

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH
GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT & GEOMATICS
WINTER 2025

GEOG*4880: Contemporary Geographic Thought

Land Acknowledgement

The University of Guelph resides on the treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. These lands are a gathering place and home to many past, present, and future First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. The Dish with One Spoon is an agreement between Hodinöhsö:ni', Anishinaabeg and their allied nations to live peaceably on these lands and those throughout what is now known as the Great Lakes Region. The Dish with One Spoon speaks to interconnectivity and our collective relations with each other and the Earth. Abiding by it means that one should always strive to take only what they need, leave enough for others, and keep the shared dish clean.

Acknowledging the land on which we live, learn and work recognizes the importance of place-based histories and upholds Indigenous peoples as having been in relation with this place since immemorial. The acknowledgement above is adapted from material shared online by the Indigenous Student Centre.

Course Description

This course explores the origins and evolution of contemporary geographic thought. The course builds around important concepts and thinkers in geography. As a capstone course that students complete near to the end of their degree, it also encourages students to reflect and to examine the relevance and significance of geographical knowledge to society, their own lives, and future career paths.

Class sessions will be participatory, combining lectures with in-class workshops and exercises, online reading discussions, and engagement with assignment materials submitted by you and your classmates. The success of the course rests on the level and quality of effort that students bring. Students are expected to keep up with readings and come to class and online discussions prepared to meaningfully engage.

Course Objectives

The course is designed to have students bring together what they have learned during their degree and to think more about what it might mean to be 'a geographer'. By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- demonstrate understanding of historical and contemporary geography;
- examine, assess, and critically discuss key scholarly contributions of geography;
- construct a logical, well-supported, and convincing argument;
- demonstrate mastery of skills in written and oral presentation;
- demonstrate enhanced skills in professionalism, group work, and case study analysis; and,
- identify and professionally communicate personal skills and career goals.

Assessments

- Test (Online, Open Book): 10%
- Professional Pathways Documents: 30%
 - Document 1: Histories of Geography Timeline (10%)
 - Document 2: Opportunities Mind Map (10%)
 - Document 3: Cover letter (10%)
- Group News/Podcast: 25%
- Discussion Board Posts: 15%
- Final Exam (Online, Open Book): 20%

Course Schedule

- Unless stated otherwise (see bullet point immediately below), topics/content are planned for in-person delivery. Students are expected report to our assigned classroom during the assigned lecture period.
- A yellow highlighted **'VIRTUAL SYNCHRONOUS'** in the course schedule denotes a day wherein content will be delivered and consumed virtually AND/OR an assessment activity will take place online. Prof. Students are encouraged to read carefully; Prof. Silver will also provide further guidance in class.

| | DATE | TOPIC and/or ACTIVITY | READINGS and RESPONSIBILITIES |
|---|--------|---|---|
| 1 | Jan 7 | Course Introduction and Overview | --- |
| | Jan 9 | Histories of Geography Introduction to Canva & Professional Pathways Documents Assignment | Read: Heffernan (2009) |
| 2 | Jan 14 | Geographical Concepts: Place, Nature, Scale | Read: Easterling & Polsky (2004); Swyngedouw (2004); Ginn & Demerit (2009) |
| | Jan 16 | Geographical Research: Explanation and Critique | Read: Katz (2009); Lave et al. (2018) |
| 3 | Jan 21 | Histories of Geography Timeline Day | DRAFT Canva Histories of Geography Timeline Each student presents their Timeline in small group; each small group nominates one for informal presentation to the class. |
| | Jan 23 | VIRTUAL SYNCHRONOUS Use lecture period to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Watch Professional Prospects Interviews - Search job adverts; select 2 to serve as options for your mind map and cover letter | Watch: At least 4 of the 'Professional Prospects Interviews'. |
| 4 | Jan 28 | VIRTUAL SYNCHRONOUS Test Covers all slide, lecture and reading material to date. | Online Test |

| | DATE | TOPIC and/or ACTIVITY | READINGS and RESPONSIBILITIES |
|-------------------------------------|--------|--|---|
| | Jan 30 | <p>What do Geographers do? Some common options and pathways</p> <p>Prof Silver introduces the pod/newscast assignment today. Podcast groups will be formalized. Each group will submit a ranked list of their week/topic preferences. Any student not in attendance will be placed into a group.</p> | --- |
| 5 | Feb 4 | Job Options and Mind Map Day | <p>DRAFT Canva Opportunities Mind Map</p> <p>Each student presents their Mind Map to small group; each small group nominates one for informal presentation to the class.</p> |
| | Feb 6 | <p>Preparation for second half of the course</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How will weeks 7 through 11 of the course work? - Introduction to Miro - Introduction to News/Podcast, including listening to 1-2 examples from last year - Groupwork time | Read: News/Podcast Assignment; Online Reading Discussions Assignment |
| 6 | Feb 11 | Each news/podcast group meets with Prof. Silver during class time (precise schedule TBD) | Come prepared to overview and discuss your news/podcast group's ideas and plan for the assignment |
| | Feb 13 | Podcast groupwork day | Professional Pathways Documents. Due 11:59pm. |
| READING WEEK: FEBRUARY 17-21 | | | |
| 7 | Feb 25 | <p>Explaining deforestation and critiquing land cover change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mini-lecture - Interactive Miro board - This week's group(s) informally preview their news/podcast | <p>Read: Kelley (2018); Metz (2009)</p> <p>Group News/Podcast Assignment. Due 11:59 pm.</p> |
| | Feb 27 | <p>VIRTUAL SYNCHRONOUS News/Podcasts & Discussion Posts</p> | <p>Watch/listen: this week's news & podcasts</p> <p>Discussion group post by 1pm.</p> |
| 8 | Mar 4 | <p>Explaining industrial agriculture and critiquing food regimes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mini-lecture - Interactive Miro board - This week's group(s) informally preview their news/podcast | Read: Guthman 2003; Pritchard (2009) |

| | DATE | TOPIC and/or ACTIVITY | READINGS and RESPONSIBILITIES |
|----|---------|--|---|
| | Mar 6 | VIRTUAL SYNCHRONOUS News/Podcasts & Discussion Posts | Watch/listen: this week's news & podcasts Discussion group post by 1pm. |
| 9 | Mar 11 | Explaining biodiversity and critiquing conservation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mini-lecture - Interactive Miro board - This week's group(s) informally preview their news/podcast | Read: Read Campbell & Godfrey (2010); Jay and Morad (2009) |
| | Mar 13 | VIRTUAL SYNCHRONOUS News/Podcasts & Discussion Posts | Watch/listen: this week's news & podcasts Discussion group post by 1pm. |
| 10 | Mar 18 | Explaining urbanization/sprawl and critiquing land use planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mini-lecture - Interactive Miro board - This week's group(s) informally preview their news/podcast | Read: Cadieux et al. (2013); Beesley & Ramsey (2009) |
| | Mar 20 | VIRTUAL SYNCHRONOUS News/Podcasts & Discussion Posts | Watch/listen: this week's news & podcasts Discussion group post by 1pm. |
| 11 | Mar 25 | Explaining value chains and critiquing globalization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mini-lecture - Interactive Miro board - This week's group(s) informally preview their news/podcast | Read: Coral & Mithöfer (2023); Hassler (2009) |
| | Mar 27 | VIRTUAL SYNCHRONOUS News/Podcasts & Discussion Posts | Watch/listen: this week's news & podcasts Discussion group post by 1pm. |
| 12 | April 1 | Class wrap-up & exam question release | |
| | April 3 | VIRTUAL SYNCHRONOUS Prof. Silver will host drop-in office hours over Zoom | |
| | | VIRTUAL SYNCHRONOUS Final exam on date/time scheduled by the registrar's office and posted to Web Advisor | |

Reading List

Beesley, K. B., Ramsey, D. (2009). Agricultural Land Preservation. In Kitchen, R. & Thrift, N. (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (pp. 65-69). Elsevier. ISBN: 9780080449111.

Campbell, L. M., & Godfrey, M. H. (2010). Geo-political genetics: Claiming the commons through species mapping. *Geoforum*, 41(6), 897-907.

Cadieux, K. V., Taylor, L. E., & Bunce, M. F. (2013). Landscape ideology in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt Plan: Negotiating material landscapes and abstract ideals in the city's countryside. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 32, 307-319.

Coral, C., & Mithöfer, D. (2023). Contemporary narratives about asymmetries in responsibility in global agri-food value chains: the case of the Ecuadorian stakeholders in the banana value chain. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 40(3), 1019-1038.

Easterling, W.E. & Polsky, C. (2004). Crossing the Divide: Linking Global and Local Scales in Human-Environment Systems. In E.S. Sheppard & R.B. McMaster (Eds.), *Scale and geographic inquiry: nature, society, and method*, (pp. 66-85). Blackwell.

Ginn, F. & Demeritt, D. (2009). Nature: A Contested Concept. In N. Clifford, S. Holloway, S.P. Rice, G. Valentine (Eds.), *Key Concepts in Geography*, 2nd ed., (pp. 300-311). SAGE.

Guthman, J. (2003). Fast food/organic food: Reflexive tastes and the making of 'yuppie chow'. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 4(1), 45-58.

Hassler, M. (2009). Commodity Chains. In Kitchen, R. & Thrift, N. (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (pp. 202-208). Elsevier. ISBN: 9780080449111.

Heffernan, M. (2009). Histories of Geography. In N. Clifford, S. Holloway, S.P. Rice, G. Valentine (Eds.), *Key Concepts in Geography*, 2nd ed., (pp. 1-20). SAGE.

Jay, M., Morad, M. (2009). Conservation and Ecology. In Kitchen, R. & Thrift, N. (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (pp. 259-267). Elsevier. ISBN: 9780080449111.

Katz, C. (2009). Social Systems: Thinking about Society, Identity, Power and Resistance. In N. Clifford, S. Holloway, S.P. Rice, G. Valentine (Eds.), *Key Concepts in Geography*, 2nd ed., (pp. 236-250). SAGE.

Kelley, L. C. (2018). The politics of uneven smallholder cacao expansion: A critical physical geography of agricultural transformation in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. *Geoforum*, 97, 22-34.

Lave, R., Biermann, C., Lane, S. N. (2018). Introducing Critical Physical Geography. In Lave, R., Biermann, C., Lane, S. N. (Eds.), *Palgrave Handbook of Critical Physical Geography* (pp. 1-21). Palgrave. ISBN: 9783319714608.

Metz, J. J. (2009). Deforestation. In Kitchen, R. & Thrift, N. (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (pp. 39-50). Elsevier. ISBN: 9780080449111.

Pritchard, B. (2009). Food Regimes. In Kitchen, R. & Thrift, N. (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (pp. 221-225). Elsevier. ISBN: 9780080449111.

Swyngedouw, E. (2004). Scaled Geographies: Nature, Place, and the Politics of Scale. In E.S. Sheppard & R.B. McMaster (Eds.), *Scale and geographic inquiry: nature, society, and method*, (pp. 129-153). Blackwell.

****All assigned readings for this course are freely available as PDFs at no additional cost. Student should access and download the readings through Courselink and Ares.****

Airborne illness, including Covid-19

Risks for many people, especially fully vaccinated individuals, have lessened since the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, risks have not disappeared. Reinfection and negative health outcome risks remain elevated for people who are immunocompromised or unable to receive vaccines, those with frequent or intense patterns of exposure, and those with certain types of care-giving or family circumstances/responsibilities.

Wellness in our classroom is a shared responsibility. For University of Guelph policy statements and updates on campus health, including the request that anyone who feels sick stay home, please see: <https://www.uoguelph.ca/healthy-campus/>. **Students are very welcome to wear masks any time we meet together, in groups, or for one-on-one meetings.**

Other Instructor policies

Video and Audio Recordings

Slides and any video/audio content developed for this course by Prof. Silver are her intellectual property. Likewise, slides and any video/audio content developed for this course by students and student groups are their intellectual property. Students are welcome to cite them in assignments and discuss them with classmates and other students. However, slides and any video/audio content developed for this course **are not** intended for circulation outside of the course and permission is not granted for students to permanently save, post or publicly share content that they have not played a part in developing.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to undertake this course with honesty and integrity, and to understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Refer to the Academic Calendar and the university policies below. If you still have uncertainty about how to avoid plagiarism, complete the U of G tutorial (see: <https://guides.lib.uoguelph.ca/academicintegrity>) and/or speak with the instructor or library resource-persons for guidance. Plagiarism and other types of misconduct will not be tolerated; any instances will be treated seriously and are likely to be referred on to the Associate Dean Academic of the College.

Communication

Please check your university email account and the 'Announcements' section of our Courselink page frequently (ideally, once per day M-F). Any important information arising throughout the semester will be communicated by these means and the university mandates that students must check them. The instructor and TA will do their best to respond to emails within 2 business days. Emails received after 3pm on Friday will not be responded to until at least the following Monday, and questions that are answered in course documents will receive short replies only (i.e., see course syllabus). Please use proper punctuation and professional language when emailing the instructor or TA.

Assignment submission, grading and grade reviews, and monitoring your Courselink gradebook

It is the student's responsibility to ensure that they are clear on when, where, and in what format assessments are due, and in the case of Courselink submissions, to double-check that the upload has worked successfully and that uploaded files are not corrupt. Prof. Silver and the TA(s) cannot download corrupt files, which means that we cannot grade them and that regular late penalties will apply.

It is the student's responsibility to check their Courselink class gradebook weekly to ensure that all grades are entered and accurate. If any concerns arise about assignment grades or grading, the student must immediately contact the instructor. Requests to review or revisit assignment and presentation grades must be made within 10 days after they are released in the gradebook; thereafter, it is likely that the instructor will deny requests and that the grade will stand as final.

If a student would like to request an extension, it is their responsibility to contact the instructor directly and with as much advance notice as possible. To do so, students should send an email or request a meeting to discuss generalities of the situation and to reach agreement about the length of extension.

University of Guelph Standard/Required Policy Statements

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

Accessibility

The University of Guelph is committed to creating a barrier-free environment. Providing services for students is a shared responsibility among students, faculty and administrators. This relationship is based on respect of individual rights, the dignity of the individual and the University community's shared commitment to an open and supportive learning environment. Students requiring service or accommodation, whether due to an identified, ongoing disability or a short-term disability should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as soon as possible. For more information, contact SAS at 519-824-4120 ext. 56208 or visit the [SAS website](#).

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.

E-mail Communication

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

Drop Date

Students will have until the last day of classes to drop courses without academic penalty. The deadline to drop two-semester courses will be the last day of classes in the second semester. This applies to all students (undergraduate, graduate and diploma) except for Doctor of Veterinary Medicine and Associate Diploma in Veterinary Technology (conventional and alternative delivery) students. The regulations and procedures for course registration are available in their respective Academic Calendars:

Undergraduate Calendar - [Dropping Courses](#)

Graduate Calendar - [Registration Changes](#)

Associate Diploma Calendar - [Dropping Courses](#)

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.

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded 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 Undergraduate Calendars are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma programs.