DESCRIPTION

The breadth contemporary geographic thought is the product of several renegotiations of the discipline's boundaries and trajectories during the past century. In today's geography departments, it is not uncommon to find a geomorphologist describing fluvial migrations across Belizean floodplains while – in the next classroom – a social theorist lectures on the politics of gendered power in public spaces. And again, the topic under discussion in the next room may radically differ from both; it might concern glaciology, cartography, ethnography, information science, ecology, climatology, history, or activism. This rich diversity introduces its own peculiar challenges to the discipline. What sense can we make, for example, of a notion like 'geographic thought' when its practitioners often undertake and value their scholarship in very different ways? How might we understand these differences in light of the analytic and/or scientific objects that we nevertheless share? When researchers from different backgrounds invoke Earth, space, place, the environment, and so on, are they talking about the same things? Do their (sub)disciplinary assumptions engender perspectives whose differences are ultimately insurmountable? Or, are these sites through which we might forge fruitful connections from disparate viewpoints? Might such endeavors discover a more unified disciplinary history or point us toward new geographic futures?

Seeking to explore these questions, this course surveys the major traditions of geographic thought from the early 20th century to the present. Attending to both 'human' and 'physical' perspectives in the discipline - as well as those that blur the lines between the social and natural sciences - we will explore the changing, contested nature of geographic knowledge in terms of its situated, historical contexts and its numerous reformulations in contemporary practice. In so doing, the course provides students with the background for understanding their research in terms of the philosophies and methods, and the convergences and departures that constitute the intellectual history of the discipline in general, and Geography at Madison in particular.

Mindful of how we understand ourselves as geographers today, it will avoid dwelling upon ‘dead ideas’ in favor of mining a ‘history of the present’. That is, we will look to the past century to explore the ways that knowledges, practices and discourses that today seem natural or obvious were ‘constructed’ during earlier periods through key disciplinary debates. Accordingly, we will mostly focus on the primary texts in which these exchanges took place. This enables us to understand our labors in their broader contexts, but further, it reveals how today’s taken-for-granted notions were at one time heavily contested. This conditional nature of our knowledge should serve as a caution against putting up the theoretical blinders of scientific bias that too often threaten to make us – to paraphrase Tom Waits – the innocent victims of our own blinded alleys. Finally, exploring the
braiding - and occasionally fraying - paths of earlier traditions, it helps us to locate (or, at least invites us to speculate about) new routes for collaboration and innovation between our different subfields.

One final note: the texts we will be covering in this class represent lines leading up to the texts that you will have read in many of your other courses in geography at Madison. This is a practical decision in consideration of the amount of reading we have to cover and the constraints of the semester. Thus it will often be up to all of us to draw upon past classes and speculate about current research questions at Madison and elsewhere.

WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU

The success of this course depends upon our collective participation. While either I or a research collective will lead-off with a short discussion and questions to situate the literature, I expect that you come to each class with the week’s material, having read it and prepared yourself to talk about it.

I understand that we all have different scholarly backgrounds, embrace different scientific and theoretical positions, and entertain different personal interests. However, I expect that you will participate throughout the semester and actively engage the varying topics and literatures from week to week.

Finally, I recognize that jumping into new theoretical and scientific areas can be intimidating and unnerving, particularly in a course populated by both graduates and undergraduates, ‘humans,’ ‘physicals,’ and ‘p-e’s’. I propose that we recognize that, in discussion, we are a reading ‘collective’, that is, a group that draws upon its members diverse backgrounds so as to collectively develop understanding of some, at times, complicated texts. Naturally, if we happen to be covering one of your areas of specialization that week, those of us who are less familiar with that area will no doubt benefit from your expertise. At the same time, it is just as crucial that you give voice to questions, complications, uncertainties, problems, and so on.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME

I will provide a number of introductory lectures on the material that explain its larger contexts and draw out several of its key theoretical contributions and implications.

I will make myself available during office hours for further discussion of the course topics and course assignments.

I will participate as a member of the collective and, recognizing the differences in power relations that inhere in the academic institution and our professional relation, will endeavor to approach our work on as equal a footing as possible.

BY THE END OF THIS COURSE,

You will be familiar with many of the key figures, debates, concepts, objects and problems that have driven the development of contemporary geographic thought.
You will be aware of key debates and discourses in the discipline.

You will be capable of critically engaging several theoretical, practical and scientific dimensions of the discipline from the perspective of the history of its ideas.

**Requirements**

**Graduate Students** will write FIVE papers (FIVE pages each) addressing the readings on weeks of your choice, to be turned in on the week those readings are discussed, or no later than a week thereafter. I expect these papers to critical assessments (not just reviews or impressions). I will hand out a separate sheet listing several possible discussion topics and paper approaches. Each paper is worth 16% of the final grade. Students will also LEAD one discussion as a member of a research collective (10%), and PARTICIPATE weekly (10%).

Further, as graduate students with an enriched and growing understandings of current practices in the discipline, I expect you to take a guiding role in addressing the readings and topics for each week. This not only helps those who are sometimes less familiar with its assumptions and routine practices, it also helps you become more comfortable with ‘running’ a classroom.

**Undergraduate Students** will write THREE papers (FIVE pages each) addressing the readings on weeks of your choice, to be turned in on the week those readings are discussed, or no later than a week thereafter. I expect these papers to critical assessments (not just reviews or impressions). I will hand out a separate sheet listing several possible discussion topics and paper approaches. Each paper is worth 26% of the final grade. Students will also LEAD one discussion as a member of a research collective (11%), and PARTICIPATE weekly (11%).

Or, **Undergraduate Students taking the course for Capstone Credit** will write ONE 15-PAGE RESEARCH PAPER addressing the a major geographic theme or area, due at the end of the semester. These papers will be well-researched, critical engagements. I will hand out a separate sheet listing several possible discussion topics and paper approaches. This paper is worth 70% of the final grade. Students will also submit a paper PROPOSAL (8%), LEAD one discussion as a member of a research collective (11%), and PARTICIPATE weekly (11%).

**All Students** will take turns introducing the material with a short summary discussion and key questions at the beginning of class. This will be done as ‘research collectives’ containing undergraduate and graduate students. Participation in the collectives is required, failure to do so will negatively impact your final course grade by 10%. We will determine collectives, and the graduate and undergraduate roles, in the coming weeks.

I expect everyone to come to class having read all the assigned material and ready to discuss it.

Any more than two absences will result in a failing grade.
**SCHEDULE**

Generally, the assigned readings for each week will consist of primary sources. These will be on electronic library reserve at ‘MyUW’ and ‘Learn@UW’. The weekly readings will correspond to the week by week topics shown below and are listed bibliographically immediately below the schedule.

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**BACKGROUND READING**

Below is a list of resources for background reading. For those with limited background in geography and those preparing a classroom presentation, I suggest reading one or another of the following books alongside our required readings. All should be available in the Geography Library.


REQUIRED READINGS*

*Subject to change as the course progresses

**Biogeography**


**Environmental Determinism**


**Cultural Geography**


Regional Geography


Spatial Science


**Behavioral and Humanistic Geography**


**Social Relevance, Radical Geography, and the Locality Debates**


**Feminist Geography and Geographies of Difference**


**Poststructuralism and the Critique of Representation**


**Deconstructing the Map**


**Soil, Ecology, and Scientific Methodology**


**Cultural and Political Ecology**


**Bridging the Human Physical Divide**


**Responses to Massey:**


Wainwright, Joel, and Mann, Geoff, *Forthcoming*. Climate Leviathan. *Antipode*. 

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