Geography 511: Advanced Political Geography
Winter 2015
Wednesdays, 11:35 a.m. - 2:25 p.m.
Burnside 429

Prof. Benjamin Forest
Department of Geography
McGill University

Course Calendar Description: Questions of space and power in contemporary political geography. Range of topics, including territoriality, the state, the politics of space, critical geopolitics, symbolic landscapes, and GIS and mapping. Emphasizes theoretical issues but includes empirical material and/or case studies. Intended to appeal broadly to graduate students in human geography.

The course focuses on questions of space and power in contemporary political geography, and is intended to appeal broadly to graduate students in human geography. The class will address a range of topics, including territoriality, the state, the politics of space, critical geopolitics, symbolic landscapes, and GIS and mapping. Most weeks will include empirical material and/or case studies, but the set readings emphasize theoretical concerns. The class is open to all graduate students, and – with the permission of the instructor – advanced undergrads.

Course Requirements: Students must prepare short summaries of the readings each week (which serve as a basis for discussion), and must present these summaries to the class on a rotating basis. Student will also need to find, read, and summarize articles and/or book reviews on certain weeks. In addition, students must submit either 3 analytic essays based on the assigned readings, or 1 major research paper on a topic related to the student’s thesis or dissertation. Undergrads are expected to write the 3 essays, graduate students may do either option (subject to my approval). Finally, students may be required to periodically attend talks in the department’s Geospectives lecture series or other venues.

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<tr>
<th>Reading summaries/responses/reviews</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 analytic essays (6-8 pages)</td>
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<td>Proposal for research paper</td>
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<td>1 research paper (&gt;20 pages)</td>
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Information on university and department policies concerning student assessment can be found at the following website: [www.mcgill.ca/geography/studentassessment](http://www.mcgill.ca/geography/studentassessment)
**Due Dates:** All papers are due by email as properly formatted PDF or Word documents by 11 PM on the dates listed below.

- Analytic Essay 1: February 14*
- Analytic Essay 2: March 16*
- Analytic Essay 3: April 11**
  (or)
- Proposal: March 10*
- Research paper: April 11**

* If the schedule of readings is adjusted, the Essay 1 is due ten days after we read *The Birth of Territory*; and Essay 2 is due ten days after we cover “State Knowledge/Local Knowledge”.

** Extensions may be granted for Essay 3 and the Research Paper. All other assignments **must** be submitted by their deadlines. The penalty for late papers is one full grade per day.

**Expectations:** This class is a graduate-style seminar. This means that in addition to the usual standards regarding academic integrity (listed below), students have responsibilities and freedoms different from undergraduate classes. In particular, all students – graduate and undergraduate – are expected to take considerable responsibility for understanding, digesting, and synthesizing the material. Taking the class is not a passive activity! You are expected to complete all readings and assignments on time, to actively participate in class discussions, and to generally take the initiative in engaging the material.

**Analytic Essays.** Your analytic essay should address material that we have read for class, but may also include any of the recommended readings. Please do not use texts that I have not assigned for the class. In your essay, you should offer a detailed analysis and critique (typically of two or more readings), rather than broad summaries and general arguments. I am interested more in depth than in breadth; this is your opportunity to explore the nuances and subtle details of the arguments beyond what we can do during class discussions.

There are several models for successful essays, but the most common is to explore a particular idea, concept, or theory that is used in several readings. Do the authors mean two different things but use the same term? Do they use different terms for the same concept? What are the (theoretical) consequences of these differences? Purcell’s (2003) article on the Marston-Brenner debate is a good example of this sort of analysis.¹

Similarly, you can offer a critique of the assumptions that underlie a set of readings. The focus here may not be on the explicit disagreements between the texts, but on the (unacknowledged) assumptions that they share. Agnew (1994) is a great example of this approach.²


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Research Papers. The research paper option is intended primarily for graduate students working on a thesis or dissertation; it is often a useful way to draft a chapter of such a document, or to explore a set of literature relevant to your research. Guidelines for the proposal and papers will be distributed in class. As with the Analytic essays, please see the Research Paper Guide on my website.

Any student who wishes to take the research paper option must receive my permission prior to due date of Essay #1.

McGill University policy requires the inclusion and wording of the following sections on Academic Integrity and Language Policy on all syllabi.

**Academic Integrity:** 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/integrity for more information).

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/integrity).

**Language Policy:** 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.

**Readings:** Books and the course pack will be available at the McGill Bookstore. All readings other than the books listed below are in the course pack.

GEOG 511 Course pack


**Required and recommended readings:** Students must read all required readings each week. The recommended readings are provided as a resource if students want to address the topic further, e.g., for an analytic essay, research paper, or comprehensive examinations.

**Topics**

Week 1: Introduction
Week 2: Disciplinary History of Political Geography
Week 3: Territoriality, Boundaries, and the State
Week 4: **Workshop**: Searching the Scholarly Literature
Week 5: The Birth of Territory
Week 6: Foucault: Power Without Boundaries
Week 7: Governmentality
Week 8: State Knowledge/Local Knowledge
Week 9: Natural Resources, Identity and Power
Week 10: **Workshop**: Scholarly Writing
Week 11: Cartography, GIS, and Power
Week 12: Urban Public Space
Week 13: TBD

**Background, Textbooks, and Surveys of Political Geography**

*These books provide a broad background to the discipline and study of political geography. Students who are not familiar with the subfield may find it helpful to consult them either prior to the class or during the semester.*


Schedule of Classes

Week 1: January 7
Introduction

Week 2: January 14
Disciplinary History of Political Geography
The two readings for this week are rather straightforward, both offering histories of political geography and addressing what the authors see as the major developments in the field in the 20th century (Agnew 2002) and in the last 40 years or so (Johnston 2001). For discussion, please think about the “big picture” each author tells: How would you describe the general development of political geography? What are the major concepts in the field, and how have they changed?

Required


Recommended:


Week 3: January 21
Territoriality, Boundaries, and the State
Murphy (2013) and Fall (2010) should be pretty straightforward. Both articles examine the nature of territorial claims or boundaries, but they are also implicit statements about how scholars should approach claims about state boundaries. Sack (1986) and Agnew (1994) are more challenging conceptually, but are well written and well organized. Sack (1986) attempts to define and offer a general theory of a fundamental concept in geography -- territoriality. Agnew (1994) critiques the use of a fundamental concept in International Relations -- the state -- and illustrates some of the conceptual consequences of Sack’s theory. You should consider how both Murphy (2013) and Agnew (1994) provide examples of the phenomenon Fall (2010) alludes to (but does not necessarily explain): reification, naturalization, and fetishization.

I suggest reading them in this order: Sack (1986), Agnew (1994), Murphy (2013), and then Fall (2010). You may not understand everything, but figure out what you do understand, and what you do not. We will work through the more difficult parts in class.

Note that Fall’s (2010) article is a response to a paper titled “Artificial States”, available at http://www.nber.org/papers/w12328.pdf.

Required


Recommended


**Week 4: January 28**

**Workshop: Searching the Scholarly Literature**

This week there is a special workshop led by super Librarian Julie Jones on the use of the Web of Knowledge, Scopus, and Google Scholar for searching the scholarly literature. Class will meet in one of the library's computer labs, rather than our regular classroom. The workshop will involve "hands-on" activities so it is very important for you to attend. These research skills will be critical for the course and for any future research endeavor.

**Location:** 413 Schulich Library

Start reading Elden (2013) – see below.

**Week 5: February 4**

**The Birth of Territory**

*We continue the theme of territory this week, but turn to a book that takes a much deeper historical and theoretical approach, Stuart Elden’s recently published The Birth of Territory (2013). This work is as much political theory as political geography, so be prepared to spend time reading and re-reading it.*

**Required**


**Week 6: February 11**

**Foucault: Power Without Boundaries**

*This week, we read Foucault's Discipline and Punish, a seminal book in the study of power, politics, and space. In particular, Foucault is interested in how states exercise and apply power using space, but with strategies that are not necessarily territorial. Foucault offers an alternative way to think about space and power that goes beyond conventional issues of territoriality, boundaries, and borders. In particular, this book has Foucault’s highly influential discussion of the Panopticon and panopiconic strategies of state power.*

*Finally, I would like everyone to find a book review of Discipline and Punish from a scholarly journal. These reviews will help you understand the book, and will illustrate how scholars have offered different interpretations and critiques of the work. Be prepared to summarize your review for the class. (Use the Web of Knowledge or Scopus to locate book reviews -- there are about 40 listed. You can navigate to either resource through the library page.)*

**Required**

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**Recommended**


Week 7: February 18

Governmentality

This week we continue our discussion of Foucault by turning to the concept of governmentality, described by Foucault as “the art of government.” As with the Panopticon, Foucault explores the ways that power is exerted in non-territorial fashions by states, in part by defining the problems that governments must solve, and thereby expanding the reach of state power. Rose and Miller (1992) develop this concept in a widely cited article, illustrating the impact that such “translations” can have on the subsequent application of an idea. Hannah (2000) is one of the few book-length treatments in geography to apply the concept of governmentality, but we will read his 2009 article instead, along with Rose-Redwood’s (2006) application of the concept.

Required


Recommended


**Week 8: February 25**

**State Knowledge/Local Knowledge**

This week we turn to the work of James Scott, a political scientist qua anthropologist who explores the application of state power through non-territorial spatial strategies. Although the book does not make explicit reference to Foucault or to geography, its case studies are superb applications of many of the principles we have addressed to date. The recommended articles are simply a selection of the many works that subsequently drew on Scott’s arguments in the book.

*Required*


*Recommended*


Winter Break: March 4

**Week 9: March 11**

**Natural Resources, Identity and Power**

This week, we address the politics of natural resource governance in the context of culture and identity. There is obviously a vast literature on the political economy of natural resources, their role in (under)development, the “resource curse”, pollution, global warming, etc., but we take a more focused perspective, examining the intersection of resources and identity, with Desbiens’ (2013) book on Quebec and hydroelectricity. Her work compares usefully with Scott (1998). The recommended readings focus primarily on water, in either Canada or Israel/Palestine.

The first hour of class will be a GeoSpectives talk by Prof. Desbiens in Burnside 426.

**Required**


**Recommended**


Week 10: March 18
Workshop: Scholarly Writing
This week we will depart from our usual format to address scholarly writing. We will discuss a brief reading, but most of class will be devoted to peer review of either your proposals (due March 10), or Essay #2 (due March 16). Orwell’s piece is a classic discussion of the political implications of writing, and not as you may have thought, a discussion of Quebec politics! Orwell was an essayist, a form of writing (now sadly in decline) that lies somewhere between political journalism and scholarship. He focuses on the distortions produced by lazy and imprecise prose in political essays, but his comments are directly relevant to scholarly writing as well.

The four recommended works are also worth reading, although Miller (2004) will be of use mostly to those of you working with quantitative data. Anyone who works with visual information (images, graphs, charts, maps, and the like) should read something by Edward Tufte. His book listed below is a good place to start. For writing, there are many style guides, including the perennial favourite The Elements of Style, but Williams (2005) is an outstanding modern guide and well worth buying. Finally, Biling (2013) is a delightfully acerbic commentary on contemporary writing in the social sciences.

Required


Recommended


Week 11: March 25
Cartography, GIS, and Power
GIS technology – as Systems or Science – raises a host of issues regarding space, power, and technology, but many similar debates arose in the context of a much older technology: cartography. For this week, we will read a history of 19th century cartography in the United States, and how it was used to fundamentally reshape and rethink social relations. The recommended readings are a mixed bag but generally are efforts to place cartography, GIS and related technologies within a social context, to tie GIS to broader debates about cartography and mapping, and to offer critiques of the common hagiographical accounts of GIS. These works include other historical accounts of cartography and mapping technologies (Edney 1997; Harley and Laxton 2001; Harley, et al 1987; Thrower 2007), critical treatments of GIS (Curry 1998; Pickles 1995), and practitioners’ guides to GIS (Duckham, Goodchild, and Worboys 2003, Goodchild and Janelle 2004).

Required


Recommended


Week 12: April 1
Urban Public Space

In the literature on public space in geography, two interwoven issues are fundamental: How space is used to include or exclude individuals and groups as members of “the public”; and conversely, how the definition of certain individuals, groups, and practices as part of “the public” shape space. Mitchell has been particularly prominent in these debates, and much of this work draws on the French theorist Henri Lefebvre’s work. Mitchell’s book (1995), for example, takes its title from an essay by Lefebvre (1996). Blomley (2011, 2004) addresses the question’s geographic and legal dimensions, an approach that we will focus on this year.

Required


Recommended:


**Week 13: April 8**

TBD.

All these books are about me, and most of them can't explain what governmentality means either.