

Frontiers in Geography
GRG 374; Unique #37875

Syllabus for Spring Semester, 2014

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A. *Course Objective and Subjects*

The primary objective of this course is to provide you a ‘working understanding’ of the contemporary nature of Geography, which means I am interested in considering Geography as it is practiced. My department expects this course, *Frontiers in Geography*, to be a ‘capstone’ experience, although none of us really knows what that means. It can be interpreted in a variety of ways and the faculty of our department have tried many of them while teaching this course, based to a great extent upon their own respective personal and academic histories, styles, personalities, and general sense of what is important and what is not. None of them are wrong. The route I have chosen is a ‘working understanding’, which it is hoped, will complement and supplement what you have been studying for these last few years.

I begin with the simplest of questions—What is Geography?—and then provide a set of fundamentals that will help appreciate the question, thus providing a ‘working’ understanding:

It is a set of *concepts*
It is a *frame* for study
It is a *discipline*
It is a *university* subject
It is a *job*

1) *Concepts*. In this section we provide an overview of the nature of the discipline—“what are the fundamental precepts that define Geography?” To some extent this is a summary and gathering together of ideas that surround what you have been doing for the last few years as a Geography major. At the same time it is my opportunity to stress my favorite geo-concept: Place, perhaps along with space, its little stepsister.

2) *Frame*. We use these concepts to help structure the ways they can help illuminate geographic processes, that is, to study the surface of the earth, especially in terms of the daily patterns of human kind. We are going to use a frame—stressing but not exclusively using the example of tourism. This will be the focus of your final capstone paper and most of your readings will be here, on the subject called “A Geography of Tourism”. If you have even a vague notion of what I do, you know that my favorite subject is cinematic geography, but I need to branch out to include something new, and so I chose tourism, which is a natural for our discipline.

3) *Discipline*. We will discuss Geography as a contemporary academic discipline in terms of its history, associations, journals, and departments.

4) *University*. The heart and history of a discipline begins with the university. Here we will talk about the contemporary nature of the American University, especially as in this contentious political and economic era; issues of note at the national, state, and UT levels will be discussed. We do so to understand the home of Geography, but we will spend time on issues that may not have immediate relevance to our discipline.

5) *Job*. Several of you will be disappointed that this course is not centered on getting you a job. In fact, we won’t spend much time on the subject at all. Why? Because basically it is not within my purview; the truth be known, I don’t know much about that subject, which is true of most of my colleagues. This goes back to our subject of the University (above); more on that later. But we will not ignore it. We will work on your resumes, discuss ways you can aggressively engage the complex and sometimes scary job market out there, consider issues of cover letters and interviewing, and we will bring people into the classroom who can help provide us some practicalities of the search. We will also discuss graduate school. Here I can help much more, although if the past is any predictor fewer than five or six of you will be immediately interested. We’ll play that one by ear.

The discussion of these five issues will be linear in the most general sense, but because they are often so closely intertwined we will integrate them at times. Now worries; it will work.

B. Schedule. This is a general order of subjects. I have never believed in an absolute and detailed agenda in which every day of the semester is prescribed without opportunity to veer in different and constructive directions. Note that there is ‘method in his madness’: we introduce Geography, then emphasize place, then write a paper using place, then introduce tourism—especially within the frame of place—and then proceed to the other subjects. But once tourism is introduced we will keep making reference to it for the rest of the semester and will often read one article per class on the subject. All of this will help you build ideas and references as you develop your final, and ‘grand’, paper.

Study Sections—rough outline

- 1) Sec 1: Intro to class, etc. (2 days)
- 2) Sec 2: Intro to Geography (at least 3 weeks)
- 3) Sec3: Personal Place Paper (one day)

- 4) Sec4: Begin Tourism (one day, then throughout)
- 5) Sec5: Geography Discipline (2 weeks)
- 6) Sec6: Tourism paper (one day)
- 7) Sec7: Professional (one week)
- 8) Sec8: Mystery paper (one day)
- 9) Sec9: The American University (one day or so)
- 10) Sec10: *La Vida Loca*—The University of Texas (3 weeks)
- 11) Sec11: More tourism (Slum, Sex, Dead People!—two weeks)

C. Grading

Shorter papers (usually 3)	25 percent of total grade
Final paper	40 percent of total grade
Participation*	25 percent of total grade
Final Examination	10 percent of total grade

*includes attendance

**Remember, this class has a ‘writing flag’, so we need to write often!

D. Readings

There will be readings assigned every week and most will be discussed in class. You are required to read all the materials that have been assigned. We are looking for themes, concepts, and ideas, but not the little details. And by the way, being prepared to discuss readings is a significant part of your participation grade, so do it!! Repeat—read the assigned material!!!!

There is no required book. All articles will either be provided to you in PDF (either sent on listserve or provided on Blackboard) or you will find them yourself.

E. Final Paper

All the issues outlined below will be discussed in detail on several occasions throughout the semester from this moment forward.

Paper: The length should be 12-15 pages double spaced, 12 font, Times Roman, standard margins (1”x1 1/2”). Inclusion of photographs and graphics is encouraged, but these do not count as part of the paper’s length.

References: You should have at least five substantive ‘academic’ references, although these can include articles we have used in class. You must cite all references used; if you borrow from the web, you must cite your references accordingly.

Reference Format: Use the format from the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, the MLA, or any model of your choice, but you must be consistent.

Subject: This paper should be concerned with a Geography of Tourism subject of your choice, although the setting must be within the state of Texas. As you will see, 'tourism' will be broadly defined, so there are many subjects at hand. The emphasis may be from within any geographic perspective with which you are comfortable, although use of the concept of place as we have outlined it is a good 'default' approach to start, given that we will be talking about it in detail. Creativity is encouraged—some of you may want to 'think outside the box'—and the subject should certainly be interesting to you and colleagues, but ultimately this must be a solid and valid piece of geographic research. From this point forward I will be talking with you collectively and individually about your project and the ways you choose to study it.

Due Date: Last day of class, Thursday, May 1 at 2.00pm as you walk in the door. Hardcopy, please. I may also ask for an e-version. **NO EXCEPTIONS, PLEASE!!!! Late papers will have a strongly negative impact on your fall grade.**

F. Rules—Please Read VERY Carefully

- 1) This course will be taught in a seminar format, and so everyone is expected to participate fully. This means that all written work and preparation (readings, etc.) must be done on time, that you participate in our conversations in a substantive way, and that you attend class regularly.
- 2) Attendance is expected; less than ideal attendance is likely to have a negative impact on your grade. Please be on time. Consistent tardiness will count toward non-attendance.
- 3) Do not ask for my notes or assignments if you miss a lecture. Get to know your colleagues; share. This is not a zero-sum game.
- 4) Late assignments are not accepted. Plan ahead.
- 5) All written assignments must be proofed for spelling, typographical errors and major grammatical mistakes. Needless to say, nothing handwritten will be accepted.
- 6) You are expected to complete the readings by the assigned times. There will be classroom discussions of the contents and implications of all that we read, so be prepared.
- 7) Please, no food, side conversations, or chewing gum during class.
- 8) *Cell phones are never to be used in this classroom. This includes texting.* This is a cell phone-free zone, so turn off those puppies OFF. IT. CAN. WAIT.
- 9) It is appropriate to use laptops in this class, but only within reason. PLEASE, no surfing unrelated to our class, and no emailing, texting, polishing up your Facebook account etc. during class hours.
- 10) I expect everyone to use e-mail as a form of communication for this class. I communicate regularly

by that medium and I expect you to do the same. Normally, I will respond to queries and comments within 24 hours. I don't check my office phone very often, so it is not a reliable source.

11) Some important 'housekeeping':

A. "Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>", and

B. "By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence."

C. Everyone is expected to know, accept, and practice the basics of honesty and integrity in all personal and professional dealings in this class. UT's Honor Code says:

"The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community."

One of the issues here is plagiarism. What does it mean? Please read carefully. http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis_plagiarism.php. *This is one thing I will not tolerate.*

D. We all need to appreciate the concepts and practices of sexual harassment (and discrimination, and misconduct). To make a long story short, the university's standards apply to ALL university participants, from students to the president to staff. Let's discuss this for a moment. <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sh/>

11) Finally, whining is not tolerated. Understand this.