

PROVISIONAL & SUBJECT TO CHANGE

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH
GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT & GEOMATICS
WINTER 2025

GEOG*4880: Contemporary Geographic Thought

Instructor

Dr. Jennifer Silver

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 major thinkers and analytical lenses 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.

Tentative Class Schedule

	DATE	TOPIC and/or ACTIVITY
1	Jan 7	Course Introduction and Overview
	Jan 9	Human geography, physical geography, and explaining the world around us
2	Jan 14	Histories of Geography
	Jan 16	Society, environment, and critique
3	Jan 21	Modes of research in geography
	Jan 23	What do geographers do? Career trajectories and professional development strategies
4	Jan 28	What have you learned and what skills have you gained through your degree? In-class learning portfolio activity
	Jan 30	Introducing the group assignment: introduction, overview, & group formation Summarizing the course to date: an in-class exercise in/with your assignment group
5	Feb 4	Place
	Feb 6	Scale
6	Feb 11	Nature
	Feb 13	Each news/podcast group meets with Prof. Silver during class time (precise schedule TBD)
READING WEEK: FEBRUARY 17-21		
7	Feb 25	Explaining deforestation and land cover change
	Feb 27	Lecture & reading discussion debrief
8	Mar 4	Explaining industrial agriculture and food insecurity
	Mar 6	Lecture & reading discussion debrief
9	Mar 11	Explaining biodiversity and conservation

	DATE	TOPIC and/or ACTIVITY
	Mar 13	Lecture & reading discussion debrief
10	Mar 18	Explaining urbanization/sprawl and land use planning
	Mar 20	Lecture & reading discussion debrief
11	Mar 25	Explaining commodity chains and globalization
	Mar 27	Lecture & reading discussion debrief
12	April 1	Class wrap-up & questions about the take-home exam
	April 3	No Class – Open office hours in Hutt 237

Tentative Readings

TEXTBOOK (REQUIRED CHAPTERS LISTED IN CLASS SCHEDULE)

Key Concepts in Geography (2009), Edited by: N.J. Clifford, S.L. Holloway, S.P. Rice, and G. Valentine.

ADDITIONAL REQUIRED READINGS

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.

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

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.

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.

Kerr, R. B. (2014). Lost and found crops: agrobiodiversity, indigenous knowledge, and a feminist political ecology of sorghum and finger millet in northern Malawi. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 104(3), 577-593.

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.

Serrano, A., & Brooks, A. (2019). Who is left behind in global food systems? Local farmers failed by Colombia's avocado boom. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 2(2), 348-367.