

Geography 408 - Fall Semester 2023

Course Syllabus

Geography of Development

Monday & Wednesday 8:35am - 9:55am

Room: 306 Burnside Hall

Section 001

Professor: Dr. Jon Unruh, Department of Geography

Office: Burnside Hall 308B

Email: jon.unruh@mcgill.ca

Office hours: By appointment, please email. Either in-person or via Zoom.

TA:

Email:

Office hours: By appointment, please email.

Course Description

This course will examine the geography of international development by looking at a selection of some of the more acute development problems and their attempted solutions, with examples drawn primarily from Africa and the Middle East.

The course begins with an overview of how international development works at the level of donors and science, along with the role of host governments and local communities--in pursuing agendas for development. Next we consider the broad issue of land rights, focusing on how land rights work in different areas of the world and how they are fundamental to development and to resolving a range of problems. We then examine the problem of armed conflict--the types, how they function, how they impact development, and the role of the 'peace process' in moving away from conflict and toward development. As an example of the latter we will look at the recovery of land rights systems after war.

We then move on to an examination of a series of selected topics important to development. These may include: COVID-19 and development; food security; deforestation and desertification; climate change; and poverty; among others.

Course Material

The course material will encompass lectures, readings, documentary videos, guest lectures and group exercises. The readings listed in the syllabus are tentative and subject to change. It is the student's responsibility to become familiar with MyCourses. Lectures and readings correspond in topic only but are otherwise independent--meaning lectures and readings do not cover the same material. Readings are available on MyCourses. Additional readings apart from those listed below may be assigned during lecture. Lectures will not be

recorded. Full copies of the powerpoint lectures will be placed on mycourses prior to class during the drop-add period. After the drop-add period a reduced version of the lecture powerpoint will be placed on mycourses.

Course Evaluation

Course evaluation will include:

1. One midterm exam:
 - a. Worth 25 percent of final grade.
2. In-class group exercises:
 - a. Five 'pop solutions' and role playing
 - b. Worth 15 percent of final grade, each is worth three percent of final grade.
3. Group Project:
 - a. Worth 30 percent of final grade
4. Final exam:
 - a. During final exam period. This is a take home exam and is not comprehensive.
 - b. Worth 30 percent of final grade

Following University policy: *“In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the evaluation scheme in a course is subject to change, provided that there be timely communications to the students regarding the change.”*

Group Exercises

Group exercises will be assigned during lectures and will not be announced prior to the lecture. In order to participate in the group exercises, class attendance is needed. The exercises are to be conducted as a group discussion. Usually this is done in-class, however at times your group will need to meet outside of class to complete the assignment. The topics of the group exercises are dilemmas of development--meaning there are no clear, correct answers. Many of the problems that international development must deal with have no clear answers, and decisions and courses of action must be made with incomplete information and not enough time. Your group however must produce a decision, or a course of action—just as you and a small group of your co-workers will do later in your career. This must be written in a one page brief and handed in at the end of class or on the assigned due date, together with the names and ID numbers of the group members that took part. If a group member did not take part in the discussion, they are not to be included on the brief to be handed in.

Group Project

The topic and framework for the group project will be announced once the semester is underway. The project is intended to be research and cooperation heavy, and writing light—meaning the writing that is done to describe the work needs to be very polished. A career in international work will involve participating in groups on projects to produce written products in order to achieve policy, practice, advocacy, research or commercial objectives. Learning to work in groups in an effective and timely manner is an important skill and fundamental to contemporary careers. The groups for the project are the same as for the group exercises.

Class Policies

Class policies follow McGill policies. In particular please note that:

1. Students are expected to keep up with lectures and readings, including any changes.
2. Students are responsible for knowing the information on the syllabus.
3. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in academia is evolving. If AI is to be used or allowed in assignments/exams for this class, it will be described specifically.
4. Accommodation for religious observances are dealt with according to McGill policy.
5. If you need academic accommodations, contact your [Faculty Student Affairs Office](#), the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), or the [Student Accessibility & Achievement](#) office (formerly the Office of Students with Disabilities) as appropriate.
6. If you wish to discuss a piece of graded assessment once it has been returned to you, this should be done with the Teaching Assistant in the first instance.
7. If an assessment (group exercise or exam) is missed with good reason (documentation needed), then the value of the missed assessment is added to the subsequent 'like' assessment. For example if the midterm exam is missed then the value of the midterm is added to the final exam. If a group exercise is missed the value of the missed exercise is added to the subsequent exercise. In all cases the student must contact the professor if an assessment is to be missed and provide relevant documentation as to the reason for missing the assessment.
8. For information on university and department policies for student assessment, please go to <http://www.mcgill.ca/geography/studentassessment>
9. Supplemental work to improve grades is not allowed.
10. The instructor reserves the right to apply a curve to exam grades.
11. "McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information) (approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)". "L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).
12. "In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded." (approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and evaluation.)" "Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue)."
13. Student well-being is a priority for the University. All of our health and wellness resources have been integrated into a single Student Wellness Hub, your one-stop shop for everything related to your physical and mental health. If you need to access services or get more information, visit the Virtual Hub at mcgill.ca/wellness-hub or drop by the Brown Student Services Building (downtown) or Centennial Centre (Macdonald Campus). Within your faculty, you can also connect with your Local Wellness Advisor (to make an appointment, visit mcgill.ca/lwa).

14. Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., lectures, assignments, handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions) are protected by law and are for your personal use only. They may not be distributed in any form or medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of [copyright](#) can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.”
15. **University content warning:** “Please be aware that some of the course content may be disturbing for some students. It has been included in the course because it directly relates to the learning outcomes. Please contact the instructor if you have specific concerns about this.”

Important Dates

Week of Oct 25: Midterm Exam

Group projects due the last day of class (Monday, December 4), in compliance with University Student Assessment Policy.

Final Exam: Take home, scheduled by the University, details to be announced

Other dates: Announced in class

Tentative Schedule

Note that the schedule is approximate and is subject to change, with changes announced in class. Students are responsible for being aware of changes that may occur in the schedule and any readings, and for keeping up-to-date on the material covered in class. This is best done by attending class regularly.

Introduction

I. Course overview and the 'Development Machine'

- a. Course Introduction and Overview.
- b. International Development and How it Works – The Development Machine

Readings:

1. Not your average diplomats, The Economist
1. How to write a policy brief - FAO
2. How to write a policy brief - IDRC
3. Diplomacy and Peace in Fragile Contexts - OECD

- c. How the International Science Machine Influences Development;
- d. The Scientific Method and Development Policy

Readings:

1. The role of science in reaching development goals
<http://theconversation.com/the-role-of-science-in-reaching-development-goals-42071>
2. The fundamental role of science and technology in international development
<https://www.nap.edu/read/11583/chapter/2>

PART I. PRIMARY DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS:

Land rights & Armed conflict

II. Land Rights and Development

- a. Fundamentals of land tenure

Readings:

1. *Land tenure, economic growth and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa.*
 2. *Customary Land Tenure in Sub-Saharan Africa Today: Meanings and contexts.*
- b. Land tenure - international agreement
- Readings:
1. *The Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure. United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization*

III. Armed Conflict

- a. Fundamentals of armed conflict, conflict types

Reading:

1. *Armed conflict: trends and drivers.* (This is a longer document, However it covers the 2-3 lectures on armed conflict)

IV. The Peace Process

- a. Operational aspects

Readings/Videos:

1. *From Conflict to Peace-building: The role of natural resources and the environment, UNEP.*
2. *Ad hoc humanity: UN peacekeeping and the limits of the international community in Gaza.*
3. How does peacekeeping work? http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/6524867.stm
4. Can the UN keep the peace? <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuy4dFSD0tY>
5. New rules for rebuilding a broken nation. <https://youtu.be/TvW4yugCPZo>

- b. Land tenure in a conflict context

Reading:

1. *Land, conflict and livelihoods in the Great Lakes Region: Testing Policies to the Limit.*

- c. Land tenure case studies, drawn from: Iraq, Liberia, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Darfur, Mozambique, Colombia

Readings may be assigned.

PART II. TOPICS IN DEVELOPMENT:

Climate, Food, Deforestation, Desertification, Poverty, Silos in International Development

(Topics covered as time permits, and not necessarily in this order)

V. COVID-19 and International Development

- a. Impacts of the pandemic on international development

Readings:

1. To be determined.

VI. Climate Change, Environment and Development

- a. Fundamentals of climate change and development

Readings:

1. *Climate Change, Resources, Migration: Campaigning rhetoric or bleak reality? Just how serious a security challenge is climate change for Africa?.*

2. *In search of shelter: mapping the effects of climate change on human migration and displacement.*

b. Madagascar case study

Reading:

1. *Environmental change and adaptation in degraded agro-ecosystems: the case of highland Madagascar.*

VII. Food Security and Development

a. Fundamentals of food security

Readings:

1. *Food Security Basics*

2. Reading: *Famine Early Warning System (FEWS)* <http://www.fews.net/> Review the countries in the 'Areas of Highest Concern'

b. Ethiopia case study: Genetic erosion and food security

VIII. Deforestation and land rights

a. Reception of rights and perception of rights.

Readings:

1. *Migrant land rights reception and 'clearing to claim' in sub-Saharan Africa: A deforestation example from southern Zambia.*

IX. Desertification

a. Old and new perspectives

Readings:

1. *Land degradation neutrality*

X. Poverty and Development

a. The UN perspective

Reading:

1. *Can the world cut poverty in half? How policy reform and effective aid can meet international development goals.*

XI. Silos in international development: the case of Afghanistan

a. International Development and working in silos:

Reading:

1. *A volatile interaction between peace-building priorities: road infrastructure reconstruction and land rights in Afghanistan.*

2. *United Nations Aims to Break Down Silos Limiting Peacekeeping's Effectiveness*
<https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/dsgsm890.doc.htm>

3. *Silos or system?*