

GEOG 030-Web: Geographic Perspectives on Sustainability and Human-Environment Systems

Syllabus, Spring 2011

Note: This version of the syllabus was copied from the course website. Some formatting was lost in the process.

This syllabus is divided into several sections. You can read it sequentially by scrolling down the length of the document or by clicking on any of the links below to “jump” to a specific section. That being said, it is essential that you read the **entire** document, as well as material covered in the course orientation. These resources will not only prepare you to be successful in this course, but they will also help you prepare for the "Course Information" quiz at the end of the orientation. You must get a score of at least 90% on that quiz to gain access to the assignment dropboxes for this course. Together these serve the role of our course "contract."

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Course Overview

GEOG 030 (GS): Geographic Perspectives on Sustainability and Human-Environment Systems (*3 credits*).

Prerequisites: None

This course introduces the study of sustainability and human-environment interactions from a geographic perspective. We examine both the influence of humanity on the environment and the influence of the environment on humanity with attention to the sustainability of current human activities. We take a complex systems perspective on major environmental and societal challenges and examine linked human-environmental issues in a variety of geographic contexts. We emphasize the major individual and societal decisions which impact the environment and the ethical views implicit in the decisions. We explore key concepts such as cartography, systems analysis, and individual and collective action, as well as various topical issues related to climate change, agriculture, biodiversity, and development. Course discussions and activities highlight both major themes in human-environment geography and the experience of what it is like to perform human-environment geography.

There are 10 modules that will be completed at a rate of approximately 1 week per module. GEOG 030 will be conducted entirely on the World Wide Web. There will be no set class meeting times, but students will be required to complete weekly assignments. Each module contains interactive exercises, links, animations, movies, and novel explanations of the basic principles related to sustainability and human-environment systems. Each unit will conclude with an open book, on-line assessment. Students will also complete a capstone project, where they will work in groups to produce a professional-quality analysis of a sustainability topic.

GEOG 030 can be applied toward Penn State's [General Education](#) "Social and Behavioral Sciences" (GS) requirement.

What I expect of you

I expect that you will treat this course in the same manner you would a credit-bearing face-to-face section of an introductory level course. You should expect to spend the same amount of time on this course that you would spend in and out of class in your other courses. On average, that may be about eight hours per week. However, you will find your workload depends on your familiarity with the technology needed to take an on-line course and any past experience you have with the subject matter.

In my experience, the students who reach their goals in on-line courses are those that are able to motivate themselves to keep up with the coursework and those that take the opportunity to communicate with the instructor and their peers. I encourage you to ask as many questions as you would in a face-to-face class. If you are struggling with any aspect of the course I can only help you if you ask for help.

Specific learning objectives for each module and assignment are detailed within each module. The class schedule is published under the `Calendar` tab in ANGEL (the course management system used for this course).

What can you expect from me?

We are using an online learning environment for this course, and as such, my "office" is also online. Please feel free to contact me directly with questions and I will try to respond to you within 48 hours. Any general questions should first be posted to the "questions" discussion board on ANGEL. If I am going to be out of touch for awhile, I will let you know ahead of time.

This course begins on a Monday and as such, each module runs from a Monday to the following Monday at midnight (11:59PM EST to be precise). You have this entire time to complete the readings, learning activities, quizzes, and self checks. Anything not completed by Monday at midnight will be considered late. **Due dates for the assignments must be strictly followed. An exception will only be made in case of an official, written document of a family or personal medical emergency. Points will be deducted for late submission.**

You can expect me to grade and provide you feedback the following weekend, after an assignment has been posted or turned-in. Like many of you, I balance several responsibilities over the course of the semester and as such, the best time I have to devote to grading and feedback is over the weekend. Once you get feedback from me, please don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions or concerns.

Course Objectives and Outcomes

Course Objectives: The aims of this course are to

- Investigate the ways that humans in various geographic contexts think about, affect, and are affected by the natural environment
- Consider the interconnectedness of complex human-environment systems, including relationships at multiple spatial and temporal scales
- Examine the sustainability of current social and environmental practices and explore alternatives

Learning Outcomes: Upon completion of this course, students will be equipped to

- Critically analyze and develop informed positions on major societal and environmental challenges associated with sustainability
- Enact principles of sustainability in everyday life, both as individuals and as members of society
- Investigate the ways that humans in various geographic contexts think about, affect, and are affected by the natural environment

Required Course Materials

All instructional materials needed for this course are presented online—no textbook is required.

In order to access the online course materials, you need to have an active Penn State Access Account user ID and password. If you have any questions about obtaining or activating your Penn State Access Account, please [contact the World Campus](#).

Assignments and Grading

GEOG 030 will rely upon a variety of methods to assess and evaluate student learning, including:

- **Learning Activities:** graded activities that are spread throughout the course.
- **Self-checks:** will NOT be graded. However, you will need to complete the Self-checks to prepare for the Unit Quizzes.
- **Automated on-line quizzes** allow you to practice your mastery of the concepts in the modules.
- **A Connections Essay** that will be used to help students make connections between key concepts and the themes presented in the course.
- **A Group Project** that will be used to evaluate your knowledge and skills through the production of a professional-quality report on a sustainability topic with a team of fellow students.

- **A final exam** that will evaluate your ability to synthesize and apply concepts from throughout the course.

You will earn a grade that reflects the extent to which you achieve the course learning objectives listed above. Grades are assigned by the percentage of possible points earned in each module's activities. Below is a breakdown of each assignment's value as a percentage of the total course grade.

Online Quizzes: 3 total	15%	50 points each
Learning Activities: 10 total	40%	40 points each
Connections Essay	10%	100 points
Connections Final Group Project	15%	150 points
Final Exam	20%	200 points
Total possible	100%	1000 points

Make-Up Exams and Late Assignments

Make-up exams will not be offered except in the case of University-excused absences. Late assignments (including project components) will be penalized at 10% per business day (MTWRF). Assignments more than ten days late automatically receive zero points. All assignments have precise (to the minute) deadlines. Anything past the deadline is automatically late, even if it is just one minute late. Every 24 hours (to the minute, business days only) after the deadline, another day of late penalty is incurred.

Grades

I will use the ANGEL gradebook to keep track of your grades. You can see your grades in the gradebook, too, by clicking the Reports tab in ANGEL, then choosing the Grades radio button under the bold heading **Type**.

The minimum scores for course grades are as follows.

- A** 93.3% (933 points)
- A-** 90% (900 points)
- B+** 86.7% (867 points)
- B** 83.3% (833 points)
- B-** 80.0% (800 points)
- C+** 76.7% (767 points)
- C** 70.0% (700 points)
- D** 60.0% (600 points)
- F** 0.0% (0 points)
- X** Unsatisfactory (student did not participate)

Course Schedule

Below you will find a summary of the learning activities for this course and the associated time frames. This course is 15 weeks in length.

TIMEFRAME	MODULE	TASKS
Unit 1, Modules 1-4: Key Concepts		
Week 1	Course Orientation Module 1: Geographic Perspectives	Activity: Course Information Quiz Learning Activity: Getting to Know You
Week 2	Module 2: Coupled Human-Environment Systems	Learning Activity: Drawing Systems Diagrams
Week 3	Module 3: Ethics	Learning Activity: Your Ethics Views
Week 4	Module 4: Individual & Collective Action	Learning Activity: Water Tracking & Usage Unit 1 Quiz
Week 5	No Module	Group Project Proposal & First Individual Reflection Due

Unit 2, Modules 5-7: Sustainable Development		
Week 6	Module 5: Development	Learning Activity: Society's Goals
Week 7	Module 6: Food & Agriculture	Learning Activity: Analyze a Meal Connections Essay Due
Week 8	Module 7: Cities & Transportation	Learning Activity: Sustainable Urban Design Unit 2 Quiz
	SPRING BREAK	
Week 9	No Module	Group Project Initial Analysis & Second Individual Reflection Due
Unit 3, Modules 8-10: Global Environmental Change		
Week 10	Module 8: Natural Hazards	Learning Activity: Natural Hazards
Week 11	Module 9: Climate Change	Learning Activity: Climate Change Policy
Week 12	Module 10: Biodiversity	Learning Activity: Interactive Mapping Unit 3 Quiz
Week 13	No Module	Group Project Final Report & Third Individual Reflection Due
Course Synthesis		
Week 14	Group Project Discussion	No Assignments Due
Week 15	Course Synthesis	End of Course Evaluation Survey
Finals Week	No Content	Final Exam Due

Tips for Success in GEOG 030

- **Participate**

In order to make the most out of this opportunity, you will need to be actively involved in this course. Your discussions with me and with your peers will be as important to your learning as your study of the material presented in the modules and activities. Discussions offer you the opportunity to organize your thoughts about the content under discussion, present a logical argument about the topic, and to give and receive feedback.

- **Do the work on time**

I see my role in this course as lead facilitator, that is, it is my job to help you achieve your educational objectives. I set deadlines to keep everyone on track to reach those goals. I think that if you do your best to adhere to those deadlines, by,

for example, setting up a routine schedule when you work on the course, you will succeed. I do not see deadlines as absolute, though, and am willing to allow students flexibility to submit work late if it is *necessary* and if I *am informed* of the reason. If you miss work and you do not inform me until long after the fact I am unlikely to be lenient, but if I know you will be turning work in late and the reason, I am likely to be lenient. Of course, I also realize emergencies arise that do not present the opportunity to inform me ahead of time, and will make allowances for those situations, as needed.

- **Be professional**

I will assume that everyone in the class is an adult and will behave with integrity. I expect that you will not lie or cheat and that you will adhere to all of Penn State's policies on academic integrity. Penn State defines academic integrity as "the pursuit of scholarly projects in an open, honest and responsible manner." Academic integrity includes "a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation, or deception." In particular, the University defines plagiarism as "the fabrication of information and citations; submitting others' work from professional journals, books, articles, and papers; submission of other students' papers, lab results or project reports and representing the work as one's own." Penalties for violations of academic integrity may include course failure. If you are unclear about these policies please review the material at <http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies>.

Course Policies

- **Penn State e-Mail Accounts**

All official communications from the Penn State World Campus are sent to students' Penn State e-mail accounts. Be sure to check your Penn State account regularly, or [forward your Penn State e-mail](#) to your preferred email account, so you don't miss any important information.

- **Deferred Grades**

If you are prevented from completing this course within your instructed the prescribed amount of time, it is possible to have the grade deferred with my concurrence. To seek a deferred grade, you must submit a written request (by email or US post) to me describing the reason(s) for the request. I will determine whether or not you will be permitted to receive a deferred grade. If for any reason the course work for the deferred grade is not complete by the assigned time, a grade of "F" will be automatically entered on your transcript.

- **Academic Integrity**

This course follows the [guidelines for academic integrity of Penn State's College of Earth and Mineral Sciences](#). Penn State defines academic integrity as "the pursuit of scholarly project in an open, honest and responsible manner." Academic integrity includes "a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation, or deception." In particular, the University defines plagiarism as "the fabrication of information and citations; submitting other's work from professional journals, books, articles, and papers; submission of

other student's papers, lab results or project reports and representing the work as one's own." Penalties for violations of academic integrity may include course failure. To learn more, see Penn State's "[Plagiarism Tutorial for Students](#)."

- **Citation and Reference Style**

See our course "Academic Integrity Guide," accessible through the "Resources" menu at left.

- **Accommodating Disabilities**

Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure the accessibility of this course. Contact your instructor or technical support personnel for assistance if you discover any element of the course that you are unable to access or use.

- **Netiquette**

The term "Netiquette" refers to the etiquette guidelines for electronic communications, such as e-mail and bulletin board postings. Netiquette covers not only rules to maintain civility in discussions, but also special guidelines unique to the electronic nature of forum messages. Please review Virginia Shea's "[The Core Rules of Netiquette](#)" for general guidelines that should be followed when communicating in this course.

Technical Requirements

For this course we recommend the minimum technical requirements outlined on the *ANGEL Help and Information Guide* for "[Recommended Browsers and Computers](#)," and for using Penn State's Web conferencing system, [Adobe Connect](#). If you need technical assistance at any point during the course, please contact the [ANGEL Help Desk](#)

Disclaimer: Please note that the specifics of this Course Syllabus can be changed at any time, and you will be responsible for abiding by any such changes. Changes will be posted to the course discussion forum.