

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Department of Geography & Geoinformation Science
Fall Semester 2023

MAJOR WORLD REGIONS GGS 101 – 002 Course Syllabus

Instructor: Ian S. Ward
Office: Exploratory Hall, Room 2222
Office Hours: By appointment 12pm – 1pm Tues., or
by appointment online via Blackboard Collaborate

Class Location: Music / Theater
Building, Room 1005
Meeting Time: 9am -10:15am TR
Email: iward@gmu.edu

Course Overview:

This course is designed as an introduction to the discipline of geography while providing the student an overview of the world's major regions as defined by their physical and cultural characteristics. It is also intended to present critical geographic concepts associated with applying a spatial perspective to understanding the world. The focus will be on developing a new frame of reference for integrating information in spatial terms.

Course Objectives: Based upon the readings, lecture notes, and independent study, students will be able to:

- 1) define a region;
- 2) describe world regions in terms of physical characteristics such as climate or landforms;
- 3) describe world regions in terms of cultural characteristics such as language or religion;
- 4) explain specific geographic concepts such as climate regions, or culture hearths;
- 5) and demonstrate how these concepts help explain regional differences and spatial patterns of distribution.

Mason Core: This course fulfills the Mason Core requirement in **Global Understanding**.

Text: 1) Nijman, Shin, and Muller, *Geography: Realms, Regions, and Concepts, 18th edition*, Wiley & Sons.
2) *National Geographic Concise Atlas of the World. 5th edition*.

Student Requirements:

To successfully complete this course, students must complete all assigned readings and exercises, watch all recorded lecture material posted to Blackboard, and attend scheduled lectures on campus; neither the textbook, lecture notes, or lecture recordings alone will suffice. During our meetings, students are encouraged to participate in class discussion, but may also be called upon at any time to offer their comments and views on class topics. If any meetings are conducted online, students are asked to turn on their cameras so as to be seen.

Basic Course Technology Requirements:

Recorded lectures, assignments, office-hours, and communication of class information will regularly use the Blackboard learning system, available at <https://mymason.gmu.edu>. Students are required to have regular, reliable access to a computer with an updated operating system (**recommended: Windows 10 or Mac OSX 10.13 or higher**) and a stable broadband Internet connection (cable modem, DSL, satellite broadband, etc., with a consistent 1.5 Mbps [megabits per second] download speed or higher. *You can check your speed settings using the speed test on this website.*) While exams will be administered in

class, map exercises will be delivered and completed through Blackboard. To ensure a 'problem-free' experience, it is HIGHLY recommended that you use [Firefox](#) or [Google Chrome](#) as your Internet browser. Experience has shown occasional issues with Safari, but migration to Chrome has significantly helped students successfully navigate Blackboard activities. I'm told Firefox is even better... a platform that is available through free download from the Web.

Examinations and Examination Policies:

- 1) Three examinations, plus a Final Exam, will be administered during the course of the semester (see attached schedule for dates). **Only your top 2 scores from the FIRST 3 exams will be recorded.** A mandatory **Comprehensive Final** will be given at the end of the semester. This last grade will count toward your overall score and will not be considered for elimination.
- 2) **All exams will be conducted in class with students using SCANTRON® forms.** Examinations will be constructed around True / False and Multiple Choice questions. Students will be expected to come to class with a #2 pencil and a clean, unfolded SCANTRON® answer sheet (available in our campus bookstore). Damaged answer sheets will not be accepted. Note: Please purchase only the green and white SCANTRON® forms ([Form No. 882-E](#))
- 3) Exams begin and end as indicated in the class schedule: No additional time for late arrivals.
- 4) **NO MAKEUP EXAMS WILL BE GIVEN.** Remember, you may drop one exam, so if during the semester you find yourself in a situation that will preclude you from taking one of the regular semester exams, that exam will count as dropped.
- 5) Start times for those students arriving late will not be adjusted.
- 6) **THE FINAL EXAM WILL NOT BE ADMINISTERED EARLY OR LATER;** please plan ahead.
- 7) No books or notes of any kind (hardcopy or electronic) may be used during any examination in this class. **Cell phones must be turned OFF at all times. Smart watches must be removed & stored.**
- 8) Hats with bills or rims that obstruct your eyes cannot be worn during in-class examinations.
- 9) Once your exams have been graded and handed back to you, please retain them for your records. Do not lose track of them until after your final grade has been posted.
- 10) Please schedule to meet with me during office hours if you would like to review your exams.

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is essential and each individual is expected to do his or her own work; violations of the University Honor Code will not be tolerated and will result in course failure. A description of the University Honor Code is available for review in the University Catalog and on our class Blackboard page.

Campus Classroom Expectations:

- 1) **NO LAPTOPS** or **TABLETS** or **PHONES** are to be used by students during lecture.
- 2) **CELL PHONES** must be **SILENCED** and put away before class begins.
- 3) **SMART WATCHES** must be removed and stored during exams only.
- 4) **NO TEXTING** – I want your full and undivided attention. This also means that if you need to sleep, stay at home.
- 5) **NO PHOTOGRAPHY** – photography is not permitted in the classroom.
- 6) **AUDIO RECORDINGS** may only be made with instructor authorization.
- 7) **FACE COVERINGS ARE OPTIONAL** – Although masks are optional, if you're more comfortable wearing a mask, feel free to continue. Students will be respectful of those choosing to wear masks.
- 8) **BE ON TIME** – Students are expected to be on time for class. Should circumstances arise that make you late, do not disrupt the class as you enter; take the first seat available in the room.
- 9) **NO CHIT-CHAT** during lecture. If you have a question or comment, please raise your hand.
- 10) **KEEP THE ROOM CLEAN.** If you pack it in, pack it out; leave your seat better than you found it.
- 11) **GET INVOLVED** – Whether or not you've had personal experiences abroad, you will undoubtedly have questions, comments, and maybe some personal experiences that you'll want to share during

the semester. We want to hear from you. If you are hesitant about asking a question in class, that's ok, but don't discard the question. Send me an email, or share it with me during office hours.

Note Taking:

- In-class lectures will be accompanied by the use of electronic slides, maps, and photographs. You are not required—nor is it necessary—to copy the contents of these slides word-for-word, but it is strongly recommended that you take good notes during lecture. Students having concerns or questions about the class material are encouraged to come to office hours or set up an online appointment with me using Blackboard Collaborate. There will be occasions when online instruction will be provided, which will be through recorded lectures posted on Blackboard. Note taking is highly encouraged during these instructional videos or if the class meets live online. Please see “*Lectures and Class Schedule*” for more information.
- If at any point during my in-class lectures you feel that I am changing slides too fast, please let me know and I will slow down.

Map Exercises:

Two Map Exercises (250 points) will be assigned during the semester. The exercises will be made available on Blackboard at least two weeks prior to the due date. Due dates can be found on the semester schedule located at the end of this syllabus. Students are to work through the questions and then provide their answers via a link on Blackboard (deployed approximately 5 days before the due date). You must use the ***National Geographic Concise Atlas of the World, 5th edition*** to complete the exercises.

Late Policy on Map Exercises:

There is a maximum of a one-week extension with a minimum of a two letter-grade deduction beginning at the time the assignment is due. To receive the highest credit possible, assignments must be turned-in on time. It is best to begin work on assignments as soon as possible to allow yourself plenty of time to prepare a well-researched product. These exercises are not meant to be difficult, but they do require a bit of thought, time, and effort. I would be happy to meet online with any students who are having difficulty with any of the questions.

Course Material:

All course material posted to Blackboard is private to this class and may **NOT** be distributed to anyone outside of this course. In addition, as stated by Federal law, any materials that identify specific students (via their name, voice, or image) must **NOT** be shared with anyone not enrolled in this class.

- Video recordings — whether made by instructors or students — of class meetings that include audio, visual, or textual information from other students are private and must not be shared outside the class.
- Live video conference meetings on Blackboard Collaborate that include audio, textual, or visual information from other students must be viewed privately and not shared with others in your household or recorded and shared outside the class.
- Instructional videos are not to be shared publicly online or elsewhere and are the property of the instructor.

Email and Student Privacy

Students must use their MasonLive (GMU) email account to communicate with the instructor and to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information. All email communication will be conducted using professional email etiquette, including appropriate salutations, a clear message, and a signature (name of sender). Emails lacking this will not be responded to.

Disability Accommodations:

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474, <http://ods.gmu.edu>. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

Possibility of Campus Closure:

If the campus closes or class is canceled due to weather, loss of power, health concerns, or other reasons, students should check Blackboard [or other instruction as appropriate] for updates on how to continue learning and information about any changes to lectures or assignments.

Grading Scheme and Policy:

Your combined score of the following will determine your grade in this course:

Exam I	→	25%	=	250 points	} (only the 2 best scores counted)
Exam II	→	25%	=	250 points	
Exam III	→	25%	=	250 points	
Final Exam	→	25%	=	250 points	} (mandatory)
1 st Map Exercise (home)	→	12%	=	120 points	
2 nd Map Exercise (home)	→	13%	=	130 points	
			=	1,000 points	

Point Translation:

980 - 1000	=	A+	800 - 819	=	B-
920 - 979	=	A	780 - 799	=	C+
900 - 919	=	A-	720 - 779	=	C
880 - 899	=	B+	700 - 719	=	C-
820 - 879	=	B	600 - 699	=	D
			0 - 599	=	F

Grading Scales for Individual Course Activities:

1st Map Exercise:

108 - 120	=	A
96 - 107	=	B
84 - 95	=	C
72 - 83	=	D
0 - 71	=	F

2nd Map Exercise:

117 - 130	=	A
104 - 116	=	B
91 - 103	=	C
78 - 94	=	D
0 - 77	=	F

Semester & Final Exams:

225 - 250	=	A
200 - 224	=	B
175 - 199	=	C
150 - 174	=	D
0 - 149	=	F

Key Dates:

8 / 22	Class begins
8 / 28	Last day to add course - must be enrolled for a grade!
9 / 5	Last day to drop course with 100% tuition refund
9 / 12	Last day to drop course with 50% tuition refund
9 / 14 – 9 / 26	Unrestricted Withdrawal Period with 100% tuition liability
9 / 26	EXAM 1
10 / 10	<i>Fall Recess (no class)</i>
10 / 12	MAP EXERCISE 1 due (<i>answers submitted on Blackboard</i>)
10 / 31	EXAM 2
11 / 14	MAP EXERCISE 2 due (<i>answers submitted on Blackboard</i>)
11 / 23	<i>Thanksgiving (no class)</i>
11 / 28	EXAM 3
11 / 30	Last day of class
12 / 7	FINAL EXAM

Lectures and Class Schedule:

In-class Lectures – These are scheduled to occur each Tuesday and Thursday morning beginning at 9:00am. There may be occasions where students will be released from class early and asked to watch the remainder of the lecture in the form of a recording on Blackboard (*see Recorded Online Lectures below*). There also will likely be two or three weeks where in-class instruction will be replaced completely by recorded lectures. These occasions will be announced a week in advance.

Live Virtual Online Lectures – Though none are scheduled for the semester, these may be necessary from time-to-time due to inclement weather or other circumstances. These will be announced as soon as possible, either in class the week before or via email (*and Blackboard*) up to the day of the lecture. On these occasions, class will be conducted through Blackboard Collaborate (*a link is provided for online access on your class Blackboard Main Menu*). BB Collaborate will also be used regularly for virtual office hours.

Recorded Online Lectures – These will occasionally supplement or replace the in-class lectures and will be posted on Blackboard under “SUPPLEMENTAL NOTES AND RECORDED LECTURES”. Students are required to watch these lectures and take notes on them at a time of their convenience (preferably well within the week that they have been assigned and posted).

Tentative Class Schedule

(as of 22 August 2023)

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	READINGS
1	8/22	Introduction / Why study Geography?	Chapter 1
	8/24	Weather & Climate	Chapter 1
2	8/29	Weather & Climate	Chapter 1
	8/31	History of Cartography	Chapter 1
3	9/5	Cartography / GIS / Remote Sensing	Chapter 1
	9/7	Europe	Chapter 5
4	9/12	Europe	Chapter 5
	9/14	Europe	Chapter 5
5	9/19	Europe	Chapter 5
	9/21	Europe	Chapter 8
6	9/26	EXAM I	STUDY!
	9/28	Subsaharan Africa	Chapter 8
7	10/3	Subsaharan Africa	Chapter 8
	10/5	North Africa / Southwest Asia	Chapter 7
8	10/10	NO CLASS	
	10/12	SW Asia	1st Map Exercise Due Chapter 7
9	10/17	Southwest Asia	Chapter 7
	10/19	North America	Chapter 2

Tentative Class Schedule

(as of 22 August 2023)

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	READINGS
10	10 / 24	North America	Chapter 2
	10 / 26	North America / Middle America	Chapter 2 / 3
11	10 / 31	EXAM II	STUDY!
	11 / 2	Middle America	Chapter 3
12	11 / 7	Middle America	Chapter 3
	11 / 9	Middle & South America	Chapters 3 / 4
13	11 / 14	South America 2nd Map Exercise Due	Chapter 4
	11 / 16	South America	Chapter 4
14	11 / 21	South America	Chapter 4
	11 / 23	NO CLASS Thanksgiving	STUDY!
15	11 / 28	EXAM III	STUDY!
	11 / 30	Australia / NZ / Pacific Realm	Chapter 12 / 13
16	12 / 5	NO CLASS	STUDY!
	12 / 7	FINAL EXAM	Exam Time: (7:30am to 10:15am)

Frequently Asked Questions

Is this a difficult class?

Like any class, this all depends on how much effort you put into it. It's not designed to be difficult, but it can easily become so if you skip on class attendance, assigned readings, recorded lectures, and time for studying your notes. Please see me as soon as possible if you think you are having trouble with understanding any of the material in the class.

I have never taken a geography course in my life. Will I be at a disadvantage?

Not necessarily, though any previous exposure to geography can only help. This is meant to be an introductory course, though those who are new to geography may need to spend a little more time studying throughout the semester. I am committed to working closely with each of you to get you up to speed, no matter your prior level of knowledge.

Why does the class not cover East and South Asia?

Because of the time constraints of the semester, this particular section of World Regional Geography will be concentrating on Europe, Africa, Southwest Asia, the Americas, and the Austral / Pacific Realm. Other sections of the course being taught at GMU will cover East and South Asia, but may not cover some of the areas addressed in this section.

I have a disability and need extra assistance. What do I need to do?

If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance, you should (1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; <http://ds.gmu.edu>) to determine the testing accommodations you need; and (2) talk with me to discuss how we can coordinate on this. In addition, you may also find that coming to my office hours will help, especially with going over lecture material together.

Why can't I use my laptop, tablet, or phone in class?

In my many years of teaching, I have found that electronic devices often become a major distraction, not only for those around the students using them, but for the users themselves who are often tempted to explore the wonderful World Wide Web... where Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, etc... seem to be popular watering holes. Sketching maps and diagrams, something that you'll be doing frequently in class, is often impossible to do on these computers. Eye contact between student, instructor, and the main classroom screen quickly evaporates as attention is focused on personal computing devices. I don't want this to happen. Having a paper notebook and a pen in front of you to take a few supporting notes is all you need. I'm aware that it generally takes longer to write notes than to type them, and I make time accommodations for this during my lectures.

Do I need to bring my book to every class?

No, I don't expect this. However, some students find it useful to do so because it allows them to use the maps and illustrations in the book during the lectures. If you find that you're having trouble understanding where these different geographic regions are, bringing the highly illustrated book to class might be something you'll want to consider.

Do you offer Extra Credit?

Generally speaking, no. However, the exception is that there will often be 2 or 3 extra credit questions at the end of each exam related to the areas of the world that are covered in those particular exams.

Why can't I use my Yahoo account to contact you with questions?

Students MUST use their GMU email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from... or send messages to... a non-Mason email address. I have specifically been instructed by the University administration to abide by this to preserve student privacy.

How do we know if class is cancelled?

In the event that class is cancelled I will try to let you know as far in advance as possible. I will do this as an in-class announcement (time permitting), through email, and via Blackboard.

What if I'm sick?

- Don't come to class. I'd be happy to meet with you later during office hours to go over the material that you missed in class.
- Take advantage of the class summaries that I provide for you on Blackboard.
- Try to get notes from one of your classmates. While I'd be happy to let you look at my slides during office hours, students will likely have contextual information in their notes that will make them more valuable than simply looking at my slides.
- There are no make-up exams in this class, so if you miss one of the regular semester exams, we'll just drop that exam. There is no penalty for missing one of the first three exams as we'll only be counting two of the grades.

What if I am sick and miss an exam?

There are no make-up exams allowed in the class. However, each student is allowed to drop one regular semester exam during the course. Either take all three semester exams and we'll drop the lowest grade (highly recommended), or, if a situation arises, skip one of the exams. There is no penalty for missing one of the first three exams as we'll only be counting two of the grades. Keep in mind that unlike the 3 regular semester exams, the Final Exam is mandatory.

I'm starting my vacation early this year and will not be around for the Final Exam. Can I make it up?

Unfortunately, we cannot accommodate this. The Final Exam date is listed in the syllabus and is fixed by the university, so please plan accordingly. Students may consider joining another section of the class early in the semester that may have a Final Exam date that is more conducive to your travel plans.

Some professors get upset at texting in class. What is your policy?

Yes, I do get very upset. Please do not text during class. **I want your undivided attention the same way I would have it if we were meeting one-on-one.**

What if I need to leave early in the middle of class?

I understand that sometimes people have prior engagements. I simply ask that students let me know before class that they'll be leaving before class ends.

Do you curve grades?

No. The average grade in the class typically ranges from a low to middle “B”.

You mentioned that you have office hours by appointment only. How do I do that?

The best way to schedule an appointment is to simply send me an email at iward@gmu.edu to let me know that you’re coming by my office. Alternatively, we might be able to meet virtually, so email me with a proposed time window. Please keep in mind that I have a full-time position off campus, so meeting during the middle of the day during the workweek might be difficult for me. Regardless, send me a proposed time and I’ll see if I can arrange it. If not, I’ll respond back to you with alternative times that might work well for both of us.

When mid-semester grades are posted, we will have taken only one exam. However, the syllabus says that we can drop one exam in our final course evaluation. How then is our mid-semester grade handled?

While it’s true that one regular semester exam is dropped in your final evaluation, the grade from the first exam must be used in the calculation of your mid-semester grade. NOTE: The mid-semester grade does NOT go on your permanent record... rather it is used as a benchmark to give students an idea of where they stand academically halfway through the semester. Because of the way this particular class is structured, mid-semester grades (required by the University) can be a bit misleading. A student who fails the first exam, (perhaps by simply choosing not to take the exam), but who goes on to do well on everything else, could very well end up earning an “A” for their final grade. This is despite their mid-semester grade equating to an “F”. With that said, mid-semester grades often serve as a wake-up call to some and suggest that changes in study habits are necessary. Please see me if you have additional questions or concerns regarding mid-semester grades.

I see that you require the 18th edition of the textbook. Can I get by with the 16th or 17th edition?

Yes, but it might be slightly more difficult for you to follow the class. Page numbers that I mention in class will be different, as will some of the material that I cite in my lectures. Clearly, the information in the older edition will not be the most current available, and some of the topics I cover may not be addressed in the book. With that said, an early edition may be the most economically viable option for you. If you do go this route, keep in mind that I always have a copy of the 18th edition in my office, so you are always welcome to schedule a time to stop by and look at it if you want to compare information or read through sections you may not have.

I already have an atlas at home. Do I really need the exact one specified in the syllabus to complete the map exercises?

Yes. There are a number of questions in the exercises that require analysis of thematic information that is uniquely displayed in this book.

I would prefer to meet with you in person, but I have a class during your posted office hours. Is there an alternate time that I can meet with you?

I may be able to meet with you before class sometime between 8am – 8:45am on a Tuesday or Thursday. Send me an email if you would like to try and do this.

Why do I need to turn my camera on when we meet online?

As an instructor, it is extremely helpful to see students when I’m speaking with them. I promise that I will never make any editorial comments on messy bedrooms.

I really enjoy the material we discuss in class and would like to study it more, but I'm already pursuing another major. Does Mason offer a minor in Geography?

Absolutely! Whether you want to earn a minor in Geography to compliment your existing major, or you want to change your major to Geography, I'd be delighted to put you in touch with the right people to facilitate this. Becoming a Geography major was the best decision I ever made, and I'll do whatever I can to help those who want to try either a major or minor in this amazing discipline.