

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Department of Geography & Geoinformation Science
Fall Semester 2025

MAJOR WORLD REGIONS

GGS 101 – 003

Course Syllabus

Instructor: Ian S. Ward

Office: Exploratory Hall, Room 2222

Office Hours: By appointment 12pm – 1pm Tues., or
by appointment online via [Zoom](#) on Canvas

Class Location: Exploratory Hall
Room L003

Meeting Time: 10:30am -11:45am 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.

Global Contexts: This course fulfills the Mason Core requirement for **Global Contexts**.

Learning Outcomes: Upon completing a *Global Contexts* course, students will be able to:

- 1) Identify and explain how patterns of global connections across nations and/or cultures have shaped societies to create interdependence and inequality.
- 2) Use a disciplinary lens to demonstrate knowledge of how at least one nation and/or culture participates in or is affected by global contexts.
- 3) Apply an understanding of one's own positionality within a globally interdependent and unequal world to analyze solutions to global problems.

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 Canvas, 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 encouraged—but not required—to turn on their cameras so as to be seen.

Basic Course Technology Requirements:

Recorded lectures, assignments, and communication of class information will regularly be deployed on Canvas, available at <https://info.canvas.gmu.edu/>. Students are required to have regular, reliable access to a laptop or desktop computer with an updated operating system (recommended: Windows 10 or Mac OSX 10.9 or higher) and a stable broadband Internet connection. While exams will be administered in class, map exercises will be delivered and completed through Canvas. 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 Canvas activities.

Campus Classroom Expectations:

- 1) NO LAPTOPS or TABLETS or PHONES or HEADPHONES (of any kind) are to be used by students during lecture. Exceptions for laptops will only be considered through coordination with GMU-ODS.
- 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 Zoom via Canvas. There will be occasions when online instruction will be provided, which will be through recorded lectures posted on Canvas. Note-taking is highly encouraged while watching these videos. Please regularly check class announcements and my Daily Log on Canvas for more information about these video postings.

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is essential and each individual is expected to do his or her own work; violations of the Academic Standards listed within GMU's Common Course Policies are taken very seriously and will not be tolerated. Violations of these standards—including but not limited to plagiarism, fabrication, and cheating—will be reported and addressed in accordance with university policies. Consequences of violations will result in course failure and may also include additional academic sanctions, disciplinary actions, and other measures. A description of the Common Course Policies is available for review at: <https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/home/gmu-common-course-policies/>.

AI Tools Policy

The use of any artificial generative text or image tools such as (but not limited to) ChatGPT, Copilot, Claude, Runway or Midjourney is strictly forbidden in this class. These tools plagiarize copyrighted work and do not properly attribute intellectual property, so using these tools is akin to a violation of Mason's Academic Standards. This prohibition does not apply to tools like spellcheck or other simple text editors, like Grammarly, which support basic text-prediction or text-completion tools. Many common applications may have an AI tool turned on by default; students are strongly encouraged to be diligent about turning off these features and to make a sincere effort to avoid these ubiquitous offerings.

Course Material:

All course material posted to Canvas 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 Zoom 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 and slides are not to be shared publicly online or elsewhere and are the property of the instructor.

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.

Map Exercises:

Two Map Exercises (250 points) will be assigned during the semester. The exercises will be made available on Canvas 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 Canvas (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 am always happy to meet with students who are having difficulty with any of the questions during office hours. Please take advantage of that time I have set aside for you.

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 Disability Services (DS) at 993-2474, or email at <https://ds.gmu.edu/>. All academic accommodations must be arranged through DS.

PLEASE NOTE: Map Exercises, which typically take around 2 to 3 hours to complete, will be deployed on Canvas 2-weeks before the due date. Because extra time is embedded in the assignment, the same due dates will apply to all students in the class, regardless of accommodation status.

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 Canvas [or other instruction as appropriate] for updates on how to continue learning and where to find additional 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 / 26	Class begins
9 / 2	Last day to add course - must be enrolled for a grade!
9 / 8	Last day to drop course with 100% tuition refund
9 / 16	Last day to drop course with 50% tuition refund
9 / 17 – 9 / 30	Unrestricted Withdrawal Period with 100% tuition liability
9 / 30	EXAM 1
10 / 14	MAP EXERCISE 1 due (answers submitted on Canvas)
10 / 30	EXAM 2
11 / 4	Election Day (no class)
11 / 18	MAP EXERCISE 2 due (answers submitted on Canvas)
11 / 27	Thanksgiving (no class)
12 / 2	EXAM 3
12 / 4	Last day of class
12 / 16	FINAL EXAM

Lectures and Class Schedule:

In-class Lectures – These are scheduled to occur each Tuesday and Thursday morning beginning at 10:30am. While most lecture slides will not be posted, daily summaries of each class will be provided on Canvas.

Live Virtual Online Lectures – None are scheduled for the semester.

Recorded Online Lectures – These will occasionally supplement or replace the in-class lectures and will be posted on Canvas. Students are required to watch these lectures and take notes on them at a time of their convenience (within the week that they have been assigned and posted).

Tentative Class Schedule

(as of 26 August 2025)

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	READINGS
1	8 / 26	Introduction / Why study Geography?	Chapter 1
	8 / 28	Weather & Climate	Chapter 1
2	9 / 2	Weather & Climate / History of Cartography	Chapter 1
	9 / 4	History of Cartography	Chapter 1
3	9 / 9	Cartography / GIS / Remote Sensing	Chapter 1
	9 / 11	Europe	Chapter 5
4	9 / 16	Europe	Chapter 5
	9 / 18	Europe	Chapter 5
5	9 / 23	Europe	Chapter 5
	9 / 25	Europe	Chapter 5
6	9 / 30	EXAM I	STUDY!
	10 / 2	Subsaharan Africa	Chapter 8
7	10 / 7	North Africa	Chapter 7
	10 / 9	North Africa / Southwest Asia	Chapter 7
8	10 / 14	SW Asia	Chapter 7
	10 / 16	Southwest Asia	Chapter 7
9	10 / 21	North America	Chapter 2
	10 / 23	North America	Chapter 2

Tentative Class Schedule

(as of 26 August 2025)

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	READINGS
10	10 / 28	North America / Middle America	Chapters 2 / 3
	10 / 30	EXAM II	STUDY!
11	11 / 4	NO CLASS	Chapter 3
	11 / 6	Middle America	Chapter 3
12	11 / 11	Middle America	Chapter 3
	11 / 13	Middle & South America	Chapters 3 / 4
13	11 / 18	South America 2nd Map Exercise Due	Chapter 4
	11 / 20	South America	Chapter 4
14	11 / 25	South America	Chapter 4
	11 / 27	NO CLASS	STUDY!
15	12 / 2	EXAM III	STUDY!
	12 / 4	Australia / NZ / Pacific Realm	Chapter 12 / 13
16	12 / 9	NO CLASS	STUDY!
	12 / 11	NO CLASS	STUDY!
17	12 / 16	FINAL EXAM	Exam Time: (10:30am to 1:15pm)