

Geography of the United States
Geography 301.500
Spring 2025

TR 9:35-10:50
ILSB 1105

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OFFICE HOURS: Mondays, 3:00-4:00; Wednesdays, 9:00-10:00.



Geography begins with the observation that the surface of the earth is not uniform, but rather varies from place to place.

Geographers describe this variety as the ***shape*** of the land. When they speak of the shape of the land, they mean both its visible appearance—the buildings, fields, and forests that anyone can see—and its organization as a system of routes (e.g. roads), regions, and places (e.g. towns). Geographers refer to the visible appearance of the land as a ***landscape***.

Geographers are interested not only in the shape of the land, but also in the ***shaping*** of land by various processes. They therefore seek to understand the processes that produce landscapes and spatial systems. These processes may be natural, economic, cultural, political, or demographic. Most landscapes and spatial systems are produced by several interacting processes.

Because geographers are concerned with shaping processes, they study ***geographic change***. The landscapes and spatial systems that you and I inhabit developed out of



earlier landscapes and spatial systems, and they are developing into landscapes and spatial systems quite different from those we know today. To understand geographic change and development, geographers study the landscapes and spatial systems of the past. These studies are called ***historical geography***.

In this course we will study the shape and shaping of the geography of the United States. I will describe the landscapes of its major sub-regions (e.g. New England, the Lowland South, the Great Plains) and explain how they were produced by natural and human processes. Our aim is to understand the geography of the contemporary United States, but to do this we will investigate the origins of present patterns in historical geography.

Students who complete this course will not only have a better understanding of where things are, but also of why they are where they are and how the United States came to be put together in the way that it is. They will be able to *explain the map* of the country, not just find places on it.

Learning Objectives

- 1) Students will be able to identify the significant geographic features and patterns of the United States, as indicated on a variety of contemporary and historic maps.



- 2) Students will be able to explain the consequences of these features and patterns in terms of economic, cultural, and political processes.
- 3) Students will be able to interpret the cultural significance of selected landscapes and landscape representations.
- 4) Students will be able to delineate the culture regions of the United States and describe their origin and character.

Course Design

This is a lecture course. Sixteen of the lectures cover major regions of the United States. Nine additional lectures treat various topics in the geography of the US, such as the sites and situations of major cities; the geographic causes, conduct, and consequences of the Civil War; geopolitics; national identity; and future geographies. Lecture titles are given in the schedule below.

The lectures will necessarily describe the locations of many geographical features, such as cities, rivers, and mountain ranges, and you are expected to have a reasonably good grasp of the locations of major features by the end of the course (beginning the course with this knowledge is an advantage, but not a requirement). Every lecture will, however, go beyond mere location to *explain* the historical origins or present significance of these features. You will also master this interpretive material.

Required Material

Maps and other material will be provided on Canvas
Ten 3X5 index cards.

Evaluation and Grades

Your final grade will be based on three examinations, ten quizzes and three Core Curriculum Assignments (CCA's). It will be calculated as follows:

Exams:	3 at 25%	=75%
Quizzes:	10 at 2.5%	=25%
CCA's	2 bonus pts. each	= 6 pts. max.

The quizzes will not be announced beforehand. Each quiz will cover material from the previous lecture. Each quiz will be worth ten points and will consist of a multiple choice question worth two points and three true-false choice questions worth one point each. You will be awarded five points simply for submitting a quiz, regardless of your answers.

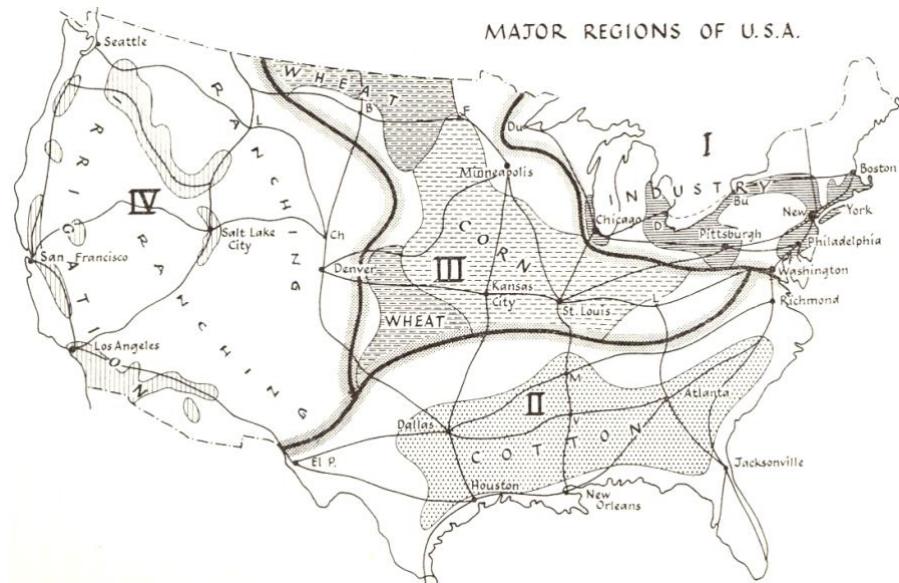
Core Curriculum Assessments

This course satisfies several core-curriculum requirements and therefore requires some special assessment. You should complete all three Core Curriculum Assignments (CCA), even if you are not using the course to satisfy a core-curriculum requirement. As stated above, each satisfactory CCA will be awarded two CCA points, and these will be added to your raw average.

(CCA1) To enhance your ability to live and work in a global society, you will write a 4 to 5 page paper that places the history of your family in its historical-geographical context. You will gain new respect for your ancestors and a new understanding of the similarities between their struggles and your own. **Due March 20 before 10:00 p.m. (4 points maximum)**

(CCA2) To enhance your appreciation of cultural diversity, you will produce a PowerPoint presentation (3 to 5 slides) that describes an American cultural region. This may be as small as a neighborhood or as large as a multi-state region, but should emphasize processes of contemporary change. **Due April 10 before 10:00 p.m.** (2 points maximum).

(3) To enhance your appreciation of different points of view, you will devise a counterfactual geography of the United States, and then record a podcast of a mock news story from that alternative America. **Due April 24 before 10:00 p.m.** (2 points maximum)



Course Schedule

Week 1

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| T 1/14 | Introduction to the course and regional geography |
| R 1/16 | TOPICAL LECTURE 1: Site, Situation, and the Development of New York City |

Week 2

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| T 1/21 | REGION 1: New England |
| R 1/23 | REGION 2: New York State |

Week 3

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| T 1/28 | REGION 3: Great Lakes |
| R 1/30 | TOPICAL LECTURE 2: American Settlement Types |

Week 4

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| T 2/4 | REGION 4: Middle Atlantic and Manufacturing Core |
| R 2/6 | REGION 5: Midwest (video to be viewed remotely) |

Week 5

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| T 2/11 | TOPICAL LECTURE 3: Washington D.C. as a Symbolic Landscape |
| R 2/13 | EXAM 1 |

Week 6

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| T 2/18 | REGION 6: Coastal South |
| R 2/20 | REGION 7: Upland South |

Week 7		
T 2/25	REGION 8: The Gulf Coast	
R 2/27	TOPICAL LECTURE 4: Geographic Causes, Conduct, and Consequences of the Civil War	
Week 8		
T 3/4	REGION 9: Florida	
R 3/6	REGION 10: Texas	
Week 9		
T 3/11	SPRING BREAK	
R 3/13	SPRING BREAK	
Week 10		
T 3/18	REGION 11: Great Plains	
R 3/20	REGION 12: Rocky Mountains CCA1 is Due	
Week 11		
T 3/25	REGION 13: Great Basin	
R 3/27	EXAM 2	
Week 12		
T 4/1	TOPICAL LECTURE 5: American Culture? American Cultures?	
R 4/3	REGION 14: Southwest	
Week 13		
T 4/8	TOPICAL LECTURE 6: Some Counterfactual Geographies of the United States	
R 4/10	REGION 15: Pacific Northwest CCA 2 is due	
Week 14		
T 4/15	REGION 16: California	
R 4/17	TOPICAL LECTURE 7: Los Angles	
Week 15		
T 4/22	TOPICAL LECTURE 8: The United States and the World	
R 4/24	TBA CCA3 is due	

R 5/1 **Third Exam** 12:30-2:30 p.m.

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Classroom Conduct

Students are not allowed to read extraneous material in class, or to use electronic devices such as cell phones, gaming devices, or MP3 players. This ban includes sending and receiving text messages. Violators will be asked to leave the classroom. Laptop computers may be used for note taking only.

Aggie Honor Code

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

Disability Accommodations

If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact Disability Resources in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

Legal Statement

This course will be conducted in compliance with all applicable federal and state laws, including but not limited to The Americans with Disabilities Act. 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 Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities in Room B118 of Cain Hall. The phone number is 845-1637.

Copyright Statement

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