

The Rocky Mountain West: Physical & Cultural Geography

Environmental Studies 251-252
Gettysburg College Summer Course Syllabus 2021

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Course Content

This intensive two-week field-based course examines in-depth the cultural and physical geography of the Rocky Mountain West. Focusing on the San Juan Mountain Range in Southwest Colorado, students participate in field-based activities and projects in order to examine the regional social-environmental relations from diverse multi-cultural (Native American and Euro-American), institutional (US Forest Service), and political-economic (logging, ranching, mining, & recreational tourism) perspectives. In this way, students develop a critical place-based understanding of how recent “New West” socio-economic changes are impacting the region, including new efforts to achieve ecologically sustainable and socially just solutions to land management problems.

Course Objectives

The course learning objectives are to:

1. Provide first-hand experiences of diverse human-environment relations via interactions with
 - a. Members of the Ute Mountain Ute Nation
 - b. Individuals engaged in timber, mining or ranching industries in southwest Colorado
 - c. USDA Forest Service and National Park personnel
 - d. Local environmental organizations or local government
2. Conduct field based tours on tribal lands, the mining district around of Silverton, the San Juan National Forest, and the Weminuche Wilderness Area
3. Gain topical knowledge of fundamental physical geographic characteristics and processes in the region (mountain geomorphology and ecological zones).
4. Develop a critical understanding of fundamental cultural, historical and regional geographic concepts and ideas in the Rocky Mountains (San Juans).
5. Demonstrate the relationships between ecological processes and human activities and how these inform efforts to address conservation land management issues in the context of the New West regional change.

Readings

Required

1. Paulson, D. & Baker, W. 2006. *The Nature of Southwestern Colorado*. Univ. Press of Colorado.
2. Packet of scholarly articles on the physical, cultural and political ecology of the region.
 - a. Blair, R. (ed.) 1996. *The Western San Juan Mountains: their geology, ecology and human history*. Niwot: University Press of Colorado. (included in Reading Packet)
 - b. Thompson, I. 1994. *An Historical Touring Guide to the San Juan Skyway*. San Juan Mnt. Assoc. & SJFN (Included in Reading Packet)

Recommended/Reference

1. White, R. 1991. *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West*. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press.
2. Brown, K. 1996. *Four Corners: History, Land and People of the Desert Southwest*.
3. Ubbelohde, C., Benson, M. and Smith, D. 1995. *A Colorado History: 7th Edition*. Boulder: Pruett.
4. Marsh, C. 1982. *People of the Shining Mountains: The Utes of Colorado*. Boulder: Pruett.
5. Rudzitis, G. 1996. *Wilderness and the Changing American West*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
6. Wilson, R. 2016. *America's Public Lands: From Yellowstone to Smokey Bear and Beyond* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield)

Evaluation:

- Research paper (35%)
- Participation in field and service learning projects (10%)
- Participation in discussion sessions (15%)
- Reading summaries (20%)
- Daily journal (20%)

Students are required to complete a subset of the readings and turn in a literature review prior to trip departure. Students will keep a daily journal of their activities, interactions, and insights gained from both the field-based activities and group discussions. I will review these at least once during the trip. Upon return from Colorado, students will have three weeks to conduct further research and write up a complete research paper on a **natural science or cultural geography topic** examined or project conducted during the field portion of the class.

Topical Outline (see itinerary for details)

Physical geography of the San Juans

- Origin of landscapes
 - Geomorphology, weather and climate
- Biotic communities – four life zones:
 - Arid pinon/juniper, ponderosa pine, mixed conifer, spruce/fir alpine

Historical, cultural & politico-economic geographies of the San Juans

- Indigenous perspectives
 - Origins, sacred sites and hunting grounds
 - Treaties and the legacy of conquest
- The federal government and public lands
 - USDA Forest Service: San Juan National Forest
 - National Park Service: Mesa Verde
- The Legacy of Euro-American Settlement
 - Spanish colonials
 - Mining and mining towns
 - Timber industry & Cattle ranching
 - Early tourism, recreation and conservation efforts

Emerging geographies of sustainability in the San Juans

- Regional socio-economic change: The New West
 - Amenity landscapes & recreational tourism
 - Ecological restoration efforts
 - Conflict & collaboration: new approaches to natural resource planning

General Daily Schedule

- 7:00am Meet at vans each morning (brkfast at motel if avail)
- 7-7:30 Gather lunch provisions
- 7:30-8:00 Coffee shop discussion/ or caffeine pickup
- 8:00-8:30am Depart for site.
- 9:00am Arrive at site by 9am
- 9:00-12:00 Activity, tour or field discussion.
- 12:00-1pm Lunch in the field.
- 1:00-4:00pm Afternoon activity
- 4pm Activity Ends
- 5:00pm Arrive back in Durango or Lodging Site
- 6:00 – 7pm Dinner/Group reflection meeting
- 7:00-7:30pm Alternative reflection meeting time

A Word on Reading Summaries

The summaries are designed to help you remember key points from the readings. Please include a summation of the author's main points and an example or two. Also include any questions that arise as you read that you can toss out during our group discussions for clarification.

Length: A general rule is to write **at minimum** a single page (single spaced typed) for each article or book chapter (For longer pieces it is a good idea to write at least a paragraph per topical section so you can recall the main points/arguments). You are welcome to write more of course.

Each student will complete these prior to the first day of class and will show them to the instructor on the first field day for full credit. You will want to have them available each day for group discussions. It will be easiest to have them as a hard copy that you can show me and that you can easily carry with you in your daypack. If you wish to keep them electronic, you can also upload them to our course Moodle site.

Exceptions: You do NOT need to write summaries for the Thompson Readings (Historical Touring Guide to the San Juan Skyway) or for the readings from the Blair book, *The Western San Juan Mountains*.

Journal Writing Guidelines

Here are some guidelines for crafting your journal entries. The purpose of journaling is to record not only descriptions of events, places and activities, but to record your thoughts, understandings and impressions of the various topics we are exploring including the ways these change over time. It will be an invaluable tool for assessing your learning experience, for providing a 'space' to capture your reflections and ideas, for strengthening your participation in groups discussions, and finally, as a resource informing your final course paper (along with reading notes and outside research materials). To help you with the journaling process, try to follow the guidelines listed below as you make your journal entries.

1. **Write each day** – no matter what! Journaling only 'works' if you are diligent about making your daily entries and if you move beyond mere description. Preferably, you can write in the evening after you have had some time to think about, ponder and filter through the experiences of the day. It is recommended that you write before you begin readings for the next day so you can keep your mind in focus. Remember, you will probably be physically tired from the days' activities, so it must be a priority.

2. **Organization**. Presumably, you will organize your journal chronologically. Each day may be further broken down chronologically or by topic/subject.

3. **Content & Structure**. Here are different orders or levels of thought/analysis that should be incorporated into your entries.

- **Level one:** Description. Describing the places, names of hosts, events and activities, of the day. Should be limited to one paragraph of each topical sub-section of a days' entry.
- **Level two:** Personal impressions and reactions. What did you learn? What surprised you? How did the experiences intersect with pre-conceived ideas, knowledge, experiences or expectations?
- **Level three:** Placing experience in context of scholarly readings. A step higher in abstraction. How did the days' activities reflect, confirm, challenge or re-work, ideas presented in the readings? ?
- **Level four:** Experiences in global context. Linked closely to level three. To what extent did your observations and experiences speak to broader, 'generalizable' ideas, theories or perspectives? Issues of race relations, human-nature relations, values of nature, etc.
- **Level five:** Critical thinking. What might account for the way you are interpreting things the way that you are? What other ways might these experiences be interpreted or viewed? What other information might be needed in order to better assess cause and effect relationships?

4. **Grading**: The journal will be turned into me at least once during the week in Colorado to make sure you are keeping up. It will also be mailed to me with your final paper. I'll be looking for evidence of higher level thinking, especially as the week progresses. Good luck!

Tentative Readings Schedule 2019

1. Monday, May 20

Arrive Denver/Boulder

Topic: The New West

Walking tour of Pearl Street and Downtown Boulder

2. Tuesday, May 21

Location: Boulder to Durango, Colorado.

Topic: The New West

Readings: Travis (Chps. 1-4) Packet (Turner, Grey, Brick, Rasker, Limerick, Lenz)

3. Wednesday, May 22

Location: San Juan Mountain High Country

Topic & Activities: Tour of physical geography of the San Juans

Readings: Packet (Blair, Chps. 1-8, 10-13).

4. Thursday, May 23

Location: Mesa Verde National Park & Anasazi Heritage Center, Dolores (tentative).

Topic & Activities: Tour of ancient indigenous cultural landscapes & sacred site mgmt. issues.

Readings: Paulson & Baker, Chp. 1; Packet (O'Rourke, Chp.II, pp. 15-21).

5. Friday, May 24

Location: Ute Mountain Ute Reservation

Topic & Activities: Tribal Park Tour & Reservation Visit

Readings: Paulson & Baker, Chp. 1; Packet (O'Rourke, Chp. V, pp. 45-54; Brown, 'The Utes Must Go!' from *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*)

6. Saturday, May 25

Location: San Juan Skyway Tour. Cortez-Dolores-Rico-Telluride-Ouray-Silverton.

Topic and Activities: Euro-American Settlement & Mining. Tours of historic mines.

Readings: Packet (O'Rourke, chps VI, VII & VIII), Paulson & Baker, Chp. 7. Note: We will follow the Thompson text as we drive (included in Packet).

7. Sunday, May 26

Location: Ouray / Silverton, CO

Topic and Activities: Env. Impacts of Mining & Reclamation Efforts, Service Activities

Readings: Paulson & Baker, Chps. 6 (pp. 227-49). Packet (Animas River Stakeholders Group).

8. Monday, May 27

Location: Durango, CO

Break ☺

9. Tuesday, May 28

Location: San Juan National Forest

Topic and Activities: National Forest Restoration in Pinon Pine and Ponderosa Pine communities

Readings: Packet (Wilson, "Community-based Forest Management;" Richard and Stein, "Kicking Dirt Together"); Paulson & Baker, Chp. 5 (pp. 177-211)

10. Wednesday, May 29

Location: San Juan National Forest

Topic and Activities: National Forest Mgmt & Restoration in Aspen & Spruce/Fir old growth communities.

Readings: Paulson & Baker, Chp. 5 (pp. 212-21), Chp. 7 review.

11. Thursday, May 30

Location: Weminuche Wilderness Area

Topic and Activities: Wilderness Mgmt. & Invasive Species

Readings: Paulson & Baker Chp. 6 (pp. 249-61). Packet (O'Rourke, Chp X & XI, Wilderness website, McNamee, & Wilson chapter from APL).

12. Friday, May 31

Location: Travel from Durango to Denver

Topic & Activities: New West Landscapes Revisited

Readings: Travis (Review)

13. Saturday, June 1

Location: Boulder / Denver

Topic and Activities: Fly home!