

GEOG 260

North America's Landscapes



General Description

Why North America? Why Geography?

If you're enrolled in this course, the chances are that you live in North America. You may have lived here all your life, or you may be a recent immigrant, but either way you probably have a desire to know more about the land where you live. North America is, after all, a natural focus for your curiosity; it is a magnificent place by almost any measure. It contains two of the richest nations in the world, and encompasses an incredible variety of both human and natural landscapes, from the dense settlement of New York City to a trailer park in rural North Carolina to the sweeping, sparsely peopled lands of the West; from the tropics in Hawaii and the subtropics in Florida to the frigid Arctic in Canada and Alaska; from the low swamplands of the Everglades to the high peaks of the Rockies and Denali; from intensely developed industrial landscapes to some of the world's great wildlands.

Okay, so why geography? If you've never taken a college-level geography course before, you are probably thinking of geography in terms of what you learned in elementary school: the capital city, the longest river, the principal export, and so on. Geography at the university level is a very different animal. You do have to learn where things are in order to understand a place, but you will find that the emphasis shifts from place-based memorization to learning a new way of thinking about and looking at places to better understand them.

Geography as a field encompasses an astonishing array of topics. There are geographers of religion and of industrial location, of cultural landscapes and of health care, of disease and of hydrology, of geomorphology and of urbanization, and countless others. What ties this incredibly diverse field together are certain concepts and ways of thinking, and a general concern with either place-based or spatial patterns on the earth's surface.

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Some of these geographical concepts include

- scale
- region and place
- site and situation
- the interplay of the human and the physical geography of a place
- the importance of interrelatedness in geographical explanation, or integrative thinking.

You will learn about these concepts as you progress through the course. In fact, as you will see, these concepts are themes that recur throughout the lessons and help to tie together the different patterns you'll be learning about. In addition, you will learn to compare and contrast geographic regions to enhance your understanding of them.

Course Objectives

At the end of this course, you can expect to have acquired

- a framework of geographic knowledge about North America. This will not be an encyclopedic knowledge, but rather a structure to build your understanding on.
- an understanding of some basic geographic concepts and terms
- an understanding of regional differences and interconnectedness in North America
- the ability to apply these understandings to places you might visit or study
- a set of basic skills to help you understand and analyze geographic data and its expression in maps and other graphic forms.

Course Materials

The required course materials for GEOG 260 include a textbook, two supplemental booklets reflecting the most recent census data for both the United States and Canada, a map, and an atlas.

The textbook is *Regional Landscapes of the United States and Canada*, 5th edition, by Birdsall, Florin, and Price, published in 1999 by John Wiley & Sons.

The required supplemental booklets are

- *Mapping Census 2000: The Geography of U.S. Diversity*, by Brewer and Suchan, published in 2001 by ESRI Press.
- A coursepack containing the 2002 Statistics Canada publication *A Profile of the Canadian Population: Where We Live*.

You do need to have access to an atlas, but you don't need to purchase one if you already have one available to you. *Goode's World Atlas*, 20th edition, published by Rand McNally in 1999 is recommended; you may be able to find a paperback or used edition if you shop around.

All of the materials above, including a hardcover edition of *Goode's World Atlas*, are available from the Higher Grounds bookstore in the Friday Center. You can purchase them there in person, by mail or fax using the book order form that is included in this manual, or online at <https://s4.its.unc.edu/HigherGrounds>.

The **required map** is Erwin Raisz' *Landforms of the United States*, Map #1, UNITED STATES, 27X42" (LT. WT.), BLACK, \$10.00 plus \$6.00 shipping. Order your map from the publishers, Raisz Landform Maps, 60 Stedman Street, Brookline, MA 02446-3009; Tel. 800-277-0047; Fax 413-828-6599; e-mail raiszmaps@theworld.com. You can order online at <http://www.raiszmaps.com>.

- **Ordering information:** You may order online, via telephone, mail, e-mail, or fax.
- **Payment:** All orders must be pre-paid unless prior terms have been arranged. Checks or money orders are accepted. There is a \$20.00 service charge on checks returned for insufficient funds.
- **Shipping:** Orders are shipped as soon as payment has been received. Orders are sent in tubes via UPS or US Postal Service. No deliveries will be made to P.O. boxes. Shipping costs are \$6.00 per tube; each tube holds up to ten maps.

This classic map shows landforms in a great deal more detail than you can see on most maps, and will help you understand the interplay between human and physical factors in the places we study. Parts of the map are reproduced in this course manual for use in exercises.

Optional is Erwin Raisz' *Landforms of Canada*. This is not required for any course activities, but if you're interested in Canada in particular, you may want to get it. You can purchase it from the publishers using the same instructions as for the required map.

Lastly, you will need a set of **colored pencils** for some of your mapping exercises.

Course Structure and Study Suggestions

When you get your text, you will see that it is organized into three introductory chapters followed by fifteen regional chapters, each of which covers a different part of North America. Rather than following that format precisely, this course is organized into twelve lessons. The first three lessons correspond to the first three chapters in the text; they will help you build a strong foundation in the geographical concepts you'll need for understanding the regional studies. Lessons 4–11 will cover the regional chapters of the book, usually in pairs. This will allow a convenient framework for comparison and contrast and for developing your integrative thinking skills. The final lesson will engage you in synthesis and reflection, tying together what you've learned into a broader understanding.

Each lesson is designed to make sure you get the most out of the material in the text. There is a discussion section that, in the first three lessons, highlights and reinforces the key points from the text, and in Lessons 4–11, expands on a small number of key topics to complement the text. The discussion section includes additional maps or graphics to help you understand these points. A list of key terms and concepts, and a list of optional readings and Web sites for those especially interested in the lesson's regions or themes, are included.

Exercises, activities, and questions

Each lesson includes exercises, activities, and questions, some of which you will turn in, while others will be for your own use. **Self-help Exercises** are presented in workbook format; these are mapping exercises and questions you should answer in the space provided, then use as a study guide for the final exam. Following the Self-help Exercises are two or three **Analytical and Mapping Exercises** to be turned in. These should be done as neatly and carefully as possible. The final part of each lesson is a set of **Discussion Questions**, also to be turned in. The Discussion Questions build on the knowledge you have gained in the lesson, both locational facts and geographical concepts. Generally,

you will answer these questions in one to two paragraphs, although in some instances you are asked to write more. Since the work you submit is your main interaction with me and forms the major part of your grade (the remaining part being the final exam), it is important to answer the questions carefully and thoughtfully. I prefer that you submit your written answers in typed form if possible. Mark your maps as neatly as possible. Keep a copy of anything you submit in case it is lost in the mail.

How to proceed through a lesson

For every lesson, first carefully read the assigned chapters from the text, then the discussion section in this lesson manual. Make sure you understand the concepts involved. If you find you are having trouble with any of the questions, I encourage you to reread the material. If you still need clarification after rereading the material, contact me with questions, either by e-mail at grdobbs@email.unc.edu or by mail through the Friday Center. **Do not continue to the next lesson until you feel confident about the Key Terms and Concepts listed and can answer all the questions (including those in the Self-help section).**

As you work, give close attention to the maps and other graphics in the material. Geography is more visually oriented than some other subjects, and you will often find that a map or graphic makes a connection or relationship clear that you might otherwise have missed. It is a good idea to find a place to work where you can spread out all your materials, so that when the lesson discussion refers you to a map or graph, you can turn to it easily and have it open as you read. This will help considerably in the development of your understanding of the material.

Grading and Final Exam

You can earn a possible total of 400 points in this course, distributed as follows:

- 25 points per lesson, for a total of 300 lesson points (75 percent of course grade). About two thirds of these points will be for Discussion Questions, and the remaining third for Analytical and Mapping Exercises.
- Final Exam, 100 points (25 percent of course grade)

You must pass the final exam to pass the course.

The final exam consists of questions and problems similar to those you'll be used to doing in the lessons. The exam will have four parts:

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1. ten short-answer questions—definitions and brief essays ranging in length from a couple of sentences to a paragraph or two, 4 points each (40 points total)
2. a map section with sixteen places or features to locate and label on a base map, 1 point each (16 points total)
3. a section with two mapping and analysis questions (one to two paragraphs in length), in which you will apply the skills you've developed in the course, 6 points each (12 points total)
4. two essay questions of two to four pages, 16 points per essay (32 points total).

You will have some element of choice in the short-answer and essay sections. The exam period is three hours; you should budget an hour and a half for the essay section.

The Honor Code

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is governed by an Honor Code. You agreed to abide by this code on your Self-paced Courses application. In practical terms, this means two things for you as you work your way through this correspondence course.

First, you must do your own work (“neither give nor receive unauthorized aid”). As specified in the Honor Code, you will be asked to sign a pledge to this effect on work that you turn in.

Second, you must avoid plagiarism. Essentially, plagiarism is using the words or ideas of someone else without giving that person credit. If you use a phrase or longer piece out of the textbook in answering a question in your written assignment, for example, you must put it in quotation marks and tell me the source. Since this work is not in the shape of a formal essay, I will be satisfied if you simply state that it is from the text and give the page number, rather than worrying about proper referencing formats. If you use material from another source, however, you will need to give enough information that I can clearly identify the source; you can use a format you are familiar with or use the references in the optional reading lists as a guide. Note that it is not just exact words you must credit; if you use someone's ideas you need to give credit as well. If you are in doubt about whether something needs to be credited, err on the side of caution and cite the material. Plagiarism is a very serious violation of the Honor Code.

A Final Word

You will certainly need to pay attention and do your work to do well in this course, but don't forget to enjoy the journey! Many people find geography to be one of the most pleasurable of academic endeavors, because the topics are so central to the human experience of the world, and the integrative approach of geography leads to new kinds of understanding of everyday matters. So have fun!