GGS 103-001: Human Geography - Spring 2026

Department of Geography and Geoinformation Sciences

Class time: Mondays and Wednesdays from 12:00 pm – 1:15 pm

Location & Modality: 2312 Exploratory Hall, in person/face-to-face

Instructor: Emma Von Hoene

Contact: **evonhoen@gmu.edu**

Office Hours: By appointment, email to arrange. Available online @ Zoom (link available on request), or in-person @ Shared GTA/GRA Space, 1102-U

Learning Management System: This course will be hosted on Canvas for the Spring 2026 semester. Please ensure you are familiar with accessing and navigating this platform. Resources and support are available at: https://lms.gmu.edu/getting-started-students/ to help you get started. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to reach out to me or contact the ITS Support Center for assistance.

Suggested Text: Rosenfeld, Christine & Burtch, Nathan. Human Geography: https://humangeog.pressbooks.com/

Course Description

Human geography investigates how human activities are connected to and interact with place. This course explores spatial patterns of human activity, the effects of global processes at local scales, and how geography influences social inequality. Students will develop skills in mapping, spatial analysis, and interpreting the human-environment relationship. *This course satisfies the Mason Core Social and Behavioral Sciences Requirement.*

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Explain how individuals, groups, and institutions are influenced by contextual factors such as culture, environment, and history.
- Demonstrate awareness of changes in social and cultural constructs and how these changes shape human experiences and identities.
- Apply social and behavioral science concepts, terminology, principles, and theories, using appropriate methods and resources, to analyze significant human issues, past and present.
- Use geographic tools and data sources (e.g., maps, GIS, demographic data) to interpret the spatial distribution of human and environmental phenomena, with particular attention to inequalities.
- Analyze interactions between people and their environments, including how individuals and communities shape, and are shaped by, physical and socio-cultural landscapes.
- Critically investigate the relationship between human activity and space, place, and landscape by asking and answering the geographer's key questions: *Why this, here? Why that, there?*

Grading Breakdown

Grades for this course are based on individual performance in the following areas:

Category	% of Final Grade	Total Points	Frequency	Points per Item
Weekly Quizzes	15%	150 points	11*	15
I-Spy Geography Assignments	15%	150 points	10	15
Projects	30%	300 points	2	150
Exams	30%	300 points	2	150
Participation: In-Class Activities	10%	100 points	13*	10
Total	**100%**	**1000 points**		

Weekly Quizzes (15%)

Eleven short quizzes are designed to help review and reinforce content from previous week's course materials and prepare for the exams. Quizzes will be completed in class through Canvas during a designated timeframe. They are open-note, but notes must be handwritten or printed — no digital notes or AI may be used as references during the quiz. Quizzes must be completed during the scheduled class period and cannot be made up without prior approval or documented circumstances. *********One of the lowest scores will be dropped at the end of the semester.* ***

I-Spy Geography Assignments (15%)

There will be ten discussion board assignments, completed outside of class in Canvas. For each assignment, students will respond to the prompt relating to the week's topic covered in class. Each discussion post should be 250–500 words and include at least one response to a classmate. These short, applied assignments are designed to help observe geography in daily life and practice making connections between course concepts and real-world examples.

Projects (30%)

Two projects will be assigned throughout the semester, tied to a themes in human geography (e.g., cultural landscapes, population patterns). These projects are designed to help apply geographic concepts to real-world examples and demonstrate understanding through data analysis, creativity, and critical thinking. The second project will serve as the final project that will be due during the final exam period in place of a test. Detailed rubrics and instructions will be provided for each project in Canvas.

Exams (30%)

There will be two exams in this course: a midterm and a final, each assessing understanding of lecture content, discussions, and in-class activities. Each exam will focus on material from the weeks preceding the exam, with the final exam not cumulative. Exams are open-book, but students may only use handwritten or printed notes — digital notes, or AI are not allowed.

Participation / In-Class Activities (10%)

Active participation is an important part of this course. Class meetings will include designated time for hands-on, active-learning activities (ALA) that promote interaction, collaboration, and engagement to help connect course material to real-world geography. These may include map exercises, group discussions, short writing prompts, or other applied geographic tasks. There will be 13 in-class activities throughout the semester. *********The lowest three scores will be dropped at the end of the semester*. *Please note that these activities cannot be made up, and arriving late or leaving early may prevent you from completing them, which could affect your participation grade.* ***

Grading Scale

Grade	Percentage
A+	97-100%
A	93-96.99%
A-	90-92.99%
B+	87-89.99%
B	83-86.99%
B-	80-82.99%
C+	77-79.99%
C	73-76.99%
C-	70-72.99%
D	60-69.99%
F	<60%

Course Policies

Attendance

- Students are **encouraged to attend all in-class meetings**. While attendance is not formally taken, there are thirteen graded in-class participation activities, which cannot be made up (3 lowest grades dropped).
- If students must miss a class due to an **excused absence** (e.g., illness, transportation issues), email the instructor prior to the start of class. It is the **student's responsibility** to follow up on any missed material.
- Conflicts with course schedule (unless unforeseeable) must be communicated with the instructor **48h in advance**. The student and the instructor will work together to find solutions to conflicts.
- For **extended absences** (longer than one week or coinciding with major assignments), contact the instructor to develop a work plan.
- If **the campus closes, or if a class meeting needs to be canceled** or adjusted due to weather or other concern, students should check Canvas for updates on how to continue learning and for information about any changes to events or assignments.

Late and Missed Work

- I-Spy Geography discussion boards and the two assigned projects are the only graded items that can be submitted late. Please manage your time carefully and follow the course schedule.
- Each student receives **three late work exemptions**, which allow a graded item to be submitted up to 48 hours past the original due date without penalty. Assignments submitted using an exemption will be graded as if submitted on time. When using a late exemption, please email the instructor.
- *Once all three late exemptions are used, any late submissions will automatically receive 0 points.*
- In-class quizzes occur most weeks. If you have an excused absence, email the instructor prior to class to schedule an **alternative time to complete the quiz**.
- **Active learning in-class activities cannot be made up**. The three lowest participation grades are dropped to accommodate occasional absences. For extended absences, contact the instructor.
- Students with **ODS accommodations** should submit documentation to the instructor as soon as possible. If your accommodations include extra time, please notify the instructor prior to the graded assignment.

Communication

- **Two-way communication** is strongly encouraged. All course-related emails should be sent using your **GMU email account**, which students are required to **check regularly** for updates.
- Please mute **cell phones** before class. If students must take a call during class, step outside to avoid disrupting peers. Computers and other devices should be used only for class-related activities. Off-task activity is considered unprofessional.
- The **instructor typically responds** Monday–Friday, 9:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m. Emails sent outside these hours may take 24–48 hours for a response. Please do not email questions about an assignment within 24 hours of its due date!

Grading

- **Citing sources:** Any information, data, or ideas that are not your own must be fully cited in APA format. Direct website links or hyperlinks alone are insufficient. Failure to properly cite sources is considered a violation of GMU Academic Standards.
- **Generative AI:** Use of Generative-AI (GenAI) tools must follow the Honor Code. Be transparent about using these tools, and cite any AI-generated work. Remember that AI tools may provide inaccurate, biased, or incomplete information, and reliance on them should not replace your own critical thinking or creativity.
- **Questions about grades:** If students have concerns about a graded assignment, email the instructor with specific questions. Feedback will be provided, but grades will only be changed in cases of calculation errors or clear oversight.
- **Graded assignments:** Assignments are generally returned and graded within one week of submission.

University Policies

- **Catalog:** The University Catalog (http://catalog.gmu.edu) is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.
- **Inclement Weather and Class Cancelation:** GMU posts closings on its website (www.gmu.edu.). You can receive notification from Mason Alerts via email or text to a cell phone; please let the instructor know if you need more information. If the campus closes, or if a class meeting needs to be canceled or adjusted due to weather or other concern, students should check Canvas [or other instruction as appropriate] for updates on how to continue learning and for information about any changes to events or assignments.
- **Registration:** Instructors do not have the capacity to remove students from class enrollment; therefore students are responsible for any changes in enrollment.
- **George Mason Diversity Statement**: George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty, and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study, and personal growth. An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected. The reflection of Mason's commitment to diversity and inclusion goes beyond policies and procedures to focus on behavior at the individual, group, and organizational level. The implementation of this commitment to diversity and inclusion is found in all settings, including individual work units and groups, student organizations and groups, and classroom settings; it is also found with the delivery of services and activities, including, but not limited to, curriculum, teaching, events, advising, research, service, and community outreach. Acknowledging that the attainment of diversity and inclusion are dynamic and

continuous processes, and that the larger societal setting has an evolving socio-cultural understanding of diversity and inclusion, Mason seeks to continuously improve its environment. To this end, the University promotes continuous monitoring and self-assessment regarding diversity. The aim is to incorporate diversity and inclusion within the philosophies and actions of the individual, group, and organization, and to make improvements as needed.

- **Academic Standards:** Academic Standards exist to promote authentic scholarship, support the institution's goal of maintaining high standards of academic excellence, and encourage continued ethical behavior of faculty and students to cultivate an educational community which values integrity and produces graduates who carry this commitment forward into professional practice. As members of the George Mason University community, we are committed to fostering an environment of trust, respect, and scholarly excellence. Our academic standards are the foundation of this commitment, guiding our behavior and interactions within this academic community. The practices for implementing these standards adapt to modern practices, disciplinary contexts, and technological advancements. Our standards are embodied in our courses, policies, and scholarship, and are upheld in the following principles:
  - **Honesty:** Providing accurate information in all academic endeavors, including communications, assignments, and examinations.
  - **Acknowledgement:** Giving proper credit for all contributions to one's work. This involves the use of accurate citations and references for any ideas, words, or materials created by others in the style appropriate to the discipline. It also includes acknowledging shared authorship in group projects, co-authored pieces, and project reports.
  - **Uniqueness of Work:** Ensuring that all submitted work is the result of one's own effort and is original, including free from self-plagiarism. This principle extends to written assignments, code, presentations, exams, and all other forms of academic work.
  - **Violations** of these standards—including but not limited to plagiarism, fabrication, and cheating—are taken seriously and will be addressed in accordance with university policies. The process for reporting, investigating, and adjudicating violations is outlined in the university's procedures. Consequences of violations may include academic sanctions, disciplinary actions, and other measures necessary to uphold the integrity of our academic community. The principles outlined in these academic standards reflect our collective commitment to upholding the highest standards of honesty, acknowledgement, and uniqueness of work. By adhering to these principles, we ensure the continued excellence and integrity of George Mason University's academic community.
  - **Student responsibility:** Students are responsible for understanding how these general expectations regarding academic standards apply to each course, assignment, or exam they participate in; students should ask their instructor for clarification on any aspect that is not clear to them.
- **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to upholding the letter and spirit of the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. Under the administration of University Life, Disability Services implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities. Students can begin the registration process with Disability Services at any time during their enrollment at George Mason University. If you are seeking accommodations, please visit https://ds.gmu.edu/ for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Disability Services is in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu. Phone: (703) 993-2474.

  - **Student responsibility**: Students are responsible for registering with Disability Services and communicating about their approved accommodations with their instructor in advance of any relevant class meeting, assignment, or exam.
- **FERPA and Use of GMU Email Addresses for Course Communication:** The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) governs the disclosure of education records for eligible students and is an essential aspect of any course. **Students must use their GMU email account** to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. Instructors will not respond to messages sent from or send messages regarding course content to a non-GMU email address.
  - **Student responsibility**: Students are responsible for checking their GMU email regularly for course-related information, and/or ensuring that GMU email messages are forwarded to an account they do check.
- **Title IX Resources and Required Reporting:** As a part of George Mason University's commitment to providing a safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and working environment for all members of the University community, the University does not discriminate based on sex or gender in any of its education or employment programs and activities. Accordingly, **all non-confidential employees, including your faculty member, have a legal requirement to report to the Title IX Coordinator, all relevant details obtained directly or indirectly about any incident of Prohibited Conduct** (such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, gender-based stalking, dating/domestic violence). Upon notifying the Title IX Coordinator of possible Prohibited Conduct, the Title IX Coordinator will assess the report and determine if outreach is required. If outreach is required, the individual the report is about (the "Complainant") will receive a communication, in the form of an email, offering that person the option to meet with a representative of the Title IX office. For more information about non-confidential employees, resources, and Prohibited Conduct, please see University Policy 1202: Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence. Questions regarding Title IX can be directed to the Title IX Coordinator via email to TitleIX@gmu.edu, by phone at 703-993-8730, or in person on the Fairfax campus in Aquia 373.
  - **Student opportunity**: If you prefer to speak to someone **confidentially**, please contact one of Mason's confidential employees in Student Support and Advocacy (SSAC), Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Student Health Services (SHS), and/or the Office of the University Ombudsperson.
- Course Materials and Privacy: All course materials posted to Canvas or any other course site are private to this class. By federal law, any materials that identify specific students (via their name, voice, or image) must not be shared with anyone not enrolled in this class. Video recordings — whether made by instructors or students — of class meetings that include audio, visual, or textual information from other students are private and must not be shared outside the class. Similarly, live video conference meetings (e.g., Collaborate or Zoom) that include audio, textual, or visual information from other students must be viewed privately and cannot be recorded or shared outside the class.
- **Additional Support Services:** Several departments exist to aid students in a wide variety of ways and are listed on the last pages of this syllabus.
- *Please refer to policies outlined in the Common Policies Addendum.*

Course Calendar

*****Syllabus is subject to change, please check Canvas for the most up to date version! *****

Class Date	Topics Covered	Important Dates **
Week 1: Overview of GGS 103		
Wednesday January 21	• Lecture 1: Introductions, Syllabus and Course Information	Quiz 1 Next Class **Monday January 26**

Week 2: Introduction to Spatial Thinking and Geography		
Monday January 26	• Quiz 1: Overview of GGS 103 • Lecture 2	iSpy Geography 1 Due **Sunday February 1**
Wednesday January 28	• Lecture 1 Continued • Active Learning Activity (ALA) 1	Quiz 2 Next Class **Monday February 2**
Week 3: Population Geography Part 1 – Distribution and Density		
Monday February 2	• Quiz 2: Introduction to Spatial Thinking and Human Geography • Lecture 3	iSpy Geography 2 Due **Sunday February 8**
Wednesday February 4	• Guest Lecture (Dr. Christine Rosenfeld, GMU/GGS) • ALA 2	Quiz 3 Next Class **Monday February 9**
Week 4: Population Geography Part 2 – Dynamics and Migration		
Monday February 9	• Quiz 3: Population Geography – Distribution and Density • Lecture 4	iSpy Geography 3 Due **Sunday February 15**
Wednesday February 11	• Lecture 4 Continued • ALA 3	Quiz 4 Next Class **Monday February 16**
Week 5: Cultural Geography Part 1 – Landscapes, Patterns and Processes		
Monday February 16	• Quiz 4: Population Geography – Dynamics and Migration • Lecture 5	iSpy Geography 4 Due **Sunday February 22**
Wednesday February 18	• Lecture 5 Continued • ALA 4	Quiz 5 Next Class **Monday February 23**
Week 6: Cultural Geography Part 2 – Identity, Language and Religion		
Monday February 23	• Quiz 5: Cultural Geography – Landscapes, Patterns and Processes • Lecture 6	iSpy Geography 5 Due **Sunday March 1**
Wednesday February 25	• Lecture 6 Continued • ALA 5	Quiz 6 Next Class **Monday March 2**
Week 7: Exam One		
Monday March 2	• Quiz 6: Cultural Geography – Identity, Language and Religion • ALA 6: Exam 1 Review	
Wednesday March 4	• Exam One	
Week 8: Spring Break		
Monday March 9	• **No Class!** • **Work on Project 1 (if needed).** The project is due after Spring Break to provide a buffer period, but students who do not wish to work during the break are encouraged to submit earlier.	Project 1 Due **Sunday March 22**
Wednesday March 11		Project 1 Presentations **March 23 & March 25**

Week 9: Political Geography		
Monday March 16	• Lecture 7	iSpy Geography 6 Due **Sunday March 29**
Wednesday March 18	• Lecture 7 Continued • ALA 7	Quiz 7 Next Class **Monday March 23**
Week 10: Economic Geography		
Monday March 23	• Quiz 7: Political Geography • Lecture 8	iSpy Geography 7 Due **Sunday April 5**
Wednesday March 25	• Lecture 8 Continued • ALA 8 Continued	Quiz 8 Next Class **Monday March 30**
Week 11: Students Teach Regional Geography		
Monday March 30	• Quiz 8: Economic Geography • Project 1 Presentations + ALA 9	
Wednesday April 1	• Project 1 Presentations + ALA 9 Continued	
Week 12: Urban Geography		
Monday April 6	• Lecture 9	iSpy Geography 8 Due **Sunday April 12**
Wednesday April 8	• Guest Lecture (Shirin Alsadat Mahmoudian, GMU/GGS) • ALA 10	Quiz 9 Next Class **Monday April 13**
Week 13: Environmental Geography and Geospatial Technologies		
Monday April 13	• Quiz 9: Urban Geography • Lecture 10	iSpy Geography 9 Due **Sunday April 19**
Wednesday April 15	• Lecture 10 Continued • ALA 11	Quiz 10 Next Class **Monday April 20**
Week 14: Health Geography		
Monday April 20	• Quiz 10: Environmental Geography • Lecture 11	iSpy Geography 10 Due **Sunday April 26**
Wednesday April 22	• Lecture 11 Continued • ALA 12	Quiz 11 Next Class **Monday April 27**
Week 15: Exam Two		
Monday April 27	• Quiz 11: Health Geography • ALA 13: Exam 2 Review	
Wednesday April 29	• Exam Two	
Week 16 & Final Exam Period		
Monday May 4	• Last day of classes: NO-IN PERSON CLASS! • Work on Project 2	Project 2 Due **Sunday May 10**

** **Items that are due must be submitted by 11:59pm Eastern Time on the dates indicated above.**