Nature of the course

This course is an introduction to the field of historical geography. It has two principal goals: To acquaint students with historical geography as it has been practiced in North America and to teach students how to do historical geography. It is also intended to help students cultivate an appreciation for the relationship between geography and history, and the value of employing a historical perspective in studying geographic subjects.

Though the course will focus on North America, it will not be a survey of the historical geography of the region. Rather it will be a selective examination of aspects of the region’s historical geography. The course will be reading, discussion, and research oriented. Students will be introduced to major areas of the field, and will read and discuss representative samples of work in each area. They will be exposed to commonly used research methods and source types in historical geography, complete a series of methodological exercises, and undertake a major semester-long research project.

What is historical geography?

Historical geography, sometimes defined as the geography of the past or the study of places through time, is one of the oldest traditions of geographical inquiry. It has been taught for as long as geography has been part of higher education. Many of the leading figures in American geography, from Carl Sauer and Peirce Lewis to Donald Meinig and Don Mitchell, have employed a historical perspective in their research.

Yet historical geography is different from other subfields within the discipline of geography, such as climatology or political geography, because it does not focus on any single aspect of geography and does not possess a unified body of theories and concepts, or a commonly agreed upon set of concerns. For this reason, historical geography has sometimes had an identity problem and some have questioned whether there is even such a thing as historical geography, arguing that all geography should be historically informed.

What unites historical geographers is a belief that in order to comprehend contemporary geographic patterns and places it is first necessary to understand the historical processes that shaped them. While other areas of geography also incorporate a historical perspective, what sets historical geography apart is that it emphasizes a historical approach. Contrary to what some definitions of historical geography suggest, historical geographers are not mere antiquarians, but are also concerned with the present because it is the product of all that happened before.
Organization and classroom activity

Following an introduction to historical geography, the class schedule and course readings will be organized around seven themes that encompass much of the recent work in the field. In each section, the instructor will provide a brief introduction to that approach and the class will read one article-length study as an example. In most sections, we will also read at least one article about research methods. Other classes will be used to introduce students to particular research techniques and sources, and discuss the research process.

Classroom activity will focus on the discussion of readings and research, so it is imperative that students do any reading before coming to class and keep up with their research on the semester research project. You are expected to contribute to class discussion and will be graded on the degree to which you participate and the quality of your contributions. A series of discussion questions about each reading will be made available before class. Students are also required to write one question designed to stimulate discussion about each reading and bring it to class.

When you read the studies and prepare for discussion, keep a few general questions in mind. What were the major themes of the study? What were the author’s most important arguments? What methods and sources did the author use? Did the author have a particular point of view? How does the study reflect the author’s training as a geographer, or how might it have been different if done by a historian or other type of scholar? What were the study’s strong and weak points? How could it have been improved?

Neighborhood research project

To help you better understand what historical geography is and how to do it, you are required to produce a 3,000-word (excluding citations) research paper that examines the historical geography of an urban neighborhood. This is intended to be a semester-long research project that you work on each and every week. Much of the work you do in the course and most of your semester grade will be based on your research paper and related work. The instructor will undertake a comparable research project at the same time as students so you can see how an experienced historical geographer would do it.

One of the most important decisions you will make in carrying out your project is choosing a neighborhood. A list of neighborhoods that you can consider will be provided, but you are not limited to areas on that list. You can choose any neighborhood that is recognized as such by people who live in an area. Don't choose a neighborhood hastily. Think about places you know and are curious about. Choose a neighborhood about which you have strong interest because that will make the research and writing process more stimulating. You should choose a neighborhood that is small enough in size that you can study it in depth in a single semester. You must also choose a neighborhood to which you can travel easily to conduct research. If you don’t have access to a car, or aren’t willing to travel regularly to do research, you should pick a neighborhood that is nearby. No neighborhood can be chosen by more than one student. Your neighborhood choice must be approved by the instructor no later than Tuesday, February 4. Please come see me if you would like to discuss possibilities or need suggestions.

The goal of your research should be to understand the origins, evolution, and changing character of your neighborhood. You should consider the diversity of forces that shape any place, but focus on those subjects that have exerted the most significant impact on your study
area. You should try to determine what the area was like before the neighborhood developed and whether that influenced what it became. You should identify when the neighborhood originated, why it emerged when it did, and how it grew. You should learn everything you can about how it has evolved and the factors that have stimulated change. You should examine through time its environmental features, population makeup, cultural attributes, socioeconomic conditions, and the characteristics of its buildings, infrastructure, and open spaces. You should identify problems that the neighborhood has experienced and explore any solutions that have been attempted or proposed. You should try to learn how people have felt about the neighborhood. You should get to know the neighborhood as you would a human being, seeking to comprehend its personality, appreciate its qualities but also its faults, and recognize its distinctive attributes but also its similarities to other places.

Because this is a geography course, your research and paper should also employ a geographic perspective. You should seek to understand why the neighborhood developed where it did and its relationship to adjacent areas and the rest of the city or town where it is located. You should acquire a detailed knowledge of your neighborhood’s geographic structure — what is located where (and why), how the neighborhood’s characteristics vary within, and the arrangement of different land uses. You should make an effort to understand how people define the boundaries of the neighborhood and why it is defined as it is (you may wish to discuss that briefly in your paper). You must also situate your study in its larger context. You should seek to understand your neighborhood’s role in the larger area. You should examine the degree to which the neighborhood has been shaped by developments beyond its boundaries. You should explore how the neighborhood’s evolution reflects larger trends and patterns.

The final product of your research should be a written portrait of your neighborhood that tells its story from the time of its origin to the present day. It should, in essence, be a concise biography of the place. It should be selective in its portrayal, emphasizing those themes that are most important to conveying a sense of the neighborhood. It should be an original piece of scholarship that does not merely duplicate the work of others. It must make some use of primary source materials, such as those to which you will be introduced in class. You may find information in books and articles or online, but it is unlikely that such sources will provide all you need to know. You will have to be resourceful. A guide to resources for local history research will be provided. There is no minimum number of sources. You should consult however many sources are necessary to carry out your study. Your study should show that you consulted a range of sources and source types. No more than 20 percent of your cited sources can be available only on the world wide web. While the Internet has become invaluable, it is an incomplete resource and does not negate the need to conduct research in traditional sources. You should also evaluate the quality and reliability of any Internet source before using it, since many online sources are not subject to the same degree of scrutiny as published works. If you cannot justify to someone else why a source should be trusted, don’t use it.

Your paper should be logically organized, clearly explained, carefully written, and interesting. You must include a map showing the location of your neighborhood and its major features. You are encouraged to include other maps, photos, charts, and tables if they help tell the story you wish to tell. Papers must be typeset, double-spaced, and printed on only one side of each sheet, with pages numbered. Please write a word count for the main body of your paper on the last page. Sources must be cited using endnotes in the format explained in chapter 14 of the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition, available in Dimond Library (Reference Z253 C57). A guide showing how to cite common source types will be provided. Papers are due by noon on Monday, May 5.
Late papers and electronic submissions will not be accepted. You must also submit a copy of your paper through Safe Assign on Blackboard so it can be checked for plagiarism. Please provide the instructor a 9-by-12 envelope addressed to you and affixed with two 49-cent stamps so your graded paper can be returned to you. You will be graded on how well you fulfill the requirements of the project. I don’t use a grading matrix because I don’t believe it is possible to distill the grading process down to a formula.

Students are also required to give a presentation based on their neighborhood research project. Presentations should be 12 to 15 minutes in length (no longer); an additional five minutes will be reserved for questions and comments. Presentations should not be mere readings of papers, but should focus on a few key themes and distill the most important information from the written study. They should recognize that public speaking differs from written communication. You may wish to employ audiovisual aids or distribute materials to the class if they help convey your ideas. Be creative and speak with as few notes as possible. You will be graded on your speaking ability, how well you present your research to the class, and your responses to questions. Your final paper should reflect that you considered comments by the instructor and your classmates.

Students will be asked to provide occasional updates on their research in class and respond to specific questions when we discuss the research process. The purpose of this is not to check up on you, but to encourage a more collaborative research process. It is hoped that students will provide suggestions to their classmates. Students are required to meet with the instructor at least once before spring break to discuss their research. You are also required to have a draft of your paper reviewed by a writing assistant at Connors Writing Center in a writing conference (see http://www.unh.edu/writing/cwc/ for more information). You must complete the writing conference by Friday, April 25. Ask the writing assistant to send the instructor a note to verify that you’ve done it; it will also summarize what was discussed. Your paper should show that you paid attention to the writing assistant’s suggestions. Students who fail to meet with the instructor or complete a writing conference will have their paper grades lowered.

**Methodological exercises**

Students are required to complete six short exercises, each intended to replicate part of a typical research process and, because they are based on your neighborhood research project, should contribute to your final paper. After choosing a topic, you will be required to produce a short project proposal and preliminary bibliography. Other exercises are intended to expose you to particular methodologies and source types used by historical geographers — fieldwork, Census data, newspapers, city directories, fire insurance maps, and interviews. Instructions for completing each exercise will be provided. Electronic submissions will not be accepted.

**Grading**

Student grades will be based on written assignments, their presentation, and participation in class discussions. There will be no quizzes or exams. The research paper will be worth 35 percent of your course grade. Each of the methodological exercises will be worth 5 percent, 30 percent total. Discussion contributions will be worth 25 percent. The presentation will be worth 10 percent. No extra credit is available, nor are students permitted to redo assignments.
Grades will be assigned based on the traditional scale in which an A represents work of exceptional quality, a B is considered good, a C is satisfactory, a D is poor, and an F is unsatisfactory. Plus grades will be awarded to any student in the B, C, or D ranges whose semester average is within two percentage points of the minimum score for the next highest letter grade. Minus grades will be awarded to any student in the A, B, C, or D ranges whose semester average is within two percentage points of the next lowest letter grade.

Grading in a course such as this is inherently subjective. Students should keep in mind that grading is an assessment of quality not a measure of effort. I strive to be fair to all students. If you have questions about how your work is evaluated, please ask. Although this is not an English class, I pay significant attention to the quality of student writing because I believe that the ability to write clearly and effectively is one of the most important skills you should possess by the time you graduate.

Students are required to complete a personal information card and turn it in no later than Thursday, January 30. Any student who fails to do so will have their grade lowered one percentage point.

**Attendance and tardiness**

Because this class is discussion oriented, attendance is important. Your discussion grade will suffer if you miss class because you will not be there to contribute. The instructor may also lower the semester grade of any student who is absent excessively. Students should obtain notes from classmates for classes missed and are responsible for any information provided during classes from which they are absent.

Any exercise turned in after the due date will be docked one letter grade for each school day it is late. Lateness will be excused only when circumstances beyond a student’s control prevent them from submitting an exercise on time. If you think you have a legitimate excuse, you must notify me by e-mail or telephone before the class in which the exercise is due, or, when that is impossible, very soon afterwards on the same day. You must also be able to prove your excuse in writing. Conflicts with jobs, other classes, and your personal life are not satisfactory excuses.

**Readings**

There is no textbook for this course, although the following book has been placed on reserve in Dimond Library for reference purposes:


Required readings will be made available on Blackboard in Adobe Acrobat format.

**Academic honesty**

Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated in this course and will be severely punished when discovered. I will review the university’s academic honesty policy in class and will provide examples of behavior that would be considered violations of that policy. If you
have questions about what constitutes academic misconduct, ask me or see the university’s Students Rights, Rules and Responsibilities handbook, available at http://unh.edu/vpsas/sites/unh.edu.vpsas/files/media/SRRR_1314.pdf

Blackboard

The university’s Blackboard system (http://blackboard.unh.edu/) will serve as an archive for course materials, will provide students access to their grades, and may be used as a method for distributing information between class meetings. I will assume that the e-mail address linked to your account is your primary e-mail address and that you check it regularly.

Academic assistance

UNH’s Center for Academic Resources in 201 Smith Hall (862-3698; http://www.cfar.unh.edu/) offers study skills assistance, help with computer applications, drop-in tutoring, and other resources to help undergraduates fulfill their academic potential.

Connors Writing Center in 329 Dimond Library (862-3272; http://www.unh.edu/writing/cwc/) provides students assistance with any kind of writing and offers individual writing conferences. Center staff can help you understand assignments, develop topics, create research plans, organize your work, improve clarity, and learn grammar, punctuation, and formal writing conventions.

Students with disabilities

The University is committed to providing students with documented disabilities equal access to all university programs and facilities. If you think you have a disability requiring accommodations, you must register with Disability Services for Students (http://www.unh.edu/disabilityservices/). Contact DSS at 862-2607 or disability.office@unh.edu. If you have received accommodation letters for this course from DSS, please provide me with that information privately in my office so that we can review those accommodations.

Tentative course schedule

January 21: Introduction to the course

January 23-28: Introducing historical geography


January 30-February 6: Regional geographies

January 30: Personal information card due
February 4: Deadline for approval of paper topic


February 11-18: Migration and settlement

February 13: Project proposal-preliminary bibliography due


February 20-27: Industry and economy

February 25: Fieldwork exercise due


March 4-18: Cities, suburbs, and towns

March 6: Census exercise due
March 7: Deadline for meeting with instructor about landscape history project
March 10-14: Spring break; no classes


March 20-27: Environmental historical geography

*March 25: Newspaper exercise due*


April 1-8: Culture and landscape

*April 3: City directory/fire insurance map exercise due*


April 10-15: Power and social relations

*April 15: Interview exercise due*


April 17-May 1: Student research presentations (four per day)

*April 25: Deadline for students to complete writing conference, Connors Writing Center*

Monday, May 5: Last day of classes

*Paper due by noon, 102 Huddleston Hall*