

GGG 689 Seminar in Geographic Thought and Methodology

Fall 2025, Thursdays 4:30 – 7:10 pm, 2312 Exploratory Hall (in-person)

Instructor: David Wong, Professor

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Office Hours (in-person or virtual): Thursdays 3-4 pm, or by appointment

Virtual Office: <https://gmu.zoom.us/j/4701770761>

Canvas: <https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/>

Course Description:

From the catalog: *Includes historical development of geographic thought and current philosophy of geography; rationale for various subfields; and geographic research techniques and methods of analysis. Offered by Geography/Geoinformation Sci. May not be repeated for credit.*

This is a graduate “seminar” focusing on research in Geography, i.e. **what** to do and **how** to do. To a large degree, the course also addresses **why** a particular research topic should be conducted. **The primary objective** is to provide an overview of the historical development of geography, including the evolving subject contents and geographic thoughts over time. The overview also includes a survey of current research methods. **The secondary objective** is to assist students to develop a research (thesis/dissertation) proposal. Materials cover major approaches in contemporary Geography and some common research methodologies for geographical studies. Students should expect to expose to thoughts and methods beyond their comfort zones. Primary modes of learning include reading, discussions, writing, presentations. Specific arrangements or platforms for these activities can be determined at the beginning of the semester.

Learning Outcomes:

General: After finishing the course, students should recognize the evolving and diverse subject matters and philosophical strands in geography. Students should also be aware of different contemporary methods in conducting research and analysis. Students should also be able to develop a research proposal for their thesis or dissertation.

Specific Learning Objectives (LO) /Outcomes

After completing this course, students should be able to:

- 1) Identify the major types of geographical inquiries from ancient time to modern era.
- 2) Discern different philosophical-methodological approaches employed in geographical research.
- 3) Select appropriate research approach, analysis methods and tools to support one’s research.
- 4) Develop a proposal, including conducting a literature review for a thesis or dissertation.

Texts:

Required texts

Holt-Jensen, Arild (2018) *Geography: History and Concepts* (5th Ed.) Sage Publishing. (HJ)

Montello, D. and P. Sutton (2013) *An Introduction to Scientific Research Methods in Geography and Environmental Studies* (2nd Ed.) Sage Publishing. (MS)

Terrell, S. R. (2015) *Writing a Proposal for Your Dissertation: Guidelines and Examples*.

Guilford. [Required for PhD students only.]

Mikolon, T. M. and C. R. Williams III. (2023) *PHinisheD!: Writing a Doctoral Dissertation*. Cognella. [Recommended for anyone writing a thesis/dissertation]

Additional references (books)

Clifford, N., M. Cope, T. Gillespie, and S. French (2016) *Key Methods in Geography* (3rd Ed.) Sage Publishing.

Cresswell, T. 2013. *Geographic Thought: A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Davis, J. P. 2011. *The Rowman & Littlefield Guide to Writing with Sources*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 4th Edition.

Gomez, B. and J. P. Jones III. (eds.) 2010. *Research Methods in Geography*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Gregory, D., R.J. Johnston, G. Pratt, M. Watts, and S. Whalmore. (eds.) 2009. *The Dictionary of Human Geography*. Wiley-Blackwell. 5th Edition.

Assessment Methods:

- 1) 5% Pre-class self-introduction
- 2) 15% Leading a seminar
- 3) 40% Participation in discussions/seminars (8 times will be counted)
- 4) 5% Presentation of initial research topic
- 5) 10% Literature review practice (~3-5 pages)
- 6) 25% Research proposal (8-10 pages text)

- Each week before class, students are expected to (1) read the assigned chapters (and articles) of the week; (2) be prepared to ask questions and participate in class discussion. This is the nature of “seminar” courses. Refer to the *Preparing for Seminar* doc in Canvas under **Resources**.

- Each student is expected to develop a research proposal on a topic of his/her interest/choice. Ideally, this proposal will eventually be developed into the student’s thesis or dissertation proposal. Before formally and fully develops the proposal, each student will write a 75-100 words **summary** of **initial** research idea and prepare a **10-minute presentation** to explain the research to your fellow classmates and instructor for comments and critique. Specifics of the presentation are provided on Canvas.

- A major component of a research proposal is a literature review. Students are required to submit the draft of the **literature review** for comment. The beginning of the 3-5-page review should include the title of your research topic, and a short paragraph (~40-70 words) concisely stating your research question(s).

- Develop the research idea more fully over the semester as students will be exposed to various thoughts and methodologies. Submit the **research proposal** (8-10 pages of text, plus figures, tables and bibliography), which includes the revised 3-5-page **literature review**, at the end of semester. Suggested structure of the proposal will be provided later.

- Literature review and proposal should be *double-spaced, include page numbers, and use Times New Roman in 12-point font with 1-inch margin in all sides*.

Final Grading Scale: approximately A: 90-100, B: 80-89, ~~C: 70-79, F: 69 and below~~ or “curved” with an average on “B+/A-.” The best students will receive an A, regardless of how

high or low his/her total score may be. ~~Students may fail if their total scores are “significantly” lower than the rest of the class.~~

Additional grading policies:

- 10% of the score for each day will be deducted if an assignment is **late**. Unless otherwise stated, all assignments are due by the end of the day in which they are due.
- All materials submitted to meet the evaluation criteria should be completed in accordance with the Academic Standard Code (<https://academicstandards.gmu.edu/academic-standards-code/>). Also, no “double dipping” of term paper/report is allowed unless permissions are given by involved instructors in advance.

Incomplete will be handled strictly according to the University policy.

Course logistics:

The course will be conducted in a fully in-person mode with most of the learning activities conducted through reading assignments and in-class discussions. Weekly in-person meetings are mainly for discussions, Q&A, and demonstrations.

Course Outline & Revised Schedule (Subject to change; due days are on the full schedule on Canvas)

Date	Topics	Learning activities/Assignments
		HJ: Holt-Jensen; MS: Montello & Sutton
	Pre-course actions	- Purchase textbooks - Review Syllabus, Technology Requirements and Schedule - Pre-class self-introduction and read HJ Ch. 1 & 2
Week 1 8/25 – 8/31	Course Logistics Basics: What is Geography?	- class meets on 8/28, 4:30 pm - Read HJ Ch. 1 (What is Geography?) & Ch. 2 (The Roots of Geography)
Week 2 9/1 - 7		Class on 9/4 is cancelled
Week 3 9/8 – 14	Basics: Some Notions of Science	- class meets on 9/11, 4:30 pm - Read MS Ch. 1 (Intro: Scientific Approach) & HJ Ch. 6 (Paradigms & Revolutions)
Week 4 9/15 – 21	Research: Research Concepts, Ideas, Publish and Ethics	- class meets on 9/18, 4:30 pm - Read MS Ch. 2 (Fund. Research Concepts), Ch. 3 (Scientific Communication), & Ch. 14 (Ethics) - Start preparing the presentation of initial research idea
Week 5 9/22 – 28	Research: Proposal Development I: Components and Structure; Literature Review & Library Research	- class meets on 9/25, 4:30 pm - Read Terrell, Ch. 1, 2 & 3 - Instructor’s demo of “Library Research”

Week 6 9/29 – 10/5	Research: Proposal Development II: Methodology & Data; Expected outcome/ preliminary results	- class meets on 10/2, 4:30 pm - Read Terrell, Ch. 4, and articles under “Article Review” - Instructor’s demo of Article Review
Week 7 10/6 – 12	Research: Proposal Development III: Initial Research Directions – Topics	- class meets on 10/9, 4:30 pm - Presentations of Research Ideas - Review and be prepare to comment on other student’s research topics
Week 8 10/13 – 19	Modern Geography I: Toward Modern Geography Regional Tradition	- class meets on 10/16, 4:30 pm - Start Literature Review & Proposal - Read HJ Ch. 3 (From Cosmography to ...) & Ch. 4 (The Regional Tradition)
Week 9 10/20 – 26	Modern Geography I: Spatial Science, Positivism & Critics	- class meets on 10/22, 4:30 pm - Read HJ Ch. 5 (The Growth Spatial Science) & Ch. 7 (Positivism and its Critics)
Week 10 10/27 – 11/2	Methods: Data Collection, Physical & Human Data	- class meets on 10/30, 4:30 pm - Read MS Ch. 4 (Data Collection), Ch. 5 (Physical Measurements) & Ch. 7 (Explicit Reports) - Read Terrell Ch. 5
Week 11 11/3 – 9	Methods: Behavioral Research Experimental vs. Non- experimental	- class meets on 11/6, 4:30 pm - Read MS Ch. 6 (Behavioral Observations & Archives) & Ch. 8 (Experimental & Nonexperimental Research) - Read Terrell Ch. 6
Week 12 11/10 – 16	Methods: Data Sampling, Display, & Reliability	- class meets on 11/13, 4:30 pm - Read MS Ch. 9 (Sampling), Ch. 11 (Data Display) & Ch. 12 (Reliability and Validity) - Read Terrell Ch. 7, and a few articles
Week 13 11/17 – 23	Modern Geography II: Alternatives to Spatial Science; Poststructuralism and Beyond	- class meets on 11/20, 4:30 pm - Read HJ Ch. 8 (Alternatives to Spatial Science) & Ch. 9 (Post-Structuralism & Beyond)
Week 14 11/24 – 30	Thanksgiving	Class will not meet this week (revise the literature review, integrate it with the rest of the proposal)
Week 15 12/1 – 7	Contributions Geographical Tasks	- class meets on 12/4, 4:30 pm - Read HJ Ch. 10 (Geographical Tasks in a Globalization World)

* Instructor reserves the right to modify this syllabus, but will notify students about the change*

Other Policies

GMU Email Accounts: Students must use their GMU email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information.

Academic Integrity: please refer to Mason's Academic Standards Code (<https://academicstandards.gmu.edu/academic-standards-code/>)

The Use of AI-generative material: All work submitted in this course must be your own original work; use of AI writing tools, such as ChatGPT, are prohibited in this course and will be considered a violation of academic standards. All academic standards violations will be reported using the [Academic Standards Referral Form](#). While AI must be involved (e.g., when using some search engines, in word processing tools with AI-embedded) in preparing submitted work, using AI beyond this software-embedded level will be a violation of academic integrity. Student work may be analyzed using an originality detection tool focused on Generative AI tools. The learning objectives for this course require students to demonstrate skills and practices that they can reliably perform without supplemental tools.

Mason Diversity Policy:

Please refer to the university non-discrimination policy and diversity statement.
<https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/non-discrimination-policy/>
<https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/general-teaching-resources/mason-diversity-statement/>

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

GMU Resources:

The Writing Center: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

University Libraries, Ask a Librarian: <http://library.gmu.edu/ask>

Counseling and Psychological Services: <http://caps.gmu.edu>

University Catalog: <http://catalog.gmu.edu>

University Policies: <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu>

Course Materials and Student Privacy:

- All course materials posted to Blackboard or other course site are private; 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 of class meetings that include audio or visual information from other students are private and must not be shared.
- Live Video Conference Meetings (e.g. Collaborate or Zoom) that include audio or visual information from other students must be viewed privately and not shared with others in your household.
- Some/All of our synchronous meetings in this class will be recorded to provide necessary information for students in this class. Recordings will be stored on Blackboard [or other secure site] and will only be accessible to students taking this course during this semester.

8/25/2025

The University has compiled a list of common policies affecting all courses as the [Common Policies Addendum](#). They are part of this syllabus and they can be accessed via the addendum hyperlink.

Selected Important Literature (in chronological order)

- Semple, E. 1911. "Influences of Geographic Environment." from *Influences of Geographic Environment on the Basis of Ratzel's System of Anthrogeographie*, New York: Henry Holt, p. 1-32.
- Sauer, C. 1925. "The Morphology of Landscape." University of California Publications in Geography 2(2): 19-54.
- Hartshorne, R. 1939. "The Character of Regional Geography." in *The Nature of Geography*, Association of American Geographers, Washington DC: 436-444.
- Schaefer, F.K. 1953. "Exceptionalism in Geography: A Methodological Examination." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 43: 226-249.
- Hartshorne, R. 1954. "Comment on Exceptionalism in Geography." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 44: 108-109.
- Isard, W. 1956. "Regional Science, the Concept of Region, and Regional Structure." *Papers and Proceedings, The Regional Science Association* 2: 13-26
- Hartshorne, R. 1958. "The Concept of Geography as a Science of Space, from Kant to Humboldt to Hettner." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 48(2): 97-108.
- Burton, I. 1963. "The Quantitative Revolution and Theoretical Geography." *The Canadian Geographer* 7(4): 151-162
- Wilson, A.G. 1972. "Theoretical Geography: Some Speculations." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 57: 31-44.
- Taaffe, E.J. 1974. "The Spatial View in Context." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 64(1): 1-16.
- Massey, D. 1979. "In What Sense a Regional Problem?" *Regional Studies* 13: 233-243.
- Harvey, D. 1985. "The Geography of Capitalist Accumulation." in *The Urbanization of Capital*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell pp. 32-61.
- Harvey, D. 1987. "Flexible Accumulation Through Urbanization: Reflections on Post-Modernism" in the American City, *Antipode*, 19: 260-286.
- Pattison, W. 1990. "The Four Traditions of Geography." *Journal of Geography* Sept./Oct. 202-206.
- Openshaw, S. 1991. "A View on the GIS Crisis in Geography." *Environment and Planning A*, 23: 621-628
- Wright, D., Goodchild, M. and Proctor, J. 1997. "GIS: Tool or Science? Demystifying the Persistent Ambiguity of GIS as Tool versus Science." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87(2): 346-362.
- Pickles, J. 1997. "Tool or Science: GIS, Technoscience and the Theoretical Turn." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87(2): 363-372.
- Cassetti, E. 1999. "The Evolution of Scientific Disciplines, Mathematical Modeling and Human Geography." *Geographical Analysis* 31: 332-339.
- Markusen, A. 1999. "Fuzzy Concepts, Scanty Evidence, Policy Distance: The Case for Rigor and Policy Relevance in Critical Regional Studies." *Regional Studies* 33: 869-884
- Wheeler, J.O. 2000. "Have We Lost a Generation of Urban Geographers?" *Urban Geography* 21: 377-379.
- Sheppard, E. 2001. "Quantitative Geography: Representations, Practices and Possibilities." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 19: 535-554.

- Cutter, S., Golledge, R. and Graf, W. 2002. "The Big Questions in Geography." *The Professional Geographer* 54: 305-317.
- Janowicz, K., S. Gao, G. McKenzie, Y. Hu, and B. Bhaduri. 2020. "GeoAI: spatially explicit artificial intelligence techniques for geographic knowledge discovery and beyond." *International Journal of Geographical Information Science* 34 (4):625–636.
- Goodchild, M. F. 2022. "Commentary: general principles and analytical frameworks in geography and GIScience." *Annals of GIS* 28:1: 85-87.

Holt-Jensen, Arild (2018) *Geography: History and Concepts* also has additional articles for each chapter. The list of articles can be found on the publisher's website.

<https://study.sagepub.com/geography/student-resources/holt-jensen-geography-5e>