

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Department of Geography & Geoinformation Science

Spring Semester 2017 PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY GGS 102 – 001

Course Syllabus

Instructor: Mike Lewis

Office: Exploratory Hall GGS Dept.

Office Hours: Thursdays 9am-12, 1pm-3pm

Class Location: Robinson Hall A111

Meeting Time: 4:30pm - 7:10pm

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Course Overview:

This introductory course to physical geography will attempt to emphasize the systemic and interconnected nature of multiple processes affecting our planet. Furthermore, it will provide you with a basic understanding of the vocabulary of the science as well as a fundamental background in which further exploration in the field may occur. It is my hope that the student recognizes that no system can be viewed entirely separately and must be analyzed in context with the other systems.

Required Textbook:

Understanding Earth, 7th Edition, by John Grotzinger & Thomas H. Jordan.

Grading:

This course will have multiple components for grading, this dispersal of grading deemphasizes any particular assignment or exam in favor of a continual application of the knowledge gained. This course will cover a broad interdisciplinary set of topics and as such, the student is expected to have a broad generalized understanding of the concepts over a detailed in-depth comprehension. The grading breakdown will be as follows:

Components	Total	Each
Homework	32%	4%
Quizzes	18%	3%
Exams I - III	27%	9%
Position Papers	10%	5%
Final Exam	13%	13%

Each assignment or paper will be turned at the beginning of class or during office hours if the student must miss class. Extra credit is not offered. Emergencies will be dealt with on a case basis.

Baseline:

A baseline exam will be offered at the start of the course. This exam will not affect your grade, however it behooves the student to do as well as possible as the exam will represent the eight homework assignments. Passing any of the eight sections of the exam with a greater than 80% success rate nullifies the need for that student to turn in that homework assignment, the grade book will report a full accomplishment for that section. Therefore, a student achieving a 100% pass rate on the baseline exam will start the class with 32% of their grade completed at 4.0.

Quizzes and exams:

Quizzes will be composed of ten questions and include material assigned for reading up to that class period excluding material covered on previous quizzes. For instance, quiz 2 will be over chapters 6, 7, 12, and 13. Exams will only include material covered up to the previous class. Exams 2 and 3 are not comprehensive but the final exam is. Absence will only be accommodated with prior approval and only in situations beyond the control of the student.

Grading Scale:

The base scale below will be used. If the curve is significantly lower than expected than some or all the breaks may be lowered as appropriate.

Letter	Scale	Break
A	4	92
A-	3.7	90
B+	3.3	87
B	3.00	83
B-	2.70	80
C+	2.3	77
C	2	71
C-	1.7	68
D+	1.3	65
D	1.00	60
D-	0.7	57

Position Papers:

Position papers will be 3 pages in length in 12pt Time New Roman or Cambia font with standard 1-inch margins. Name, date, and title will be on a title page not included in the 3 page length, nor is the works cited page. No less than five scholarly works are to be cited and used as the basis of your papers. Your assignment is to identify two articles from a peer reviewed journal pertaining to any of the topics listed in the outline and to discuss the interactions between the topic systems. For instance, I may choose an article on the oceanic currents during the Younger Dryas and an article on the desertification in the Levant during the same period. I would then write my paper describing both articles and hypothesizing the linkages and identifying papers to confirm or deny the linkages I propose. You are not being graded on being correct, you are graded on your methodology.

Standard Course Policy:

Plagiarizing is not permitted, please see university policy if you need a refresher. When in doubt, always cite. Please turn off/mute your cell phones in class. Just be reasonable and respectful of each other and your position as student and everything will be great.

Course Outline:

Date	Lesson	Topic	Selected text readings from	In-class	Due
26-Jan	1	Intro to physical geography & Earth structure	(Chapter 1 & 9)	Baseline Exam	
2-Feb	2	Minerals & plate tectonics	Chapters 2 & 3	Quiz 1	
9-Feb	3	Lithographic modification	Chapters 6 & 7		HW1
16-Feb	4	Earthquakes & volcanoes	Chapters 12 & 13	Quiz 2	HW2
23-Feb	5	Biosphere	Chapter 11	Exam I	HW3
2-Mar	6	Climate systems	Chapter 15		HW4
9-Mar	7	Weathering, erosion, and mass wasting/ Soils	Chapter 16	Quiz 3	Position Paper 1
16-Mar	Spring Break				
23-Mar	8	Hydrology	Chapter 17	Quiz 4	HW5
30-Mar	9	Fluvial systems	Chapter 18	Exam II	
6-Apr	10	Winds & deserts	Chapter 19	Quiz 5	HW6
13-Apr	11	Coastlines & oceans	Chapter 20		Position Paper 2
20-Apr	12	Cryosphere	Chapter 21	Quiz 6	HW7
27-Apr	13	Tectonic-climate interaction	Chapter 22	Exam III	
4-May	14	Human impact	Chapter 23		HW8
Final Comprehensive Exam (TBD)					