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GPHY 338.01: Mountains and Society

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GHPY 338-01 Mountains and Society

Fall, 2021

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Course description: Mountains account for a fifth of the world's terrestrial land area and provide the direct life-support base for about a tenth of its human population. They provide indispensable elements (e.g., half of the world's fresh water) for a viable global system, and serve to support tremendous biological, social, and cultural diversity. Since antiquity, people have found spiritual inspiration, aesthetic pleasure, cultural vision, peace of mind, and even fear and loathing in and from mountains in their many forms and locations.

Many mountainous regions today face acute and worsening problems of resource scarcity, environmental degradation, and conflict. World-wide attention and concern have been allocated to a range of mountain-related problems: poverty, deforestation, water pollution, natural disasters, threats to biodiversity, population growth, environmental impacts of recreation and tourism, and so forth. How are different mountain regions dealing with these problems? Is sustainable mountain development a fallacy or a potential reality? How can geographic analysis help explain and solve these mountain-related problems? In tackling these questions, the course seeks to highlight the geographical and societal conditions that characterize the diverse mountain areas around the world.

While building this geographical perspective on mountain environments, the course will investigate and analyze the interactions between global, regional and local scales of change, influence, and experience. Following an overview of the physical processes that shape mountain environments, the course focuses on the interconnections between people and mountainous landscapes. This entails attention to cultures and cultural change, mountains as sacred spaces, mountain agriculture, water management, highland-lowland interactions, mountain hazards and disasters, economic development, war and peace, and human dimensions of environmental change. Approaches to conservation and environmental policies to protect mountain areas will be evaluated.

Coursework is designed to improve academic knowledge and to create an opportunity for students to investigate collectively and individually mountain experiences and physical and social processes that shape mountain environments. Lecture material will be supplemented and supported by readings, films, guest speakers, and class discussion. Theoretical discussions will be grounded in data, case studies, and scientific observations that draw from major ranges.

Learning objectives: At the end of the course, students should be able to know and/or understand the following-

1. Geographic and integrated scientific knowledge of the complexity and diversity of historical, cultural, geopolitical, and environmental factors in mountainous regions;
2. Enhanced abilities to examine, critique, and rethink the nature and meaning of sustainable development in mountain areas using data, statistics, human and physical geography indicators, and analyses of trends;
3. A familiarity with approaches, tools, policies, and actions to proactively address the threats of socio-ecological transformations driven by loss of biodiversity, uneven development, environmental degradation, land use decisions, political crises, and climate change;
4. A grounding in the field of mountain geography scholarship and debate on key issues facing mountainous places;
5. Skills in critical thinking and in geographic analysis that are helpful in the scientific study of mountains;
6. An appreciation of what it means to be a global citizen advancing an ethic to respect, nurture, and protect mountains and all they have to offer.

Course structure: This course will be implemented through a 'flipped' mode of instruction. What this means is that most course material (lectures, readings, etc.) will be available to the student in an asynchronous format on Moodle. I will send out a weekly work plan email on Monday or Tuesday of every week. The synchronous portion of the course will consist of structured discussions in the classroom or in an outdoor setting with proper physical distancing. These live sessions will take place once per week (on Thursdays) during the assigned course time (2-3:20pm).

The structure of this course will require students to have access to a computer, a reliable internet connection, and the ability to connect to Zoom (if we need to move to an online format). Students will also need to monitor their email regularly for communications regarding weekly work plans, live sessions, and assignments.

Open and regular communication is key for the success of this course, I will be communicating regularly with the class via email, and I expect that students check their email regularly. I also expect that students will communicate with me if there are any issues with technology, health or anything. I understand that these are difficult and unprecedented times and want to work with everyone to make this the best possible experience. Please reach out if you need anything whether or not it is related to the course.

The course will follow a combined lecture and discussion format and students will be assigned readings for each week (posted on Moodle). In addition, students will be responsible for participating in discussions and completing assignments.

Topics and course schedule:

The following set of topics and course schedule is tentative and subject to change.

class meeting:	Topic:
Week-1 31-Aug & 2-Sept	Syllabus and introductions
Week-2 7 & 9-Sept	The study of mountains/mountain environments
Week-3 14 & 16-Sept	Mountain weather and climate/flora and fauna
Week-4 21 & 23-Sept	Mountain hazards
Week-5 28 & 30-Sept	Mountain biodiversity, flora and fauna
Week-6 5 & 7-Oct	Mountain people and sacredness
Week-7 12 & 14-Oct	Agricultural systems
Week-8 19 & 21-Oct	Conservation and development
Week-9 26 & 28-Oct	Environmental and livelihood change
Week-10 2 & 4-Nov	North America- Rockies and Appalachia
Week-11 9 & 11-Nov	South America- Andes
Week-12 16 & 18-Nov	Europe- Alps and Caucasuses
Week-13 23 & 25-Nov	Asia- Himalaya and Hindu Kush
Week-14 30-Nov & 2-Dec	Africa- Atlas and Ethiopian Highlands
Week-15 7 & 9-Dec	Course wrap up

Assignments and assessment: The assignments and assessments for this course will be used to measure your understanding of the topics covered and your ability to communicate that understanding verbally and through writing. The assignments will also provide additional opportunities for learning about and synthesizing the topics covered in this course. All assignments are due in Moodle by the deadline and late assignments will not be accepted unless the student has a written and verifiable excuse.

assignment	points	due date
Participation and attendance	100	weekly
Weekly quiz	200	weekly
Mountains in your life paper	150	9-14-21

Mountain film and paper	150	10-12-21
Mountain culture paper	150	10-26-21
Mountain issue group project	250	TBD
Total	1000	

Explanation of assignments:

Participation and attendance: Students are expected to attend the live session of this course weekly on Thursdays and participate in the discussion. When weather permits, we will meet outside in the assigned space north of the CHCB building. Students who are not comfortable meeting face to face will be able to join through Zoom. I will take attendance and expect students to participate in the discussion either through Zoom or in person.

Weekly quiz: Students will take a weekly quiz on Moodle that will focus on lecture and reading material. The quiz will be due before the live session on Thursday of each week.

Short papers: Students will be assigned a series of three short papers that are designed to further the learning experience and allow for inquiry into specific topics. Paper assignments will be given one week prior to the due date for each paper. Papers are expected to be 2-3 pages in length, double-spaced and should include all components requested in the specific assignment.

Group project: Students will be put into small groups and assigned a mountain range. Students will then research a current issue in that mountain range and write a short paper 3-5 pages, double spaced and prepare a short presentation (6-8 minutes).

Class participation and attendance:

The success of this course depends on lively in-class discussion. Therefore, students are expected to come to the live sessions well-prepared and ready to discuss the assigned readings and topics. Students who do not prepare and those who miss class will find it difficult to succeed in this course. Those of you who do prepare and attend class regularly will learn a great deal and have fun in the process.

Academic Integrity:

Students are expected to abide by the University of Montana Student Conduct Code. Academic misconduct will not be tolerated.

Equal Access: The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Office of Disability Equity (ODE). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommasson 154. I will work with you and ODE to provide an appropriate accommodation.