

McGill University
Department of Geography
Barbados Field Course -- Geog 496 - 2022

Nov 2021

FAQ

The Barbados Field course will be offered during the winter “reading week” break. We leave Montreal for Bridgetown Barbados at **6 AM Friday Feb 25 and return Sun Mar 6, 2022**. The course is limited to 14 students, with priority going to Geog students whose program requires a field course, and then students from other programs requiring field courses, but there is often space for students from other programs as well and we try to build an interdisciplinary team for the course. Here is some information that addresses FAQs regarding GEOG 496 (Barbados).

Cost: The final cost is set by the university, and will be 2,582.08\$ for 2022. The fee does include airfare, as well as accommodation, all local group travel, entries for sites we visit, and some meals (lunch on some days when we are doing field work). That means that you are responsible for the additional expenses of meals, and whatever minor costs might be associated with research that you undertake to do as part of the course. There are kitchen facilities at Bellairs, and so generally students make their own meals or pack lunches for days when there are not group meals. The research costs are usually only local transport (buses or taxis) and some photocopying etc., so it does not add up to much. Applicants MAY be eligible for an Enriched Educational Opportunities: need-based bursary. Details available at <https://www.mcgill.ca/studentaid/special-funding/eoo>.

Activity: The overall objective of the course is to study “environment and development,” that is, to study the interactions of economic diversification and social change with the unique, valuable and vulnerable aspects of local biophysical systems. The “small island developing state” (SIDS) status of Barbados makes it a particularly interesting place to study these interactions. The fact that it is a relatively small and safe island, with a well-educated population and excellent transport infrastructure--as well as the fact that it has a McGill research station--makes it an ideal setting for university courses on this topic.

The course is structured around something called “situation analysis” and consists of three categories of activities:

- Overall orientation: discovery of the island system, with a focus on the interaction between bio-physical and socio-cultural system (2.5 days).
- Sector focuses: a series of in-depth case-studies of important economic or management activities. These are assessed in which relation to development objectives and environmental impacts (3 days).
- Independent research: Following leads from the case studies, students select projects for independent research (actually, small teams) (3.5 days).

Course Demands: The course is intended to be compatible with an otherwise full semester of courses (15 credits), and so course activities are very heavily concentrated within reading week. There is a course pack that will be available early in the term and students should do some reading prior to departure. There will also be two one-hour seminars before departure: one to deal with safety and logistics; the other to deal with course material. Typically there are three in-field assignments, two of which are completed in the field and one of which is done within 48 hours of return to Montreal. The research papers are due about three weeks after reading week (and therefore before the “end of term crush” of other essay deadlines and final exams. Depending on your status, you may be able to take this as a sixth course during the winter term, and therefore earn 18 credits during the semester.

Free Time on the Island: As noted in the previous paragraph, the course places heavy demands on students’ time when we are on the island – there are field activities every day with early starts, and assignments some nights that keep students up late. This is not a course for people who are looking for a mid-winter holiday! (However, it is true that students generally enjoy the course very much, proving that learning and fun are not inherently mutually exclusive.) Although the course was not offered last year because of COVID lockdowns, we will try to arrange an opportunity to speak to previous students about the demands and the rewards.

Applying: If you are interested in applying for this course, please email an application as outlined below. Selection is based on four main factors: program, GPA, application statement, and date the application is received.

The application should be a Word attachment. Please use ***BARBADOS 496 2022 – your name*** as both the SUBJECT LINE for the email and the FILE NAME of the attachment. Email to tom.meredith@mcgill.ca.

The attachment should include, in this order,

1. your name, email contact, program and year,
2. CGPA or GPA from last two terms (and add a note of explanation if you believe your GPA is not an accurate reflection of your actual academic ability).
3. whether or not your program requires a field course,
4. a short application statement (150 word max) addressing
 - how the field course would contribute to your academic program,
 - what you would hope to get from the field course, and
 - what you think you could contribute to the field study group.