texts:

- R.C. West and J.P. Augelli. 1989. *Middle America: Its Lands and Peoples*. Third edition. Prentice-Hall.
- P.B. Goodwin. 1998. *Latin America*, 8th ed., Annual Editions Global Studies Series. Dushkin/McGraw-Hill.

A schedule of required readings in these texts is given in the tentative schedule below. Although it is 10 years old, the West and Augelli text is still valuable because it takes a cultural historical approach to the region, and no other single geography book available does this. Of course, West and Augelli is not current on contemporary statistics, e.g., for population and economy, but such figures are provided in Goodwin. Strictly speaking, the Goodwin book is not a geography text, but it offers up-to-date profiles on each Middle American country as well as a handy set of current articles from a broad range of international periodicals and newspapers. You can supplement these by regularly reading about Middle America in daily newspapers.

Class meetings: You can succeed in this course because it offers alternatives for different learning styles--conventional quizzes, research, writing, and oral reporting. Class attendance will be taken regularly. Classes will include lectures, discussions, selected films, scheduled quizzes, and student reports. You are encouraged to participate by asking questions and making comments on the material being covered.

Quizzes: These cover readings, films, lectures, and discussions from the previous quiz. They are a combination of "objective" type questions (e.g., fill-in, multiple-choice, map location) and short essays. They are designed to test your ability to geographically describe and analyze important physical and human features, patterns, and processes, to synthesize information, make generalizations, and apply knowledge to address and solve problems.

Final exam: This will take roughly the same form as the quizzes, but will be somewhat longer. It will be comprehensive in its coverage, but will emphasize material covered after Quiz 2.

Research paper: This semester-long activity (10-15 typewritten pages in length, plus reference list) must examine an important Middle American issue from a geographic perspective. This gives you an opportunity to explore a topic of special interest to you and to hone your research and writing skills, which you will continue to use in many future endeavors. You should follow the tips for writing these papers, which are given below. With special permission of the instructor, pairs of students may co-author papers. The grading criteria for research papers will be given out in class. A modified Delphi panel technique will facilitate groups to report their predictions of future trends and events.

Term grades: These will combine your performance on all assignments in the following proportions:

Quiz 1	20%	Research paper	35%
Quiz 2	20%	Final exam	25%
Points are deducted for poor class attendance and participation			

Dave Hill's office hours: Please visit me in my office in Gugg. 102B on TR 9:30-10:45; 3:15-4:30, or by appointment. Office phone is 492-6760. E-mail is adh@colorado.edu (I check my e-mail daily so this is the easiest way to reach me).

Web page: <http://www.colorado.edu/geography/COGA/GEOG3812/>

If you lose your syllabus, you can get it on this page. Outlines for most (but not all) of the lectures are linked to the schedule; click on the topic on the schedule. In previous classes, some students have found it helpful to print out the lecture outlines and bring them to class. This way they have the basic outline and can fill in the details during the lecture. We hope to have a discussion board up and running.

Listserve: To enhance communication, we will develop an e-mail listserve for students enrolled in the course, so check your e-mail often.

Please jot down the names, phone numbers, and e-mail of at least two fellow students in the class. These should be people you can call to get assignments and notes if you must miss class.

Tentative Schedule:

Required readings are in parentheses. All chapter references are to West & Augelli; all page and article references are to Goodwin. A few additional readings are listed. Underlined topics are clickable on the course Web page. Some topics are continued, as noted, for more than one class period. Readings should be completed prior to the class period for which they are assigned. (This schedule may change as problems and/or opportunities arise. You are responsible for any changes announced in class.)

Dates	Topics and Readings
<u>August</u>	
T, 25	Introduction to the course and to the geographic perspective (Read <u>How Geography Examines the World</u> by A.D. Hill, available on the course homepage)
R, 27	(continued)
<u>September</u>	
T, 1	<u>Latin American unity and diversity in global context</u> (Chap. 1; pp. 2-7; Art. 1)
R, 3	<u>Physical diversity of Middle America</u> (Chap. 2; Art. 2)
T, 8	<u>Aboriginal geography of the Caribbean</u> (Chap. 3; pp. 100-107)
R, 10	<u>Sugar and slavery</u>
T, 15	(continued) (Chap. 4; pp. 114-17; 120-21; 124-25)
R, 17	<u>Caribbean emigration</u> (Chap. 5; pp. 108-13; 118-19; 122-23; 126-35.)
T, 22	Developing Stories video: <i>Desounen: Dialogue with Death</i> (Chap. 6; Arts. 17 & 18)
R, 24	Developing Stories video: <i>And the Dish Ran Away with the Spoon</i> (Chap. 7)
T, 29	<u>Quiz 1</u> (only at this time--no makeups are given)
<u>October</u>	
R, 1	<u>Conquest of Mexico and early colonialism</u> (Chap. 8; Arts. 6 & 8)
T, 6	video: <i>Conflict of the Gods</i> (Chap. 9)
R, 8	<u>Geography of colonial institutions</u> (Chap. 10)
T, 13	NO CLASS MEETING (NCGE)
R, 15	<u>Transition to independence</u> (Chap. 11; pp. 8-17)
T, 20	video: <i>Continent on the Move: Migration and Urbanization</i> (Arts. 3, 4, 5)
R, 22	video: <i>Borderline Cases: Environmental Matters at the U.S.-Mexico Border</i>

T, 27 Chiapas: Indians, Ladinos, and Insurrection (Chap. 12 and Ch. 1 from Collier's
 Basta)
R, 29 (continued)

November

T, 3 **Quiz 2** (only at this time--no makeups are given)
R, 5 Central American demography (Chap. 13; pp. 18-25)

T, 10 (continued) (Arts. 9 &10)
R, 12 El Salvador: Agrarian change and civil war (Chap. 14; pp. 31-34; 26-27; 35-
 41)

T, 17 Nietschman's Miskito (Chap. 15; pp. 28-30; 42-48; Arts. 11 & 12)
R, 19 Nicaragua After the War (Vicki McVey)

T, 24 **Research papers due** and Delphi panels (late papers are downgraded)
R, 26 NO CLASS MEETING (THANKSGIVING)

December

T, 1 video: *The Americans: The Latin American and Caribbean Presence in the*
 United States (Chap. 16)
R, 3 Delphi panel reports

T, 8 LAST CLASS MEETING: Final review and evaluation

Final exam: **Tuesday, December 15, 7:30 a.m.** PLEASE MARK THIS ON YOUR
CALENDAR NOW. THE FINAL WILL BE GIVEN ONLY AT THIS TIME: NO
EXCEPTIONS WILL BE MADE.

Research Paper Writing Tips

1. The first and worst mistake you can make is to misunderstand the assignment. Be sure you understand the assignment and have thought about the assumptions and implications embedded in it. Then, commit yourself to addressing the assignment with *your own original* paper. As you know, plagiarism is a big academic sin.
2. My assignment is broadly phrased in order to give you latitude in choosing the theme for your paper, but you must not try to cover a broad theme because that only leads to superficiality. Rather, take a particular aspect of that broad theme, one that is so narrow and carefully focused that you can cover it well in the allowable page limit, and one for which you know you will have adequate information.
3. The success of the entire mission depends upon having a good thesis statement, i.e., *a proposition or argument that you will examine in your paper*. The thesis depends upon a question you seek to answer. Your thesis may propose an explanation for some characteristic, process relationship, or pattern. (In geography, that typically means a thesis concerning place characteristics, human–environment relationships, and/or spatial interactions.) A thesis gives you two powerful advantages: a *critical perspective* and a test for *relevancy*. Without a thesis, the paper is likely to become a mere collection of information, something like an almanac or encyclopedia item, without any *interpretation* of data (interpretation gives the work a critical perspective; it is also the essence of research). The test for relevancy tells you what to include and what to leave out: "Does this have relevance to my thesis?"
4. Make an outline. Begin with your thesis and list the key ideas that support and contradict your point. List the arguments and/or evidence for each idea.
5. Start your paper with an introduction that establishes what your paper is about, i.e., your thesis. Unlike a good mystery, you are not trying to surprise your reader, so make it clear where the paper is heading. In some cases, it might be necessary to tell your reader why your thesis is important, i.e., why she should bother reading this paper.
6. The body of your paper should address in organized fashion the data and key ideas that support (and possibly contradict) your thesis. Develop the ideas fully and provide a flow between them. Each point should be supported rationally or empirically using arguments, examples, quotations, or other data. Unsubstantiated generalizations produce vague, unconvincing, and superficial papers. Quotations that are not fully discussed are unconvincing. Don't rely on quotations to do your writing. Paraphrase where possible. Remember, the essence of research is the *interpretation* of data. Convey a clear, consistent, original, interesting, inquiring, intellectual, challenging, speculative, unambiguous point of view about this topic.

7. How the data are displayed is important, too. Maps, graphs, and tables should be *original*, simple, and easy to read, and should be numbered and integrated into the text and referred to in the text. Cartographic elegance is not a high priority with these papers.

8. Each paragraph or section should have a topical sentence and provide a transition into the following paragraph or section. Use visual cues (subheadings, white space, typography) to signal your clear-cut organization.

9. Write a conclusion summarizing your major points and underscoring for the reader the significance and meaning of the paper. Do not introduce new ideas or data in the conclusion.

10. Give credit where credit is due: Note sources for the ideas of others and for all data. Use a scientific in-text referencing system of author and date (Brown 1992) giving the page number(s)

only for direct quotations (Brown 1992, 16–17). Full references should be assembled (alphabetically by author) at the end in a List of References, which should include only items for which you have given in-text references. For further guidance, follow the conventions used in the journal *Annals, Association of American Geographers*.

11. Style and mechanics are important. Mechanics, spelling, and punctuation count. Avoid passive voice, run-on sentences, hyperbole, verbosity, comma faults, misuse of the apostrophe, conclusion of sentences with prepositions, and other common mistakes. Use language carefully; let the interested and interesting human mind, voice, and personality shine through. Your paper's title is important, too. Make it descriptive rather than cute, "clever," and ambiguous. Don't waste resources on a title page or plastic cover, and be sure you number all your pages.

12. A good paper requires a great deal of hard work. It *a/ways* goes through several drafts.

13. Please meet with me early in your research so I can have an opportunity to react to your ideas.

Department of Geography Code of Conduct

In the Department of Geography, instructors strive to create an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect in which learning, debate, and intellectual growth can thrive. Creating this atmosphere, however, requires that instructors and students work to achieve a classroom in which learning is not disrupted. At the most basic level, this means that everyone attend class, be prepared with readings and assignments completed, and that students pay attention. This means no conversations with friends, reading the

newspaper, coming late, or leaving early. Such behavior is disruptive to the instructor and to your fellow classmates.

These basics of classroom etiquette are an important means of building and showing mutual respect. Inevitably, however, disagreements will arise. Sometimes these disagreements will be about content, sometimes about grades or course procedures, and sometimes they will be about the treatment of participants in the class. In order to facilitate the resolution of these disagreements, the following guidelines should be followed by everyone:

- All interactions must be guided by mutual respect and trust.
- If you are bothered by some aspect of the class, identify what it is that is bothering you and center the discussion on that issue.
- Address issues that concern you early. Problems are easier to resolve before they fester.
- Consider whether it is best to address your concerns in class or in a separate appointment with the instructor. Remember, behavior that disrupts your fellow classmates is not acceptable.
- Abusive speech or behavior will not be tolerated in any interaction between students or between student and instructor. If an instructor feels that your speech or behavior is abusive, you will be asked to leave the room. If you believe an instructor has become abusive, you may leave the room and talk with the department chairperson. Debate and discussion can continue after all parties can proceed with mutual respect.
- If mutual respect cannot be restored, either you or the instructor may take the issue to the department chairperson or the campus Ombuds Office.

Notice to All Students Taking Geography Courses

In cases of academic dishonesty the Geography Department, following College of Arts and Sciences regulations, will give an **F** for the part of the course (such as an individual lab exercise, or test) or possibly an **F** for the whole course, depending on the seriousness of the instance, for any violations of academic dishonesty. If copying a piece of work is involved, action will be taken against both the person who copied and the person whose work was copied, unless the latter had no control over the situation. All cases of academic dishonesty have to be reported to the Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Cases where one person is illegally in possession of another person's work are subject to further disciplinary measures by the College Committee on Academic Ethics.