Course outline, Honours Field Course

Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Carleton University

(Subject to change; last updated March 20, 2026)

"Investigating human activity and environmental change in urban greenspaces"

Instructor: Derek A. Smith
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Room B449 Loeb building
Office hours by appointment.

Class meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:35 to 2:25 (May 7 to June 16)
In class and field sites located within walking distance of campus.

Brightspace: https://brightspace.carleton.ca/d2l/home/420968

Prerequisites:

(1) GEOG 2005/ ENST 2005 and (2) third-year Honours standing in Environmental Studies, Geomatics, or Geography (or permission of the Department). GEOG 2006/ ENST 2006 normally a prerequisite but is not required for this particular course.

Calendar description:

Field research, with a focus on data collection methods, analysis and presentation of findings. Design and conduct research that links the human and biophysical environment. Topics may change from year to year.

Course description:

The purpose of this course is to learn about the role of fieldwork in geography and environmental studies. This includes an examination of different approaches to doing fieldwork, learning data collection techniques and examining the strengths and limitations of different methodological choices. Students will gain hands-on experience with methodological design, fieldwork activities, and analyzing and presenting field research data. Overall, the course will provide students with a better understanding of how fieldwork fits into the broader process of generating knowledge about our changing world. For this course, we are using the greenspaces within walking distance of the university campus as our field site.

Course objectives / learning outcomes:

- To gain an understanding of different approaches to doing fieldwork and its role in social and environmental research;

- To examine different field research methodologies and gain an appreciation of the strengths and limitations of different data collection methods;
- To become familiar with the practicalities of doing fieldwork, including the importance of preparation, safety considerations, and conducting field research in an ethical manner;
- To gain hands-on experience collecting, compiling, and analyzing field data; and
- To develop skills in presenting field research results in the form of research reports.

Class format and delivery:

This course combines class meetings with field outings within walking distance of Carleton University campus. Fieldwork activities and subsequent tasks to compile data will be done in groups but final reports will be written independently. For each meeting, either in the classroom or in the field, there are required readings. Given the nature of fieldwork, we may need to adapt to unanticipated circumstances or make changes to the schedule, and there will likely be shifts in planned fieldwork activities as we go. In addition to classroom meetings and fieldwork during our time slot, each fieldwork team will need to work on their datasets outside of class time. Students may also need to do some additional fieldwork or lab work outside of class time to complete their datasets (later in the term, when there will be fewer required readings).

Communications and our online platform:

Given the nature of a field course, there will be regular emails from the instructor, so you will need to check your university email in between class meetings. Please feel free to contact the instructor by email if you have any concerns or questions or would like to set up an in-person meeting. You will use Brightspace to access to course materials (e.g., lecture slides, assignment instructions), to access required readings (via the Ares system), and for submitting fieldwork datasets and final reports. Brightspace Support is available via phone, email, or chat 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year (https://carleton.ca/brightspace/students/). For technical problems, contact Information Technology Services (https://carleton.ca/its/contact/).

Required readings and other materials:

Required readings will be available though the Ares course reserve system or in some cases directly from a website or in the case of certain documents, as an email attachment. Typically, there will be around three journal articles, book chapters, and/or reports assigned for each class. It is imperative that you complete the required readings before class so that you are prepared and ready to participate in group discussions, fieldwork activities, and/or other activities.

Evaluation:

	Weight (%)
Class participation	15
Midterm examination	15
Field data submissions	25
Field notebook	10
Final research reports	35

** *Note*: A 2% bonus mark will be added to the final grade for students completing the TCPS 2: CORE-2022 research ethics course, upon receipt of the certificate that is received.

Students will be given a letter grade for class participation, based on being prepared for meetings and being an active, engaged, and respectful participant. The in-person midterm exam will be one hour in length and will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and one or more short essay questions. The field notebook will be assessed and assigned a letter grade based on both thoroughness and the quality of observations and reflections. Field data will be submitted as a group project, and will be assigned marks based on completeness, organization, and overall quality of presentation. Research reports due on the last day of early summer term classes (June 18) will be given marks based on the quality of the introduction and background, presentation of findings, the strength of the analysis, and overall quality of presentation (clarity, organization, use of figures and tables, and correct and complete citations and references). Further instructions and guidelines for field data submissions and final reports will be provided in class and in supplemental materials.

Use of AI tools:

The use of generative AI tools for producing text for assignments is not permitted – in other words, all of the written work presented must be your own writing. However, as our understanding of the uses of AI and its relationship to student work and academic integrity continue to evolve, there may be ways that AI tools can be used to support the learning goals of this course. Students are required to discuss and obtain approval of any use of AI tools with the course instructor in advance to ensure that only permitted uses are employed. More specific instructions on what constitutes acceptable use of GenAI will be provided in assignment guidelines.

Late policy:

Developing effective time management and organization skills to complete academic work for multiple classes is indispensable for university students if they are to be successful. Meeting deadlines is a critical element of this. Late assignments will be accepted, but with a penalty of a 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.

Final grades:

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.

Schedule (with fieldwork activities in *green italics*):

May 7	Introduction / What is field research? / Fieldwork methodologies / Reading the landscape / How to take good field notes / Greenspaces / Environmental history and land cover change
May 12	*Exploratory fieldwork / Reading the landscape / Taking field notes*
May 14	Geographic field data / Spatial sample design / Measuring stream discharge and water salinity / Delimiting urban watersheds / Plastic pollution
May 19	*Scouting the study area* / *Measuring water quality*
May 21	Defining macroplastics methodology / *Macroplastics fieldwork*
May 2	Surveys, questionnaires, and interviews / Ethical issues
May 28	Midterm examination / *Macroplastics fieldwork (continued)*
June 2	Urban greenspace management / Survey design
June 4	*Greenspace visitor survey / Macroplastics fieldwork (continued)*
June 9	*Greenspace visitor survey (continued) / Macroplastics fieldwork (continued)*
June 11	*Greenspace visitor survey (continued) /* Macroplastics lab work
June 16	Analyzing field data / Writing the research reports / Course conclusion

Deadlines:

June 16 – Visitor survey dataset / Macroplastics dataset

June 16 – Field notebooks

June 18 – Final reports

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); certain tasks may be done with the assistance of AI tools with the instructor's permission;
- 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 with proper citations when using another's work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

The use of generative artificial intelligence or any other AI tool to produce work submitted for assessment is not permitted for this course.

Student mental health:

As a 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. For more information, please consult https://wellness.carleton.ca/.

Requests for academic accommodation:

Carleton is committed to providing academic accessibility for all individuals. You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. The accommodation request processes, including information about the Academic Consideration Policy for Students in Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances, are outlined on the Academic Accommodations website (https://students.carleton.ca/course-outline/).