Purpose of the course

This course will introduce students to the physical and human geography of the United States and Canada. Roughly equal attention will be devoted to landforms, climate and biogeography, environmental issues, population and settlement, culture and identity, political geography, urban patterns, natural resources, and economic development.

Because the subject of this course is broad, the specific topics covered will be selective. Course content will alternate between topics that are large in scope and scale, and others that are more narrowly focused. Students should acquire a general understanding of the geographic characteristics of the United States and Canada, but also more in-depth knowledge about numerous topics that are representative of the diversity of the two countries.

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 U.S. and Canada. Students are encouraged to ask questions and contribute.

The course will be divided into nine sections. The first three sections will focus on environmental geography. The middle three sections will focus on human and cultural geography topics. The final three sections will focus on urban and economic themes. Sections will be four to five class periods in length. Each class will be devoted to a single topic. The course will give greater attention to the United States than Canada because the U.S. is larger in population and more diverse than its northern neighbor. Nevertheless, effort will be made to present Canadian perspectives throughout the course.

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. Although this is not an English class, the quality of your writing does count in grading because it will likely count in whatever you do after college.

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 the United States and Canada. You should choose a topic that is sufficiently narrow in scope to be researched in depth over the course of the 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 research and writing process more engaging. Topics should not duplicate lecture subjects as identified in the course schedule. Please come see me if you wish to discuss topic ideas or would like suggestions. You must have a topic approved by me no later than Monday, September 21.

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 essential 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 multiple 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 Monday, December 7. You must also submit an electronic version of your paper through Safe Assign on Blackboard so it can be checked for possible plagiarism. Late papers and electronic submissions will not be accepted.

Examinations

There will be three exams, each covering one-third 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 course themes, concepts, and issues. Students are required to bring an unmarked blue book to class on exam days.

Grading

Each of the exams will be worth 25 percent of your semester grade. The research paper will also be worth 25 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 given 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. Please keep in mind that grading is an assessment of quality, not a measure of effort. If you don’t understand why you received a grade, disagree with how you were graded, or want to know how you can do better in the class, please come speak with me.
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 Friday, September 11 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 re-teach material or provide notes to individual students. Students are also responsible for obtaining information about any announcements made during class periods from which they are absent.

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 also 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.

**Readings**

There is no textbook for this course. Article-length readings covering some of the subjects we will examine in class (but not all) are listed in the course schedule. The readings are intended to supplement lectures and often provide greater explanation and depth than is possible in class. The readings, however, do not cover everything that will be discussed in class and, therefore, will not provide all you need to know for exams if you miss a particular lecture. Exam questions will be based on what we cover in class. All readings will be posted on Blackboard.

**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. 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/srrr1516.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**

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/). If you have questions about this process, please contact DSS at 862-2607 or disability.office@unh.edu. If you are registered with DSS, and eligible for accommodations that you would like to utilize in this course, please forward that information to me in a timely manner so that we can meet privately in my office to review those accommodations.

**Tentative schedule and readings**

August 31: Introduction to the course.

September 2-14: Landforms (5 classes).

- September 7: Labor Day; no class.
- September 11: Information card due.
- Topics: Landform regions, making the Appalachians, glaciation and its impacts, California’s earthquake risk, landmaking in Boston.


September 16-23: Climate and biogeography (4 classes).

- September 21: Deadline for approval of paper topic.
- Topics: Climate influences, severe weather, ecological regions, clearing the forests.


September 25–October 2: Environmental issues (4 classes).

Topics: Climate change, municipal solid waste, dam removal, invasive species.


October 5: Exam 1.

October 7-14: Population and settlement (4 classes).

Topics: Settlement and migration, peopling of the United States and Canada, geography of African-Americans, immigration from Mexico.


October 16-26: Culture and identity (5 classes).

Topics: Comparing U.S. and Canadian national cultures, geography of religion, Mormon culture region, geography of gays and lesbians, North American foodways.


October 28-November 4: Political geography (4 classes).

Topics: U.S.-Canada relations, beyond red and blue, Canada’s French-English fault line, Washington D.C. voting rights.


November 6: Exam 2.

November 9-18: Urban patterns (5 classes).

November 10: Classes follow Wednesday schedule.
November 11: Veterans Day; no class.

Topics: Development of the U.S. and Canadian urban systems, suburbanization in the United States, Montreal v. Toronto, green Manhattan, American college town.


November 20-December 2: Natural resources (4 classes).

November 25-27: Thanksgiving break; no classes

Topics: Geography of agriculture, energy resources, decline of North Atlantic fisheries.


December 4-11: Economic development (4 classes).

December 7: Research paper due at beginning of class.

Topics: Sectoral transformation of the U.S. and Canadian economies, geography of the high-tech economy, evolution of American retailing, poverty in the U.S. and Canada.


December 16, 10:30-11:30: Exam 3.