



## FIELD EXPLORATIONS IN GEOGRAPHY (GEOG 483/583)

New Mexico State University  
Department of Geography

**SPRING 2011**

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Office Hours: Mon, 9:30-10:30; Tue, 9:00-12:00, Wed, 9:30-11:00 & 14:30-17:00; Thu, 9:00-11:00 (sign up on my door to ensure my time is all yours!)

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### Course Description & Structure

This three-credit-hour course is designed to introduce you to the fundamentals of fieldwork-based geographical research and, as a result, touches on such varied topics as: research ethics; research design; mapping; collection, recording, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of various kinds of data (vegetation, soils, land use, etc.); and report writing. We will devote a roughly equal amount of time to an exploration of concepts, techniques, and tools pertinent to both human and physical geography, and emphasize the assessment of coupled human-environmental systems whenever possible. The course will meet on five separate occasions, each focused on a different aspect of field work. During the first meeting, you will enhance your knowledge and skill set with respect to mapping, which is central to much of what geographers do. During the second meeting, you will train your “landscape forensics” skills (e.g., skills at identifying, describing, and explaining spatial patterns and processes) and ability to identify and formulate environmental research questions. During the third meeting, you will practice some data collection techniques for answering some of the questions identified during the previous meeting. During the fourth meeting, you will learn how to analyze and interpret the field data acquired during the third meeting and how to communicate your findings in writing and by means of graphs, tables, maps. Finally, during the fifth meeting, you will practice sharing your research findings by means of an oral presentation. So, in this course, you will learn how to conduct a field research project, from the identification of research objectives and methods to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data and, ultimately, the communication of results.

### Course Goals

In this class, you will be exposed to many and yet not even close to all field techniques used by geographers. The goal is neither that you’ll be able to master each of these techniques nor that you’ll be able to know exactly which techniques are best suited to address any given problem. Rather, upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

- read human and natural landscapes (e.g., describe, analyze, and interpret spatio-temporal patterns and processes of vegetation, soil, landforms, land use, etc.);
- utilize a range of geographical field techniques and tools;

- apply various techniques for the analysis of geographical data; and
- communicate research findings by means of a written report and oral presentation.

## Course Materials

### **Website**

The website for this course can be found at <https://learn.nmsu.edu/>. To access course materials, simply log in to your Blackboard account and click the link for this course. On the website, you will find all course materials, announcements, your grades, and more. The website is a key element of this course and you are required to review its contents regularly. If you encounter problems related to the website, please contact me immediately.

### **E-mail**

Official communication to you will often come through your NMSU e-mail box, not through your Yahoo, Gmail, or other personal non-NMSU e-mail box. Please access your NMSU e-mail regularly, or forward it to your current use address, as your success in college may ride on your ability to respond quickly. We will not use the e-mail tool in Blackboard in this class; all e-mail correspondence in this class will occur via NMSU email.

### **Textbook**

There is NO required textbook for this class, simply because no existing textbook adequately covers all of the material that we'll be discussing in class. However, there are some required readings, which will be made available to you on Blackboard.

### **Materials**

There is no specific set of materials you need to bring to every class period. However, there is a range of materials you will need at one point or another during the semester (I will let you know when you'll need which materials), including:

- All-weather notebook for taking notes in the field
- Pencil and eraser
- Metric ruler and protractor
- Pocket calculator
- Field clothes
- Water bottle
- Camera (digital or film; photo quality must be sufficient to not hurt your instructor's eyes)
- ...



## Field Trips

There will be two **MANDATORY** field trips in this course. The first field trip (**Saturday, March 19**) will focus on landscape observation and the second (**Saturday-Sunday, March 26-27**) on the collection of data using tools and techniques employed by human and physical geographers. Details regarding the field trips will be made available to you in class and on the course website. For now, just note the following: if you are not dressed appropriately or if you do not bring the required supplies and equipment, you cannot be allowed to participate in the field work!

## Miscellaneous Field Rules

**CELL PHONES:** Cell phones must remain turned off throughout the day, except in emergencies. You may check your messages and return calls upon completion of official class activities.

**Help:** We are a fact-finding research team and we must act as a team. Everyone helps out. No shirkers in this Whoville. This applies to all aspects of this field experience.

**Happy:** Be happy. You may worry all you want, however.

**Fun:** No one is allowed to have any fun. At the first sign that any course participant is having fun, we are heading back to the Fort. Okay, just kidding ...

**Whining:** No whining. Definitely no whining!

## Grading

Your final course grade is determined by the amount of points you **EARN** (NOT deserve) out of a total possible 500 points. The points are allocated as follows:

<b>Compass &amp; Pace Map</b>	50 points	10 %	} <b>500 Points (100 %)</b>
<b>Field Report #1</b>	100 points	20 %	
<b>Field Report #2</b>	100 points	20 %	
<b>Research Paper</b>	100 points	20 %	
<b>Research Presentation</b>	25 points	5 %	
<b>Final Exam</b>	100 points	20 %	
<b>Participation</b>	25 points	5 %	

### *Graduate Students:*

Upon completion of this course, the number of points listed above for undergraduate students will be adjusted to account for only 85 % of your final grade—you will earn the remaining 15 % of your final grade through the completion of an annotated bibliography OR literature review OR research project.

***Your final course letter grade will be based on the following scale:***

<b>A</b>	95-100%	<b>B+</b>	87-89%	<b>C+</b>	77-79%	<b>D+</b>	67-69%
<b>A-</b>	90-94%	<b>B</b>	84-86%	<b>C</b>	74-76%	<b>D</b>	60-66%
		<b>B-</b>	80-83%	<b>C-</b>	70-73%	<b>F</b>	< 60%

Individual assignments and tests will not be curved (↑ or ↓). We *may* make adjustments of the final letter grade after an assessment of the class curve at the end of the term. We consider class participation, attendance, and improvement over the term as justification for discounting a grade that is uncharacteristically lower than others.

### **Compass & Pace Map**

You will create a compass and pace map on the first day of class and this map, which is due by the end of the class meeting, will contribute **10 %** (50 points) toward your final course grade.

### **Field Reports**

You will have to submit two field reports, one after each field trip. Both reports, while based on class expeditions, have to be written by you as an **individual** (See “Code of Academic Integrity” statement below.). Each report will contribute 10 % (100 points) toward your final course grade;

collectively, the two reports will determine **40 %** (200 points) of your final course grade. Details regarding the field reports will be provided to you in class and on the course website. For now, note that only those reports that are based on excellent field notes, sketches, and photographs can earn the highest grades. Furthermore, only those reports that are submitted on time (For due dates, refer to the Tentative Course Outline below.) will be evaluated; **late submissions will not be accepted** and receive 0 points.

### **Research Paper**

You and your **team** (See “Team Work” statement below.) will be preparing and submitting a scientific report that should, as closely as possible, resemble a mini-peer-reviewed journal article. The scientific report will account for **20 %** (100 points) of your final course grade. Details regarding the report will be discussed in class and made available to you via the course website. The report has to be submitted on time (For due dates, refer to the Tentative Course Outline below.); **late submissions will not be accepted** and receive 0 points.

### **Research Presentation**

During our last class meeting, each **team** (See “Team Work” statement below.) will present its paper to the class and potentially other interested parties. The presentation will determine **5 %** (25 points) of your final course grade and, in addition to the “typical” paper components, include a few comments and slides on your “personal” experiences with the project. Further details regarding the presentation will be made available to you in class and on the course website.

### **Exams**

There will be one final comprehensive exam that will test your understanding of the concepts, tools, and techniques discussed throughout the term. The exam will account for **20 %** (100 points) of your final course grade and consist of short answer / essay questions and tasks (e.g., mapping). ALL course materials are considered potential exam material. Exams represent YOUR understanding of the course material and not that of your peers; that is, taking exams is an **individual** effort, not a team effort (See “Code of Academic Integrity” statement below.). Further details regarding the exam will be provided to you in class and on the course website.

### **Participation**

Your participation as an **individual** in this class will be determined by both the instructor and your peers and contribute **5 %** (25 points) toward your final course grade. Your participation grade will be based on the following criteria: attendance; preparedness for class; participation in class discussions; participation in laboratory and field activities; and general behavior (e.g., assistance to other students; ability to compromise and respect other people’s ideas; ability to motivate others; responsible behavior in the field; etc.). The success of an interactive course such as this one heavily depends on the participants: YOUR contributions are just as important as those of your instructor! So, help me make this an excellent course!

### **TEAM WORK**

In a course such as this, working collectively on assignments with others is generally very beneficial. So, on the first day of class, you will be divided into teams, each comprised of three to four students. Each team will be made up of a diversity of individuals but the different teams will be comparable to each other (each team will be composed of roughly the same number of men and women, freshmen and seniors, etc.). That is, all teams will be roughly equally strong. Members of every individual team will complete assignments (including the report and

presentation) as just that—a team. However, while you as a team member will initially receive the same grades as all other members of your team, adjustments of your grades (upward or downward) will be made based on peer evaluations (e.g., evaluations of your contributions to the success of the team through preparedness, reliability, participation in discussions, ability to compromise and respect other people’s ideas, etc.). It is thus in your own best interest to always be prepared and contribute as much as possible to teamwork and other class activities.

### Tentative Schedule

Hours	Date & Time	Key Themes
4	Saturday, 03/12/2011, 8 AM – 12 PM	<b>Warm-Up</b> - Syllabus - Introductions - Maps, Compass & Pace Mapping <b>Compass &amp; Pace Maps Due (Individual)</b>
8	Saturday, 03/19/2011, 8 AM – 5 PM	<b>Landscape Forensics</b> - Human Geography - Physical Geography - Human-Environment Interactions
16	Saturday & Sunday, 03/26-27/2011, 8 AM – 5 PM	<b>Field Methods</b> - Sampling techniques - GPS - Human geography: surveys, interviews, etc. - Physical geography: vegetation and soil sampling, etc. <b>Field Report #1 Due (Individual)</b>
8	Saturday, 04/09/2011, 8 AM – 5 PM	<b>Field Data Analysis &amp; Interpretation</b> - Creating maps, graphs, and tables - Doing the stats - Creating presentations - Writing reports <b>Field Report #2 Due (Individual)</b>
n/a	n/a	<b>Research Paper Due by 04/16/2011 (Team)</b>
3	Saturday, 04/23/2011, 9 AM – 12 PM	<b>Presentations</b> <b>Final Exam (Individual)</b> <b>Presentations Due (Team)</b>

### Policies, Codes, Etc.

**CODE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** Enrollment in this course and acceptance of this syllabus is your **CONTRACT** constituting acceptance of all University policies regarding academic integrity, including but not limited to cheating and plagiarism. You are expected to comply fully

with the NMSU Honor Code as presented in the Student Handbook and on NMSU's websites (e.g., <http://www.nmsu.edu/~vpsa/SCOC/index.html>). Students who violate the NMSU Student Code of Conduct will be dealt with severely, at both the course and the University level. Please see me if you have any questions concerning this matter.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please meet with me immediately so that we can discuss ways to ensure your full participation in the course. If you determine that formal, disability-related accommodations are necessary, you must be registered with "Services for Students with Disabilities" (<http://www.nmsu.edu/~ssd/index.html>; contact Diana Quintana – 575-646-6840 – with any questions you may have) and notify me of your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. We can then plan how best to coordinate your accommodations.

**NON-DISCRIMINATION:** Please call Jerry Nevarez, Director of Institutional Equity, at 575-646-3635 with any questions you may have about NMSU's Non-Discrimination Policy (<http://www.nmsu.edu/~vpsa/APAP/nondiscrimination.html>) and complaints of discrimination, including sexual harassment.

**ABSENCE POLICY:** Complete or partial absences from any given meeting in this course will be handled on a case-by-case basis, but are typically inexcusable for two major reasons. 1) We will complete one semester's worth of work (3 credit hours) in only five separate meetings, each meeting corresponding to somewhere between 1 and 5 weeks of contact time during a regular semester. 2) Guided field experiences cannot simply be "made up" through personal field explorations, reading, or other activities.

**WITHDRAWALS AND INCOMPLETES:** Withdrawals from this course are solely your responsibility; I will not withdraw or drop you from this class under any circumstances! If you no longer wish to be enrolled in this course, you must drop it. Students still on the class roll at the end of the semester will be issued grades based on work completed. Incomplete grades will not be given except in the case of extraordinary situations related to serious illness, bereavement, or personal crises; documentation will be required in these limited cases, and incompletes will be granted solely at my discretion.

**WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME:** I will be available in class, during office hours and scheduled appointments, and via email to respond to any questions or concerns you may have. Don't be shy and contact me as soon as ambiguities, problems, or concerns arise! I will take all of your concerns seriously and respond to you as soon and as specific as possible. I will address any issues that are of importance to all students in class and on Blackboard. I will do my very best to always be prepared for class, grade assignments fairly, and return your work promptly (within one week). I reserve the right to change scheduled lectures, exams, and assignments. Any changes made will not adversely affect your workload or grade.

**WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU:** Enrollment in this course and acceptance of this syllabus is your **CONTRACT** constituting acceptance of ALL New Mexico State University policies and codes (See above.) as well as ALL specific policies outlined in this syllabus. I expect you to be on time for all class-related activities, submit all tasks as instructed, and always show "good" behavior toward both your instructor and peers. **HAVE FUN!!!**