Purpose of the course

This course is intended to introduce students to the physical and human geography of New England, including landforms, climate and vegetation, population and settlement, urban patterns, culture and identity, political geography, natural resources, and economic development.

Approach and organization

The course will be lecture-based because I believe that is the best approach for providing students an introductory knowledge about the geography of the region. Students are encouraged to ask questions and contribute.

The course will be divided into eight thematic sections, each two to three class periods in length. Each exam will cover two sections. The first exam unit will focus on physical geography. The second exam unit will cover population and urban patterns. The third exam section will focus on cultural and political geography. The fourth exam unit will cover economic themes. Each class will focus on a single topic.

All of you reside in New England and you may have lived here all your life, so you probably know things about the region that I don’t. Please share your knowledge when appropriate and tell me if you think I’ve gotten something wrong. I am not native to the region but I have lived here since 2003 and have worked hard to learn as much as I can about New England. Still, I don’t know everything (and may mispronounce a few names!). I’m still learning.

Although this course is not officially designated as a writing-intensive course, student grades will be based entirely on written work 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.

Research paper

Students must produce a 2,000-word (excluding citations and other supplementary materials) research paper on a topic of their choice about some aspect of the geography of New England. You should choose a topic that is sufficiently narrow in scope to be researched in depth over the course of a semester. Topics can concern the entire region or focus on some part of it. Don’t choose a topic hastily and make sure to pick a subject that interests you, because that will make the project more stimulating. Please come see me if you wish to discuss topic ideas or would like suggestions. Students must obtain approval for a topic no later than Thursday, February 5.
Your research should address geographic questions and your finished paper should employ a geographic perspective, but you should also address non-geographic themes that are important to understanding your subject. If you’re unsure how to make your work geographic, please ask. Papers should be researched in depth, show that you examined a variety of sources and source types (not just the web, not just a book or two), and demonstrate an ability to synthesize information from a variety of sources to create a cohesive study. Papers should be logically organized, clearly explained, carefully written, and interesting. Include maps, photographs, charts, or tables if they help tell the story you wish to tell. You will be graded on the thoroughness of your research, how well you explain your subject, and the quality of your writing. Papers that show an overreliance on web sources will be graded down. You are encouraged to seek my help as you work on your paper.

Papers must be typeset, double-spaced, and printed on only one side of each sheet, with each page numbered. Sources must be cited using a widely accepted citation method (parenthetical notes, endnotes, and footnotes are all fine, so long as you use an accepted method and supply all information necessary to enable a reader to locate each source). Please write a word count for the main body of your paper on the lower right corner of the last page. Papers are due in class on Tuesday, April 28. You must also submit an electronic version of your paper through Safe Assign on Blackboard so it can be checked for plagiarism. Late papers and electronic submissions will not be accepted.

Examinations and grading

There will be four exams, each covering one-quarter of the course. The last exam will be given during the final exam period but will not be comprehensive and will have the same format and length as the other exams. Exams will be composed of short answer and essay questions, and are intended to measure your general understanding of key course themes, concepts, and issues. Study questions intended to help you prepare will be made available before each exam. Students are required to bring an unmarked blue book to class on exam days.

Each of the exams will be worth 20 percent of your semester grade. The research paper will also be worth 20 percent. Final grades will be assigned based on the traditional scale in which an A represents work of exceptional quality (90 percent or better), a B is considered good (80-89 percent), a C is satisfactory (70-79 percent), a D is poor (60-69 percent), and an F is unsatisfactory (below 60 percent). 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 average is within two percentage points of the next lowest letter grade. No extra credit is available.

Grading in a course such as this where all grades are based on written work is inherently subjective. I strive to be fair to all students and provided you information on why I graded you as I did. Please keep in mind that grading is an assessment of quality, not a measure of effort. I encourage you to come see me if you have questions about how you were graded or other concerns.

Students are required to complete a personal information card that will be supplied on the first day of class. Students who fail to turn in a completed card by Thursday, January 29 will be docked one percentage point from their semester average.
Attendance and missed exams

Attendance will not be taken, but students are responsible for obtaining notes from classmates for any classes missed. I will not provide notes to individual students (that would be unfair to other students), nor do I post the text portion of my PowerPoint slides online (because they are an unsatisfactory substitute for notes and that would encourage poor attendance). Students are also responsible for obtaining information about any announcements made during class periods they miss. Although attendance will not generally be counted in grading, the instructor may lower the semester grade for any student who is absent excessively.

Makeup exams will rarely be permitted and will only be considered when circumstances beyond a student’s control prevent them from taking an exam during the scheduled class period. If you think you have a legitimate excuse, you must notify me by e-mail or telephone before the exam begins, or, when that is logistically impossible, very soon afterwards on the same day. You must be able to prove your excuse in writing. Conflicts with jobs, other classes, and your personal life are not satisfactory excuses. Exams cannot be taken early for any reason.

Textbook

There is no textbook or required reading for this course. Use the time you would normally devote to class reading to work on your research project.

Blackboard

The university’s Blackboard computer 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 Blackboard account is your primary e-mail address and that you check it regularly.

Academic honesty

Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated and will be severely punished when discovered. I will review the university’s plagiarism 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 UNH’s Students Rights, Rules and Responsibilities handbook, available at http://unh.edu/vpsas/sites/unh.edu.vpsas/files/media/srrr1415.pdf

Academic assistance

UNH’s Center for Academic Resources (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 (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**

Students with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course should register with Disability Services for Students (201 Smith Hall; 862-2607, http://www.unh.edu/disabilityservices/), for assistance in developing a plan to address their academic needs.

**Tentative course schedule**

January 20: Introduction to the course

January 22-29: Landforms

  January 29: Information card due

  Possible topics: Building the land, glaciation and its impacts, landform regions

February 3-10: Climate and vegetation

  February 3: Guest lecture, Marcello Graziano, Scottish Association for Marine Science
  February 5: Deadline for approval of paper topic

  Possible topics: Climate influences, climate change, New England’s forests

February 12: Exam 1

February 17-24: Population and settlement

  Possible topics: Settlement of New England, peopling of New England, contemporary population patterns

February 26-March 5: Urban patterns

  Possible topics: Urban New England, understanding Boston, New England’s secondary cities

March 10: Exam 2

March 12-31: Culture and identity

  Possible topics: Ethnic geography, religion in New England, New England speech

March 16-20: Spring break; no classes
March 26: Instructor in Texas; no class
April 2-9: Political geography

Possible topics: State political cultures, electoral geography, local government in New England

April 14: Exam 3

April 16-21: Natural resources

Possible topics: Agriculture, collapse of New England’s fisheries, energy in New England

April 23-30: Economic development

April 28: Research paper due

Possible topics: Evolution of the regional economy, high-tech economy, wealth and poverty

May 7, 3:30-5: Exam 4