

**Geography 9998**  
**Debates in Geographic Thought**  
**Seminars: Thursdays, 12.30–2.30pm**  
**Social Science Centre, Room 1004**

**Instructors:**

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**Description:**

Introduces students to the diversity of philosophical and theoretical approaches to Geography by engaging with current debates in the discipline. Students learn how different approaches inform research practice, and thus how to locate their own research within a wider intellectual and disciplinary context.

2 seminar hours, 0.5 course (mandatory)

**INTRODUCTION**

Geography is a broad, integrative field of enquiry combining social science, physical and natural science, and humanities. Like any academic discipline, it is also undergoing continual change, as new ideas, technologies and real-world developments challenge existing thinking and research practice. Together, this means that geographers have varying and competing ideas about how to define and delineate appropriate topics and objects of study, how to design and carry out geographic research, and what is regarded as valid geographic knowledge. By engaging with current debates in Geography, this survey course will expose you to different ways of “thinking geographically” and help you position your own research within Geography as an academic discipline.

**FORMAT**

The course is based on active learning and student engagement including class discussion, student-led seminars and peer teaching. Seminars are intended as intellectual forums in which to critique geographical literature and debate ideas. With your active participation, the process should prove not only interesting but also useful as you conceptualize your own research project and develop your own intellectual position.

Individually and in groups, you are expected to have done the necessary reading and other preparation for each class (which run September 14<sup>th</sup> to November 30<sup>th</sup>). In addition to group presentations, each student will also submit two written assignments (see *Evaluation* below).

## WEEKLY SEMINAR TOPICS

Date	Topic
<b>I: Introduction and Setting the Scene</b>	
Sept 7/8	Grad Orientation and Meet and Greet (tbc)
Sept 14	Course Introduction: Thinking Geographically
<b>II: Current Debates in Geography</b>	
Sept 21	The Anthropocene
Sept 28	Big Data
Oct 5	Resilience Thinking and Wicked Problems
Oct 19	More-than-Human and More-than-Physical Geographies
<b>III: Student-Led Seminars</b>	
Oct 26	Reflection on Weeks 3-6 Planning for Student-Led Seminars <b><i>First assignment due</i></b>
Nov 2	Preparation for Student-Led Seminars <b><i>Students submit plans and instructions for next 3 classes</i></b>
Nov 9	Student-Led Seminars: Current Debate in... (Cluster-Based Groups)*
Nov 16	Student-Led Seminars: Current Debate in... (Cluster-Based Groups)*
Nov 23	Student-Led Seminars: Current Debate in... (Cluster-Based Groups)*
<b>IV: Relevance and Application</b>	
Nov 30	Moving Forward: From Ways of Thinking to Ways of Doing
Dec 7	One on One
Dec 14	One on One
Dec 21	<b><i>Second assignment due</i></b>

\*Scheduling and group composition to be determined.

Clusters are: Physical Geography; Geographic Information Science; Urban Studies; and Environment, Development and Health.

## READING AND OTHER PREPARATION

Instructions regarding readings or other preparatory tasks will be provided each week for the following week's class. You can expect to do several hours of preparatory work in order to fully understand the material and be ready to engage in discussion. For the student-led seminars, each designated group of students will be responsible for assigning reading or other preparation, with assistance and guidance from the instructors.

Material will either be available online through Western Libraries or via the course website on OWL.

## WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
<b>First paper</b>	Review and commentary on one of the debates in Weeks 3-6	Oct 26
<b>Second paper</b>	Positioning your own research	Dec 21

## EVALUATION

**Evaluation is based on two individual written assignments and presentation of one group seminar.** Details of topics, format requirements and evaluation criteria will be provided at a later date.

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Due Date</u>
Student-led seminar	30%	Various dates Nov. 9-23
First paper	20%	Thursday, October 26
Second paper	50%	Thursday, December 21

### **How do we grade?**

A mark of 'B+' (78%) is expected as a minimum level of performance: an acceptable and general understanding of the course material has been demonstrated through the formal assignments and seminar participation. An 'A' level performance (80%+) exceeds this minimal standard by demonstrating a thorough grasp of course material, and the ability to engage key concepts in an effective, informed and insightful fashion. Diligence and demonstrable effort are necessary but not, by themselves, sufficient to warrant an 'A.' An 'A+' (90%+) reflects an outstanding performance in the seminars and written work, an exceptional command of written and oral communication skills, and a critical mind capable of synthesizing complex ideas and generating astute conclusions.

## **PURPOSE**

In keeping with the *Graduate Degree Level Expectations* of our programs, this course promotes several objectives:

- *'Depth and breadth of knowledge'*  
by introducing and interrogating various geographic concepts and debates within the discipline
- *'Research & scholarship'*  
by encouraging independent learning and critical thinking, and assisting Master's level students in particular with a well-ordered transition from the constraints of undergraduate education to the less structured research-oriented world
- *'Application of knowledge'*  
by evaluating the appropriateness and theoretical underpinnings of a given philosophical approach to research
- *'Professional capacity/autonomy'*  
by cultivating a professional and collegial spirit of scholarly engagement
- *'Communication skills'*  
through practicing and developing skills in academic reading, writing, presentation & dialogue
- *'Awareness of the limits of knowledge'*  
by respecting and recognizing the inherent strengths, weaknesses and complexities of different approaches within our varied discipline toward constructing arguments, interpretations and creating geographical knowledge.

Fulfilling these objectives will provide numerous *'learning outcomes'* that will enable you to:

- Approach the discipline of Geography and the work of academic geographers with a more open and informed perspective on the plurality and commonality of ways geographers think, question, analyse and interpret.
- Critique and theoretically situate the ideas and research of geographers, including your own work and those of your peers', in a balanced, reasoned and constructive fashion.
- Demonstrate an understanding and awareness of the complexities and limitations of constructing geographical arguments and interpretations contributing toward knowledge.
- Exercise and improve your verbal, presentation and writing skills, through both individual and group work.
- Begin to feel part of an academic community, both within Western's Department of Geography and within Geography as an academic discipline, toward engaging and contributing to the broader academic and public debates of our time.

## **ATTENDANCE AT GRADUATE CLASSES**

**Your attendance at all classes is crucial to the delivery and success of this course and to your own success in it.** Although no marks are allocated directly for attendance and participation, failure to attend and participate in the seminars will result in deduction of up to 10% in the final course grade.

Unanticipated absence for medical or personal reasons will be sympathetically dealt with according to University and departmental procedures, which may require submission of supporting documentary evidence such as a doctor's letter.

You may seek permission to be absent from class for academic-related activities such as conference attendance and research activity that requires you to be away from London. Those planning on being absent at any stage during the term should, as soon as possible, request permission to be absent, informing the instructors of the dates of the absence, the reason for the absence and the steps taken to fulfil the course requirements.

## **LATE ASSIGNMENTS, EXTENSIONS, PLAGIARISM, RE-EVALUATIONS, APPEALS**

You are advised to read the relevant sections of the SGPS website to familiarise yourself with Western's regulations and procedures concerning appeals, grades, regulations, penalties and such:

[http://www.grad.uwo.ca/current\\_students/regulations/index.html](http://www.grad.uwo.ca/current_students/regulations/index.html)

### **Late Assignments**

Papers are due on the dates indicated above. A **late assignment will lose 5% per day**. An assignment submitted five or more days beyond the deadline will be graded for your educational benefit but will NOT count toward your final course grade.

We are **sympathetic to extensions of a few days**, but they must be made at least seven days before the initial due date.

### **Scholastic Offences**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

**Plagiarism is unacceptable** and those who tempt fate will be prosecuted to the fullest extent allowed under the university's regulations.

## **Grade Appeals**

Requests to have an **assignment re-evaluated** must be submitted to us in writing within one week of receiving the graded assignment. In this written request for reappraisal, the specifics of what you would like revisited and the justification for doing so must be clearly and concisely stated.

Should you still feel that any grade that you receive in the course is biased, inaccurate or unfair; you have **the right to appeal**. Please refer to the SGPS Regulations on Student Academic Appeals prior to doing so:

[http://www.grad.uwo.ca/current\\_students/regulations/13.html](http://www.grad.uwo.ca/current_students/regulations/13.html)

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/appealsgrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/appealsgrad.pdf)

## **MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS**

You can expect us to arrive punctually and prepared for all class sessions. We will strive to promote a collegial atmosphere of mutual respect conducive to the exchange of ideas and learning. We expect the same from you. This entails respecting the opinions and questions of others and behaving in a courteous manner.

If you would like to come and talk to either of us about any aspect of the course, please make an appointment to do so. We are approachable, we welcome your comments and questions, and we very much want you to succeed in the course. Suggestions and constructive criticism to improve the course are particularly welcomed.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Both during the course and afterwards, you are encouraged to do further reading on different approaches and ideas in Geography. Explore journals like *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *Canadian Geographer*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Progress in Human Geography* and *Progress in Physical Geography*, as well as journals in your own area of specialization.

Some recommended texts are listed below, available in the Weldon Library.

Aitken, Stuart and Gill Valentine, eds. (2006) *Approaches to Human Geography*. London: Sage.

Castree, Noel (2005) *Key Ideas in Geography*. New York: Routledge.

Castree, Noel, Alisdair Rogers and Douglas Sherman, eds. (2005) *Questioning Geography*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Cresswell, Tim (2013) *Geographic Thought: A Critical Introduction*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell. (Available as an e-book in Western Libraries.)

Gregory, Derek et al., eds. (2009) *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed.

Oxford and Malden, MA. Blackwell (available via Western Libraries as an e-book)

Holloway, Sarah, Rice, Steve and Valentine, Gill, eds (2003) *Key Concepts in Geography*. London: Sage. [Also 2nd edition (2009) Nicholas Clifford et al. eds.]

Inkpen, Rob (1st edition 2005, 2nd edition with Graham Wilson 2013) *Science, Philosophy and Physical Geography*. London and New York: Routledge. (Both editions also available as an e-book in Western Libraries. 2nd edition has additional text and new chapters on field work and modelling.)

Thomas, David S.G., and Andrew Goudie, eds. (2000) *The Dictionary of Physical Geography*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Oxford and Malden, MA. Blackwell. Weldon Reference No Loan GB10.E53 2000

Trudgill, Stephen and Roy, Andre, eds. (2003). *Contemporary Meanings in Physical Geography: From What to Why?* London: Arnold.