

Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Carleton University

**Doctoral Core Seminar: Geography, Society and Environment (GEOG 6000), Fall 2025**  
**“An Integrative Orientation to Problems in Geographic Thought”**

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## **Course outline**

*(preliminary version; last updated August 26, 2025)*

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**Instructor / facilitator:** Derek A. Smith  
Email: [dereka.smith@carleton.ca](mailto:dereka.smith@carleton.ca)  
Office hours by appointment.

**Schedule:** Tuesdays, 2:35 to 5:25 pm, Room A220 Loeb

### **Course objectives:**

- To enhance critical thinking about the production of geographic knowledge, including an ability to question and reflect on underlying philosophies, ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies.
- To provide students with an appreciation of the intellectual history of geography, its current orientations, and its relevance for solving problems and informing policy;
- To enable students to locate their own geographical research interests within a broader intellectual context; and
- To cultivate an environment of interdisciplinary collegiality, mutual respect, and an openness to a broad range of geographical approaches to understanding social and environmental change.

### **Seminar format:**

The course follows a seminar format, in which students will play active roles discussing assigned readings, sharing thoughts on seminar themes, and introducing topics. Students will also be given opportunities to present their own research plans and advances in their own fields of study. One or more short field outings will provide opportunities to make connections between theory and “real world” locations and discuss how geographic concepts and methodological approaches can be put into practice to gain a better understanding of socioenvironmental phenomena. If possible to arrange, one or more guest speakers will provide additional perspectives on geographical research. Please note that this seminar is provided as an in-person class and that students should not expect to be provided special accommodations for remote participation.

**Brightspace:** <https://brightspace.carleton.ca/d2l/home/339869>

The Brightspace site for this seminar will be used, but mainly to access the required readings (Tools > Ares). Communications to individual students or to the entire group will be sent by email (i.e., not through Brightspace). Please ensure that you check your Carleton email regularly for announcements.

### ***Course assignments and evaluation:***

The course grade will reflect the student's overall performance and intellectual development. It will be based on short written commentaries (30 percent of final grade); contributions to seminar discussions (30); and a critical review paper (40 percent).

#### ***Class participation (30 percent of final grade)***

An assessment of class participation will be based on being prepared for our meetings and being an active, engaged, and respectful participant, as well as on the presentation at the end of term. Seminar discussions will include a co-facilitation approaches, whereby students will introduce topics to the rest of the class. Additional contributions can be made to the seminar by sharing additional materials, bringing our attention to relevant events, reporting on research presentations or conferences attended, and in other ways that complement the seminar.

#### ***Commentaries (30 percent of final grade)***

Students are required to share with other members of class and the instructor thoughtful comments stimulated by the assigned readings. The main purpose of these contributions is to demonstrate an understanding of the material but to also reflect on one's own reactions to the readings. The suggested length is 500-600 words (not including references). These commentaries should be sent by email by the deadline, with a hard copy submitted at the beginning of class. There will be a total of eight (8) written commentaries. The content of the commentaries should fall within the seminar theme, but can focus on a more narrow topic discussed in the readings. You may include connections to previous readings and discussions, and when applicable, make connections to your own areas of interest. All readings will be available either through the Brightspace learning platform (from the "Tools" menu, select "Ares Reserves"), directly from a website, or in some cases as an email attachment. Commentaries will be given a letter grade, with feedback.

#### ***Review paper (40 percent of final grade)***

The main purpose of the review paper (7,500 words, approximately) is to develop a more thorough understanding of your own particular field within geography and to provide your own critical assessment of both the strengths and limitations of current knowledge in this area. This should include some explanation of how the field has developed over time, leading to current knowledge in this field, and the dominant understandings, research approaches and methodologies that are used today. In other words, what is known and how do we know what we know? The paper should also examine issues that have been neglected and/or questions that have been difficult to answer. In other words, what are the knowledge gaps in your field and what are the challenges in trying to answer outstanding questions in this field? Are there new approaches that you believe are promising? Your assessment might also include a discussion of how new ideas or technologies are opening up new avenues for knowledge in this field, or alternatively, limitations with current models, theoretical approaches and/or research practices. You may also wish to address how broader societal concerns have shaped and continue to shape research priorities in the field. Students will be given an opportunity to present their review paper to the class toward the end of term as a way to get feedback for the final paper. The latter presentation should be done in a conference style – 10 minutes, with up to 5 minutes for questions and discussion.

You will need to consult your supervisor(s) on both the topic and approach to this review paper. A useful library subject guide for graduate students in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies is available at: <https://library.carleton.ca/research/subject-guides/geography-graduate-studies-detailed->

[guide](#). Supervisors may also be involved in the assessment of the paper. The deadline for the final paper is December 5, the last day of classes. Extensions to this deadline can be made week in advance. Please submit both a digital and hard copy to me, as well as a copy to your supervisor or co-supervisors (hard copy or digital, whatever they prefer).

*Late policy:*

Developing effective time management and organization skills to complete academic work for multiple classes is indispensable, but extensions for assignments can be requested in advance of the deadline. Late assignments will be accepted, but with a penalty of 10 percent per calendar day. If you have a medical issue or there are extenuating circumstances, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss the situation.

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

**Reference materials**

In addition to the required readings listed in the schedule below, you may at times wish to consult the following sources for overviews of subfields, concepts and methodologies you are not familiar with. The books and book chapters are more comprehensive, critical reviews. The handbook and encyclopedia entries are more concise but are for the most part thoughtful essays or critical overviews written by highly regarded experts in the related field.

Aitken, Stuart C. and Gill Valentine, editors (2015) *Approaches to Human Geography: Philosophies, Theories, People and Practices*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Cresswell, Tim (2024) *Geographic Thought: A Critical Introduction*. Second edition. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell. (*Physical copy on reserve for 4-hour loans.*)

Cuff, David and Andrew Goudie, editors (2008) *The Oxford Companion to Global Change*. Oxford University Press.

Goudie, Andrew, editor (2004) *Encyclopedia of Geomorphology, Volume 1 & 2*. London: Routledge.

Kobayashi, Audrey L., editor (2020) *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, second edition. Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

Stoltman, J. P. (2012) *21st Century Geography: A Reference Handbook*. SAGE Publications.

Warf, Barney, editor (2010) *Encyclopedia of Geography*. SAGE Publications.

***Seminar schedule (subject to change, required readings to follow):***

*Part I – Geography past and present*

September 9 – Introductions / The role of geography in understanding social and environmental change

September 16 – Geographic thought: Historical context, current orientations, and future trajectories

*Part II – Ontology, different ways of knowing*

September 23 – What is real?

September 30 – Entities, objects, fields, classification

*Part III – Theoretical approaches and key concepts*

October 7 – Theoretical approaches in geographical research

October 14 – Space and scale

October 28 – Place / Culture, identity, social difference

*Part III – Geographic epistemologies*

November 4 – Fieldwork

November 11 – Mapping / Spatial Analysis / Critical Cartography

November 18 – Quantitative approaches / Big data

November 25 – Qualitative approaches / Mixed methods / Community engaged geographical research

December 2 – Review paper presentations / Course conclusion

## **Academic Integrity Policy**

### *Plagiarism:*

The University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, artworks, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- Any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT);
- Using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- Using another’s data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- Submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one’s own; and
- Failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course’s instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of “F” for the course.

### *Policy on AI:*

If you use generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, etc.) to produce assessed content, please do so with extreme caution. You will still be held to the highest

standards of academic integrity, and thus responsible for any plagiarism and inaccurate or fabricated references. We expect you to use these tools in an ethically sound manner, to be explicit and transparent about their use, and to seek approval first.

### Statement on Student Mental Health

As a University student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. Here is a list that may be helpful:

Emergency Resources (on and off campus): <https://carleton.ca/health/emergencies-and-crisis/emergency-numbers/>

Carleton Resources:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>
- Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>
- Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>
- Academic Advising Centre (AAC): <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>
- Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): <https://carleton.ca/csas/>
- Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Off Campus Resources:

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>
- Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>
- Empower Me: 1-844-741-6389, <https://students.carleton.ca/services/empower-me-counselling-services/>
- Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>
- The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: <https://walkincounselling.com>

### Statement on Pandemic Measures

It is important to remember that COVID is still present in Ottawa. The situation can change at any time and the risks of new variants and outbreaks are very real. There are a number of actions you can take to lower your risk and the risk you pose to those around you including being vaccinated, wearing a mask, staying home when you're sick, washing your hands and maintaining proper respiratory and cough etiquette.

*Feeling sick?* Remaining vigilant and not attending work or school when sick or with symptoms is critically important. If you feel ill or exhibit COVID-19 symptoms do not come to class or campus. If you feel ill or exhibit symptoms while on campus or in class, please leave campus immediately. In all situations, you should follow Carleton's symptom reporting protocols.

*Masks:* Masks are no longer mandatory in university buildings and facilities. However, we continue to recommend masking when indoors, particularly if physical distancing cannot be maintained. We are aware that personal preferences regarding optional mask use will vary greatly, and we ask that we all show consideration and care for each other during this transition.

*Vaccines:* While proof of vaccination is no longer required to access campus or participate in in-person Carleton activities, it may become necessary for the University to bring back proof of vaccination requirements on short notice if the situation and public health advice changes. Students are strongly encouraged to get a full course of vaccination, including booster doses as soon as they are eligible and

submit their booster dose information in cuScreen as soon as possible. Please note that Carleton cannot guarantee that it will be able to offer virtual or hybrid learning options for those who are unable to attend the campus.

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow requirements and guidelines regarding health and safety which may change from time to time. For the most recent information about Carleton's COVID-19 response and health and safety requirements please see the University's COVID-19 website and review the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). Should you have additional questions after reviewing, please contact [covidinfo@carleton.ca](mailto:covidinfo@carleton.ca).

### **Requests for Academic Accommodations**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

*Pregnancy obligation:* write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, you must complete the Pregnancy Accommodation Form (available here: <https://carleton.ca/equity/contact/form-pregnancy-accommodation/>).

*Religious obligation:* write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details (available here: <https://carleton.ca/equity/focus/discrimination-harassment/religious-spiritual-observances/>).

*Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:* The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

*Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>.

*Accommodation for Student Activities:* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>.