

GEOG 260

North America's Landscapes



General Description

Overview

Anyone who is familiar with Hollywood movies or North American television programs already has an idea or perception of various landscapes of the United States and Canada. Without having ever visited there, people all across the globe have mental images and perceptions—“geographical imaginations”—gained from watching television and movies that depict the landscapes of places such as New York City, Chicago, the Southwest, Los Angeles, the Yukon, and Miami. Because of globalization and the spread of media and technology, one could argue that the landscapes of North America are some of the most familiar regions in the world. Yet precisely because of this seeming familiarity with the United States and Canada, North America's landscapes are often misunderstood or only partially known.

This course provides students with information and the analytic and critical skills necessary to more fully comprehend the geography of North America and to understand why its landscapes look the way they do and have evolved the way they have. To understand why the contemporary landscape looks as it does, we must consider a variety of features, constraints, and influences beginning with the perceived natural assets of different places but also, in some cases, considering the goals and histories of the people who settled them.

One of the primary concerns of geographers is the location of places and how that location affects how people use their resources. The preeminent geographic question is “Where?” Once that is determined, a complex set of implications are obvious, provided you know the geography of that location. The next question is “So what?” Physical environment patterns are systematically distributed over the earth's surface, as are many patterns in the human environment. Knowing the elements of the physical environment, and how different cultural groups have adapted to and used them, enables you to generalize about

possible land-use patterns and perceived limitations at any location. Thus, in this course we will examine the distribution of natural resources as well as how people in the United States and Canada have used these resources. An overly simplified view is that the environment provides the stage on which the drama of human occupation is played out. Geographers feel that humans are not simply players in a passive environment, but rather that there is interplay between humans and the physical environment they occupy. This is one of the long-standing themes of geographic study. As a result geography bridges from both the physical and social sciences.

During the early years of geography, geographers were mainly concerned with describing “what” was located “where” and then assessing the significance of that location. In essence, this was descriptive science. Today geographers feel that mere description is not sufficient, and they have become more concerned with identifying and understanding the processes of spatial change. If we understand why things are located where they are, and can discover what has caused changes in location, then we should be able to predict where optimum locations will be in the future.

Landscapes change over time through both physical and human processes. As knowledge, ideologies, values, resources, and technologies change, people make decisions about how to use land, how to organize society, and how to relate (such as economically or politically) to nearby and distant places. Out of these processes emerge new landscapes, with existing landscapes being reorganized and expanded, and others disappearing altogether. Landscapes change in size and complexity and in economic, political, and cultural significance.

With the increasing speed of landscape changes throughout the world, the pace of social and environmental change is also accelerating. Some landscape features are remarkably persistent and permanent while others are ephemeral and quickly gone. Both types of features may be important to the geography of an area, but geographers have a tendency to emphasize the more persistent ones—and that will be our focus in this course.

Objectives

One of our main goals in this course is to develop an understanding of why the landscape of North America looks the way it does. To answer this question, we must first answer the following questions:

- Where do people live? (settlement and land use patterns)
- What do they do? (patterns of economic development and locational attributes of various economic activities)
- Why do they do it? (social and cultural behavior)

In order to address these questions we must first develop an understanding of the historical evolution of land use in both Canada and the United States. We will also learn how various land use patterns are the result of environmental, economic, cultural, and political assets and limitations.

Different individuals and different groups of people will perceive landscapes and environments differently, and this in turn will shape attitudes and behaviors. Throughout this course we examine how individuals and societies perceive their environments. In order to do this, we will be learning geographic concepts that will be necessary to understand the processes of change that constantly reshape North America's landscapes. These concepts will allow us to succinctly but completely identify some of the forces at work altering the environment in which we live and work. You should have a working vocabulary of concepts and conceptual ideas by the time you finish this course, and these can be used in future geographic studies.

In this course we will examine the physical, territorial, and demographic contexts in which the United States and Canada evolved. We will review the landforms and climates of the regions and examine the territorial, historical, and political evolution of these two nations. We will analyze how, and by whom, these countries were settled.

At the end of this course, you will be expected to have acquired:

- the ability to describe the differences, similarities, and interconnectedness that exists among locations and regions within North America
- the ability to explain how these differences and similarities are a result of the variations in the physical geography of the landscape (topography, resources, climate) and the cultural,

economic, and political landscapes of the various historical and contemporary periods

- the ability to use some basic geographic concepts and terms
- the ability to understand and analyze geographic data and its expression in maps and other visual or 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, and an atlas.

The **required textbook** for this course is: *Regional Landscapes of the United States and Canada*, 7th edition, by Birdsall, Palka, Malinowski, and Price, published in 2009 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*.

Optional is Goode's *World Atlas*, 21st edition, published by Rand McNally in 2004. You need to have access to **some kind of atlas**, but you don't need to purchase one if you already have one available to you. If you do purchase one, Goode's is recommended; you may be able to find a paperback or used edition if you can shop around, or you can purchase the hardcover edition when you purchase your other materials.

All of the materials above, including a hardcover edition of Goode's *World Atlas*, can be purchased from Friday Center Books & Gifts at the Friday Center using the book order form in this manual, or online at <https://s4.its.unc.edu/HigherGrounds/>.

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. Keep a copy of anything you submit in case it is lost in the mail.

General Description

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; my contact information is in your welcome letter. 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:

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 pts 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 on all graded assignments (“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.

Course Evaluation

Please complete a course evaluation form when you finish your course or otherwise end your enrollment. A course evaluation form can be found near the end of this manual; a copy of the form will also be provided when you take your final exam. If you would prefer to complete your evaluation online, visit <https://itsapps.unc.edu/PPSEval/>. You will need to enter your PID in order to access the online evaluation form.

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!

List of Lessons

- Lesson 1: Geography and North America
- Lesson 2: North America's Physical Environment
- Lesson 3: People in North America
- Lesson 4: America's Urban-Industrial North
- Lesson 5: Canada's Urban Core, New England, and the Atlantic Provinces
- Lesson 6: Grasses and Grains in the Heartland
- Lesson 7: The South and the Southern Mountain Regions
- Lesson 8: The Sunbelt/Hispanic Regions
- Lesson 9: The Sparsely Populated Lands of the North and West
- Lesson 10: The North Pacific Coast and Islands
- Lesson 11: California: A Law Unto Itself
- Lesson 12: Reflection and Synthesis