

University of Guelph - Department of Geography, Environment & Geomatics
PROVISIONAL Course Description – Winter 2026

GEOG*1300 INTRODUCTION TO THE BIOPHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT
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Class Meetings: See Calendar

Instructor: Ze'ev Gedalof (zgedalof@uoguelph.ca)

Office Hours: **TBA**

Graduate Teaching Assistants: **TBA**

GTA Office Hours: **TBA**

STATEMENT ON ELECTRONIC AIDS

You are responsible for all content submitted for evaluation. Remember that Generative AIs, such as ChatGPT, use existing information. This means that their use may result in misappropriation of others' work as your own should you use it and submit it. This is academic misconduct (see Section VIII in the calendar). If you have used Generative AI you must identify how and appropriately cite it as you should any third party. Be warned that generative AIs can be confidently wrong. Also, I ran a few of my assignments through ChatGPT and it got a solid C+, but was also flagged for plagiarism by the University system. Secondly, there are versions of old assignments that are similar to this year's that have been uploaded to various websites. If you use them you will get caught and you will face the maximum consequences I can muster. Do not do it!

REQUIRED TEXT

Alan F. Arbogast *et al.* (2018). *Discovering Physical Geography – Canadian Edition*. Wiley

The last time I checked this textbook cost \$57 as an e-rental, or \$135 as a download. I have listed it as required, but if you show up to class and take good notes you can pass the course without buying it. There are also loose-leaf copies available, probably including used, which is probably the best option.

OVERVIEW

This course is the foundation for more specialized courses in physical geography and geomatics. In it we will learn the basic principles of physical geography: biogeography, climatology, geomorphology, hydrology, and soil science. More specifically, we will look at the patterns and processes governing climate, landforms, and vegetation systems, and their interrelationships. We will look at both natural and human-induced changes to environmental systems. Laboratories will address techniques of measurement, representation and analysis of environmental systems through maps, remotely sensed images, laboratory, and field observations.

COURSE AIM

The aim of this course is to introduce the components of the Earth's natural systems as studied by physical geographers through the processes, interactions and flows of energy between of the atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere and biosphere. The surface of the Earth is an extremely dynamic environment where forces and processes driven by internal and external sources of energy interact to create climate, landforms and landscapes. The effects of solar energy, climate, tectonic activity, gravity, weathering, erosion and sediment transport will be discussed within the context of physical geography. While much of the material covered will be descriptive, rather than mathematical, students are reminded that Physical Geography is a quantitative science and some of the material in this course draws upon basic science theory and relationships. From time to time simple numerical relationships will be introduced and you will be expected to solve simple problems in lab assignments.

OBJECTIVES

- To learn the fundamental principles of physical geography
- To develop basic skills for the measurement and analysis of data relevant to earth systems
- To appreciate the beautiful complexity of the Earth system, and to experience the joy that comes from exploring it.

APPROACH

The course will largely follow the textbook, with each major theme covered by in-class material supported by laboratory exercises. This is a large class, but questions, comments, and interaction are important. In my experience CourseLink is a useful resource if students use it collectively.

EXPECTATIONS

Students are required to be respectful of their peers, GTAs, and the course instructor (e.g., if you wish to talk with your friends, check or post in your social media accounts, or use your cell phone please do so outside of class).

Lectures are intended to supplement the assigned readings, so students should review this material prior to class. Some in-class participation discussions will be based on assigned readings, and these must be completed before class.

The use of digital devices (phones, tablets, laptops, etc.) for any purpose other than note-taking is not permitted during class time unless you are sitting where no other students can see your screen. This is because the science shows that you distract the people around you more than you distract yourself and that's just not fair to them.

[See here for details](#)

I do not make my PowerPoint files available on CourseLink. There are many reasons for this, but it boils down to two main considerations: You learn more if I don't provide them;

and much of the material I present is copyrighted and I am not allowed to distribute it outside of the classroom.

The sharing of electronic files, other than your lecture notes, is strictly prohibited and will lead to a lot of paperwork and unwanted time with the Associate Dean Academic. (e.g. no sharing of lab assignments, graphs, essays.)

COURSE EVALUATION

- *Laboratory Exercises*. There are five laboratory sections that meet most weeks, from week 2 to week 9. Stay tuned to CourseLink for details. **All labs must be submitted as PDF files.** If this is a problem you must make *prior* arrangement with me or your lab instructor. **There is a \$10 lab fee to cover costs, payable in the main office, Hutt 119.**
- *Field Trip*. There is a **required** field trip, scheduled on a Saturday near the end of the semester. It is rain or shine, barring lightning, tornadoes, or freakish snow.
- There will be an in-class *Midterm Examination* (25 February, 2026) and a *Final Examination* (Date and Location TBA). Both exams consist mainly of multiple choice questions, and a few carefully selected short answer questions. Expect to see at least one graph, and a question about important scientists, but no math.

GRADING

Laboratory Exercises	35 %
Field Trip Report	12.5 %
Mid-term Examination	17.5 %
Final Examination	35 %

All assignments must be submitted through Dropbox on Courselink **as pdf files**. Other file formats will be blocked. Late assignments (without prior approval) will be penalized at a rate of 10 percent of the value of the assignment per day. **Your GTA is your first point of contact for extensions and other lab related questions.** This course uses Turnitin to help encourage academic integrity. A reminder again that using Generative AI to write your assignments is academic misconduct, though might qualify you to run for the US presidency.

COMMUNICATION

This course uses ~~WebCT Blackboard D2L~~ CourseLink as the primary tool for communication and distribution of course material.

All email correspondence will be sent to your University of Guelph email address. I normally respond to student inquiries during my office hours. I do not normally reply to messages from off-campus email addresses. Only messages and postings that are appropriately professional will

be responded to. For example, **I ignore emails that begin “Hey,”** or that include texting lingo; I’m too old for that.

University of Guelph Policy Statements (aka “The Fine Print”):

E-mail Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <mail.uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. [See the undergraduate calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration.](#)

Drop Date

I assume the last day of classes?

Copies of out-of-class assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Accessibility

The University promotes the full participation of students who experience disabilities in their academic programs. To that end, the provision of academic accommodation is a shared responsibility between the University and the student.

When accommodations are needed, the student is required to first register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS). Documentation to substantiate the existence of a disability is required, however, interim accommodations may be possible while that process is underway. Accommodations are available for both permanent and temporary disabilities. It should be noted that common illnesses such as a cold or the flu do not constitute a disability.

Use of the SAS Exam Centre requires students to book their exams at least 7 days in advance, and not later than the 40th Class Day.

More information: www.uoguelph.ca/sas

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor.

[The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar.](#)

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to **course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded, photographed or copied** without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer. Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that course unless further permission is granted.

Resources

The [Academic Calendars](#) are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma programs.

Very Provisional Schedule

Date	Topic	Text.	Lab
05-Jan-26	Intro	1	No Labs this week
07-Jan-26	Lat / Long, UTM, GPS	2	
09-Jan-26	Earth-Sun geometry and seasons	3	
12-Jan-26	Global energy patterns	4	Map Interpretation
14-Jan-26	Global temperature patterns	5	
16-Jan-26	Pressure wind and circulation	6	
19-Jan-26	Pressure wind and circulation	6	GIS and Hurricanes
21-Jan-26	Moisture and precipitation	7	
23-Jan-26	Weather Systems	8	
26-Jan-26	Weather Systems	8	No Labs this week
28-Jan-26	Global climate change	9	
30-Jan-26	Global climate change	9	
02-Feb-26	Plant Geography	10	Weather & Climate
04-Feb-26	Plant Geography	10	
06-Feb-26	Soils	11	
09-Feb-26	Soils	11	No Labs this week
11-Feb-26	The rock cycle and geologic time	12	
13-Feb-26	The rock cycle and geologic time	12	
23-Feb-26	Plate tectonics and landforms	13	No Labs this week
25-Feb-26	MIDTERM	--	

Date	Topic	Text.	Lab
27-Feb-26	Weathering and mass movement	14	
02-Mar-26	Weathering and mass movement	14	Hillslope Processes
04-Mar-26	Groundwater and karst landscapes	15	
06-Mar-26	Groundwater and karst landscapes	15	
09-Mar-26	Fluvial systems and landforms	16	Fluvial Processes
11-Mar-26	Fluvial systems and landforms	16	
13-Mar-26	Glacial processes and landforms	17	
16-Mar-26	Glacial processes and landforms	17	
18-Mar-26	Glacial processes and landforms	17	
20-Mar-26	Periglacial processes and landforms	17	Field Trip, Saturday March 22
23-Mar-26	Arid landscapes and aeolian processes	18	
25-Mar-26	Arid landscapes and aeolian processes	18	
27-Mar-26	Coastal processes and landforms	19	
30-Mar-26	Coastal processes and landforms	19	No Labs this week
01-Apr-26	Geography and environmental issues	20	
03-Apr-26	Review Class - Q&A	--	
	Final Exam		Room TBA