GEG 100: Introduction to Geography

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The Course

We live in a pluralistic, interconnected world that is reflected at every level of our society from this classroom to our city, state and nation. Much of the world is experiencing rapid and profound change as a result of the internet and growing globalization at a speed that has no parallels in human history. Yet most of the world is left out of the benefits of change, if that’s what it is, for a variety of reasons, it might be the result of geographic isolation, dearth of resources, lack of transportation, or just plain poverty and such groups cling to their traditional beliefs. As the world gets “smaller” and people come into ever increasing contact with others, for good or ill, one of the lessons of history’s is change and contact with those having a different view of the world often leads to conflict. It follows then that it is essential, not just the mere spice of life, to have geographic and culturally literate citizens.

Every culture (Latin, to cultivate) has a place where it came into being and it doesn’t take a great leap of imagination to realize that people living in different geographic environments evolved different systems of beliefs, mores, folk tales, myths, customs, laws, truths, ways of using materials, attitude toward the land or nature, exploiting resources, food, clothing, art, music, literature, family relationships, educating its children, worshiping, making love and dying through which people find order, stability, security and meaning that is passed on to their children, for each environment presented different challenges and this triggered different responses. While similar events and ordeals befall all people, each and every act happens under different geographic and historical circumstances often resulting in different reactions. What one thinks about something naturally influences what they do about it. It follows that the crisis of today were shaped by the way people behaved towards each other then and continue to behave towards each other.

Most people are aware that an individual’s character is determined by a number of factors; instinct, hereditary, family, friends, school and society at large, there is another factor that is equally important and that is geography which does for society what the social environments do for the individual. It touches the family, community, tribe, state and nation directly, actively, and continuously. Few human activities are independent of its benefits, challenges or power.
Geographic influences go well beyond the local scene to include larger regional relationships, and extend beyond to global interactions. The community to which each of us belongs is bound to a web of geographic linkages.

**Tentative Course Outline**

Approaching the course from the angle of cultures presents a special challenge as there are certain geographic concepts one who has had a course in introductory geography should be knowledgeable about. I want you to be aware that there will be times when the material under discussion may seem to drift from the course description, as listed in the schedule of classes, but are an important part of achieving these objectives, for example we begin by applying mathematics to the globe in order to do two things: one, make it possible for you to find the position of any place on the globe without using an electronic device, which will come in handy a number of times; and second, reading a map, a geographers most important tool, makes much better sense after understanding global mathematics or *geodesy* (Greek, *Ge*, Earth + *dalein*, to divide; from *geometry* (Greek, *Ge* + *metria*, to measure), they are different sides of the same coin. This is followed by a short introduction to weather and climatic regions to be followed by our first cultural region, India and Hinduism, then to China and the “Four Teachings” – Confucian, Dao, Buddhism and Marxism. A short stop in Japan and then to the world of Monotheism - mainly Judaism and Islam. And from we’ll see but most probably a Primal culture.

**The Geographer**

Geographers are a mix of individuals who have one thing in common, a desire to understand our world and the people react to its challenges. The word geography is from the Greek, *ge*, Earth + *graphein*, to write. There are all types of geographers: political geographers, urban geographers, population geographers, biogeographers, economic geographers, geographers that are engaged in developing “laws,” models and mathematical theories to explain patterns of spatial phenomenon. Spatial is from Latin, happening or existing in space. Regardless of personal interest geographers attempt to correlate and assemble data on spatial phenomenon into an overall and meaningful picture. A jigsaw puzzle is an excellent metaphor. The pieces of the puzzle scattered over a table top are clues, little bits of information (data), which when correctly assembled provides an understanding of the whole. Geography is unique in that it is the only discipline that attempts to give a total explanation of the relationships that exist in any physical and/or human environment. Since change is a constant, there are few disciplines that are as contemporary in their approach. The geographer is less a narrow specialist and more a person of broad vision.
Course Disclaimer

Discussing cultural topics has the potential to generate controversy, for it is frequently necessary to contrast and compare one idea or value with another in order to make unfamiliar concepts clear. Sometimes these analogies/metaphors/idioms may touch closer to home than some would like causing them to see the material as a criticism or an attack on their deeply held beliefs. No such thing is ever intended.

If you feel that your personal beliefs have been trampled on let us talk about it in an atmosphere of mutual respect. I understand that little is of more importance to each of you than your own values, but by the same token I do not want a course that is safe but says little nor do I suspect, do you. We must not forget that there is constant debate even among people that share the same religion, claiming membership in the same group or belonging to the same community or family as to the truth of how things are, or should be.

The opinions expressed in this course, from whatever source, do not necessarily reflect those of the administration of Seattle Community College District, the administration of North Seattle Community College, nor of the Science, Math, Social Science (MS3) Division of NSCC. The material is the sole responsibility of your instructor.

Expected Student Outcomes

You should be able to identify and describe some of the basic geographic factors that influence people’s actions and some of the ways people react to geographic restraints, the major cultural realms of the world based on their mythic beliefs, doctrinal and ritualistic expressions, where applicable their political, social, economic systems, and the relevant historical factors that contributed to the uniqueness of each. The type, amount, and the way material is presented will vary depending on the culture under discussion.

Class Standards

✓ You expect your instructor to be prepared and in class everyday - I expect the same from you!
✓ While this is not a scent free classroom let us be sensitive to those who may suffer from MCS (Multiple Chemical Syndrome) and refrain from using scented products in class.
✓ Texting a friend during class might come back to bite you.

Student Evaluations

There will be at least 4, possibly 5 multiple choice exams of between 25 to 35 questions. The plan is to have one after every topic. Each topic in the course will
contain a list of study questions from which all exam questions will be taken. Be advised that it is sometimes necessary to rephrase the study questions to fit the exam formats. You are free to ask your neighbor the answers to questions you are not sure of during an exam (let’s hope they have the right answer) as the purpose of a course is to learn. ON THE FINAL YOU ARE NOT FREE TO ASK FOR HELP FOR IT IS A TEST OF WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED!!!! The final will cover the entire course and run to at least 50 MC questions.

Final grades will be issued on the basis on the highest score (or scores if there is a tie or are too close to call) receiving a 4.0, others are evaluated from that standard. You can track your own progress by using the following general rule of the thumb.

<1> to receive between a 3.5 to 3.9 your accumulative points must be within 5% of the top score.

<2> to receive between a 3.0 to 3.4 you must be within 10% of the top score.

<3> to receive between 2.5 to 2.9 you must be within 15% of the top score.

<4> to receive between 2.0 to 2.4 you must be within 20% of the top score.

<5> If you are below 20% of the top score it will result in a grade below 2.0 to be determine by the instructor.

- Since it is my policy to return games by the next class period no make ups are allowed unless you clear it with the instructor a minimum 24 hours in advance. On game days students must provide themselves with a scan-tron form (available in the college bookstore) and a number 2 pencil.

How to Prepare for the Exams.

You are not required (nor expected) to agree with your instructor to pass the course. You are only obliged to know what has been said. Do not memorize the following type of material. If there is anything from the following that you will need to know for exam purposes, it will be singled out by your instructor.

- Statistical information is principally used for comparison purposes only. It is adequate to know that a particular country may rank as the third, seventh, fifteenth, or whatever as the largest country in the world. The size of a number of countries are an open question, for example: India, China, and Pakistan each claim for themselves territory that the others claim as theirs and include that territory in their statistics. Populations are changing so fast in some place that figures obsolete by the time the text is ready.

- The metric system is included throughout the text along with the “American” system for two reasons: to accommodate foreign students unfamiliar with the system used in the United States and to give American students a sense of the metric system. You are not required to know either
The names of most geographical features as many are known by several names. The World's tallest mountain, Mount Everest (in English) is known as Chomolungma by Tibetans, spelled Qomolungma by the Chinese, and in Nepal it is Sagarmatha. To be politically correct one should learn them all. That is a little much to ask. What is important is the geographic significance of some feature not who calls it what.

Dates mentioned in the text are to help you put things in perspective. If there are dates to remember they will be singled out for you. This does not mean one should ignore the chronology. It is important to know that the Korean War came before Vietnam, even if you can’t remember their dates.

Names of a number of important personalities will be found throughout the text. The important ones will be singled out for you.

Throughout the text you will run across the etymology (Greek, *eytmon*, original sense or form + logy < logos, a word) of a number of words. This is to help clarify meanings. Such material will not appear on exams.

What is important is learning concepts and terminology these remain basically unchanged with time or place and are the essence of the course. Keep an eye on the bold lettering as it indicates the more important information.

WELCOME TO THE COURSE. I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU AS A GROUP OR INDIVIDUALLY. PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO CALL ON ME FOR HELP AT ANY TIME.