

Frontiers in Geography, GRG 374, Spring 2011
Time and Date: T-TH: 2-3:15
Location: Geography Building, Room 404

Professor: Dr. Eliot M. Tretter (etretter@mail.utexas.edu)
Office: GRG 116
Office Phone: 232-6560
Office Hours: T: 1-2, or by Appointment

Required Texts:

Godfrey-Smith, Peter 2003. *Theory and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*. Chicago, University Of Chicago Press.

Punch, Keith F, 2006. *Developing Effective Research Proposals*. Sage.

Description: This course is called *Frontiers in Geography*, which the Department of Geography and the Environment expects to be a capstone experience. "Capstone" means the crowning achievement or culmination, and this class is supposed to signify the "culmination" of your undergraduate career as a geographer. However, what the capstone entails can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and the faculty members of our department have tried (many of them while teaching this course) to define what capstones means to them. The structure and content of this course is, therefore, based to a great extent upon their own respective personal and academic histories, styles, personalities, and, in a more general sense, their conceptions of what is important and what is not. None of them is wrong. The route I have chosen emphasizes the "practice of being a geographer" as the capstone experience.

But what does that mean? For me, it means that we will think about the engagements among the role of geography, geographers, and geographical inquiry in the context of the wider world, especially in relation to social change. Most of you have spent some of your time as an undergraduate learning about various theories and methods of geography (learning about the world and how different physical and social aspects of it work). This class is an opportunity to step back and think more broadly about questions like the following: What is geography? What role does it play in society? What is it for? In order to get at some of these questions, the class is organized around two projects — one individual, one group.

The specific objectives of this course that are intended to contribute toward this broader practice are: 1) to become familiar with Geography as a discipline; 2) to construct the basis for a substantive geographical research project; 3) to engage the world with geographical knowledge, which will result in written and oral presentations; 4) to get a sense of the nature of "scientific reasoning" (the general problems of methods and evidence) and issues facing geography, particularly in regards to the relevancy of research.

During the first few weeks of the course, we will survey recent discussions about geography and graphical practice. Work for this part of the class will consist of a small quiz, which will make up 5% of the course grade.

The majority of the course, and your grade, will consist of two projects that will run consecutively throughout most of the semester.

1. The first project you will do alone. You will be writing a formal research and grant proposal. The course will examine how to select a topic, establish a research design, do a literature review, and search for funding agencies. This exercise will show you what goes into a research proposal, how to write them, and what exactly they are for. Students will be responsible for selecting both the topic and a funding institution and for writing an appropriate proposal for a project of their choosing. Students will be required to produce an outline of their project early on and will develop their proposal over the course of the semester in several different stages and drafts. Note: This is not a term paper; you will not be doing very much research on the topic you choose.

2. The other project, which will run parallel with the individual project, is a group project with People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources (PODER). Students will have to work in teams on this class research project that helps PODER meet their goals of serving people in the Austin. The point of this project is to show you how to work in groups and to see ways that geographical knowledge and skills can contribute to a community organization. Work in this part of the class will consist of the research outcome. There will be some time in class to work with your groups, but additional time outside of class will also be required.

3. While you are doing these projects outside of class, class readings will focus primarily on the philosophy of science, or scientific reasoning and method. The class will read a book on the development of scientific thought in the 20th century, and we will also discuss these issues in relation to global climate change. We will end the courses with a discussion of the importance of the relevancy of geographical and scientific research. There will be a quiz and a journal for this section.

Learning Objectives

- Equip students with the skills needed to make effective presentations
- Help students develop intellectual tools for critical reading
- Provide students with tools to make an effective grant proposal.

Grades: Grades are based on the following criteria.

Group Project - 30%

Grant Proposal - 35%

Two quizzes - 30%

1st Quiz - 5%

2nd Quiz and Journal - 25%

Participation and attendance - 5%

Grading: No extra credit will be given. Letter grades will follow approximately the following scheme:

A+: 100-96

B+: 89-86

C+: 79-76

D+: 69-66

F: Below 60

A: 95-93

B: 85-83

C: 75-73

D: 65-63

A-: 92-90

B-: 82-80

C-: 72-70

D-: 62-60

Required Reading: There are two books required for this course. They are available at Monkey Wrench Books, on Northloop (53rd Street and Avenue F); they will also be on reserve at the library. In addition to the books, there will be readings posted on the blackboard. Please check the syllabus for the correct readings for the class. All students are expected to read all the material assigned to them; this means the entire book, book section, or article.

Coursework: There is not much assigned reading for each class period, but you are expected to spend a good deal of time preparing for individual and group projects. A good rule of thumb is that three to four hours of outside work is necessary for each day of class. Budget your time accordingly!!

Final Evaluation: Your final grade will be based on an assessment of your grant proposal, your group project, and quizzes.

Course Policies: In addition to the normal high standards of courtesy and respect expected in any university classroom, please take note of the following:

Scholastic dishonesty: Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information please visit the Student Judicial Services Web site: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs>.

Grade disclosure: All personal information concerning your performance in this course is covered by federal privacy legislation, known as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). No grades or status questions will be provided by telephone or e-mail.

ADA Statement: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at Student Services Building (SSB), Room 4.1048. The phone number is 471-6259.

Absences: Absence on examination days must be fully justified. You must telephone the departmental secretary at 471-5116 or e-mail me on the same day as the emergency and follow up with written documentation as per student rules. I will not provide any make-up examinations for students who do not follow this procedure or do not have documentation.

Attendance policy: This class involves informal and informed discussion. Hence your participation in class is necessary. Attendance is mandatory and taken at every class. **Three** unexcused absences will result in my **dropping** your final grade by **one letter grade**; **five** or more will result in **automatic failure**.

Test-taking rules:

- No baseball caps or hats
- No books on the table or under your seat.
- There will be no leaving and re-entering the classroom once examinations have been distributed.

Other Classroom Policies:

- Cell phones must be turned off.
- Do not eat food that makes a lot of noise, i.e., potato chips.
- Do not use computers to surf the Internet during class.