GEOGRAPHY & GEOINFORMATION SCIENCE 315/533
Geography of the United States
Spring 2025

Syllabus

1. INSTRUCTOR AND COURSE DETAILS

Instructor: Dr. Matt Rice
Term: Spring 2025
Class-Section (CRN): GGS 315- 001 (12055) & GGS 533-001 (12127)
Modality: in person
Class Time: Thursdays, 1:30-4:10pm
Location: Exploratory Hall room 2312
Faculty Office: Exploratory Hall, Room 2202
Faculty In-Person Office Hours: Wednesdays & Thursdays, 4:15 – 5:00pm
Instructor Email: mrice4@gmu.edu subject=[GGS 315]
Phone: (703) 957-9575

Contact and Office Hours: I can be reached via email or phone, with a response within 24 hours during weekdays. If you email after 5pm on Friday, you will usually receive a response by Monday at Noon. Students must activate and use their GMU campus email to facilitate contact. **I cannot communicate with you through a non-GMU email.** Please use a subject line prefix tag [GGS 315] to help me filter and increase email visibility. Office hours will be conducted in-person.

Name and pronoun use: If you wish, please share your name and gender pronouns with me and indicate how best to address you in class and via email. I use [He/Him] for myself and you may address me as "Dr. Rice" or "Matt Rice" in email and verbally.

2. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed as a **regional geography** course, looking at the physical and cultural landscape of the United States and adjacent regions of Canada. The course focuses on the fundamental geographic patterns, features, and processes, as well as historical and contemporary events that are critical in forming a context for understanding the geography of the United States and Canada. To facilitate a regional geographic perspective, students will learn about certain aspects of the discipline of geography, its history, and its contemporary practice.
- Credit Hours for this course: 3

3. COURSE PREREQUISITES

Recommended course prerequisites include six hours of geography or American studies coursework. Students may find GGS 110 or 550 (Introduction to Geoinformation Technologies) to be a useful introduction to some of the technology that will be used in this course; however, any technical content for this course will assume no previous experience.

4. COURSE EXPECTATIONS

1. Students are expected to attend and participate in this class weekly, and to read the assigned reading material prior to class.
2. This class requires dedication and organization. Proper preparation is expected every week. You are expected to log in to Blackboard each week and complete the assignments and activities on or before the due dates.
3. Students must check their GMU email messages on a daily basis for course announcements, which may include reminders, revisions, and updates.
4. It is expected that you will familiarize yourself with and adhere to GMU Academic Standards. Members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, and/or lie in matters related to academic work.
5. It is essential to communicate any questions or problems to me promptly so that we can quickly resolve any problems as soon as they arise.

5. LEARNING COMMUNITY

This course is taught in person, but will be supplemented with online content via Blackboard Courses (Log into http://mymason.gmu.edu, select the Courses Tab, and the course can be found in the Course List).

This course may use Zoom for optional online sessions. **In order to participate, you must be at a computer with a microphone** and optionally, a video camera.

In our online interactions, we must be respectful of one another. Please be aware that innocent remarks can be easily misconstrued. Sarcasm and humor can be easily taken out of context. When communicating, please be positive and diplomatic. I encourage you to use netiquette during any online discussions.

6. LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a broad knowledge base of the fundamental physical and cultural geographic features, patterns, and processes present on the North American continent.
2. Understand basic principles, techniques, and methods of analysis in the discipline of geography.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the important historical events, contemporary developments, and future trends that shape the geography of North America.
4. Demonstrate a basic understanding of the Earth's shape, composition, and associated modeling within computer systems.
5. Understand the most common metric georeferencing systems, methods of map use, and standard cartographic practices for depictions of North America.
6. Produce detailed explanations of the geography of North America.

7. TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS & EXPECTATIONS

General Hardware:

To complete this class and use Blackboard effectively, you will need access to a Windows or Macintosh computer with at least 8 GB of RAM and a reliable broadband Internet connection. A larger screen is recommended for better visibility of course material. You will need speakers or headphones to hear recorded content and a headset with a microphone is recommended for the best experience. For the amount of Hard Disk Space required to take a course such as this, consider and allow for: **1.** The storage amount needed to install any additional software and **2.** Space to

store work that you will do for the course. If you are considering the purchase of a new computer, please go see Patriot Tech at the BN College Bookstore: https://gmu.bncollege.com/shop/gmu/home

Software:

This course uses Blackboard as the learning management system. You will need a browser and operating system that are listed compatible or certified with the Blackboard version available on the myMason Portal. See supported browsers. Log in to myMason to access your registered courses. Some courses may use other learning management systems. Check the syllabus or contact the instructor for details. Online courses typically use Acrobat Reader, Java (Windows), and QuickTime. Your computer should be capable of running current versions of those applications. GMU Information Technology Services recommends that you protect your computer from viruses: https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/does-mason-provide-antivirus-software/.

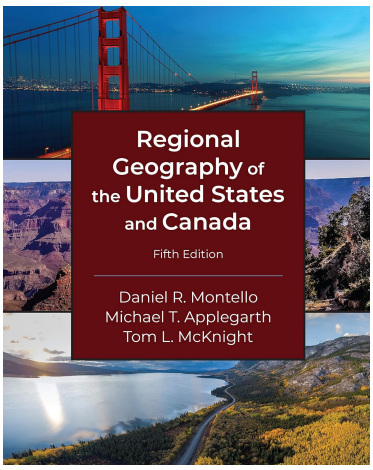
Students owning Macs or owning computer running Linux should be aware that some courses may use software that only runs on Windows, including ArcGIS. You can set up a Mac computer with Boot Camp or virtualization software so Windows will also run on it. This following webpage https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT201468) contains information about using Windows on a Mac in bootcamp mode. It is also possible to run Windows using a virtual machine on your Mac. Search "running windows on my Mac". Computers running Linux can also be configured with virtualization software or configured to dual boot with Windows. Setting up Windows on your Mac can be a bit complicated and will require some external technical support.

Note: If you are using an employer-provided computer for coursework, please verify with your systems administrators that you will be able to install the necessary applications and that system or corporate firewalls do not block access to any sites or media types.

Geographic Information Systems Software

We may use GIS or other online mapping tools for a few simple class exercises, which will be taught **assuming you have no previous experience**. You will have ArcGIS Pro 3.3 provided for you through a software download link, through campus computer labs, and through the GMU Patriot Virtual Computing Lab, which can be accessed from off-campus using a VPN. If you choose to do an optional install, ArcGIS installation requires administrator-level access and control of a Windows PC computer. Any virtual lab use of ArcGIS will require some familiarity with the Patriot Virtual Computing Lab environment: https://its.gmu.edu/service/pvcl/ . When any mapping tools are used, they will be taught from scratch, with extra help provided by the Instructor and TA.

8. REQUIRED TEXTBOOK



REQUIRED

Regional Geography of the United States and Canada, Fifth Edition / 5th Edition
by Daniel R. Montello, Michael T. Applegarth, Tom L. McKnight

Publisher: Waveland Press, Inc.
ISBN-10: 147863961X
ISBN-13: 978-1478639619

Note: All editions of this textbook are excellent, in my opinion. Please search and find the 5th edition so that page numbers and chapter content will match the references in the lectures, assignments, and assessment content.

9. PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENTS

You will achieve the course learning outcomes (**Syllabus Section 6**) through viewing and participating in course lectures, reading the textbooks, preparing and writing reading summaries when required, participating in class discussions, working through mapping exercises, completing class presentations, and completing weekly assessments.

a. Class Presentations: Students will actively participate in class discussions and presentation of content. On at one occasion, each student will give a class presentation on a specific facet of the regional geography a region of the US or Canada. This presentation will be done in person with material prepared in advance by the student. With advance permission, student presentations may be pre-recorded and uploaded to Blackboard to share in-class. These class presentations will be based on textbook readings, current events, and significant geographic aspects of current class content. Graduate students enrolled in GGS 533 will be required to provide current statistical data for the region covered along with at least 1 GIS-based map . Each of the class presentations will be graded out of 100 points, based on organization, length, research content. This class presentation will be worth 10% of the final course grade.

b. Mapping Exercises: There will be two mapping exercises, focusing on general course content and the regions being studied. These exercises will be collectively worth 15% of the final course grade.

c. Course Research Project: Students will prepare a course research project comprised of a geographic analysis and presentation of the unique physical and cultural features, patterns, processes, and trends of a region in North America. This class research project will be conducted cooperatively with feedback from the Instructor on a project proposal, draft presentation, and final project presentation. Feedback on the draft presentation will contribute to a revised final presentation due at the end of the term. The research project submission will be worth 15% of the final course grade. For graduate students enrolled in GGS 533, the length of the course research project will increase to a minimum of 1200 words and must include descriptive statistical analysis of data for the region and a GIS-based map layout.

d. Assessments: Students will take 12 weekly assessments based on assigned course readings and class content. The assessments will be released via Blackboard on Thursday morning and will be due on Sunday night at the end of the week. Each of the assessments will be worth 5% of the grade, for a total of 60% of the final course grade.

10. GRADING SUMMARY

Late assignments will be accepted and graded with a 10% per day penalty. Exceptions to this policy must be requested in advance and will be granted at the discretion of the Instructor. Students with expected absences are encouraged to work ahead to avoid penalties.

Students will be evaluated in the following areas, with the following grade weighting:

Class Presentations (10%)
Mapping & Written Exercises (15%)
Course Research Project (15%)
Weekly Assessments (60%)

Grades are assigned using a standard undergraduate scale (**A**), and the graduate grading scale shown below (**B**).

A. Undergraduate Grading Scale

A+	> 99+
A	93 – 98.9
A-	90 – 92.9
B+	87 – 89.9
B	83 – 86.9
B-	80 – 82.9
C+	77 – 79.9
C	73 – 76.9
C-	70 – 72.9
D	60 – 69.9
F	0 – 59.9

B. Graduate Grading Scale

A+	> 99
A	93 – 98.9
A-	90 – 92.9
B+	87 – 89.9

B	83 – 86.9
B-	80 – 82.9
C	70 – 79.9
F	0 – 69.9

11. RUBRICS

Class Presentations

(1) Instructions:

Each student will prepare class presentations based on course readings and prompts from the Instructor. The class presentations will be evaluated and assessed by the Instructor and/or Teaching Assistant using the standard rubric below. Class presentations are limited to five minutes, and should contain a comprehensive synthesis of the assigned material and at least one relevant map. Class presentations can include quotes, references, and relevant personal experiences or anecdotes. The length of a typical class presentation will be 4:30-5:00 minutes, with a short written summary or 100-150 words and other content as dictated by the Instructor's prompt.

(2) Rubric (Adapted from http://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/grading/sample-rubric-for-grading-a-research-paper/)

Class Presentation Rubric				
Criteria	**Outstanding**	**Good**	**Fair**	**Poor**
Organization	Class Presentation includes a short introduction with a clear topic, a presentation with at least one map, a short summary, and is well organized	The Class Presentation is missing an introduction or map or summary, and has minor organizational errors	The Class Presentation is missing an introduction, a map, and summary and is poorly organized	The Class Presentation lacks coherent organization and structure and is missing an identifiable introduction, body, and summary
Length	Presentation is 4:30 – 5:00 minutes, and contains 100-150 words, **or** as indicated in assignment	Minor length deviation (<20%)	Major length deviation (20%-40%)	Length does not adhere or approach length requirements (> 40% deviation)
Syntax	Correct grammar and syntax, format is PPTX or ArcGIS StoryMap	Minor syntax, grammar, spelling, and format errors	Multiple syntax, grammar, spelling, and format errors throughout Class Presentation	Class Presentation is replete with syntax, grammar, spelling, and format errors
Research and Content	The Class Presentation contains relevant material from the lecture and assigned content material, and extends the material through a well-presented synthesis	The Class Presentation contains material from the lecture and assigned content, with minor deficiencies, omissions, or irrelevant content	The Class Presentation only partially relates to the assigned content and lecture material and contains much irrelevant content	The Class Presentation does not relate to the lecture or readings at all
Points	**90-100**	**75-90**	**50-75**	**50 or less**

Mapping & Written Exercises

Each mapping exercise will be worth 100 points, with 1 or 2 points for each substantive answer indicated in the assigned problem set, or other significant methodological step. For numerical answers, a complete answer with the relevant units will be worth full credit for that problem. Students start with 100 points and receive a 1 or 2 point deduction for incorrect answers or incorrect execution of a method, and a ½ point deduction for minor errors such as a lack of units where required. Incorrect or incomplete answers not including an omission of units (ft., yards, acres, miles, meters, etc.) will receive a full point deduction. Mapping exercises will have a full written evaluation and specific indicators of reasons for point deductions. Written exercises without a mapping component will be worth 20 points. Mapping and Written exercises should be submitted through Blackboard in Microsoft Word format or other relevant format as specified in the assignment. Cartographic work must be submitted in PDF format or through an ArcGIS Story Map. Specific rubrics applicable to each assignment, if they different substantially from above, will be included in the assignment directions.

Class Research Project

Instructions:
Each student will prepare a final research project based on a pre-defined research proposal, Instructor feedback, analysis, synthesis, ancillary material, journal articles, class lectures, and other assigned material. The research project will be evaluated and assessed by the Instructor and Teaching Assistant using the standard rubric below. The research project should be a comprehensive synthesis of the proposed topic and can citations, quotes, illustrations, maps, graphics, images, references, and any other relevant material. The length of the research project proposal will be determined by the presentation medium and inclusions of graphical, tabular, statistical, or other information, but will not be less than 800 word equivalent content, with at least one map showing the geographic features of the project area. The length of class research projects for graduate students enrolled in GGS 533 will increase to 1200 words, and must include a descriptive statistical analysis of data for the region and a GIS-based map layout.

Rubric (Adapted from http://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/grading/sample-rubric-for-grading-a-research-paper/)

Research Project Rubric				
Criteria	**Outstanding**	**Good**	**Fair**	**Poor**
Organization	Research project includes a relevant title, abstract, introduction, conceptual framework, literature review, methodology, results and conclusions, future	The research project is missing a section and has minor organizational errors.	The research project is missing several section and is poorly organized.	The research project lacks coherent organization and structure and is missing an identifiable structure.

Research Project Rubric				
Criteria	**Outstanding**	**Good**	**Fair**	**Poor**
	work, and reference sections. The content is well organized.			
Length	Range as indicated for assignment	Minor length deviation (<15%)	Major length deviation (15%-30%)	Length does not adhere or approach length requirements (> 30% deviation)
Syntax	Correct grammar, syntax, spelling, and format	Minor grammar, syntax, spelling, and format errors	Multiple grammar, syntax, spelling, and format errors throughout Research project	Research project is replete with grammar, syntax, spelling, and format errors
Research and Content	The research project is based on an approved, well-written research proposal. The final project contains relevant content addressing the proposed area of research. The final project uses appropriate analytical methods and relevant maps & graphics.	The research project contains relevant material, but deviates in some way from the proposal and lacks relevance in content. The research project is missing some relevant analysis.	The research project only partially relates to the proposed research, and many of the research methods are inappropriate, incorrectly applied, or missing.	The research project does not relate to the proposal and lacks appropriate research analysis and content.
Points	**90-100**	**75-90**	**50-75**	**50 or less**

11. COURSE SCHEDULE

Although the Weeks are listed with inclusive dates, **class is held on in person on Wednesday between 1:30pm and 4:10pm**. You are responsible for keeping up with the textbook readings, lectures, class presentations, discussions, mapping tutorials/methodology exercises, and assessments. No makeup assessments will be available. Readings assigned for the week should be completed before the scheduled date. **Any changes to this schedule will be announced via email and posted to the course Blackboard page.**

	Dates	Regional Geography of the US & Canada (textbook)	Class Presentations	Mapping/Writing Exercises	Course Research Project	Assessments
Week 1	Jan. 21 – 26	***Syllabus Review, Course Requirements, Introductions***				
Week 2	Jan. 27 – Feb. 2	**1: Introduction to the Regional Geography of the United States and Canada,** pp. 1-18				
Week 3	Feb. 3 – Feb. 9	**2: Physical Geography of the United States and Canada**, pp.19-48		**Ecoregions of North America**		Weekly Assessment
Week 4	Feb. 10 – 16	**3: Human Geography of the US and Canada: Population and Culture,** pp. 49-76		**Streets, City Form, and Transportation**		Weekly Assessment
Week 5	Feb. 17 – 23	**4: Human Geography of the US and Canada: Economic Activities and the Urban Landscape,** pp. 77-112				Weekly Assessment
Week 6	Feb. 24 – Mar. 2	**5: The Concept of Geographic Regions** pp. 113-124		**Geographic Travel Narrative**		Weekly Assessment
Week 7	Mar. 3 – Mar. 9	**6, 7: The Atlantic Northeast, French Canada** pp. 125-174	1			Weekly Assessment
Week 8	Mar. 10 – 16	**Spring Recess (No Class)**				
Week 9	Mar. 17 – 23	**8: Megalopolis** pp. 175-204	2	**ArcGIS Online Map of the US**		Weekly Assessment
Week 10	Mar. 24 – 30	**9: Appalachia and the Ozarks** pp. 205-228	3	**Cultural Contributions of Appalachia and the Inland South**		Weekly Assessment
Week 11	Mar. 31 – Apr. 6	**10, 11: The Inland South, The Southeastern Coast** pp.229-292	4			Weekly Assessment
Week 12	Apr. 7– 13	**12, 13: The Midwest, The Great Plains and Prairies** pp. 293-362	5	**The Decline or Rebirth of the Industrial Midwest**		Weekly Assessment
Week 13	Apr. 14 – 20	**14, 15: Rocky Mountains, The Intermountain West** pp.363-428	6		**Project Mini-proposal**	Weekly Assessment
Week 14	Apr. 21 – 27	**16, 17: California and the Northwest** pp.429-502	7	**West Coast Vacationland**		Weekly Assessment
Week 15	APR. 28 – May 4	**18, 19, 20: Hawaii, the Boreal Forest, and the Arctic** pp.503-581	8		**Project Review (in-class)**	Weekly Assessment
Week 16	May 5 – 11				**Project Submission (due May 5th)**	

12. STUDENT EXPECTATIONS, POLICIES, AND RESOURCES

Academic Standards

Academic Standards exist to promote authentic scholarship, support the institution's goal of maintaining high standards of academic excellence, and encourage continued ethical behavior of faculty and students to cultivate an educational community which values integrity and produces graduates who carry this commitment forward into professional practice.

As members of the George Mason University community, we are committed to fostering an environment of trust, respect, and scholarly excellence. Our academic standards are the foundation of this commitment, guiding our behavior and interactions within this academic community. The practices for implementing these standards adapt to modern practices, disciplinary contexts, and technological advancements. Our standards are embodied in our courses, policies, and scholarship, and are upheld in the following principles:

- **Honesty:** Providing accurate information in all academic endeavors, including communications, assignments, and examinations.
- **Acknowledgement:** Giving proper credit for all contributions to one's work. This involves the use of accurate citations and references for any ideas, words, or materials created by others in the style appropriate to the discipline. It also includes acknowledging shared authorship in group projects, co-authored pieces, and project reports.
- **Uniqueness of Work:** Ensuring that all submitted work is the result of one's own effort and is original, including free from self-plagiarism. This principle extends to written assignments, code, presentations, exams, and all other forms of academic work.

Violations of these standards—including but not limited to plagiarism, fabrication, and cheating—are taken seriously and will be addressed in accordance with university policies. The process for reporting, investigating, and adjudicating violations is outlined in the university's procedures. Consequences of violations may include academic sanctions, disciplinary actions, and other measures necessary to uphold the integrity of our academic community.

The principles outlined in these academic standards reflect our collective commitment to upholding the highest standards of honesty, acknowledgement, and uniqueness of work. By adhering to these principles, we ensure the continued excellence and integrity of George Mason University's academic community.

Student responsibility: Students are responsible for understanding how these general expectations regarding academic standards apply to each course, assignment, or exam they participate in; students should ask their instructor for clarification on any aspect that is not clear to them.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to upholding the letter and spirit of the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. Under the administration of University Life, Disability Services implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities. Students can begin the registration process with Disability Services at any time during their enrollment at George Mason University. If you are seeking accommodations, please visit https://ds.gmu.edu/ for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu. Phone: (703) 993-2474.

Student responsibility: Students are responsible for registering with Disability Services and communicating about their approved accommodations with their instructor *in advance* of any relevant class meeting, assignment, or exam.

FERPA and Use of GMU Email Addresses for Course Communication

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) governs the disclosure of education records for eligible students and is an essential aspect of any course. **Students must use their GMU email account** to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. Instructors will not respond to messages sent from or send messages regarding course content to a non-GMU email address.

Student responsibility: Students are responsible for checking their GMU email regularly for course-related information, and/or ensuring that GMU email messages are forwarded to an account they do check.

Title IX Resources and Required Reporting

As a part of George Mason University's commitment to providing a safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and working environment for all members of the University community, the University does not discriminate on the basis of sex or gender in any of its education or employment programs and activities. Accordingly, **all non-confidential employees, including your faculty member, have a legal requirement to report to the Title IX Coordinator, all relevant details obtained directly or indirectly about any incident of Prohibited Conduct** (such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, gender-based stalking, dating/domestic violence). Upon notifying the Title IX Coordinator of possible Prohibited Conduct, the Title IX Coordinator will assess the report and determine if outreach is required. If outreach is required, the individual the report is about (the "Complainant") will receive a communication, likely in the form of an email, offering that person the option to meet with a representative of the Title IX office.

For more information about non-confidential employees, resources, and Prohibited Conduct, please see University Policy 1202: Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence. Questions regarding Title IX can be directed to the Title IX Coordinator via email to TitleIX@gmu.edu, by phone at 703-993-8730, or in person on the Fairfax campus in Aquia 373.

Student opportunity: If you prefer to speak to someone ***confidentially***, please contact one of Mason's confidential employees in Student Support and Advocacy (SSAC), Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Student Health Services (SHS), and/or the Office of the University Ombudsperson.

13. DIVERSITY

Diversity is an important in an academic environment, and is a priority for George Mason University. See: http://ctfe.gmu.edu/professional-development/mason-diversity-statement/

> *"George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth. An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected."*

14. RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

I am generally aware of some religious holidays and observations, and will help minimize difficulties for students of different faiths in terms of scheduling course assignments. It is the student's responsibility to speak to me in advance should their religious observances impact their participation in class activities and assignments. [See: http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/]

15. ADDITIONAL UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

University Libraries

The George Mason University Libraries provides resources for distance education students. For access to these resources and services, see http://library.gmu.edu/for/online .

Writing Center

The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. [See http://writingcenter.gmu.edu]. You can now sign up for writing assistance through the Office of Digital Learning's Online Writing Center.

Counseling and Psychological Services

The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See http://caps.gmu.edu].