

GEO 412.101 Physiographic Regions of North America  
Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30-10:45 am, LSCB 018  
Spring 2009

Dr. Carol Sawyer, Assistant Professor

**Email:** sawyer@usouthal.edu (preferred contact method)

**Homepage:** <http://www.southalabama.edu/geography/sawyer>

**Office Hours:** 4:00 – 5:30 pm Mondays, 1:30-4:00 pm Tuesdays, and 9:00-11:00 am Wednesdays, *or by appointment*

**Office:** LSCB 341

**Phone:** (251) 460-6169

### **Course Description:**

The study of the major and minor natural regions of the North American continent, from Alaska to the Mexican border, including the Caribbean area. The course will focus on the different physically defined regions of North America, studying the homogenous variables that make each region distinct, including the topography, vegetation, soils, surface features, and past climates.

### **Objectives**

The objective of the course is to introduce students to the physiographic regions of North America. Students will be asked to make connections between homogenous and heterogeneous variables to discern what makes a physiographic region. Additionally, students will analyze the connections between past climates in North America to present physiographic regions. Students will learn how different landscape processes interact within specific regions of North America. Throughout the semester, students will be completing assignments to learn how compile and present research on particular physiographic regions.

### **Course Content** (see schedule for detailed projection of topics)

Major and minor physiographic regions of North America

Identification of dominant landform processes that shaped each region

Identification of physiographic regions- the homogenous and heterogeneous variables

Climates, biomes, and soils associated with each physiographic region

Characteristics of the physiographic regions

Topography of the region

Past climates of the physiographic regions

Surface water distribution in each region

### **Course Material**

*Physical Geography of North America* (Anthony Orme, editor, Oxford University Press, publisher) is a required text for the course and is on reserve in the University Library. Other readings will come from the texts placed on reserve in the library and from journal articles.

The following texts will also be on reserve in the library at various times during the semester:

*Geomorphic Systems of North America*, William L. Graf

*Physiography of western United States*, Nevin Fenneman

*Physiography of eastern United States*, Nevin Fenneman

*Natural Landscapes*, James A. Henry and Joann Mossa

### **Attendance and classroom policies**

Students are expected to attend and to be on time for all classes. Five percent of the course grade is based on your attendance. You will be marked as absent if you are late to lecture or leave early. It is your responsibility to sign the attendance sheet. Please keep in mind that missing any lecture, excused or not, will likely have a detrimental affect on your grade.

Please adhere to the policy on classroom etiquette; these include: no talking during the lecture, reading the newspaper or other non-course related material, coming late, sleeping, texting/messaging, or leaving early. Turn off all cell phones, pages, and any text messaging devices and put them away! You will be asked to leave if caught texting/talking during class.

### **Assignments**

Students are required to complete four (3 full pages minimum, 5 ¾ page maximum written) writing assignments for the course. Students will select four minor physiographic regions (in either one or two adjacent major physiographic regions) for their writing assignments. This focus on a few regions does not preclude students from knowing all the regions of North America for the exams. Students will cover 3 points in each paper: what makes the region homogeonous (i.e. why is it considered a region, physiographically; what separates that area for the surrounding regions); describe the characteristics of the region (i.e. soils, topography, vegetation); and explain the recent history of the landforms found within the region.

The writing assignments will be peer reviewed by fellow classmates and the professor. Each student will be required to read and provide *written* comments on a fellow student's writing assignment. Peer review gives students an opportunity to learn how to objectively assess the work of others, in addition to becoming familiar with other regions of North America from reading their fellow students assignments. Upon return of their assignments and written comments from the peer reviewer and professor, each student is expected to correct mistakes and the comments made by the reviewers.

The final term paper (20-25 pages) will consist of all the sections of the writing assignment, in corrected form, seamlessly tied together. This paper should not simply be the five papers stapled together but rather one single paper describing physiographic regions adjacent to each other. All previous drafts and comments must accompany the final paper. All papers (assignments, term paper, and peer reviews) are to be typed in a word processor software package (i.e. Microsoft Word) in 12-point font, Times New Roman. The assignments should have a 1-inch margin around the text and be double-spaced. No hand written assignments will be accepted. To receive full credit, assignments, peer reviews, and the term paper must be turned in on the announced due date unless other arrangements have been made IN ADVANCE. Late assignments lose 15% per day, including weekends.

Given the focus of the written assignments, students will likely need to cite other people's work in the assignments. Proper format for citing other works is expected to be followed for the writing assignments and term paper. Several books have been placed on reserve to ensure equal access to these materials by all students. These books and the required texts should not be the only books you use. Students will need to access journal articles and other sources of information for their assignments. Database searching and citation methods will be covered during the first week of class.

### **Exams**

Two exams will be given in the course. The exams will include short answer and essay-type questions. The exams will cover material presented in lecture and in the assigned readings.

### **Grading**

The writing assignments are together worth 28% of your final course grade, with each assignment worth 6%. The term paper is worth 25 % of the course grade. You will complete four peer reviews worth 4% each or, together, 16% of the course grade. Two exams will be given in the course: a mid-term (worth 12%) and a final (worth 14 %). Attendance is worth 5%.

#### **The *final* grades will be determined based on the following rules:**

100 to 90% = A      89 to 80% = B      79 to 70% = C      69 to 60% = D      <60% = F

## **Grade Breakdown**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Writing assignments (4)	28 (7% each)
Final term paper	25 %
Peer reviews (4)	16 (4% each)
Attendance	5 %
Mid term	12 %
Final Exam	14 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Make-up policy**

If you have a valid excuse for missing an exam, contact me via email within 2 class days following the exam to schedule the make-up. All legitimate excuses require written validation. Valid excuses include: illness (your's or a dependent's), a death in the immediate family, or participating in a university-sponsored event. Only exceptional excuses from work-related absences are accepted. Make up exams *will be different* than those given at the scheduled time. Students who miss an exam with a valid excuse are responsible for contacting the instructor to schedule the make-up exam.

### **Students with disabilities**

The University of South Alabama provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities. In accordance with the American with Disabilities Act, students with bona fide disabilities will be afforded reasonable accommodations. The Office of Special Student Services will certify a disability and advise faculty members of reasonable accommodations. If you have a specific disability that qualifies you for academic accommodations, please notify me and provide certification from Disability Services (Office of Special Student Services). The Office of Special Student Services is located in the Student Center, room 270. Their phone number is (251) 460-7212.

### **Academic honesty policy**

The University of South Alabama is committed to the fundamental value of academic honesty. The student handbook, The Lowdown, defines plagiarism as one form of academic misconduct which is "subject to investigation and disciplinary action through appropriate university procedures." Cheating includes using or taking someone else's work and using it as your own. This includes using fellow classmate's work. Plagiarism is using somebody else's ideas and/or words in your writing without correctly identifying the sources. As one resource for helping you avoid plagiarism, your written work in this class may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar detection method, for an evaluation of the originality of your ideas and proper use and attribution of sources. Assignments submitted to Turnitin.com will be included as source documents in a restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting possible plagiarism of such documents. As part of this process, you may be required to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your writing. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may be subject to some form of originality review. A paper not submitted according to procedures and format set by the instructor may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

### **Changes in Course Requirements:**

The course may be changed the number and frequency of exams, exam dates, or the number and sequence of assignments, as circumstances dictate. Inclement weather may also force rescheduling of lectures, assignments or exams. When ever possible, this material will be made up. Students will be given adequate written notification of such changes.

### Tentative schedule\*

Week of:	Topic	Activities
Jan 12 <sup>th</sup>	Introduction and review of basic landforms.	
Jan 19 <sup>th</sup>	Past climates and topographic setting	
Jan 26 <sup>th</sup>	Northern/Arctic region	
Feb 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Appalachian Mountains and Plateaus Feb. 5 <sup>th</sup> : Attend GTU talk, 5 pm	Assignment 1
Feb 9 <sup>th</sup>	Eastern Coastal Plain and Continental Shelf	Peer review
Feb 16 <sup>th</sup>	Western Coastal Plain	Assignment 2
Feb 23 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>Feb 24<sup>th</sup> – NO CLASS</b> Great Lakes and Lowlands Region	Peer review
Mar 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Great Plains Region and Lowlands Region	
Mar 9 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Mar 10<sup>th</sup> – Mid term</b>	Assignment 3
Mar 16-20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK</b>	
Mar 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Rocky Mountains	Peer review
Mar 30 <sup>th</sup>	Rocky Mountains continued	Assignment 4
Apr 6 <sup>th</sup>	Western Plateaus and Plains	Peer review
Apr 13 <sup>th</sup>	Western Plateaus and Plains continued	
Apr 20 <sup>h</sup>	Pacific Border and Mountain Provinces	
Apr 27 <sup>th</sup>	Pacific Border and Mountain Provinces continued	Term paper due April 27 <sup>th</sup> , 4 pm
May 7 <sup>th</sup>	Comprehensive final exam, 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	

**\*The course schedule and the due dates of the assignments may change or be adjusted as the semester progresses. Students will be notified of any adjustments at least one week in advance.**