

**GEOGRAPHY 4000b**  
**The Nature and Philosophy of Geography**

Winter 2013

**Instructor:** Dr. L. Graham Smith  
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**Meetings:** Fridays, 9:30-11:30 am SSC 2020

**Calendar Description:**

The discussion of geographical paradigms within an historical and social context. A central concern is the relationship between the academic and professional practice of geography.

**Prerequisite:** Fourth year status, and enrollment in a major or Honors Specialization in the Department of Geography

**Scope:**

Change is the dominant process in today's world: what makes geography and a geographical education relevant today and on into the future? Whereas there is no single answer to the question "what is geography?", it is essential that each geographer have an individual sense of clarity about the nature and philosophy of their discipline.

This course examines the nature and philosophy of geography. Discussions focus on geographical paradigms within an historical and social context. A central concern is the relationship between the academic and professional practice of geography in an era of globalization.

**Optional Texts:**

- Paul, R. And L. Elder (2006)  
*The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking.* Foundation for Critical Thinking: CA
- Weiner, E. (2008)  
*The Geography of Bliss.* Hachette: New York
- Postrel, V. (1998)  
*The Future and its Enemies: the Growing Conflict Over Creativity, Enterprise and Progress.* The Free Press: New York

## Topic Outline:

- Why geography? Introduction and overview
- Geography defined: what is your definition of geography?
- Mapping geography: seeing the discipline and your place in it
- Excellence in geographic research: how is it determined?
- Geography's traditional traditions: geography yesterday and today
- Science, knowledge and wisdom: paradigm shifts, ideology, epistemology, methodology and philosophy
- Physics or landscape? Process and form in physical geography
- Critical necessity or unnecessary criticism? the status of human geography
- Globalized sustainability or sustainable globalization? The status of environmental geography
- Self-reflection: geography as lifelong learning

## Structure and Evaluation:

The educational paradigm adopted in the course is that of inquiry-based learning which uses both problem-based and active learning methods. To facilitate these learning styles, the course adopts a highly interactive structure with a large component of small-group interaction and workshop exercises. Emphasis is placed upon the development of skills (e.g. oral and written presentations, awareness, problem-solving, dispute resolution, group interaction) as well as the specific content of the subject matter. The course structure is specifically intended to facilitate **independent learning**. Structured feedback is provided for each class session in response to two central issues:

- what did I learn today?
- what questions do I have?

Grading in the course is based on four components:

○ **Defining geography, 20%:**

What is the meaning of geography to you? Answer this question providing:

- your definition of geography
- a map of the discipline and your location in it, and
- a discussion of the leading edge of your field in 1000 words or less.

**Length: maximum of five pages typed**

**Due: January 25, 2013**

○ **Your network of geographic excellence, 20%:**

What criteria do you use to define the meaning of excellence in geographic research? Which single article/book/blog best illustrates excellence in geography to you? Why? Develop a referral network from your seminal work. What are the characteristics and dominant traits of your network?

**Length: maximum of five pages typed**

**Due: February 15, 2013**

○ **Self-reflection: geography as lifelong learning, 20%:**

Using the collated feedback sheets from each of the classes you have attended, discuss what you have learnt about your chosen discipline. The feedback sheets must accompany the paper as an appendix.

**Length: maximum of five pages typed**

**Due: April 8, 2013**

○ **Final Exam, 40%:**

- Held after the completion of the course, the final exam covers all materials introduced during the term.
- The exam structure focuses on creative thinking and critical awareness developed through the course.
- The exam is closed book. No aids are permitted.
- No electronic devices will be allowed during the examination.
- Provisionally scheduled **April 14-30, 2013**

**Caveats:**

- ❑ the professor reserves the right **not to grade** any material submitted after its due date without his prior approval.
- ❑ the course is specifically designed to provoke participants to question, assess and formulate their thinking, beliefs, ideology and/or philosophy: a premium is placed on the development of thought rather than a reliance upon pre-existing opinion. However, it is not a requirement of the course that students agree with or subscribe to the beliefs, ideology and/or philosophy of the professor.

**A statement on Academic Offences**

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/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf> Students in geography are expected to conduct themselves in a polite and civil manner. Students are reminded of the University Code of Conduct for Students:<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/board/code.pdf>

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> ).

**Support Services**

- Registrarial Services: <http://www3.registrar.uwo.ca/index.cfm>
- Student Development Services: <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>
- For UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and a downloadable SMC see:
  - [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)
  - Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC): <https://studentservices.uwo.ca> under the Medical Documentation heading

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department