Geography 1301 Physical Geography

Spring 2026
MWF 9:05 to 10:00 am
CAS 158

Instructor: Dr. E. Cory Sills, Associate Professor
Office: CAS 142
Office hours: MWF 10:05-11:05 am
In Person, By Appointment
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Communications: I encourage you to visit office hours or directly after class via zoom. This is a good opportunity for you to look over your exams, ask questions, or seek clarification. If you cannot attend my office hours, you may set-up an alternative time. I will respond to your emails within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends**. In your email, include your first and last name and the course title Geography 1301, Physical Geography, or Geog 1301.**

Open Educational Resources (OER): Links are also available in Canvas

1. Ritter, Michael E. The Physical Environment: An Introduction to Physical Geography. OER-Commons. December 31, 2024. https://www.thephysicalenvironment.com/

2. Patrich, Jeremy. Physical Geography. December 31. 2024. https://oercommons.org/courses/introduction-to-physical-geography

Catalogue description: This course introduces students to the processes that drive Earth's physical systems. Students will explore the relationships among these physical systems, with emphasis on weather and climate, water, ecosystems, geologic processes and landform development, and human interactions with the physical environment.

Course objective: The primary objective is for you to describe how environmental systems work on a global scale. Although you will learn the locations of key landforms in order to become globally-aware citizens, *this course's objective is not to promote or reward memorization*. The objective is to provide a geographical context for physical landforms, to make spatial connections, and to understand the importance of geographical contexts in our everyday lives.

Learning Outcomes: Upon successful completion of this course, you will:
1. Demonstrate the ability to apply critical thinking to formulate hypotheses and investigate environmental issues using the scientific method.
2. Develop and articulate clear written explanations of landscape features and their significance.
3. Demonstrate quantitative reasoning by analyzing, calculating, and predicting environmental data.
4. Collaborate effectively in evaluation scientific processes and methodologies within a team setting.
5. Demonstrate an understanding of the principles of scientific investigation as they apply to Earth's physical systems and processes.
6. Describe and explain the processes of Earth's physical systems: weather and climate, water, ecosystems, geologic processes and landform development.
7. Demonstrate an understanding of the interactions among the Earth's physical systems.
8. Demonstrate an understanding of the modifications humans make to the environment through interactions with Earth's physical systems.

Course format: This is a face to face, in person class, with materials posted to the online learning management platform Canvas. The class lectures will be supplemented by the required text, current events, videos, demonstrations, discussions, guest lectures, and maps. Lectures and readings will not necessarily cover the same ground. Indeed, they are intended to supplement each other rather than to completely overlap.

I strongly recommend that you attend every lecture and carefully study the assigned readings. I encourage relevant questions and comments during the lecture and through email. A question you have other students might also have, and thoughtful remarks will make the course more interesting for everyone, including myself. One of the goals for the course is to convey how important and useful the field of geography is in the modern world. Hopefully, some of you might pursue geography as a profession. If not, at least you will gain insight and appreciation into evaluating the regions emphasized in this course, as well as world events in the news, movies, and in documentaries.

Class Etiquette: I expect everyone in the classroom to be **respectful** of each other and treat everyone with dignity – we have discussions about cultures from around the world that will be different from your own. I expect comments to be positive and objective and not judgmental and rude.

Grading and Course Requirements: The course grade will be based on four exams (including the final), 2 assignments (1 with a group component), and attendance and participation in class activities.

> **Assignment**: There is one assignment for this course, a Weather Collection assignment (15%) with a group infographic component (5%). Instructions and due dates will be posted to Canvas and discussed in class.
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> **Exams**: There will be four exams each worth 19% your grade for a total of 76%. The exams will cover all the material from the lectures including slides, materials, videos, guest lectures, and the material from the textbook. The first test will cover material from the first part of the course; the second test will cover material from the second part of the course, the third test will cover material from the third part, and the fourth test will cover material from the last part of the course. Exams will be multiple choice and true/false. Exams are closed book and closed notes. **Any communication via an electronic device during an exam will be considered potential cheating**.
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> **Attendance and Participation:** You are expected to come prepared to class by reading beforehand and participating in class activities and discussions. Attendance is worth 2% and participation in class activities is worth 2% for a total of 4%.

Make-up policy: Make-up tests will be given for a legitimate reason and in rare circumstances. Students should contact the instructor **prior** to the exam and not after if they will miss the exam. Make-up exams will not be given except when there are exceptional circumstances (be prepared to provide documentation of your circumstances, such as a doctor's note, police report, University-excused absence, *et cetera*).

All assignments will be graded in a timely manner usually within one week after the due date. However, this will vary slightly depending on the assignment. I will announce in class any delays on receiving feedback or grades earned.

Course weights:
Four exams: 19% each for a total of 76%
Weather Collection Assignment: 15% + 5% Group Infographic Total) 20%
Attendance (2%) + Participation (2%): 4%
Total: 100%

- Grading scale: A 90-100% B 80-89.99% C 70-79.99%
  D 60-69.99% F 0-59.99%

Attendance and Participation Policy
Regular attendance and active participation are essential for success in this course. Many class activities involve hands-on learning, group collaboration, and discussion that cannot be replicated outside of class. Students are expected to attend all scheduled sessions and contribute meaningfully to in-class activities.

You are allowed up to three (3) unexcused absences during the semester without penalty. Additional unexcused absences will result in a deduction from your participation grade. Excused absences (e.g., illness,

religious holiday, university-sponsored events) must be documented and communicated to the instructor in advance when possible.

Cell Phones/Laptops: Turn off your ringer and do not use your cell phone during class – this includes text messaging. If you are expecting an important call, please put your phone on vibrate and sit close to the door. This action will help minimize any disturbance to the class. Laptops are allowed for note-taking, but I reserve the right to ask you to shut your computer down (or to change my class policy) if you are using your computer for uses other than note-taking and disrupting those around you**. Any video, photographic or audio recordings of the class must be approved by me.**

Class AI Statement: In this course, we may use AI tools (such as ChatGPT and Copilot) to examine how these tools may inform our exploration of the class topics (i.e., used to brainstorm ideas). However, to best support your learning, you must complete all graded assignments by yourself to assist in your learning. This exclusion of other resources to help complete assignments includes artificial intelligence (AI). Refrain from using AI tools to generate any course context (e.g., text) for an assignment or classroom assignment. You will be notified as to when and how these tools will be used, along with guidance for attribution. Using AI tools outside of these parameters violates UT Tyler's Honor Code, constitutes plagiarism, and will be treated as such.

Also please notify me if you are using translation software as these programs are often flagged by AI.

University Policies and Information

Withdrawing from Class

Students may withdraw (drop) from this course using the Withdrawal Portal. Withdrawing (dropping) this course can impact your Financial Aid, Scholarships, Veteran Benefits, Exemptions, Waivers, International Student Status, housing, and degree progress. Please speak with your instructors, consider your options, speak with your advisor, and visit the One-Stop Service Center (STE 230) or email enroll@uttyler.edu to get a complete review of your student account and the possible impacts to withdrawing. We want you to make an informed decision. UT Tyler faculty and staff are here for you and often can provide additional support options or assistance. Make sure to carefully read the implications for withdrawing from a course and the instructions on using the Withdrawal portal..

Texas law prohibits students from dropping more than six courses during their entire undergraduate career*. The six courses dropped includes those from other 2-year or 4-year Texas public colleges and universities. Consider the impact withdrawing from this class has on your academic progress and other areas, such as financial implications. We encourage you to consult your advisor(s) and Enrollment Services for additional guidance. **CAUTION #1**: Withdrawing before census day does not mean you get a full refund. Please see the Tuition and Fee Refund Schedule. **CAUTION #2**: All international students must check with the Office of International Programs before withdrawing. All international students are required to enroll full-time for fall and spring terms. **CAUTION #3:** All UT Tyler Athletes must check with the Athletic Academic Coordinator before withdrawing from a course. CAUTION #4: All veterans or military-affiliated students should consult with the Military and Veterans Success Center.

* Students who began college for the first time before 2007 are exempt from this law.

Artificial Intelligence Statement

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course

is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy. *Refer to the About This Course section of the UT Tyler Syllabus Module for specific information on appropriate use of AI in your course(s).*

Final Exam Policy

Final examinations are administered as scheduled. If unusual circumstances require that special arrangements be made for an individual student or class, the Dean of the appropriate college, after consultation with the faculty member involved, may authorize an exception to the schedule. Faculty members must maintain student final examination papers for a minimum of three months following the examination date.

Incomplete Grade Policy

If a student, because of extenuating circumstances, is unable to complete all of the requirements for a course by the end of the semester, then the instructor may recommend an Incomplete (I) for the course. The "I" may be assigned in place of a grade *only when **all** of the following conditions are met*: (a) the student has been making satisfactory progress in the course; (b) the student is unable to complete all coursework or final exam due to unusual circumstances that are beyond personal control and are acceptable to the instructor, and (c) the student presents these reasons before the time that the final grade roster is due. The semester credit hours for an Incomplete will not be used to calculate the grade point average.

The student and the instructor must submit an Incomplete Form detailing the work required and the time by which the work must be completed to their respective department chair or college dean for approval. The time limit established must not exceed one year. Should the student fail to meet all of the work for the course within the time limit, then the instructor may assign zeros to the unfinished work, compute the course average for the student, and assign the appropriate grade. If a grade has yet to be assigned within one year, then the Incomplete will be changed to an F, or NC. If the course was initially taken under the CR/NC grading basis, this may adversely affect the student's academic standing.

Grade Appeal Policy

Disputes regarding grades must be initiated within sixty (60) days from the date of receiving the final course grade by filing a Grade Appeal Form with the instructor who assigned the grade. A grade appeal should be used when the student thinks the final course grade awarded does not reflect the grades earned on assessments or follow the grading scale as documented in the syllabus. The student should provide the rationale for the grade appeal and attach supporting document about the grades earned. The form should be sent via email to the faculty member who assigned the grade. The faculty member reviews the rationale and supporting documentation and completes the instruction section of the form. The instructor should return the form to the student, even if a grade change is made at this level. If the student is not satisfied with the decision, the student may appeal in writing to the Chairperson of the department from which the grade was issued. In situations where there is an allegation of capricious grading, discrimination, or unlawful actions, appeals may go beyond the Chairperson to the Dean or the Dean's designee of the college from which the grade was issued, with that decision being final. The Grade Appeal form is found in the Registrar's Form Library.

NOTE: The Grade Appeal Form is different from the Application for Appeal form submitted to the Student Appeals Committee, which does not rule on grade disputes as described in this policy.

Disability/Accessibility Services

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA), the University of Texas at Tyler offers accommodations to students with learning, physical, and/or psychological disabilities. If you have a disability, including a non-visible diagnosis such as a learning disorder, chronic illness, TBI, PTSD, ADHD, or a history of modifications or accommodations in a previous educational environment, you are encouraged to visit https://hood.accessiblelearning.com/UTTyler/ and fill out the New Student application. The Student Accessibility and Resources (SAR) office will contact you when your application has been submitted and an appointment with the Assistant Director Student Accessibility and Resources/ADA Coordinator. For more information, including filling out an application for services, please visit the SAR webpage at https://www.uttyler.edu/disability-services, the SAR office located in the Robert Muntz Library, LIB 460, email saroffice@uttyler.edu, or call 903.566.7079."

Military Affiliated Students

UT Tyler honors the service and sacrifices of our military-affiliated students. If you are a student who is a veteran, on active duty, in the reserves or National Guard, or a military spouse or dependent, please stay in contact with your faculty member if any aspect of your present or prior service or family situation makes it difficult for you to fulfill the requirements of a course or creates disruption in your academic progress. It is important to make your faculty member aware of any complications as far in advance as possible. Your faculty member is willing to work with you and, if needed, put you in contact with university staff who are trained to assist you. The Military and Veterans Success Center (MVSC) has campus resources for military-affiliated students. The MVSC can be reached at MVSC@uttyler.edu or via phone at 903.565.5972.

Students on an F-1 Visa

To remain in compliance with Federal Regulations requirements you must do the following:

- Traditional face-to-face classes: Attend classes on the regular meeting days/times.
- Hybrid Classes: Attend all face-to-face classes convened by the instructor according to the schedule set for your specific course.
- Online course: Only one online course can count toward your full-time enrollment. Students are expected to be fully engaged and meet all requirements for the online course.

Academic Honesty and Academic Misconduct

The UT Tyler community comes together to pledge that "Honor and integrity will not allow me to lie, cheat, or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do." Therefore, we enforce the Student Conduct and Discipline policy in the Student Manual Of Operating Procedures (Section 8).

FERPA

UT Tyler follows the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as noted in University Policy 5.2.3. The course instructor will follow all requirements to protect your confidential information.

Absence for Official University Events or Activities

This course follows the practices related to Excused Absences for University Events or Activities as noted in the Catalog.

Absence for Religious Holidays

This course follows the practices related to Excused Absences for Religious Holy Days as noted in the Catalog.

Absence for Pregnant Students

This course follows the requirements of Texas Laws SB 412, SB 459, SB 597/HB 1361 to meet the needs of pregnant and parenting students. Part of the supports afforded pregnant students includes excused absences. Faculty who are informed by a student of needing this support should make a referral to the Parenting Student Liaison. NOTE: Students must work with the Parenting Student Liaison in order to receive these supports. Students should reach out to the Parenting Student Liaison at parents@uttyler.edu and also complete the Pregnant and Parenting Self-Reporting Form.

Campus Carry

We respect the right and privacy of students who are duly licensed to carry concealed weapons in this class. License holders are expected to behave responsibly and keep a handgun secure and concealed. More information is available at http://www.uttyler.edu/about/campus-carry/index.php.

What we cover in the lecture on a day-to-day basis may differ from the attached schedule. I will inform the class via email if topics change.

Foundations	**Week 1 Jan. 12 to Jan. 16**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**
Monday Jan. 12	• Lecture: Mapping the Course and Introduction to Physical Geography	• Syllabus/ OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environment* Chapter 1
Wednesday Jan. 14	• Lecture: Earth's Dimensions	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environment* Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 "Size and Shape"
Friday Jan. 16	• Exploring Latitude and Longitude	OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environment* Chapter 1
Scale and Energy	**Week 2 Jan. 19 to Jan. 23**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**
Monday Jan. 19	• **No Class, MLK Day**	
Wednesday Jan. 21	• Lecture: Mapping the Earth	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environment* Chapter 1
Friday Jan. 23	• Lecture: Solar Energy and Insolation	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environment* Chapter 2 "Seasons and Day Length and Seasons" and Chapter 4 • OER Book by Patrich Unit 5
Atmosphere	**Week 3 Jan. 26 to Jan. 30**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**
Monday Jan. 26	• Lecture: Solar Energy and Earth's Atmosphere • **Census Date** • **Introduce Weather Assignment**	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environment* Chapter 3
Wednesday Jan. 28	• The Hole in the Ozone	
Friday Jan. 30	• Lecture: Air Temperature	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environment* Chapter 5
Temperature	**Week 4 Feb. 2 to Feb. 6**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**
Monday Feb. 2	• Lecture: Air Temperature and World Patterns	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environment* Chapter 5
Wednesday Feb. 4	• Wrap up lectures • Review for Exam 1	
Friday Feb. 6	• **EXAM 1**	
Moisture and Precipitation	**Week 5 Feb. 9 to Feb. 13**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**
Monday Feb. 9	• Lecture: Atmospheric Moisture and Precipitation	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environment* Chapter 7
Wednesday Feb. 11	• Lecture: Clouds and Precipitation	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environment* Chapter 7
Friday Feb. 13	• Lecture: Atmosphere Pressure	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environment* Chapter 6
Wind and Circulation	**Week 6 Feb. 16 to Feb. 20**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**
Monday Feb. 16	• Lecture: Global Wind and Ocean Currents	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environment* Chapter 6
Wednesday Feb. 18	• Global Circulation	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environment* Chapter 6
Friday Feb. 20	• Lecture: Weather Systems	• OER Book by Ritter *The*

		*Physical Environmen*t Chapter 8
Xtreme Weather	**Week 7 Feb. 23 to Feb. 27**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**
Monday Feb. 23	• Lecture: Thunderstorms and Tornadoes	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 8
Wednesday Feb. 25	• Tornadoes	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 8
Friday Feb. 27	• Wrap Up lectures • Review for Exam 2	
Climate	**Week 8 Mar. 2 to Mar. 6**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**
Monday Mar. 2	• **EXAM 2**	
Wednesday Mar. 4	• Lecture: Climate	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 9
Friday Mar.6	• Lecture: Climate Continued	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 9
Mar. 9 to Mar. 13 Spring Break No Class!		
Earth's Structure	**Week 9 Mar. 16 to Mar. 20**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**
Monday Mar.16	• **Due: Weather Report** • **Meet** in groups about infographic	
Wednesday Mar.18	• Lecture: Earth's Structure and Topography	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 14
Friday Mar. 20	• Lecture: Geography Rocks	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 14 • OER Book by Patrich Unit's 8-11
Plate Tectonics and Surface Movement	**Week 10 Mar. 23 to Mar. 27**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**
Monday Mar. 23	• Lecture: Plate Tectonics and Volcanoes	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 15 and 16
Wednesday Mar. 25	• Lecture: Weathering and Mass Wasting	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 17 • OER Book by Patrich Unit 12
Friday Mar. 27	• Outdoor Activity on Weathering	
Water	**Week 11 Mar. 30 to Apr. 3**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**
Monday Mar. 30	• Lecture: Fresh Water • **Last day to withdrawal**	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 10
Wednesday Apr. 1	• Climate Classification • Review for Exam	
Friday Apr. 3	• **EXAM 3**	
Running Water	**Week 12 Apr. 6 to Apr. 10**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**

Monday Apr. 6	• Lecture: Landforms Made from Running Water	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 18 • OER Book by Patrich Unit 17
Wednesday Apr. 8	• Lecture: Mississippi River	
Friday Apr. 10	• Landforms Made from Waves	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 21 • OER Book by Patrich Unit 16
Wind, Waves, and Glaciers	**Week 13 Apr. 13 to Apr. 17**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**
Monday Apr. 13	• Lecture: Landforms Made from Wind • **Due: Group Infographic Assignment**	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 20 • OER Book by Patrich Unit 18
Wednesday Apr. 15	• Lecture: Glaciers	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 19 • OER Book by Patrich Unit 19
Friday Apr. 17	• Lecture: Soils	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 11
Soils and Mangroves	**Week 14 Apr. 20 to Apr. 24**	**Readings Should Be Completed Before the Start of Class**
Monday Apr. 20	• Lecture: Soils	• OER Book by Ritter *The Physical Environmen*t Chapter 11
Wednesday Apr. 22	• Lecture: Mangroves	
Friday Apr. 24	• Physical Geography Jeopardy Team Event	
Finals Week	**Week 15 Apr. 27 to May. 1**	
Monday Apr. 27	• **Final Exam 8 am.**	
Wednesday Apr. 29	• **Final Exam Week: No Class**	
Friday May 1	• **Final Exam Week: No Class**	