Field Research – GEOG 590 - or “Muddy Boots and Grassroots”

Syllabus - Fall 2016

Dr. Jennifer Brewer
T Th 9:40-11:00am
Morrill 103

-Course Objectives-
This course provides students with opportunities to explore a range of methods in geographic research. It focuses particularly on the collection and analysis of field data to understand human-environment relationships. It encompasses both biophysical and social dimensions, emphasizing the latter. It covers quantitative approaches, but focuses more on qualitative approaches. Covered topics include explanation, rigor, ethics, archives, secondary data, sample design, surveys, participant observation, interviews, focus groups, coding, content analysis, text analysis, discourse analysis, visual analysis, quantitative techniques, and participatory research. The class format includes interactive lectures and seminar-style discussion. Students will complete hands-on field data collection and analysis, activities that require students to demonstrate independent initiative and problem-solving.

-Readings-
I will assign readings on a weekly basis. The required text is:
Other readings will be made available on MyCourses.

-Course Topics-
We will cover the following topics, in roughly the order listed, but the sequence may change.

- Introductions & wonder walk
- Epistemologies - deductive & inductive logic
- Research design and research questions
- Literature reviews, archival sources, and secondary data
- Biophysical data
- Sampling frames and case studies
- Surveys, questionnaires
- Ethics and rigor
- Interviews and focus groups
- Participant observation
- Coding and content analysis
- Textual and discourse analysis
- Quantitative analysis
- Participatory methods
- Visual materials and analysis
- Mixed methods
• Writing up and presenting

-Class Policies-

My office hours and contacts:
My office is 102B Huddleston Hall. Enter through the Geography office on the east end of the building. Office hours are by appointment, but please don’t hesitate to make an appointment.

My e-mail is jennifer.brewer@unh.edu. Please begin your message subject line with “GEOG 673,” so it doesn’t get waylaid in my inbox. I often answer within a few hours, but if you don’t hear back within 48 hours, feel free to re-send.

End of term is a busy time for all of us, and some faculty schedule field research or other professional travel immediately after classes end. I might not be available in-person after our last day of regularly scheduled class. If you anticipate needing to speak with me in that timeframe, check in advance.

Attendance:
I assume that you will be in class. Any absences should be explained with a legitimate and significant excuse (such as a religious holiday), as far in advance as possible. Unexcused missed classes will harm your participation grade.

Although we have a textbook, much of the essential material for understanding and completing major out-of-class exercises will be discussed only in class. Full details may or may not be available on MyCourses. I rarely allow make-ups of missed in-class or homework assignments, unless you have a letter from a UNH Dean, DSS, Counseling Center, or SHARP. If you have a family or health emergency, feel free to let me know as far in advance as possible. I believe such issues are very important, and may well merit accommodation, so it is often best to get a letter from the Dean’s office, even after the fact.

It is up to you to consult with your classmates on all missed material. I strongly recommend that in the first few days of class, you get to know a few people in class and exchange contact information for this purpose. On the other hand, if someone asks you for more than a couple days of notes, you can certainly refuse, unless there seem to be extenuating circumstances.

Courtesy:
If you do not intend to participate fully and actively in your own learning, and help create a supportive learning atmosphere for other students, you do not belong in this class. I understand that the occasional personal situation arises, but it is rude and unacceptable to frequently arrive more than a minute or two late without explanation, or to leave class early without prior explanation, as such behavior can be distracting to the instructor and students. The following distracting activities are not appropriate during this class and will not be tolerated: sleeping, inappropriate talking/socializing, reading non-class materials, voice or text use of digital devices such as cell phones, music players, laptops, or other distractions.
It is my job to provide you with college level educational content, not to talk aloud to myself while you check messages or surf the internet. Old fashioned pen or pencil and paper are less distracting to yourself, to me, to others, and are therefore better learning tools for our purposes. For these reasons, I do not allow use of laptops or other electronic devices during class, not even silently for note taking -- unless you ask to sign a release that commits to sitting in the front row and using the machine only for taking notes.

I do not allow audio/video recording or taking pictures of class without my permission. In the rare event that you need to keep your cell on for some emergency purpose (such as a family health matter), let me know and put it in silent mode.

Grading:
Unless specified otherwise, assignments must be completed by the beginning of class and must be wordprocessed. Otherwise, late penalties will apply. If you do find yourself late on an assignment, however, it is ALWAYS better to complete it as soon as possible rather than to postpone or skip it. I reserve the right to require satisfactory completion of any and all assignments.
For ALL academic work, including for this class, ALWAYS keep two digital backup copies, such as one on Box and one on your personal hard drive or external drive.
Final grades will be calculated as follows (assuming all assignments have been satisfactorily completed):
Class participation - 25%
This means active participation, not passive attendance. You should be speaking up in each class. Your comments should demonstrate engagement with the readings, and with comments from other students and the instructor. I reserve the right to schedule unannounced in-class exercises.
Short writings on readings - 40%
Field assignments, including oral presentation - 35%

Investing in your own learning:
If you encounter words in readings or lecture that you don’t understand, look them up in a dictionary and/or ask for clarification. Vocabulary-building is a lifelong skill that will serve you well as a student, on the job market, and in the workplace. If you use a hard copy dictionary for this purpose, especially a large one, you can also see other words related to the one you are looking up, and other new words. This provides more context for the word you are looking up, and helps grow your vocabulary more quickly, compared to using online sources. Sometimes unfamiliar words are used just to sound smart (which is generally unhelpful), but I more often use them because they carry more precise or nuanced meaning than other possible word options.

Note taking:
As most UNH students know, taking notes is a basic skill for life and learning. Research shows that taking notes by hand instead of electronically improves learning outcomes. The following websites have some tips for notetaking, but most people find they have to develop their own
individualized approach and style:
http://education.exeter.ac.uk/dll/studyskills/note_taking_skills.htm
http://www.palgrave.com/skills4study/studyskills/reading/notes.asp
http://academic.cuesta.edu/acasupp/as/208.HTM

MyCourses:
I will use MyCourses to post additional readings, assignments, and grades, and to collect some out-of-class assignments. This course was previously on Blackboard, so I imagine some issues may arise in the switch. If you encounter difficulties, it is best to contact the IT Service Desk http://it.unh.edu/index.cfm?ID=AF65A729-D567-BF1C-C7B097B99B4D357A. They answer phones M-F 7:30am to 5:00pm at 603-862-4242 and offer online tutorials. These folks are more familiar with the software intricacies and glitches than I am, and may be more immediately available.

Academic integrity:
Students in this class are bound to the university policy on academic honesty http://www.unh.edu/vpsas/handbook/academic-honesty. Violation of this policy may result in course failure. The policy applies to all assignments, including any extra credit options. I take these issues seriously and will take action when warranted. Students who have cheated, plagiarized, lied, or misrepresented the truth in my classes later wished they hadn’t.

If you have ANY questions about whether something constitutes an academic integrity violation, ASK. I view such issues through the lens of fairness and respect, considering the considerable effort put forth by most instructors and students. If you violate this policy, you lower the value of all our academic diplomas, of this university as a commons for social learning, and the larger civic merit of higher education. That is a long term social cost, not just an individual character flaw.

Equity and accessibility:
If you have a special need or disability, even a minor one, and if you desire appropriate accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services to provide me with the necessary documentation http://www.unh.edu/disabilityservices/

Students in this class are expected to conform with university policies on discrimination and harassment http://unh.edu/vpsas/handbook/affirmative-action-and-equity-policies

Unforeseen emergencies:
If some unforeseen emergency conflicts with our class meeting or exams, such as a weather event or public health or safety issue, you can expect general information to be provided by the university. In such an event, you may also receive an e-mail from me with follow-up information about any necessary rescheduling, so you’ll want to be attentive for any such e-mail communications.

Credit toward non-Geography majors:
If you are taking this course for credit toward a major or minor in Environmental Sciences or Environmental Conservation and Sustainability, or the dual major in Sustainability, your final project needs to have an environmental component.

If you wish to count this course toward a major or minor in Women’s Studies, your final project must have a gender component. To make sure that any other program requirements for credit are met, please check with your Women’s Studies advisor.