GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SCIENCE

Department of Geography & Geoinformation Science

Fall Semester 2013

Course Syllabus Geography 689

The course is taught on Wednesdays in Engineering Room 1110 4:30 – 7:10 p.m.

Instructor: Allan Falconer    email afalcon1@gmu.edu    phone: 703 993 1360*
Office: Exploratory Hall Room 2412
Office Hours: Wednesdays 3.00-4.00 p.m. or by appointment*.

Introduction: The course is designed as a graduate seminar that provides a context for discussion and discovery of the current form and content of Geography as an academic discipline. You are expected to contribute to class discussion and the assumption is that each of you is about to become a Professional Geographer. In this capacity you become colleagues of your instructors and all other professional geographers. You are in the final stages of the transition from pupil/student to a professional who has mastered the subject. Your Master’s degree carries with it the responsibility to be knowledgeable about your chosen subject and to represent it in the workplace.

Content: The course will trace the growth of human knowledge from its earliest days, the emergence of Geography in the third century BCE and its evolution to the present. Definitions of the subject over the centuries and the current content of academic Geography will be considered. Initially we address the questions “Are you a Geographer?” and “What is Geography?” We conclude by examining the content of recently published geographical work.

Much of this is well summarized in Questioning Geography: Fundamental Debates by Noel Castree, Alisdair Rogers and Douglas Sherman; 2005 Published by: Blackwell Publishing, Malden MA. USA, Oxford, UK, Carlton, V, Australia. This book is available from the bookstore.

Assignments and grading: There will be five assignments each of equal weight. Each provides the opportunity to gain 20 points towards a possible course total of 100. Note: In general I DO NOT deduct points. You start with the blank paper (inherently worth zero points) on which your assignment is printed. For all the correct and relevant scholarly opinions, arguments and reasoned viewpoints that you write you gain points. If the writing doesn’t say what you mean then you can’t gain points for what you don’t state. My job is to help you gain the maximum number of points by advising about content and presentation. You do not begin with 100 points that I am trying to take away from you.
# Important Dates

Dates listed on this page are for full semester courses only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First day of classes</strong>; last day to submit Domicile Reclassification Application; Payment Due Date</td>
<td>August 26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labor Day, university closed</td>
<td>September 2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Last day to add classes</strong>—all individualized section forms due Last day to drop with no tuition penalty</td>
<td>September 3</td>
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<td><strong>Last day to drop with a 33% tuition penalty</strong></td>
<td>September 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Drop Deadline (67% tuition penalty)</strong></td>
<td>September 27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm progress reporting period (100-200 level classes)—grades available via <a href="#">Patriot Web</a></td>
<td>September 23 - October 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selective Withdrawal Period (undergraduate students only)</td>
<td>September 30 - October 25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Columbus Day recess (Monday classes/labs meet Tuesday. Tuesday classes do not meet this week)</td>
<td>October 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incomplete work from spring/summer 2013 due to instructor</td>
<td>October 25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incomplete grade changes from spring/summer 2013 due to registrar</td>
<td>November 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thanksgiving recess</td>
<td>November 27 – December 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last day of classes</td>
<td>December 7</td>
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| **Reading Days**
Reading days provide students with additional study time for final examinations. Faculty may schedule optional study sessions, but regular classes or exams may not be held. | Mon Dec 9 – Tues Dec 10, 4:30 pm |
| **Exam Period**                                   | Tues Dec 10, 4:30 pm – Wed Dec 18, 10:15 pm |
| **Degree Conferral Date**                         | December 19        |
**COURSE ACTIVITY:** Outline of probable content week by week during the semester. These topics are subject to change in sequence or focus depending on class interests and progress.

**August 28, 2013**  Introduction to Geography and a sharing of personal perceptions of geography and experience. This first class will include organizational items, a lecture-discussion-question session, and an opportunity to write a brief description of what Geographers do and to write a definition of Geography. These definitions will become the basis of the first assignment.

**September 4, 2013**  What do geographers do? A look at applications of geography and career paths of graduate geographers.

**September 11, 2013**  Invited Speaker: **Joy Suh** topic “Library Facilities and support for Geography.”
Joy Suh is the university librarian specialized in Geography and the person who has been responsible for the development of an excellent collection of geographic materials including maps and government documents in the Fenwick library.
Discussion of definitions of Geography from multiple sources. Interactive discussion based on library research and other literature review. Material contained in reference atlases will be discussed in class to support definitions of Geography. The purpose is to provide a guided preparation for the assignment.

**Assignment 1** is a scholarly essay that is your reasoned and referenced personal definition of Geography. This should be approximately 1,800 words (more or less three typed pages, single-spaced and in 12pt. type.) and should relate your personal experiences and viewpoint to those of the geographers of the past as recorded in literature, scholarly writings and academic studies. The definitions should be well formulated.

*Research task: Library search to support and document your understanding of Geography with formal citations and references.*

**September 18, 2013**  “Early Days: Geography emerges as a human pursuit”. Following a discussion, students will prepare PowerPoint presentations to illustrate chosen events in the development of human occupation of the Earth. These presentations are **Assignment 2** and will be the discussed in the context of the development of Geography. Each presentation must be submitted in written form with illustrations (PowerPoint CD’s). Grading will award 10 points for the written form, 5 points for the presentation and 5 points for your contributions to discussion.

**September 25, 2013**  Student presentations on the development of geography.

**October 2, 2013**  Conclude student presentations on the development of Geography.

*Research Task: Background reading on the academic development of Geography and the emergence of internal tensions. Examples include: Determinism vs Possibilism; Cultural vs Physical; Systematic vs Regional, Quantitative vs Qualitative, etc.*

Discussion and analysis of controversy in Geography highlighting the major supporters of each side of the controversy.
The grade for this Assignment (3) will be 20 points for the individual study Assignment topic; Discuss any conflict that arose in Geography and present an assessment of the impact that conflict had on the subject.

October 9, 2013  The development of ideas and technology through time and the geographical aspects of this. The diffusion of technology around the world and a look at regional patterns embedded in the geography of towns, cities and nations across the globe.

October 16, 2013  Research Methods in Geography. Lecture material on Quantitative, Qualitative, Theoretical, Empirical and Philosophical approaches to Geography, including content analysis. Assignment 4  Write an analytical review of published papers addressing one topic in geographic showing changing attitudes, approaches or techniques over a period of two or more decades. Illustrate what Geographers are currently researching and publishing. Analysis may include recently published text-books or atlases or content analysis of the professional journals. The tabulated data from the content analysis will be written as short notes (about 1,000 words, or not more than 2 pages of single spaced typing with 12 pt. type,) that accompany the data tables. Research Task: What are Geographers actually doing? Analyze content in current Learned Society Journals, and present results with summary statistics and analysis of the empirical data.

October 23, 2013  Lecture material on GIS and synthesis in Geography. Is synthesis being attained or is it a myth? Presentations on Content analysis begin. Assignment 5 (is based in part on Assignment 4.) Data from assignment 4 should provide you with information that will support reasoned opinion on the topic of geographers’ contribution to science. Research Task: Prepare an essay on the topic “Geography’s contribution to Science” The essay text should not exceed 3,000 words (maps, diagrams, references and citations are additional to this)

We will open the topic(s) of the final essay to discussion and may redefine the essay topics as the course progresses.

October 30, 2013  Content Analysis presentations.

November 6, 2013  Content analysis presentations continue.

November 13, 2013  Content analysis concludes.

November 20, 2013  Forum on Geography Education and Geography in Education.

November 27, 2013  No class Thanksgiving Holiday  November 17th – December 1st

December 4, 2013  Geography for the Nation: What are we doing? Forum. (Submit final essay “Geography’s contribution to Science” not to exceed 3,000 words. This is Assignment 5)

**GRADING POLICY**

The following rubric is the basis for the criteria used in grading essays and modified versions are used for Power Point presentations.
# GGS 689: Geographic Thought and Methodology

## GRADING CRITERIA FOR WRITTEN WORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent A (4)</th>
<th>Strong B (3)</th>
<th>Satisfactory C (2)</th>
<th>Inferior D (1)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic</strong></td>
<td>Clearly defined and sustained throughout; topic effectively limited. Highly insightful.</td>
<td>Topic stated; not fully addressed; some attempt to limit topic. Moderately insightful</td>
<td>Topic stated; poorly addressed; no attempt to limit topic. Minimal insight.</td>
<td>Unclear topic; inappropriate; no attempt to limit topic; no insight discernible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>Content is accurate, complete, clearly stated, and appropriately referenced. Several sources of information are used.</td>
<td>Content is accurate, fairly complete, and clearly stated. Appropriate referencing and some attempt to use information from several sources.</td>
<td>Content is accurate, but is incomplete, lacks clarity, and appropriate references. Sources of information are very limited.</td>
<td>Content is inaccurate and incomplete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>Highly organized plan with effective transitions. Superior introduction and conclusion, which clearly relate to whole.</td>
<td>Logical organization that supports your transitions. Lacks a strong thesis Introduction and conclusion related to whole.</td>
<td>Logical organization, with some transitions. Ineffective introduction and/or conclusion.</td>
<td>Poor organization, lacks unity. No transitions. Poor introduction and/or conclusion.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Writing Mechanics</strong></td>
<td>Superior editing. No errors in the following areas: spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, format</td>
<td>Careful editing. Few errors in the following areas: spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, format</td>
<td>Needs closer editing. Errors in some of the following areas: spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, format</td>
<td>Careless editing. Too many errors in the following areas: spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, format</td>
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</table>

Total rating: ______  Rating average: ________________  Grade: ____
Invited speakers:

As the semester progresses I will invite speakers to address the class. There are several local geographers who may come and speak to you including:

GMU Professor **Lee Talbot**, topic “What Geographers Do” Dr Talbot serves as Senior Environmental Consultant or Advisor to the World Bank, the Asian and Inter-American Development Banks, U.N. bodies, governments and universities. Formerly Director-General of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), he also held the position of environmental advisor to three U.S. Presidents, and was head of environmental sciences at the Smithsonian Institution. His credentials as a Geographer are impeccable; his Ph.D. was supervised by Carl O. Sauer.

One of the earliest adopters of GIS in local government **Larry Stipek**: Larry is the Director of the Loudoun County Office of Mapping and Geographical Information and I have invited him to speak on the topic “GIS: A Geographical Basis for Local Government”

A popular invited speaker is **Charlie Grymes** a Geographer of note recently retired from a lifetime career in the Department of Interior that began as a member of the National Park Service. Prof Grymes has taught for many years at GMU and has a wealth of information and experience with the discipline of Geography especially the Geography of Virginia.

In addition I will invite graduate students to speak about their research projects.

General Information:

Essays are expected to be scholarly in presentation, style and content. Essays will be graded for content, style, grammar, spelling and all the usual points considered in the review of papers for publication. There is 50% of the credit for relevant content and organization. Illustration and presentation will be 25% of the assessment and grammar, spelling, style, clarity and effectiveness of the communication will form the remaining 25% of the grade. You are encouraged to adopt the manuscript style prescribed by a specific journal (please attach a style sheet copied from the journal). Illustration is encouraged, maps could be important in geographical work.

All written work, essays, papers and notes, submitted will be used in the context of the seminar format and may be copied for (anonymous) distribution to the class, consolidated into a class viewpoint on geography, or used as the basis for discussion and examination by the group. The schedule of dates for submission of the assignments will be finalized in class. It is a seminar course, active participation by students is essential to the success of the discussion and debate in class seminars.

General advice: We are not in a schoolroom relationship, so please communicate with the instructor as necessary. Do not hesitate to bring to my attention any items that are causing you difficulty or concern. Most concerns can be addressed and (usually) resolved and many are familiar to me after 43 years as a
You must be willing to take professional responsibility for your own commitments to this course and to your program of graduate studies.

University Catalog: [http://catalog.gmu.edu/](http://catalog.gmu.edu/)
University Policies: [http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/](http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/)

* **Tentative Course Schedule.** Students often make decisions about their class schedule based on the tentative course schedule. Please refer to the calendar of religious holidays and observations: [http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/](http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/) that is designed to help minimize difficulties for students of different faiths. It is the student's responsibility to speak to the instructor in advance should their religious observances impact their participation in class activities and assignments.

**General Expectations:** All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the University honor code. The purpose of the code is to support the community of scholars that is George Mason University and build the sense of fairness, trust, respect and mutual responsibility that this requires. Only if all members of this community feel valued and supported can we expect that all members will reach their full academic potential. It is therefore important that you understand university policy on cheating, plagiarism, lying and stealing (ideas as well as material goods). These standards are expected to be observed in this course.

- **Please arrive on time;** your classmates do not appreciate disturbances caused by late arrivals.

- **Other forms of class disruption,** including private conversations with another member of class, conversations over a cell phone or text-messaging are not acceptable and will be penalized. Listening to personal radios, CD music players or other devices or playing electronic games are considered inappropriate during class time. Students doing this clearly are not contributing to a seminar class and will be penalized. Reading newspapers, books, magazines or similar on-line or virtual material extraneous to the class will be penalized also. Eating, drinking and related nourishment of your body is best done in the cafeteria setting or in the food court and is not expected to be a classroom activity. Any and all disruption of the learning environment for the class is disrespectful of others and will attract penalties.

- You are entitled to excused absences from class for the observance of religious holidays. Please notify me in writing in the first week of the semester. We can then arrange to avoid conflict with deadlines and work assignments before they become a source of anxiety.

- **Students with disabilities** are responsible for reporting the disability to the Disability Resource Center (703 993 2474). This enables us to make suitable accommodations for the situation with the support of the University. I am most
willing to make any appropriate arrangements for students who need special consideration, but it must be done in accordance with the university’s procedures.

- **Other unexpected problems.** Please let me know if your work is being affected by a crisis with your parents/husband/wife/boyfriend/girlfriend/dog/cat/parrot/car/computer/iPod/Blackberry or any other item in your life. Most needs can be accommodated if we communicate about the issues as they happen and address them in a realistic manner. Such issues are a part of your student experience and communication is often the best route to a timely resolution. Usually, the longer a problem is allowed to grow the more difficult it is to solve.

**Electronic Requirements**
Students must have access to email and the internet, either at home, work or GMU campus. GMU provides students with free email accounts, which must be accessed for information sent from the university, including your instructors. Go to [http://mason.gmu.edu/](http://mason.gmu.edu/) for information on accessing email.

(See below, third bullet)

**GMU Policies and Resources for Students**
- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See [http://oai.gmu.edu/honor-code/](http://oai.gmu.edu/honor-code/)].
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [see [http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/](http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/)].*
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
- 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/](http://caps.gmu.edu/)].
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See [http://ods.gmu.edu/](http://ods.gmu.edu/)].
- Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
- 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/](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/)].

*Regarding electronic devices (such as laptops, cell phones, etc.), please be respectful of your peers and your instructor and do not engage in activities that are unrelated to
class. Such disruptions show a lack of professionalism and may affect your participation grade.

MASON EMAIL ACCOUNTS
Students must use their Masonlive email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See http://masonlive.gmu.edu for more information.

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

OTHER USEFUL CAMPUS RESOURCES:
Writing Center: A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; http://writingcenter.gmu.edu

University Libraries “Ask a Librarian” http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): (703) 993-2380; http://caps.gmu.edu

UNIVERSITY POLICIES
The University Catalog, http://catalog.gmu.edu, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.