Geography 1301 – Physical Geography
Sample Syllabus

Instructional Materials:

Required: “Visualizing Physical Geography”, 2/e (Strahler)
Optional: National Geographic College Atlas of the World, 2/e
Note: Other readings may be assigned throughout the semester.

Course Description – Geography is a dynamic spatial science that features a heritage of investigating the relationship between people and the natural environment through time and space. Physical geography explores the spatial distribution of climate, topography, water, soils, ecosystems, and other natural phenomena on the Earth’s surface, along with the functional interactions that exist between them and their relationships with humanity. In this course, students study the physical environment through a spatial lens, focusing upon the basic forces that govern the distribution and flow of mass and energy over the Earth’s surface and applying knowledge of these processes to better comprehend major environmental issues such as climate change, water scarcity, and desertification. The theoretical focus of this class is on the Earth as a set of interconnected systems guided by mass and energy exchanges.

Core Competencies – Courses offered at HCC which are taken within “core” status meet a set of stringent guidelines which will help the student advance core skills in foundational areas. Physical Geography meets a Life and Physical Sciences core requirement at HCC. Life and Physical Sciences core area courses “focus on describing, explaining, and predicting natural phenomena using the scientific method” and “involve the understanding of interactions among natural phenomena and the implications of scientific principles on the physical world and on human experiences.” By taking a Life and Physical Sciences core offering, you will have the opportunity to further develop the following core competencies: critical thinking skills, communication skills, empirical and quantitative skills, and teamwork skills. Throughout the semester, assignments and assessments in this class will help measure your advancement in each of these core competencies.
Objectives / Student Learning Outcomes – Courses at HCC have objectives which are centered on “Student Learning Outcomes” (SLOs). These reflect what students will know, be able to do, or be able to demonstrate once they have taken a course. The objectives for this course are guided by the measurable core competency and student learning outcome paradigms. Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Define geography, physical geography, and the earth's four interrelated spheres: the atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, and biosphere.
2. Describe geography in terms of flows, maps, and place.
3. Explain the earth's geographic reference grid, specifically developing an understanding of latitude and longitude.
4. Describe geographic patterns associated with the atmosphere.
5. Explain patterns of climate and weather.
6. Analyze geographic patterns linked to the hydrosphere.
7. Discuss and explain the physical processes and geographic patterns associated with the lithosphere.
8. Describe geographic patterns that are connected to the biosphere.

Assignments as they relate to each of the core competencies

Critical Thinking Skills - Examples may include, but are not limited to: research, reports, writings, use of Scientific Method, technology-based compilations or presentations which include analysis, analysis/solutions of problems/case studies, analysis of spatial data and patterns, justification of results, and explanation of reasoning. These assignments can be completed by an individual or in a group environment.

Communication Skills – Examples may include, but are not limited to: Assignments which present a grammatically correct essay or speech, effectively organized with a thesis statement, introduction, body, conclusion, supportive reasoning, and appropriately documented evidence. If the assignment is an oral presentation, the assignment should also require effective verbal and nonverbal delivery. Visual design elements should be incorporated into any communication assignment. Visual elements may include graphs, tables, charts, slides, or streaming video as examples.

Empirical and Quantitative Skills – Examples may include, but are not limited to: case studies, atlas exercises, reports, creating or analyzing tables and graphs related to statistical data, projects that utilize applied mathematics.

Teamwork Skills – Examples may include, but are not limited to: collaborative work on case studies, atlas exercises, reports, projects or presentations which measure not only the end result, but quality of contribution, cooperation, and self-management in the process of working on a team-based assignment.
HCC Mission Statement:
• The Houston Community College System is an open-admission, public institution of higher education offering academic preparation, and lifelong learning opportunities that prepare individuals in our diverse communities for life and work in an increasingly international and technological society. The History and Geography Department will provide an environment conducive to learning and encourages academic excellence. Furthermore, the History and Geography faculty will encourage the development of the following competencies: Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, Critical Thinking and Computer Literacy.

Attendance:
• You are expected to attend every class meeting during the course of the semester. You are also expected to be in class on time. This is showing basic respect to your fellow classmates and instructor. You are however allowed up to 3 absences for whatever reason – more than 3 absences and/or frequent lateness to class will result in points being taken from your grade.

Drop/Withdrawal:
• It is the responsibility of the student to officially drop or withdraw from a course. The last day for student withdrawals is on this set date. Failure to officially withdraw will likely result in the student receiving an “F” for the course.

The State of Texas has begun to impose penalties on students who drop courses excessively. For example, if you repeat the same course more than twice, you have to pay extra tuition. In 2007, the Texas Legislature passed a law limiting new students (those starting college in Fall 2007) to no more than six total course withdrawals throughout their academic career in obtaining a baccalaureate degree.

Academic Integrity:
• Violations of scholastic ethics are considered serious offenses by Houston Community College, the Department of History and Geography, and by your instructor. Students may consult the HCC Student Handbook to find out more about academic honesty. An online copy can be found at: http://www.hccs.edu/handbook/StudentP.htm

• Notice: Students who repeat the course three or more times will face significant tuition/fee increases at HCC and other Texas public colleges and universities. If you are considering course withdrawal because you are not earning passing grades, confer with me or your counselor as early as possible about your study habits, reading and writing homework, test-taking skills, attendance, course participation, and opportunities for tutoring or other assistance that might be available.

ADA Compliance:
• Any student with a documented disability (e.g. physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, etc.) who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations must contact the Disability Services Office at the respective college at the beginning of each semester.
Faculty are authorized to provide only the accommodations requested by the Disability Support Services Office.

**Sample Grade Structure for Assignments and Assessments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Course Grade:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlas Exercises, Physical Geography Exercises</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>90-100% = A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term Paper or Group Project</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80-89% = B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual or Group Presentation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>70-79% = C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exams and/or Quizzes</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60-69% = D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0-60% = F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Atlas Exercises, Physical Geography Exercises, Web-based Exercises.** These assignments collectively make up 20% of your course grade and are linked to the following core competencies: critical thinking skills, empirical and quantitative skills, teamwork skills.

**Term Paper or Group Project.** Your term paper or group project will incorporate a closer investigation and analysis of an element of or interrelationship between one or more of the major spheres, including the atmosphere, biosphere, lithosphere, and/or hydrosphere. The paper/project is worth 20% of your course grade and is linked to the following core competencies: critical thinking skills, communication skills, empirical and quantitative skills, teamwork skills.

**Individual or Group Presentation.** The individual or group presentation will provide you with an opportunity to share your research findings with your classmates. The presentations can be given in a variety of ways, but they will include a combination of written, oral, and visual elements. The presentation is worth 10% of your course grade and is linked to the following core competencies: communication skills, teamwork skills.

**Exams and/or Quizzes.** The exams and/or quizzes for this class will be worth 50% of your course grade. These assessments will measure your knowledge and understanding of the course material and are linked to the following core competencies: critical thinking skills, empirical and quantitative skills.

**Sample Course Outline - Please note that the content and the dates given are “best estimates;” they may be adjusted from time to time and in accordance with the course objectives.**

**Week 1:** Introduction; Location, Mapping and Scale

**Week 2:** Time and Space

**Week 3:** Energy Balance
Week 4: Air Temperature
Week 5: Atmospheric Pressure and Winds; Midterm I
Week 6: Atmospheric Moisture and Precipitation
Week 7: Weather Systems
Week 8: Global Climates
Week 9: Weather and Climate Summary; Midterm II
Week 10: Plate Tectonics / Volcanic and Tectonic Landforms
Week 11: Global Soils
Week 12: Global Biogeography
Week 13: Presentations
Week 14: Ground and Surface Water
Week 15: Human-Environment Interactions
Week 16: Final Exam