

Department of  
Geography  
Undergraduate  
Program  
Assessment Report  
2006

# 1. Assessment Overview

## **SCHOOL/COLLEGE**

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### **SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY**

#### **Program Overview and Description**

Purpose: to provide a context for the assessment materials contained in this binder through a brief description of the program.

Name: Geography

Level: Undergraduate and Graduate

Degrees: BA/MA/PhD

Majors: Geography

Minors: Geography

Catalog Description: Geography offers a unique approach to understanding the world by studying people, environments, and problems. Diverse coursework is offered in the social and natural sciences, mapping, and geographic data analysis. Many geography students combine majors with other multidisciplinary studies, including environmental management, urban and regional development, resource conflict, and international affairs.

#### **MAJOR REQUIREMENTS**

The Geography major consists of 33 credit hours (11 courses) of coursework, 21 of which must be at the upper division (i.e., 300-level or above). All students take three introductory survey courses. Students also are required to take at least one “techniques” class. All majors are also required to take GEO 491, Senior Seminar.

Majors are encouraged to concentrate the remainder of their credits in one of the following topical specializations: (1) Environmental Systems and Landscape Dynamics; (2) Nature, Society, Sustainability; (3) Globalization, Development, and Citizenship; (4) Culture, Justice and Urban Space; or (5) Geographic Information Science; Analysis, Modeling and Applications. These topical specializations provide students in depth training in a particular sub-field of the discipline. In some cases, students may choose to combine areas of specialization to suit their particular academic or career interests.

#### **MINOR REQUIREMENTS**

To complete a minor in geography, students must complete 18 credits of geography courses, 12 of which must be upper-division (i.e., at the 300-level or above). There are no specifically required courses.

The Syracuse University Department of Geography is an integral component of the Maxwell School and of the College of Arts and Sciences. Interdisciplinary work has always been a particular strength. Specifically, in addition to our expertise in cultural, economic, environmental, historical, physical, and urban geography, an in geographic information and analysis, we maintain active links to several Maxwell programs, including the Center for Environmental Policy and Administration and the Global Affairs Institute. Strong links also exist with earth sciences, civil and environmental engineering, the School of Architecture, and with the SUNY School of Environmental Science and Forestry. Finally, the department has long valued investigating geographical processes in a wide array of regions, places, and landscapes. Recent graduate students have conducted field research in the Caribbean, Latin America, and Europe, as well as in the U.S. and Canada.

The prospective student will find opportunities to develop an array of research skills and to study and conduct research with the faculty in the following specializations:

**Geographic Information Systems and Spatial Analysis:**

*Cartography* design and use of maps, including cartographic multimedia; the history of cartography in the 19th and 20th centuries.

*Geographic Information Technologies* applications and methods in geographic information systems, remote sensing, computer cartography, multimedia, geographic information, society, and public policy.

*Spatial Analysis* Visualization of geographic distributions; spatial statistics; statistical graphics.

**Human Geography:**

*Globalization and Urban Change* place commodification and tourism; housing; home and homelessness; public space; transformations in gender identities and relations; comparative urbanization; local-scale community assessment.

*Historical Geographies* historical methods; geographical history; historiography; urban history; labor history; working-class landscapes; colonialism in Africa and in Latin America; environmental and Western (U.S.) history.

*Political and Economic Restructuring* labor market policy and labor issues; industrial spaces and places; service industries; geography of institutions; political economy of development.

*Social and Cultural Theory* political economy of culture; Marxism; poststructuralism; feminism; interdisciplinary theories of space and place.

## **Environment and Society:**

*Environmental Ideologies and Politics* environmental conflict; environmental monitoring; environmental issues in mass communications.

*Human Dimensions of Global Change* land-use and land-cover change; population and resources.

*Political and Cultural Ecology* disease ecology; food systems; environmental social movements.

*Sustainable Development* resource use and conservation; NGOs and local development.

## **Physical Geography and Environmental Science:**

*Plant Biogeography* geomorphic biogeography; disturbance ecology; tropical biogeography.

*Geomorphology* fluvial systems; vegetation-geomorphic interactions; Quaternary and periglacial environments; topoclimate.

Within the framework of the principal clusters, students pursue individually designed programs, assisted by their advisory committee. The goal is to maintain and enhance an open intellectual environment with continuous interaction between graduate students and departmental faculty. In support of this, distinguished scholars and professionals are regularly brought to Syracuse for seminars, lectures, and symposia.

The department also participates in a variety of interdisciplinary programs in the Maxwell School and maintains strong links with other parts of the campus, including the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Normally the department has about 30 resident graduate students.

Each student has an advisory committee, consisting of the principal advisor and one or more faculty members. The committee advises the student and regularly evaluates progress toward the M.A. or Ph.D. degree.

## **M.A. DEGREE**

The M.A. program in geography gives the student a perspective on the nature of contemporary trends in geography, develops research skills, and provides a beginning to advanced training in three special subfields of the discipline.

The program consists of 30 graduate credits, at least half of which must be at the 600 level or above. The students may write a master's thesis (three to six credits) or two master's papers or take a comprehensive examination. The choice must be made by the end of the first year.

The M.A. program assumes a basic foundation in geography, including work in human, environmental, and physical geography, as well as in cartography and relevant methods. Students without such a background must do extra work, such as attending courses, auditing, or reading.

The student's advisor and committee approve the topic for and supervise the writing of the master's thesis, which must be completed by the end of the second year. Students electing to write two master's papers instead of a thesis must have each paper approved by two members of the geography faculty.

## **PH.D. DEGREE**

Students entering the Ph.D. program with master's degrees from other universities are expected to have or acquire qualifications equivalent to those normally achieved by a Syracuse M.A. in geography. The student must maintain a 3.0 grade average.

**Coursework** The Ph.D. degree requires a total of 72 credits of approved graduate work in geography and related fields. The 72 credits include credits accepted for the master's degree, and as much as 12 credits in dissertation research. At least 24 credits of coursework must be taken in residence at Syracuse. At least two-thirds of the coursework (not including the dissertation) must be at the 600 level or above. All doctoral programs in geography are research-oriented.

**Areas of Competence** Toward the end of the program, a Ph.D. student must demonstrate, through a written and oral qualifying examination, special competence in three topical fields. Each doctoral student must provide evidence of competence in those research skills to be used in the dissertation as outlined in the formal proposal.

**Dissertation** A formal dissertation proposal must be submitted and approved before the Ph.D. qualifying examination is taken. The dissertation itself should be an original scholarly contribution to the field and may be highly varied in methodology, topic, and style of presentation. It must be defended orally.

**Qualifying Examination** Before taking the qualifying exam a student must have completed all requirements except the dissertation itself. The exam has both written and oral parts covering the specific subfields identified by the student in consultation with the advisor.

## **Department of Geography Assessment Committees**

The Undergraduate Assessment Committee is the same as our Undergraduate Committee. It consists of:

- The Undergraduate Director (3 year term, currently Professor Tom Perreault)
- Two other faculty members (rotating yearly, currently none as it is summer and faculty are off contract)
- Department Chair (ex officio; currently Professor Don Mitchell)

The Graduate Assessment Committee is the same as our Graduate Committee. It consists of:

- The Graduate Director (3 year term, currently Professor Jacob Bendix)
- Two other faculty members (rotating yearly, currently none as it is summer and faculty are all off contract)
- Department Chair (ex officio; currently Professor Don Mitchell)

## 2. Student Learning Outcomes

### **Department of Geography Undergraduate Learning Outcomes**

Specific Program and Course Outcomes are Listed in Attached Document.

These Outcomes have been developed at the Program level only

- We do not know how they map onto College/School outcomes because we have never been informed what these are
- We do not know how these map to Institutional Outcomes because we have never been informed what they are.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT IN GEOGRAPHY

Specific objectives are detailed and assessed for each course within individual courses. The assessment mechanism is therefore determined by the nature of the material, the instructor, and the level of course. See individual course objectives listed as Appendix 1. The objectives outlined for each course are directed to address one or more of the general program objectives that are listed below. A table is provided in Appendix 2 to illustrate what objectives each individual course seeks to address.

The breadth and depth of knowledge, and range of skills that students are expected to attain are predicated on the type of geography course taken and their own overall goals. In other words, the degree to which they will attain the program objectives differs according to whether the student is taking one introductory course for Arts and Sciences credit, whether they are pursuing a Minor in Geography or whether they are pursuing a Major in Geography. This document is organized so that the primary overall objectives of the Geography Program at Syracuse are presented. The goals for each constituency (general education, minor or major) are then articulated in light of the overall program objectives. The nature of assessing the degree of achievement of the objectives is discussed under each constituency.

### Overall program objectives

#### A. General skills and ability

1. Ability to critically read and understanding scholarly literature
2. Computer literacy
3. Library skills
4. Multiple perspectives
5. Research Skills
6. Oral presentation skills

#### B. Specific to Geography

7. Knowledge of the natural environment, the cultural environment and how they interact
8. A regional perspective
9. Technical skills for spatial data
10. Ability to represent geographic information in a graphical or visual form
11. Sense of geography as a discipline of learning

#### A. General Skills and Ability

It is assumed that the student is proficient at writing and with quantitative skills. These skills are not explicitly addressed in the geography student's learning objectives; however, it is assumed that the student is already competent in them. Geography courses will enhance these skills, help will be provided as needed, however, if students fail to demonstrate a firm grasp of these skills they will be directed to the appropriate department for remedial instruction.

##### *1. Ability to critically read and understand scholarly literature*

A key aspect of a university education is to create an independence of thought in the individual. The student must learn how to dissect scholarly, and not-so scholarly writings and to interpret the results that are presented. A common element in all geography courses is the presentation of information not just as facts, but as contested knowledge. The debates and varying perspectives on issues are clearly articulated so that students become more aware of the history of development of our current knowledge base. Awareness of the struggle inherent in the development of knowledge is usually made clear at the introductory level. Students are assessed explicitly for their understanding of the arguments that have or are currently taking place within each sub-discipline of geography at the upper division level. This is often the focus of their research papers in these classes and therefore an explicitly assessed learning objective.

##### *2. Computer Literacy*

A student must at least be competent to use common word-processing and spreadsheet software. In geography there is an opportunity for more advanced computer expertise in the form of web development (Geo 595), computer cartography (Geo 383), statistical analysis software (geo 386), spatial analytic software (geo 383), presentation software such as powerpoint, and other graphics software (geo



383, geo 326). Excepting the “techniques” courses discussed below (objective #9), this ability is not directly assessed in most courses. Students are required to provide word-processed final papers that incorporate scanned or computer-drafted maps and images. This exercise requires that students have at least competency with computers.

Specific upper division courses also address some of the societal impacts of computer use and literacy (and indeed, illiteracy). This is not a fundamental objective for geography students, but it does offer alternative perspectives on the use of technology in the global environment.

### ***3. Library Skills***

An undergraduate must be able to research information, regardless of its nature. In all upper division geography courses a major aspect of student assessment is the ability of the student to find relevant literature, data and other information from library resources. This could include all possible formats including books and journals, government documents, microform, microfiche, maps, video and computer media. To fulfil the course requirements these skills will have to be well-demonstrated.

### ***4. Multiple Perspectives***

As in all academic disciplines geography has a history of development in terms of its association with, and emphasis on, particular paradigmatic approaches to understanding. A student in introductory courses will gain an elementary appreciation of these diverse perspectives; however, at the upper-division level, courses emphasize the theoretical constructs and philosophical underpinnings of the knowledge that is gained in their respective systematic area. This objective overlaps somewhat with critical thinking skills.

A second aspect of the multiple perspective objective is the knowledge of different cultural and environmental settings, and their role in the human condition. This objective overlaps with the several of those specific to geography including the relationship between humans and their environment and a regional knowledge base. An understanding of this aspect of multiple perspectives is gained at the elementary level in introductory courses, and more fully in the upper division courses. Assessment is appropriate to the individual course, but a Geography Major is required to take at least one course on the natural environment and one course on the cultural environment.

### ***5. Research Skills***

A student must be able to collect, analyze and interpret information. This is applicable to all university graduates, and in the context of geography can involve information of multiple types. The student will learn how to frame a problem or issue, and apply the appropriate methodology to develop results that can be properly interpreted. This differs from the more fundamental “library skills” objective above which focuses simply on retrieval of information. A very rudimentary awareness of research skills is gained in introductory courses, is either explicit or implicit in upper division courses, but for the geography major it is the main theme of the capstone seminar (Geo 491).

### ***6. Oral Presentation skills***

All students should be prepared to present information orally to an audience. The students should be able to synthesize their research and distil out the most salient points to structure a short presentation that should be comprehensible to the audience. The style of presentation is dependent on the course and course content. The presentation may be a specific research topic, it may be weighing up of evidence, it may be a position piece or advocacy statement. Most upper division courses in geography assess the ability of students to present research material in an oral form. The capstone seminar in geography (geo 491) explicitly addresses and assesses presentation skills.

## **B. Specific to Geography**

### ***7. Knowledge of the natural environment, the cultural environment, and how they interact***

This objective is at the heart of the substantive knowledge of the discipline of geography, and is therefore an area of learning exclusive to geography courses and students. At the introductory level, the degree to which each of the sub-areas -- the natural environment, the cultural environment, or their interaction -- are stressed, depends on the courses a student takes. Regardless, each knowledge base is placed in the context of a larger global system, and all our courses emphasize this. At the major and minor level, the breadth of course work extends the knowledge base in these 3 sub-areas to allow for

students to examine interactions within and between them. In introductory courses assessment of the knowledge is primarily in the form of exams. In upper division courses, the level to which the knowledge is understood and integrated is assessed in research and term papers, and essay exams.

### ***8. A regional perspective***

To examine particular issues, whether cultural, social, physical, political or economic, geographers often discuss them in terms of the region. The region serves as a tool to classify or structure knowledge to make easier observations of the internal differences and contradictions in the phenomena being studied, and their interaction outside the region. This is a key conceptual framework particular to the discipline of geography. An elementary understanding of the notion of region is introduced in all lower division courses. It is intrinsic to the upper division courses although implicitly rather than explicitly articulated in some. At the rudimentary level, "regional perspective" courses are offered that focus on a particular cultural or physical region. At least one course in this area is required by all majors. Geography minors are more than likely to take a "regional" course, but even if they do not, the concept of the region is a strong theme in all geography courses. The assessment mechanisms are primarily exam based in introductory level courses, and research and term paper-oriented in upper division courses.

### ***9. Technical skills for spatial data***

As a well-trained scientist or social scientist, it is crucial that the geography student have the ability to analyse information of a geographic nature, that is information that is distributed across space (and time). Such skills include the production of high quality maps to represent data, geographic information science to analyze layers of spatial data, quantitative skills to manipulate and analyze spatial and temporal data statistically. These skills may be introduced at the introductory level (geo 155 for example), but are not normally introduced until the upper division level. A geography minor may not be exposed to these technical skills either; however, it is a requirement of all geography majors who must take at least one course in a geographic technique. The assessment tools in these courses are generally the production of a cartographic and/or graphical output embedded within a research paper discussing the methods employed, followed by interpretation of the information.

### ***10. Ability to represent geographic information in a graphical or visual form***

Although similar to the technical skills requirement, it is expected that all geography majors have the ability to present their data or research in some graphical or visual form. Unlike most other disciplines geography is conceptually and spatially oriented, whereby the visual patterns and distributions provide much of the interpretative strength of a geographic argument. As a geographer, the students should be able to present their information to utilize this asset of geographical examination. Many courses provide an opportunity for students to develop this skill primarily in the form of the requirement of integrating maps, charts and conceptual diagrams in term papers in most upper division courses.

### ***11. Sense of geography as a discipline of learning***

Geography has a unique history in terms of its growth as a discipline. It is expected that students should elicit some degree of an awareness of this fact in all introductory level courses: so that they can at least answer the question as to why a study is geographic. At the upper division level, all courses contextualize knowledge within the discipline of geography, discussing key researchers and key philosophical underpinnings in the specific topic area. All geography majors are required to take a course called "Geographical Perspectives" (Geo 301) that focuses on the history and development of geographic thought. This course is designed to integrate much diverse knowledge that students should already have from other upper division courses. This "formal" approach is not required of geography minors, but it is expected that they will absorb much of it within the 4 upper division courses that they must take. The assessment of this objective is primarily within Geo 301 in the form of exams and a research paper. No other courses explicitly assess students knowledge of the discipline as a whole, although they may assess a small component of it.

### **Learning Expectations of the Three Constituencies**

Our expectations for each constituency group vary. The role that geography plays in the intellectual development of students changes according to the level of involvement of the student. Each group, student expectations, learning objectives, and assessment tools are presented below.

### *Introductory, General Education Courses*

At the introductory level most students are simply completing requirements for the general education core curriculum. For many students it may be the first, and only geography course they ever take. A key objective is therefore for students to understand the relevance of geography and the strengths of a geographic approach to examining the world, regardless of the subject. Key geographic concepts such as the region, interactions between places and between regions, scale relationships, spatial patterns and variability are introduced in all lower division courses. Grasp of these concepts is assessed at the individual course level in the form of exams, short papers, and projects. The expectation is that all introductory students will therefore attain objectives 4,7,8 and 11 at an elementary level. The introductory courses therefore offer non-geography students a critical understanding of differences that exist in cultural and physical environments, and the implications of these differences to global society as a whole.

### *Geography Minor*

The geography minor is intentionally a very flexible mechanism for students to benefit from the diversity of geography. The requirements are 18 credits, 12 of which must be upper division. It is therefore likely that a student will not experience the full extent of the subject matter in geography, but will definitely be exposed to the most central themes of the discipline, such as the concept of a region, multiple perspectives of cultural and/or environmental settings and approaches to knowledge; and to a minor degree, will get a sense of geography as a discipline. In upper division courses, the emphasis is on papers as a mode of assessment, therefore the student will develop their library skills, writing, critical thinking and synthesis, and presentation skills. The specific objectives that the minor is expected to attain are 1,3,4,8, and 11.

### *Geography Major*

The geography major is expected to successfully develop all the objectives. The extent to which goals are realized depends on the student's own choice of specific courses and emphasis. Within the major, the student can focus on particular topic areas – general, local worlds, global worlds, environmental, or information. However, there are 6 requirements within the major that ensure that ALL students graduating with a degree in geography achieve the 11 objectives. At the introductory level all majors must take Geo 105 and Geo 155. These two courses present the end points of the subject matter of cultural and physical environments.

At the upper division level, students are required to take Geo 301, which traces the discipline's roots and key philosophical underpinnings, and how they have changed over time. In the senior year, all majors are required to take Geo 491, the capstone seminar, which emphasizes research methods, library searches, critical thinking and reading, synthesizing the geographic knowledge the student has gained throughout their four years as a geography major, preparing a large research paper, and presenting their work in an oral form.

Further, all geography majors must take a course that is identified as a “regional perspective”, ensuring that they have knowledge of places and/or cultures beyond their immediate horizon, and that they understand “the region” as a concept involving the integration of the many aspects of the subject matter of geography. All majors must also take a “techniques” course, which equips them with the tools to analyze and present spatial data.

Assessment of objectives is primarily at the course level for majors, as they are for the other constituencies. In addition, the geography department conducts an annual survey of graduating seniors that asks the students to respond to various questions that have been designed to determine the extent to which the learning objectives have been achieved.

### *Implementation of Assessment*

1. All instructors are being asked to develop a set of course-specific objectives that address one or more of the key objectives laid out in this document. Assessment tools in each course will be modified to incorporate a mechanism to assess those objectives in the form of questions on tests, or a short paper (depending on the level of the course, and the nature of the assessment mechanisms already in place).
2. This information will be collated to determine how well the geography minor and geography major programs are currently designed. Modifications may be instituted if it is apparent that the faculty's collective objectives for a “geography degree” are not being met.

3. At the introductory level, course offerings may be modified or streamlined so that the collective objectives can be more explicitly addressed and assessed. At the introductory level there is overlap in some topic areas, and a lack of coverage in others. We will discuss potential changes that might remedy this situation.
4. The current version of the “exit survey” for graduating senior geography students will be slightly modified to incorporate questions that are more explicitly directed at the assessment of learning objectives.
5. The Geography department has historically tried to keep track of alumni. The effort to do so will be heightened in the future as a tool to assess the success of the program in enabling the students to attain their personal objectives.

## APPENDIX I

List of all geography courses and their specific learning objectives. **This will need to be provided by individual faculty members.**

## 103 – Population and Environment

- Students will gain an understanding of the diverse ways in which population, resources and environment interact over space and time; will learn to think critically about concepts frequently used to describe these interactions, such as ‘scarcity’, ‘growth’ and ‘natural limits;’ and will be encouraged to see resources as dynamic, cultural appraisals.
- Students will become familiar with - and will be able to apply - a range of theoretical arguments commonly used to explain environmental change, particularly those that root environmental impacts in a combination of population, affluence/consumption, and technology (the so-called ‘IPAT’ equation); students will become familiar with the arguments put forward by Malthus and modern-day Malthusians, and will be able to offer challenges and critiques of these arguments.
- Students will gain an understanding of the geographical distribution and demographic structure of population, the interaction of birth and death rates in different parts of the world, and the range of approaches that societies have taken to manage ‘the problem of population.’
- Students will be introduced to a range of data sources used by geographers to describe population and environment interactions; and will be able to interpret and comment on data, graphs and maps illustrating these interactions.

## 105 – World Geography

## 155 – The Natural Environment

- Students should learn an awareness of the natural environment around them, how several complex physical systems (atmosphere, cryosphere, lithosphere and biosphere) are inextricably linked, and how basic physical laws can aid in our understanding of the natural environment.
- Physical geographers generally use the scientific method to address problems; therefore students will be exposed to how this mode of investigation is applied to questions about the environment.
- One third of the course will be conducted as small group discussion sections, which will allow for application of concepts and techniques discussed briefly in lecture. These sessions will introduce students to elementary physical, mathematical and statistical applications that are commonly used by physical geographers.

## 172 – World Cultures

- Students will understand that different places have different cultures and that culture is always contested.
- Students will understand the way local and global connections structure social and cultural life in particular places.
- Students will learn to analyze the geographical relations between people, politics, technology, economics, etc. at different scales.
- Students will learn key analytical concepts and themes of human and cultural geography.
- Students will understand the formation, career, demise, reunion, and complete discography of the Sex Pistols.

## 173 – World Political Economy

- Students should develop an understanding of the way that globalization processes are creating forms of interdependence and inequality in different places, spaces and across different scales of analysis.
- Students are presented with contemporary case studies to critically assess the relevance and reality of various theoretical approaches to the problem of economic, social and spatial inequality.
- In order to develop written and interpretative skills students are required to write two short essay questions and develop a longer research paper that engages with a theoretical debate explored during the lectures. The course also introduces problem case studies that are analysed and assessed in small discussion groups.

### 203 – Environmental Pollution and Policy

- Students should gain a basic appreciation of environmental resource use and the elements of environmental policy. This includes a critical awareness of the social aspects of environment, such as environmental justice, agroecosystems, water pollution, and energy use. The course looks at the intersection of society and environment, with a focus on environmental policy as a site of political and social contestation. As such, we will focus not only on the legal and administrative aspects of policy (though these are in many cases quite important to class discussion), but on the social, political, and economic aspects of resource use, pollution, and environmental management. The course focuses primarily on the U.S., but draws on examples from around the world.
- Through lecture, reading materials, and discussions, the course aims to introduce students to critical environmental geography. As such, students are encouraged (both implicitly, through the course's approach, and explicitly, through discussion material and exam questions) to link course material to broader geographical concepts (such as place, space, and scale) covered at the beginning of the semester.
- Students should enhance critical thinking skills through writing assignments and discussions during lecture and discussion sections. Students are evaluated not based on whether they produced a "correct" answer, but rather on how well they understand complex concepts, formulate an argument, and communicate a set of ideas.

### 219 – American Diversity and Unity (Honors only)

- Students encounter the complexity and liveliness of immigration to what has become the USA. They gain a general understanding of how the Social Science disciplines (including History) approach these matters -- i.e., they encounter multiple perspectives --but with a particular appreciation of the *geographical* perspective.
- The class is *discussion-intensive*, a seminar of between 10 and 15 students only. Skills of assimilating assigned readings, and then coming to class to orally present and debate, are of the essence.
- The class is *writing-intensive*, consisting of one short written assignment, two written exams, and, most important, a 20-page-minimum research paper. (The course officially has writing-intensive status as per CAS/Honors Program guidelines.)
- The class is *fieldwork-intensive*. Going out into the city, talking with residents, taking photos, such are integral to completing the research paper assignment. (The course begins with a two-to-three-hour walking field trip from campus on a weekend morning.)
- The course also expects library research skills. Archival evidence, old maps, censuses, newspaper records, are recommended, as is using the Onondaga Historical Society.

### 301 – Geographical Perspectives

- The course provides a common foundation for Geography Majors

- Undergraduate majors will learn the history and development of geography as a discipline.
- Majors will understand how geographers have approached questions of human and physical environments and their interactions, and how to interpret these at different scales and in different locations/
- Majors will be introduced to elementary research methods and design and learn to put them into practice.
- Majors will engage in basic critical reading and discussion of key geographical texts and concepts.

302 – World of Food and Famine

303 – The Geography of Wine

305 – Population Change

311 – The “New” North Americas

- By focusing on the ways that globalization processes create new forms of interconnectedness and inequality, students in the course should develop an understanding of the changing geography of the North American region, that is, Canada, the United States of America, Mexico and the Caribbean.
- Students study the current debates around globalization and then are presented with case studies that reflect the impact of these processes at different scales and in different regions. They are expected to develop an understanding of the micro consequences of macro-level processes and vice versa, and their manifestation in the form spatial inequalities.
- Through the analysis of case studies and in the development of individual and group projects, students should develop their library skills, writing, critical thinking and synthesis, group work and presentation skills.

313 – The United States

315 – Global Environmental Change

- Develop an understanding of i) basic earth system processes and the mechanisms that lead to environmental change, and ii) the human impact on earth systems, its effects on the global environment, and the ways in which these changes in turn affect humans.
- Scientific writing skills
- Evaluation: library resources, web resources, written topic papers, oral presentation, written term paper.

316 – River Environments The range of natural processes that effect the form and behavior of rivers, including hydroclimatology, watershed hydrology, channel and floodplain processes, and their geomorphic role in shaping the landscape

The ways in which river systems respond to climatological and land-use change.  
The complex and unique ecological characteristics of riparian environments.

The impacts and policy complexities of direct human alteration of river systems (e.g. dam construction and reservoir management).

Understanding both of the state of knowledge about these topics, and of remaining uncertainties and theoretical debates.

Ability to acquire data from topographic maps and government agencies, and to quantitatively analyze, graph and interpret those data.

## 321 – Latin American Spatial Development

- Students should learn of the relationships between the natural and manmade landscapes of the region, together with the modifications to both of them since the pre-Historic period.
- The process of “development” is both complex and hotly debated and students should learn of the origins and phases of its varied interpretation.
- The spatial distribution and interrelationship of resources and technology has produced complex patterns of development at the macro and microlevel and students should be able to describe and explain the same.
- Students should be able to discern the different views on development –from ethnic, gender, political, social, economic, perspective, and the many agencies and institutions involved in bringing it about or hindering its progress

## 323 – Latino USA

- Students should learn of the diversity in the population described as “Latino” (and the several alternative terms)
- The regional and micro-regional (barrio) social formations of Latinos need to be clearly understood, especially as they have changed over the last 50 years in the USA
- The cultural richness of Latinos (language, music, literature, etc) in the USA is to be understood as a combination of each groups’ *patria* origins, combined with the assimilation effects of living in the USA.
- The local Syracuse Latino community is assessed as a case study of many of the problems confronting Latinos more generally

## 325 – Colonialism in Latin America

- Students should learn of the origins and development of the colonial systems of Spain and Portugal in the New World.
- The differentiated but interrelated urban and rural components need to be analyzed.
- The impact of colonialism on the indigenous population and varied cultures needs to be thoroughly understood, as well as the relevance of the “Columbian exchange.”
- Students have to learn of the complexities of regional formations that emerge during the colonial period, as well as the revolutionary movements that provoked the end of colonial rule.

## 326 – Geography of Climate and Weather

- Physical science basis of atmospheric processes (this will include the use of mathematical formulae to describe processes and concepts).
- Case studies of particular regional meteorological and climatological events, e.g., tropical cyclones, Monsoon circulation, El Niño-Southern Oscillation, and their role in the global atmospheric system.
- Basic use of Powerpoint and Excel to present climatological data, and student’s research.
- Basic statistical analysis with application to climatological data
- Library and database research
- Use of scientific method for problem development

## 331 – The European Union

- Students should know about the processes underlying European and European Union development and understand contemporary issues confronting the EU. They should also develop an understanding of the EU’s relationship with the global economy and the policies of other nations such as the United States.
- Students are expected when writing essays and discussion pieces to write both effectively and be able to synthesize material from different sources. For their discussions students are also expected to develop the skills and confidence to present their views effectively.



## 336 – Africa, Problems and Prospects

## 356 – Environmental Ideas and Policy

- students will become familiar with a range of distinct environmental issues; will be able to compare and contrast these issues by reference to several different parameters (such as geographical scale, historical trajectory, rate of change, and susceptibility to existing policy solutions); and will have an understanding of the geographies of economic activity that produce these environmental issues.
- students will be able to differentiate between a range of theoretical explanations of environmental problems (culture, economy, bureaucracy, patriarchy, racism/injustice); will be able to identify how the process of defining 'environmental problems' produces particular solutions; and will become familiar with the ideas and work of key figures in U.S. environmentalism.
- students will be able to analyze and critically interpret a range of tabular and graphical data relating to environmental issues and the success or failure of environmental policies.

## 361 – Global Economic Geography

- Students are expected to know and understand issues involving the historic, economic, political and social dimensions of globalization.
- Case studies of different industries undergoing globalization are compared and contrasted.
- Students are expected to understand different paradigms of explanation of globalization based on economic geography and social science perspectives.
- Students are expected to develop critical thinking skills. They prepare and present short discussion pieces and also write a longer essay which involves the development of writing skills and the synthesis of a range of material.

## 362 – Cities of Europe

- Students will gain an understanding of the historical and geographical underpinnings of European cities. They will appreciate the interlinking of political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors.
- They will gain a sense of regional variation within Europe, between for example Venice or Rome as compared with St. Petersburg or Moscow. But comparison, not an idiographic one-by-one description, is of the essence. What is common here, and why so?
- To be comparative means one has to observe in an analytical fashion. Students will appreciate how to perceptively analyze the city -- for example, the similar social will behind British "New Towns" and Soviet "Mikrorayons" in the 1950s through 1970s.

## 363 – Cities of North America

- Students will understand the spatial and social structure of North American cities.
- Students will understand the historical, economic, political, and legal processes shaping growth, changes, and development of North American cities.
- Students will learn the major themes of urban geography as a discipline.
- Students will understand the application of major theories of urban processes to specific case studies.
- Students will learn multiple perspectives (race, class, gender, sexuality) on the city and understand how these affect inequality, power, and politics.
- Students will develop critical reading, library, and research skills and engage in independent research.

## 372 – Political Geography

## 381 – Cartographic Design

- Principles of graphic design relevant to cartography, including variables, graphic hierarchy, figure-ground relationships, and typography
- Roles of scale, generalization, geographic scope, and geographic frame of reference
- Application of illustration software (Macromedia Freehand)
- Theory of map projection; analysis of distortions on small-scale maps; selection of an appropriate map projection
- Strategies in the evaluation of map design and execution
- Case studies in map design and map use, including the rhetorical use of maps
- Subjectivity and choice in mapping
- Principles and techniques of statistical mapping, including
- Color theory relevant to cartography
- Measurement scales, re-expression of data, and cartographic complementarity
- Relational cartography and the pitfalls for ecological correlation
- Basic use of PowerPoint for sequential graphics

## 383 – Principles of Geographic Information Systems

- Theoretical and practical knowledge necessary to understand the uses and limitations of GIS
- Conduct typical GIS operations and analyses; skills in use of GIS software
- Research design and presentation.
- Evaluation: lab exercises; research project with poster presentation; written topic papers.

## 386 – Quantitative Geographic Analysis

## 388 – Geographic Information and Society

- Case studies in map design and map use
- Appreciation of the broad uses of maps and geospatial data
- Subjectivity and choice in the collection and dissemination of geospatial data
- Uses and limitations of aerial imagery
- Critical assessment of maps as tools for public administration, communication, national defense, propaganda, risk management, and social control
- Relationships between public and private sectors in the development and use of geospatial information
- Influence of defense needs on civilian cartography
- Mapping institutions in the public and private sectors
- Library and web-based research
- Basic use of PowerPoint

## 491 – Senior Seminar in Geography

- students will develop the ability to perform in depth research on a selected geographic topic
- to explore and synthesize scholarly literature
- apply theoretical concepts and analytical techniques to research questions
- have the ability to report research results orally and in written form

- 555 – Biogeography

- Processes and interactions that affect the distribution of plants and plant communities, focusing on interactions between organisms, other organisms, and the abiotic environment.
- Understanding both of the state of knowledge about these topics, and of remaining uncertainties and theoretical debates.
- Implications of biogeographic facts and theories for the development of land-management policies.
- The “process of science” as illustrated by using specific studies as examples of both concepts and the ways they have been elucidated.
- Ability to seek out, critically analyze, and synthesize published scientific research, and write clearly about scientific ideas.

#### 558 – Sustainable Development

- This course seeks to problematize the notion of sustainable development, and place it within the broader historical context of development theory and practice. Students are encouraged to think critically, a skill which is evaluated through (1) in-class discussions; (2) take-home examinations; and (3) weekly comments on the class e-mail listserv. Through these methods, students have the opportunity to enhance their oral and written communication skills, and to receive frequent feedback from the instructor. Students are exposed to academic literature in the fields of environmental geography, development studies, anthropology, and political science.
- This course focuses on international development. As such, students are exposed to a broad range of development literature concerned with Latin America, Asia, and Africa, with a particular focus on South Asia and South America.

#### 563 – The Urban Condition

- Students will think critically about contemporary conceptual approaches to understanding North American cities.
- Much of the students' reading centers on understanding cities as dynamic, fluid sites perpetually transformed by globalization and transnational flows. Students are exploring how to conceptualize cities as locations of the concentrated networks that drive these flows.
- Students will also frequently discuss the relationships between identity, urban neighborhoods, and residents. Much of this discussion pivots on the racialization and gendering of urban processes, often understood within historical context.
- Students will explore a variety of empirical and theoretical perspectives on life in cities that will teach them not only about differences among urban residents, but also about differences among urban geographers and other social scientists.
- Students will conduct independent research projects that enable them to apply the ideas learned in class to contemporary urban issues.
- Students must present both of their papers to their peers and in so doing, develop skills in research, synthesis, and oral presentation.
- Students will also take a field trip in Syracuse to meet with local community groups to apply what they have learned in class to their immediate surroundings.

#### 564 – Urban Historical Geography

#### 572 – Landscape Interpretation in Cultural Geography

- Students will understand the history of landscape concepts in geography (and related fields), and how these concepts have been important to understanding cultural processes and the interpretation of landscape.

- Students will understand how the landscape serves as a both a process and a place that structures social life.
- Students will critically read the key theoretical and empirical literature in landscape studies (and cultural geography more generally).
- The course is run seminar-style and students will conduct original research and give oral presentations.

#### 573 – The Geography of Capital

- Students will undertake a close symptomatic reading of Marx's *Capital* and at least one key work in Geography to understand the role that Marxist theories of capitalism have played in contemporary economic, social, and cultural geography.
- Students will evaluate the degree to which Marx's *Capital* has been or continues to be relevant for understanding the *geography* of the economy.
- Students will write weekly papers assessing what they have read and working it into their own developing theories of the geography of capital, labor, culture, and/or economic restructuring. Students will present and discuss their ideas and evaluations during weekly class meetings. They will be expected to develop both critical thinking and critical debating skills.

#### 576 – Gender, Place and Space

- Students are introduced to a series of theories and debates in order to develop an understanding of the diverse ways that gender influences the experience of space and how both space and place shape the experience of gender. Students should also develop an awareness of the ways that difference expressed through race, ethnicity and sexuality influence the way in which space, place and gender is experienced, discussed and theorized.
- Through critical discussion of readings students should develop the ability to make connections among the dominant themes presented by writer across a range of disciplines. They should also learn to understand these themes in from a geographic perspective by focussing on their relevance to an understanding of space, place and scale relationships.
- Students are required to present the work of a variety or writers on a weekly basis in order to develop their critical thinking and synthesis, and presentation skills. Through the preparation of a research proposal and a research paper students also develop their writing, analytic and library skills.

#### 578 – History of Cartography

#### 583 – Environmental Geographical Information Science

- Understanding of principles and applications of GIS
- Skills in use of GIS software
- Research design
- Evaluation: lab exercises; discussions of readings; presentations; research project and written paper.

#### 593 – Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

#### 595 – Geography and the Internet

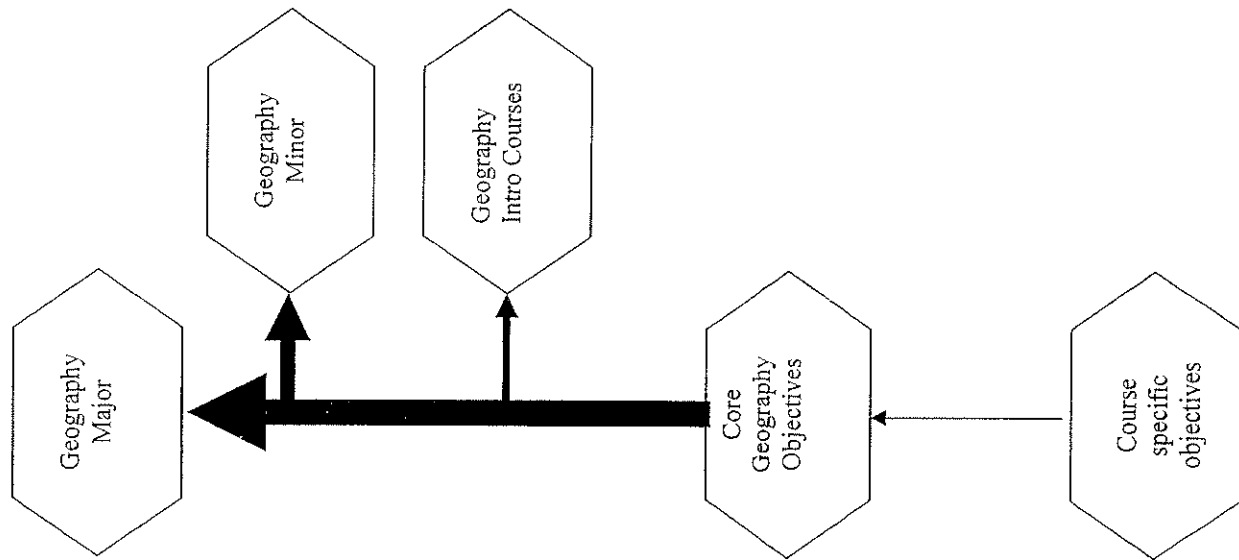
- Students examine the origins, development and current state of the Internet, together with possible future situations.
- The various, and increasingly complex, uses of the Internet (especially the WWW) in educational, commercial, governmental and other arenas will be analyzed.
- Key issues such as privacy, surveillance, electronic communities, cyberculture, searching, hacking, domain registration, languages and interfaces, and virtual worlds are examined.
- Students learn how to code in HTML, use MapEdit, NeoTrace and other selected programs.
- Students design their own webpages on a selected topic, and learn to use the web in their research.

- The impact of networked technological change on differentiated societies worldwide, especially the expansion of “virtual places”, is assessed.



	361	362	363	372	381	383	386	388	491	555	558	561	563	564	573	576	578	583	593	595
<i>Critical thinking</i>	**	*		***	***	*		***	***	***	***		***		***	***		***		***
<i>Computer literacy</i>				***	***	***	**	**					*					***		***
<i>Library skills</i>	*			**	**		***	***	***	***	**	*	*		**	**	*	*		***
<i>Multiple perspectives</i>	**			***	***		**	**	*	**	***		***		***	**				***
<i>Research Skills</i>				*	*	***	***	***	***	***	**	***	***		**	***		***		***
<i>Oral presentation skills</i>				**	**		**	**	***		***	***	***		**	**		***		**
<i>Physical, human and interactions</i>		*							*	***			**		*	*				***
<i>Regional perspective</i>	**	**							*	*			**		*					*
<i>Technical skills for spatial data</i>				***	***	***	**	**	*	*								***		*
<i>Graphical presentation</i>				***	***	***	**	**	*	*								**		***
<i>Geography as a discipline</i>		**		**	**	**	**	**	***	*	**		**		**	***		**		**

### Conceptual Model of Application of Assessment to Learning Outcomes for Geography



Constituency Learning Outcomes Expectations for each constituency group.

Department Learning Outcomes Level Faculty consensus of key learning objectives for geography.

Course Learning Outcomes Defined by individual instructor to address key learning objectives for geography.



## **Department of Geography Graduate Learning Outcomes**

There are no specific graduate level learning outcomes attached. We have not specifically developed these. We did not learn until May 9, 2006 that they were required. Faculty contracts ended on May 14, 2006. We will begin developing these during fall semester 2006, if we are mandated to do so.

### 3. Assessment Methods

#### **Department of Geography Outcomes Assessment Methods**

Attached is our Learning Outcomes Assessment Survey.

We have no other assessment measures because (1) we have never been mandated to develop them; (2) we choose to spend our time teaching, learning, and improving our program.

#### *Assessment Plan*

We administer this survey in every 100-500 level class every semester.

Results are reported to the Undergraduate Director. The Undergraduate Director warns the Chair of any areas of concern.

# Student Ratings of Learning Outcomes in Geography Courses

Course number: \_\_\_\_\_ Section: \_\_\_\_\_

Student ratings are useful to your professor in enhancing this course. Please take the time to rate the following items in a thoughtful and conscientious manner. Thank you for your feedback.

## Student Information

- Which of the following best describes you?  
 1 Geo Major     2 Geo Minor     3 Other (specify):     4 Undeclared
- Class Status:     1 Freshman     2 Sophomore     3 Junior     4 Senior
- Gender:     1 Female     2 Male
- Cumulative Grade Point Average:  
 1 4.0-3.5     2 3.49-3.0     3 2.99-2.5     4 2.49-2.0     5 less than 2.0
- I missed the following number of class meetings  
 1 zero     2 one to two     3 three to four     4 five or more
- On average, how many hours per week did you spend preparing for this course outside of class time?  
 1 less than one hour     2 one to two hours     3 three to four hours     4 more than four hours
- The work load for this course in relation to other courses of equal credit was:  
 1 much lighter     2 lighter     3 about the same     4 heavier     5 much heavier
- The level of difficulty of this course was:  
 1 very easy     2 somewhat easy     3 about right     4 somewhat difficult     5 very difficult
- Are you taking this course to fulfill a requirement?  
 1 yes     2 no

## Learning Outcomes

- I gained an understanding of the major concepts of geography.  
Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree    Not Applicable  
 1     2     3     4     5     6
- I became more aware of multiple perspectives on issues in geography.  
Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree    Not Applicable  
 1     2     3     4     5     6
- I have a better understanding of physical and human interactions as a result of taking this course.  
Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree    Not Applicable  
 1     2     3     4     5     6
- I have a better understanding of the significance of regions to geography as a result of taking this course.  
Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree    Not Applicable  
 1     2     3     4     5     6
- I learned to read critically and understand the scholarly literature in geography.  
Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree    Not Applicable  
 1     2     3     4     5     6

## **Department of Geography Outcomes**

### **4. Gathering, Analyzing, Reporting Information on Student Learning**

The Department of Geography has no plan for gathering, analyzing and reporting information beyond what is noted in previous section. Until May 9, 2006, we had no idea we were expected to.

Through our experiences, extensive feedback from current and past students, current faculty, and through review of other programs in the US, we thoroughly revamped our undergraduate program in AY 2005-2006 to be implemented in AY 2006-2007.

In this process we examined our learning outcomes and implemented new courses to cover areas of relative weakness (e.g. Geo 171).

If we are mandated to begin collecting, analyzing, and reporting information on student learning, we will begin developing a plan to do so in Fall 2007. Two key elements of this plan will be (1) to find out who these are to be reported to – since this has never been clear; (2) demand new staff members to undertake this task as faculty time is better spent teaching, researching and actually working with students.

5.

### **Department of Geography: Closing the Loop**

The faculty as a whole discusses program issues at every faculty meeting. The Graduate and Undergraduate Committees develop position papers outlining suggested improvements. This is, and always has been, an on-going process. So-called Learning Outcomes are (rightfully) a minor part of this process (more important considerations are actual student achievement, developing curriculum that matches state-of-the-art knowledge in the field, balance of coverage, faculty strengths, intellectual merit, etc.). In our review and revision of our undergraduate program we assured that new courses were developed that covered areas of relatively weak coverage in our learning outcomes.

Results of student surveys of learning outcomes are available to every faculty member. Faculty are provided with the results of survey's for their own classes as soon as grades are turned in each semester. Faculty have access, in the department office, to summery results if they wish to consult them

We have no Chart of Decisions. The first we learned of anyone's desire for such charts was May 9, 2006. If such charts are mandated we will make one up in Fall 2007, when faculty are back on contract.

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## **Department of Geography: Communications Plan**

Undergraduate Learning Outcomes documents are available to all students in the Geography Department office.

Faculty often list expected learning outcomes on course syllabuses.

Expected learning outcomes are reinforced for students when they fill out the learning outcomes survey.

Changes in the undergraduate curriculum and major are communicated through a new brochure given to all prospective students and all students in introductory course.

Changes in undergraduate curriculum and major are communicated in the University Undergraduate Catalogue.

The great things that students learn in Geography are shouted from rooftops, trumpeted in the press, and inserted into everyday conversation by students themselves. They have been doing this since long before May 9, 2006.