Purpose of the Course

This course examines the United States from geographical history perspective, using three basic theoretical concepts for its organizational structure: regions, scale, and networks. We will start by identifying and discussing the social, economic and political implications of some schemas that Americans have used to carve the U.S. into regions. During this discussion, we will note how the country has been structured into a nested jurisdictional “scalar hierarchy” that includes federal, state and local levels. Although this scalar hierarchy might seem quite static and natural, it’s not. Here’s some evidence: electoral boundaries get redrawn after each census. And, after the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections the geographical underpinnings to the Electoral College were held up to new scrutiny. Throughout American history a fundamental political debate that has underpinned many other political debates (even regarding recent issues such as abortion and gay rights) concerns the overall organizational system that’s held the scalar hierarchy together: federalism. At which level should the ultimate power lie within the federalist scalar hierarchy that the Founders created? For what things should each level of (or constituent within) the hierarchy be responsible? How should those responsibilities be financed and executed?

From time to time (and it seems like it is getting to be all the time these days), many America-watchers have wondered if this scalar hierarchy is the most appropriate official structure. American society and economy have changed so much since the late-eighteenth century. Instead of doing anything comprehensive to effect radical change, however, politicians and their supporters have pursued a variety of strategies to keep the system intact and operational. They’ve helped the private sector construct a national culture (through the media and advertising) that promotes a “common” American Dream as a consumer ideal [because, as William Levitt put it back in the 1950s, homeowners don’t have time to be Communists], they’ve enacted funding and entitlement programs that hold financial carrots (and sticks) out to those at the lower levels of the hierarchy, and they are continually redefining their responsibilities by cutting or rationalizing existing programs—with impacts that trickle both upwards and down.

How well the federal system does or doesn’t operate becomes clearer during crisis. For this reason we will spend some time talking about the geographies of the Great Depression of the 1930s, World War II, the civil unrest of the 1960s, Reaganomics and the New Federalism of the 1980s, the events of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. These crises highlight the fact that the United States is a multi-networked society that has become functionally dependent upon a somewhat fragile and perhaps overly complex nested jurisdictional scalar hierarchy for its very day-to-day as well as long-term existence.

Required Books (All available at Follett’s Orange Bookstore in Marshall Square.)

Thomas Frank, What’s the Matter with Kansas: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America (Owl Books, 2005)


Attendance

Required. See the section on “Evaluation.”

Evaluation

So as not to place too much emphasis on any one measure of your performance, grades will be based on six major pieces of information. This way you will be assessed on your overall performance and not simply or solely on your ability to take exams or write papers. I recognize that some people just do not do well under pressure; others are really bad at writing papers.

1. Three (3) Quizzes (worth 5% each for a total of 15% of the course grade)—Wednesday, January 25th, Monday, January 30th, and Wednesday, February 1st. The quizzes will take about 10 minutes of class and will consist of a set of map-related questions. Accompanying this syllabus is a packet that will help you study for the quizzes.

2. The Mid-Term Exam (worth 20% of the course grade)—Wednesday, February 22nd. The Mid-Term will consist of short-answer questions, matching questions, multiple-choice questions and an essay question. To help you prepare, I will hand out a review sheet a week before each exam. Take my review sheets at face value. If you prepare written answers to all of the review questions and work up definitions for each of the concepts listed, you will be more than adequately prepared for the exam. I will base the actual test questions on the review questions.

3. Final Exam (worth 20% of the course grade)—Thursday, May 4th from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. The Final will have a similar structure to the Midterm, but it will be comprehensive and cover the entire course.

Makeup Quiz and Exam Policy: If you are ill or must miss a quiz or exam, I need to know BEFORE the exam occurs. If I’m not in my office, you MUST leave a message on my answering machine (443-1510) or send email to amosher@maxwell.syr.edu. Realize, however, that your make-up exam or quiz will be different from that given in class. I can’t guarantee that it won’t be harder. In other words, don’t miss an exam unless you are really, really, really sick.

4. The Vernacular Regions Paper (15% of the course grade). Five type-written pages requiring original research (some investigative reporting and analysis!) An assignment sheet will be distributed in class on Wednesday, January 25th. The paper will be due in class on Wednesday, February 15th.

5. The Term Paper Project (25% of the course grade) 10 type-written pages requiring original research (some more investigative reporting and analysis!) Briefly, there are 27 national heritage areas that have been created by the U.S. Congress (the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor in which we currently are sitting is one of them.) They are a great example of something we will be talking about called the “new regionalism.” They are also great vehicles for getting at the difficulties involved in intergovernmental relations. I will be assigning a national heritage corridor to each of you and asking you to do some web and internet-based research on it. An assignment sheet will be distributed in class on Monday, February 27th. The paper will be due in class on Wednesday, April 19th.

6. Attendance, Participation and Attitude (worth a total of 5% of your course grade). If you are going to miss class, please let me know in advance in order to get an approved absence. Other absences will go down as being unexcused. During the second week of class we will make a seating chart and we will use it to take attendance and to call for participation in the class discussion.
LATE ASSIGNMENT AND PAPER POLICY

ANY assignment that is late will be penalized by half a letter grade (5%) per day. Therefore, an assignment that is three days late will receive a grade that has been reduced by a letter grade and one-half (15%) from the grade it would have earned had it been on time.

CITATION OF SOURCES

Also note: Original work is expected for all writing that you submit in this course. Consultation of books, articles, the web, and other media is expected. HOWEVER, any sources consulted MUST be referenced IN DETAIL in footnotes and/or a bibliography. I might want to look at your sources and need to know where to find them!

A few words about how the grades will be assigned at the end of the course. First off, I do NOT believe in grading on a curve. That pits everyone in competition with each other. I think that if everyone does A work in the class, then everyone gets an A. Or, conversely, if no one does A work, then no one gets an A. Thus I make up the grading criteria beforehand and set what I expect an A-answer, B-essay, to be like. If you meet all the criteria for getting an A, you get an A. I will use the following scale to calculate your grades:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95-100%</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>90-94%</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>86-89%</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83-85%</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72%</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>60-69%</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>0-59%</td>
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The percentages are important because they are what I will use to quantify the qualitative A, B, and C’s that we assign when grading exams, abstracts, etc. For example, let’s say that your final paper is worthy of a B+. We’ll decide whether that B+ is a low or high B+. Let’s say it is a medium B+: 88%. Since the term-paper is worth 25% of the course grade, we will multiply that 88 times .25. This means that your final paper will count toward 22 percent of your entire course grade. I’ll do the same thing for all of your other grades, multiplying the percentage grade you earned by the amount of the course grade that each task is worth. You might consider keeping track of this as the course goes along, too.

Academic Honesty and Conduct

Academic dishonesty, including but not limited to plagiarism and cheating, and other forms of academic misconduct, will not be tolerated. Moreover, in a class this size, cheating is REALLY EASY TO SPOT. So . . . don’t do it, please!! Cases of academic dishonesty will be handled according to University guidelines. [Please note that the professor was on the College of Arts and Sciences faculty-student committee that handles cases of academic dishonesty for four years. I know how the system works and I’m not afraid to use it when necessary!]

The professor also expects that students will deport themselves in a professional and polite manner in lecture. This means arriving on time and staying in the lecture until the end of class. It also means respecting the opinions of others, even if you disagree. Rudeness to other students is unacceptable!
Disability

Students who have a certified disability that might impact performance in this course should let the professor know as soon as possible so that any necessary arrangements can be made. If you suspect you may have a learning disability you should contact Learning Disabilities Services in the Center for Academic Achievement, Room 303, 804 University Ave.; 443-4498. For other disabilities students should contact the Office for Student Assistance, Room 306 Steele Hall; 443-5019.

Schedule (tentative except for examination and assignment submission dates: changes to be announced in class)

NB: Reading assignments are due on the day that they are listed.

PART I: REGIONS

JAN 18 W  Introduction to the Course/National Mental Mapping  
“Syllabus”  
“Background Information Sheet” (to turn in today)  
♦ Start reading What’s the Matter with Kansas?  
♦ Start learning the 50 U.S. states and their capitals.

JAN 23 M  Vernacular Regionalization according to GEO 313  
“How to Interpret National Mental Maps”  
“Map Quiz Study Guide”

JAN 25 W  Vernacular Regionalization at Syracuse University?  
10-minute Quiz 1: States and Capitals  
“Vernacular Regions Assignment”

JAN 30 M  Perceptual Regions, Cultural Regions and Consumer Regions  
“How to Interpret a Choropleth Map”  
10-minute Quiz 2: Major Urban Areas  

FEB 1 W  Place Branding and Region Formation  
10-minute Quiz 2: Physiographic Regions and Major Natural Features

FEB 6 M  Basic Theories of the Region: Types, Structure, Implications

FEB 8 W  The Functional Basis to Regional Consortia

FEB 13 M  The Ultimate U.S. Formal Region: The Federation  
♦ Finish reading What’s the Matter with Kansas?

FEB 15 W  “What’s the Matter with Kansas?”  
Vernacular Regions Paper Due in Class  
“Mid-Term Exam Review Sheet”

FEB 20 M  FILM: “Power and the Land”  
“Film Guide” for “Power and the Land”

FEB 22 W  Mid-Term Exam

PART II: SCALE

FEB 27 M  Federal Territorial Expansion and Land Alienation  
♦ Start reading Bowling Alone.  
“Term Paper Assignment”
MAR 1 W  Political Representation and the Shifting Philosophy on the Proper Scalar Locus of Power within American Federalism

MAR 6 M  Basic Theories of Scale and Intergovernmental Relations: Who is Responsible for Tackling Urban Problems? (The Case of New York City: From “Ford Says Drop Dead” to 9/11)

MAR 8 W  Constructing the National Scale: The Role of Memorials and Commemorations

MAR 13 M  No class—Spring Break

MAR 15 W  No class—Spring Break

MAR 20 M  Constructing the Regional Scale: The Role of Heritage

MAR 22 W  Deconstructing the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, I

MAR 27 M  Deconstructing the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, II
  ♦ Finish reading Bowling Alone.

MAR 29 W  “Bowling Alone”
  ♦ Start reading Rising Tide.

PART III: NETWORKS

APR 3 M  The Historical Geography of National Networks

APR 5 W  Basic Theories of Networks

APR 10 M  Areal Functional Specialization and Regional Economies

APR 12 W  Snowbelt to Sunbelt and Offshore Shifts (De-Industrialization)

APR 17 M  Network Disruptions: The Case of Hurricane Katrina
  ♦ Finish reading Rising Tide.

APR 19 W  “Rising Tide” and Hurricane Katrina
  Term Paper Due

APR 24  Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans

APR 26 W  Network Reconstruction: Wireless New Orleans
  “Final Exam Review Sheet”

MAY 1 M  Course Conclusion

MAY 4 TH  5:00 PM TO 7:00 P.M.  Final Examination/Papers Returned

Please remember that I will be holding regular office hours each week outside of our class meetings. I am also available via email (amosher@maxwell.syr.edu).

If you have any questions or problems regarding the course, please contact me. I’m here to help! Welcome to Geography 313!

Anne E. Mosher