

Field Excursion: Barbados

1. INTRODUCTION

Efforts to increase environmental utility or decrease environmental hazard are called environmental management (see Geog 302 and 404). Integrating environmental management into a larger framework of social and economic priorities is the focus of the “sustainable development” discourse. It is increasingly evident that the current human impact is unsustainable, and new strategies must be found for managing our relationship with our planet, our ecosystem, our resource base, our economy, our remarkable history and pre-history, and our community (in the largest sense). This reality presents challenges to all citizens, but there is a particular obligation for university communities to explore the challenges. This course is intended to explore the challenges by examining transition in a Small Island Developing State: Barbados.

The central attribute of the course is geographic synthesis. In your previous studies you will have learned about various facets of geographic analysis. Some of these courses may have been in the field, but many will have taken place in the confined space of the university, making it difficult to test, apply, or truly explore the concepts that are taught. In this course we draw on the various tools and perspectives (and add some new ones), and we try to apply them to understanding the interlinked forces that shape both physical landscapes and human communities.

Two distinct but interdependent problem sets: Since the 1987 Brundtland Commission report, “sustainable development” has become a fashionable phrase for describing the challenge of reconciling human needs with planetary limitations. The net impact of humans on the carrying capacity of the planet, or of any region, is a function of both numbers of people and impact *per capita*. There are two categorically distinct components to the challenge of sustainability. One is exemplified in the so-called “developing world” where population pressures and material hardship often define the major impacts. The other relates to the industrial world where impacts arise from consumption rates and from the political strategies required to maintain them. The constructs of “environment” in these two settings are distinct, as are the cultural options for management. The “Common Future” of the Brundtland Report refers to the interlinking of strategies. Barbados, a Small Island Developing State, provides an ideal microcosm within which to explore both the challenges of integrated sustainable development planning and the operational links and mutual obligations that connect the “global north” with developing countries. Geography, with its focus on synthesis, offers a valuable perspective for this exploration.

2. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Barbados offers a unique study environment. It is small enough that in the space of ten days we can get a coherent overview of the geological and geomorphic background, the biogeographic context, the impact of history, and the current operation of the forces of “development” and social change. We will strive to see how these processes interact and how they become visible in the contemporary landscape. We will be particularly concerned about issues of environmental change, environmental protection, globalization and sustainable development.

The objective of the course is to develop skills of geographic synthesis as a means to understanding conditions for and barriers to sustainable development planning. We will examine the “physical evidence” on the island, discuss issues and priorities with local experts, and conduct independent targeted research.

3. COURSE ACTIVITIES

The field trip can be divided into three sections. The first is the introductory overview (two days). The second is a series of case studies, field exercises and site visits (three days). The last is the period of independent research (three days). These activities are interdependent, and the boundaries between them may shift slightly, depending on circumstances. You will be marked for exercises associated with each section as follows.

A 1000 word “situation analysis” of Barbados:	20
Field exercises:	40
Participation in the field:	10
Research paper:	30 (due TBA)

4. SAFETY AND DECORUM

Field activities are always associated with some hazard. We are obliged to minimize these. For that reason, and also to ensure smooth coordination of course activities, it is essential that we communicate about schedules and activities. For safety, students should never be alone outside of the field centre. When any students are away from the group – always two or more -- someone within the group should always be told where students will be and when they will return. It is, of course, vital that when we are working in communities we are fully respectful of residents and other visitors.

5. STUDENT INTEGRITY

Ideas are the currency of universities and they must be treated with the appropriate respect. We are now obliged to post the following quote (Article 15) from the Handbook on Student Rights and Responsibilities

“No student shall, with intent to deceive, represent the work of another person as his or her own in any academic writing, essay, thesis, research report, project or assignment submitted in a course or program of study or represent as his or her own an entire essay or work of another, whether the material so represented constitutes a part or the entirety of the work submitted.”

For more details, See: <http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/>. **This is important!!**

6. PREPARING

There are several steps you need to take BEFORE leaving for GEOG 496 excursion. These include:

- 1) Ensuring that you are medically prepared for the trip
 - your state of health is adequate for the trip,
 - you have consulted with a tropical medicine specialist about preparing for the areas you will visit and you have taken recommended action,
 - you have notified the instructor in writing of any special medical needs.
- 2) Ensuring that all travel documents (passports and visas – as required) are in order.
 - you must leave passport information with the instructor.
- 3) Leaving emergency contact information with the instructor.
- 4) Ensuring that you have adequate medical and travel insurance. (You will be given the opportunity to purchase “trip cancellation” insurance directly from the travel agent. This covers your ticket cost in the event that you cannot travel for health reasons.)
- 5) Reading and signing the “GEOG 496 Student Acceptance Form”
- 6) You must attend the information meetings held at McGill.