

GEOG 9998A – Debates in Geographic Thought

Course Outline: Fall 2023

1. Course Information

1.1. Contact Information:

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2. Calendar Description

2.1. Course Description

Introduces students to the diversity of philosophical and theoretical approaches to Geography by engaging with current debates in the discipline. Students learn how different approaches inform research practice, and thus how to locate their own research within a wider intellectual and disciplinary context.

2 seminar hours, 0.5 course (mandatory)

3. Introduction

Geography is a broad, integrative field of enquiry combining social science, physical and natural science, and humanities. Like any academic discipline, it is also undergoing continual change, as new ideas, technologies and real-world developments challenge existing thinking and research practice. Together, this means that geographers have varying and competing ideas about how to define and delineate appropriate topics and objects of study, how to design and carry out geographic research, and what is regarded as valid geographic knowledge. By engaging with current debates in Geography, this survey course will expose you to different ways of “thinking geographically” and help you position your own research within Geography as an academic discipline.

4. Course Objectives

In keeping with the *Graduate Degree Level Expectations* of our programs, this course promotes several objectives:

- *'Depth and breadth of knowledge'*
by introducing and interrogating various geographic concepts and debates within the discipline
- *'Research & scholarship'*
by encouraging independent learning and critical thinking, and assisting Master's level students in particular with a well-ordered transition from the constraints of undergraduate education to the less structured research-oriented world
- *'Application of knowledge'*
by evaluating the appropriateness and theoretical underpinnings of a given philosophical approach to research
- *'Professional capacity/autonomy'*
by cultivating a professional and collegial spirit of scholarly engagement
- *'Communication skills'*
through practicing and developing skills in academic reading, writing, presentation & dialogue
- *'Awareness of the limits of knowledge'*
by respecting and recognizing the inherent strengths, weaknesses and complexities of different approaches within our varied discipline toward constructing arguments, interpretations and creating geographical knowledge.

5. Learning Outcomes

Fulfilling these objectives will provide numerous *'learning outcomes'* that will enable you to:

- Approach the discipline of Geography and the work of academic geographers with a more open and informed perspective on the plurality and commonality of ways geographers think, question, analyse and interpret.
- Critique and theoretically situate the ideas and research of geographers, including your own work and those of your peers, in a balanced, reasoned and constructive fashion.
- Demonstrate an understanding and awareness of the complexities and limitations of constructing geographical arguments and interpretations contributing toward knowledge.
- Exercise and improve your verbal, presentation and writing skills, through both individual and group work.
- Begin to feel part of an academic community, both within Western's Department of Geography and within Geography as an academic discipline, toward engaging and contributing to the broader academic and public debates of our time.

6. Evaluation

Evaluation is based on two individual written assignments and presentation of one group seminar. Details of topics, format requirements and evaluation criteria will be provided at a later date.

Assignment	Value	Due Date
First paper	20%	Thursday, October 26
Student-led seminar	30%	Various dates (Nov 9, 16, or 23)
Second paper	50%	Thursday, December 21

Students are responsible for material covered in the lectures as well as the assigned chapters/sections in the text. Students are **REQUIRED TO COMPLETE ALL COMPONENTS** of this course. There are no exceptions to this. Extra assignments to improve grades **will NOT** be accepted.

Grades **will not** be adjusted on the basis of need. It is important to monitor your performance in the course. Remember: **You are responsible for your grades in this course.**

7. Late Assignments

Papers are due on the dates indicated above. *A late assignment will lose 5% per day.* An assignment submitted five or more days beyond the deadline will be graded for your educational benefit but will NOT count toward your final course grade.

We are *sympathetic to extensions of a few days*, but they must be made at least seven days before the initial due date.

8. Grading

How do we grade? A mark of 'B+' (78%) is expected as a minimum level of performance: an acceptable and general understanding of the course material has been demonstrated through the formal assignments and seminar participation. An 'A' level performance (80%+) exceeds this minimal standard by demonstrating a thorough grasp of course material, and the ability to engage key concepts in an effective, informed and insightful fashion. Diligence and demonstrable effort are necessary but not, by themselves, sufficient to warrant an 'A.' An 'A+' (90%+) reflects an outstanding performance in the seminars and written work, an exceptional command of written and oral communication skills, and a critical mind capable of synthesizing complex ideas and generating astute conclusions.

9. Course Content

The course is based on active learning and student engagement including class discussion, student-led seminars and peer teaching. Seminars are intended as intellectual forums in which to critique geographical literature and debate ideas. With your active participation, the process should prove not only interesting but also useful as you conceptualize your own research project and develop your own intellectual position.

Individually and in groups, you are expected to have done the necessary reading and other preparation for each class (which run September 14th to November 30th). In addition to group presentations, each student will also submit two written assignments (see *Evaluation* above).

Instructions regarding readings or other preparatory tasks will be provided each week for the following week's class. You can expect to do several hours of preparatory work in order to fully understand the material and be ready to engage in discussion. For the student-led seminars, each designated group of students will be responsible for assigning reading or other preparation, with assistance and guidance from the instructors.

Material will either be available online through Western Libraries or via the course website on OWL.

WEEKLY SEMINAR TOPICS

Date	Topic
I: Introduction and Setting the Scene	
Sept 7	No seminar
Sept 14	Course Introduction: Thinking Geographically
II: Current Debates in Geography	
Sept 21	The Anthropocene I
Sept 28	The Anthropocene II: Sustainability and Planetary Urbanism
Oct 5	More-than-Human and More-than-Physical Geographies
Oct 12	Big Data, AI, and Digital twins
Oct 19	Reflection on Weeks 3-6 Planning for Student-Led Seminars
III: Student-Led Seminars	
Oct 26	Preparation for Student-Led Seminars Students submit plan and instructions for next 3 classes First Assignment due
Nov 2	Fall Reading Week – No Seminar
Nov 9	Student-Led Seminars: Current Debate in . . . (Cluster-Based Groups)*
Nov 16	Student-Led Seminars: Current Debate in . . . (Cluster-Based Groups)*
Nov 23	Student-Led Seminars: Current Debate in . . . (Cluster-Based Groups)*
IV: Relevance and Application	
Nov 30	Moving Forward: From Ways of Thinking to Ways to Doing
Dec 7	One on One discussion with Instructors on final paper
Dec 14	One on One discussion with Instructors on final paper
Dec 21	Second assignment due

**Scheduling and group composition to be determined.*

Clusters are: *Physical Geography; Geographic Information Science; Urban Studies; and Environment, Development and Health.*

10. Additional Course Resources

Both during the course and afterwards, you are encouraged to do further reading on different approaches and ideas in Geography. Explore journals like *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *Canadian Geographer*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Progress in Human Geography* and *Progress in Physical Geography*, as well as journals in your own area of specialization.

Some recommended texts are listed below, available in the Weldon Library:

Aitken, Stuart and Gill Valentine, eds. (2006) *Approaches to Human Geography*. London: Sage.

Castree, Noel (2005) *Key Ideas in Geography*. New York: Routledge.

Castree, Noel, Alisdair Rogers and Douglas Sherman, eds. (2005) *Questioning Geography*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Cresswell, Tim (2013) *Geographic Thought: A Critical Introduction*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell. (Available as an e-book in Western Libraries.)

Gregory, Derek et al., eds. (2009) *The Dictionary of Human Geography, 5th ed.* Oxford and Malden, MA. Blackwell (available via Western Libraries as an e-book)

Holloway, Sarah, Rice, Steve and Valentine, Gill, eds (2003) *Key Concepts in Geography*. London: Sage and 2nd edition (2009) Nicholas Clifford et al. eds.

Inkpen, Rob (1st edition 2005, 2nd edition with Graham Wilson 2013) *Science, Philosophy and Physical Geography*. London and New York: Routledge. (Both editions also available as an e-book in Western Libraries. 2nd edition has additional text and new chapters on field work and modelling.)

Lee, Roger, et al., eds. (2014). *The Sage Handbook of Human Geography: Two Volume Set*. London: Sage.

Thomas, David S.G., and Andrew Goudie, eds. (2000) *The Dictionary of Physical Geography, 3rd ed.* Oxford and Malden, MA. Blackwell. Weldon Reference No Loan GB10.E53 2000

Trudgill, Stephen and Roy, Andre, eds. (2003). *Contemporary Meanings in Physical Geography: From What to Why?* London: Arnold.

11. University Policy Regarding Illness

11.1. Illness

Please visit the link to the university policy for more information.

<http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=> - Page 12

If you feel that you have a medical or personal concern that is interfering with your work, you should contact your Instructor, Graduate Program Administrator, Supervisor, or SGPS.

It is expected that students will attend all classes. The professor does not provide access to lecture notes. Students are encouraged to obtain missed lecture notes from a fellow student.

12. Attendance

Your attendance at all classes is a mandatory program requirement; it is crucial to the delivery and success of this course and to your own success in it. Although no marks are allocated directly for attendance and participation, failure to attend and participate in the seminars will result in deduction of up to 10% in the final course grade. Unanticipated absence for medical or personal reasons will be sympathetically dealt with according to University and departmental procedures, which may require submission of supporting documentary evidence such as a doctor's letter.

You may seek permission to be absent from class for academic-related activities such as conference attendance and research activity that requires you to be away from London. **Those planning on being absent at any stage during the term should, as soon as possible, request written permission to be absent, informing the instructors of the dates of the absence, and the reason for the absence.** Written confirmation and justification for your academic-related absence by your supervisor is required. **Steps taken to fulfil the material and exercises missed due to an absence are at the discretion of the course instructors and may include, but are not limited to, additional written assignments.**

13. Scholastic Discipline for Graduate Students

For the complete policy and regulations visit the [Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#) website.

14. Procedures for Appealing Academic Evaluations

Students may appeal an academic decision or ruling in accordance with the appeal procedures set out below. Students have a right to appeal to their graduate programs and, if unsuccessful, to the Vice-Provost (Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies). Some decisions may be appealed further to the Senate Review Board Academic. The Vice-Provost's rulings in academic matters are final unless overturned or modified on appeal to the Senate Review Board Academic (SRBA).

For the complete policy and regulations visit the [Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#) website

Requests to have an assignment or examination re-evaluated must be submitted to the course instructors in writing within one week of receiving the graded assignment. In this written request for re-appraisal the specifics of what you would like re-visited and the justification for doing so will be clearly and concisely stated. Should you feel that your final grade in the course is biased, inaccurate or unfair, you do have the right to appeal your mark. Please refer to the *Western Calendar* prior to doing so (see web site above). In an attempt to avoid such time-consuming and stressful procedures for us both, be assured that each and every piece of work is graded carefully and thoroughly. *Be aware that marks may be raised--as well as lowered--through an appeal process.*

15. Support Services

15.1. Support Services

Student Support Services

Academic Support and Engagement

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to [Mental Health@Western](mailto:MentalHealth@Western) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

15.2. Short Absences

If you miss a class due to minor illness or other problems, check your course outline for information regarding attendance requirements and make sure you are not missing a test or exam. Cover any readings and arrange to borrow the missed lecture notes from a classmate.

15.3. Extended Absences

If you expect to be away from campus for an extended amount of time, please make prior arrangements with your course instructors and/or supervisor.

For the complete policy on registration visit the [Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#) website.

15.4. Academic Concerns

If you are in academic difficulty, it is strongly recommended that you see your Graduate Program Administrator, Supervisor, or SGPS.

16. Important Dates:

September 7: Classes resume

September 15: Last day to add a first term half course

October 9: Thanksgiving Holiday – Department Office Closed

October 30 to November 3: Fall Reading Week (No classes; Department Office open)

November 13: Last day to drop a first term half course without penalty

December 8: Classes end

December 9: Study day

December 10-22: Examination Period

December 22: Fall term ends

17. Other Information

For a list of Graduate Regulations please visit the [Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#) website

For The University of Western Ontario Senate Regulations, please see the [Handbook of Academic and Scholarship Policies](#)

17.1. Email Policies:

Please respect the fact that Professors receive multiple emails from students and will deal with those emails in a fair, organized and timely manner. Please ensure the subject line contains the name, number and section of the course in question. Instructors email will be checked daily and students can expect to receive a response within 24-48 hours during weekdays. For complex questions make use of our office

hours. Updates will be provided using OWL announcements. Please opt in to receiving OWL announcements by email.

17.2. Safety

Safety is a shared responsibility. Ultimately each individual must act in a reasonable manner in order to ensure their safety and the safety of others. (For more information, please see http://www.geography.uwo.ca/resources/health_and_safety/docs/2014-Fieldwork%20Safety%20Policy.pdf.)

17.3. Use of Electronic Devices:

Never record digitally or otherwise any part of the class without prior and specific permission from the course instructors. Handwritten or typed notetaking is encouraged.

17.4. Mutual Expectations:

You can expect us to arrive punctually and prepared for all class sessions. We will strive to promote a collegial atmosphere of mutual respect conducive to the exchange of ideas and learning. We expect the same from you. This entails respecting the opinions and questions of others and behaving in a courteous manner. If you would like to come and talk to either of us about any aspect of the course, please make an appointment to do so. We are approachable, we welcome your comments and questions, and we very much want you to succeed in the course. Suggestions and constructive criticism to improve the course are particularly welcomed.

17.5. Code of Conduct for Students, Staff, and Faculty for The Department of Geography and Environment*:

Please familiarize yourself with this code:

Affiliation with the Department of Geography presumes mutual respect among students, staff, teaching assistants, and faculty. A positive atmosphere of professionalism and collegiality is essential for everyone to perform to the best of his or her abilities. This requires respect for the opinions and questions of others and behaviour that is, at all times, courteous, and conducive to creating a pleasant and productive environment for learning and working. As members of a Department of Geography, we are expected to show special respect for our environment, being individually responsible for promoting a clean and safe work environment within the facilities of the Department and the Social Science Centre, including classrooms, laboratories, offices, hallways, washrooms, exterior grounds, and the facilities and vehicles used in field courses and field trips. It is inevitable that misunderstandings will occur from time to time. However, it is in everyone's interest to try and resolve problems in a non-confrontational manner. Threatening, violent, or abusive behaviour, harassment (including sexual and racial harassment), rudeness (in person, in writing, or on the telephone), and abuse of authority, for whatever reasons, corrode good working and learning conditions. Incidents that cannot be resolved amicably may be reported to the Chair of the Department). The Chair will consider appropriate actions for resolving the problem, usually after consultation with the parties involved. If required, contact with university services (e.g., Police, Equity) or civil authorities will be invoked.

17.6. Student Use of University Facilities and Classroom Decorum*:

Please familiarize yourself with this code:

Students are expected to comply with the authority of University staff and faculty on all matters relating to access to facilities (offices, classrooms, laboratories, and Map Library) and to use of equipment and resources. Students are expected to attend all lectures and laboratory sessions regularly and punctually.

Instructors are responsible for maintaining an appropriate academic atmosphere in all class activities; students are expected to cooperate in this effort. Actions that impede instruction deter the ability of students to learn, or show disrespect for instructors and fellow students, will not be condoned in Geography classrooms and labs. Such actions include reading during lectures, disturbing consumption of food or drink, use of electronic devices, and disruptive conversation. Serious disrespect for classroom decorum should be reported to the instructor.

Students are expected to adhere to University standards of academic honesty, as outlined under "Scholastic Offences" in the Western Calendar. Unacceptable practices include cheating, impersonation, plagiarism, misrepresentation of research, falsification of documents, obstructing the academic activities of another, aiding or abetting academic misconduct, and abuse of confidentiality. In addition to incurring penalties, as outlined in the Calendar, some academic offences may fall under the Criminal Code of Canada.

18. Academic Offences

The statement: "Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf Additionally, A) If written work will be assigned in the course and plagiarism-checking software might be used, the following statement to this effect must be included in the course outline: "All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>)." B) If computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams will be given, and software might be used to check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating, the following statement must be added to course outlines: "Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating."

19. Western's Commitment to Accessibility

The Department of Geography and Environment strives at all times to provide accessibility to all faculty, staff, students and visitors in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities.

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519-661-2147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. [Information regarding accommodation of exams](#) is available on the Registrar's website.

More information about "[Accessibility at Western](#)" is available.

20. Mental Health

If you or someone you know is experiencing distress, there are several resources here at Western to assist you. Please visit Western's [Health and Wellness website](#) for more information on mental health resources.

21. Support Services

Academic Support and Engagement