Great Plains & Nebraska

Geography 4230/8236
Summer 2018

Tuesdays & Thursdays 6-9:10pm
DSC 294

Instructor: Dr. Christina Dando
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Office hours: by appointment
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Materials
Readings will be on Canvas.

Goals of this class
The Great Plains are a region that both attract and repel humans. Since the first descriptions of the Great Plains landscape, humans have reduced the Plains landscape to a monotone line. We have all talked to someone who goes on and on about how the Plains seemed to go on forever when they crossed the Plains on their family’s summer vacation, usually not to see the Plains but to see somewhere else West, like Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon. Yet there seems to be always an interest in the Plains landscape, be it books such as Ian Frazier’s Great Plains, television series such as Ken Burns’ Dust Bowl or movies such as The Homesman. Geographers in particular are drawn to the Plains: the combination of a misunderstood landscape and a misunderstood population are intriguing.
In this class, we will be exploring the images and stories that circulate about the Plains. The images of the Plains, be it of table-flat or varied land, a garden or a desert, a home or an alien-landscape, haunt the Plains, shaping human perception of the place as well as human actions. We will examine these images, see how these images came to persist, think about how these images impacted the Plains once they took hold, and reflect on their ramifications.

By the end of the course, you will hopefully have:

- A basic knowledge of the key physical and cultural features of the Great Plains and an understanding of their development
- A heightened sense of the impact of images (written, visual, scholarly, popular culture) on our perceptions of landscape, particularly of the Great Plains
- An appreciation of the Great Plains, its rich history, and landscape

**Grading**

Undergraduates:

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<td>Journal entries</td>
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<td>Project #1</td>
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Graduates:

You have a choice – you must do the journal but you can either do slightly longer versions of the undergraduate projects (and I am expecting more sophisticated) OR you can do an original research paper. Think about this carefully – you will have to let me know next week!

OR

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**Class Participation**

**Attendance:** Attendance in class is required. Things happen – family crises, cars breaking down, shifting work schedules, the flu season. **Given the scheduling of this class, missing more than one class may affect your grade!** Please let me know if you have any attendance problems (or other issues I should know about). As late arrivals interrupt the flow of class, arrive for class on time (or warn me!).

**Discussions:** I will be doing my best not to spend every minute of class lecturing. To facilitate discussion, have the readings done before class.

Be willing to participate in class discussions. I realize that some may be shy or intimidated by more vocal members of class. I know it is hard. Make your voice heard. This is your class too. At the same time, try to be good listeners. Be respectful of others and their opinions. Do not interrupt others as they speak. **Incivility to classmates can result in removal from class.**
Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the “taking” or “borrowing” of someone else’s words, ideas, or entire works and presenting them as your own. Plagiarism includes:

- Turning in a paper obtained from another person, a “paper service” or a Web source.
- Copying some portion of text from another source without proper acknowledgement
- Borrowing specific ideas without proper acknowledgement

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this class or at this university. When in doubt about documentation – see me. It is much better to be safe than very, very sorry.

Writing Assignments

Journals

All class members are expected to keep up with the class readings and to either keep a reading journal OR write a critical summary every week. However, you are allowed one pass during the course when you can opt out of the writing (you ARE expected to keep up with the reading!).

Reading journal – this is a journal where you review and respond analytically to each week’s reading assignments. In these journals you can take notes on the readings, highlight quotes that you think are important or that are bogus, react/respond to the information being presented. It should illustrate clearly what you are thinking about and how you are interacting with the work. It must go beyond – “I disagree.” “Bullshit.” Or “I think the author is a genius.” It should demonstrate in clear notes that you get what the author is writing about and can explain why this work is significant. There should be three parts to each article’s entry:

1. Your reading notes
2. A brief, one-paragraph summary of the article -- emphasizing what you think the author believes is really important about their essay (why they wrote it) and how you evaluate their argument.
3. 1 or 2 discussion questions based on the article

Critical summary – 1-2 pages summarizing and discusses the readings as a whole, including points that you find unclear or that you disagree with, and one or two discussion questions for the group.

It is not necessary to pick one and stick with it. If you want to try both, that is fine. If you want to vary it, that is fine. As for its form – do what you feel comfortable with. If you like to write a more traditional journal, as in hand written, go ahead (as long as I can read it!). If you’d rather do it on a computer, that’s fine too.

The important thing is to have the readings done and some form of writing done before class time and have them with you. I WILL collect the journals/summaries at each class!

Undergraduates – you will be required to choose one of the readings per class to address in your reading journal. Journal should be 1-2 pages.
Graduates – you will be required to read two of the readings per class. As graduate students, I will be expecting more from your journals, both in terms of length and in terms of content. Journal should be 2-3 pages per article.

Journal substitutions: If you wish, you can substitute either a film evaluation and/or an “independent field trip” for a journal entry . . . for up to two journal entries. You still must do the readings for class.

Independent Field Trip
It is almost summer and the weather is great for exploring the region! Visit a location and write up a journal entry reflecting on the location. In the entry, try to convey the connections between the place or event and the Great Plains and its geography . . . If it is easier, concentrate on one element – such as a painting or two at the Joslyn (esp. in the Great Plains/Native American wing).

Field trip ideas:
- Joslyn Art Museum (free)
- Union Pacific Railroad Museum, Council Bluffs (free)
- Mormon Trails Center at Historic Winter Quarters (free)
- Farmer’s Market in the Old Market
- Fontenelle Forest ($9.50 per adult)
- DeSoto Wildlife Refuge (be sure to visit the Bertrand! $3 per vehicle)

In general, parks outside of Omaha . . . Plains cities outside of Omaha . . . Any museums!

Film Entry
Or you can watch a Great Plains film and substitute an entry writing about the film for a journal entry. Provide a brief summary of the film and then connect the film to course content.

Some possibilities:
- The Homesman (2014)
- Nebraska (2013)
- True Grit (2010)
- There Will Be Blood (2007)
- August: Osage County (2005)
- Brokeback Mountain (2005)
- And, of course, classics like Dances with Wolves (1990) or In Cold Blood (1967) or . . .

Project #1: Tourism analysis (3-4 pages for undergrads; 6-8 for grads)
Your first project is to take either a state highway map, tourism brochure or tourism website for any Plains state (I will have some to choose from or you can provide one) and analyze the photographs and information on it, exploring how Plains states are shaping and molding their images. We will talk about this in class and the Bockenhauer reading will help clarify the project. Hand in your analysis AND the map or brochure on May 29th.

Project #2: Short research project . . . either US/Canadian comparison or explore a Plains questions that you have . . . (4 pages for undergrads; 8-10 for grads)

Your second project can either be:

A) compare the US Plains and the Canadian Plains in some way. This could be:
   - General Plains population changes over the past 25 years, comparing US and Canada (using census data)
Leading agricultural output in a US state to that of a Canadian province
Comparing the ethnic population of Nebraska to that of a Canadian province
Exploring whether the Canadian Plains have the same “image” problem as the US Plains
Comparing a tourism brochure from a US state to that of a Canadian Province

B) explore a Plains question that you have, such as:
   - Has the Corn Belt expanded onto the Plains, where and why?
   - What parts of the Plains are pursuing Wind Energy? Why aren’t other parts?
   - We know who the recent immigrants to the Nebraska are . . . who are the new immigrants to the Canadian Plains?
   - My family immigrated to the Plains and homesteaded . . . where do they fit in Great Plains history?

This is open to creativity and flexibility – see me if you’d like help brainstorming. I would like to know what you are going to compare/explore on 29th May. This is due the last day of class – June 21st. I do expect you to have a bibliography and cite your sources for this project! And please use in-text citations.

You will be doing a brief presentation in class of 5-10 minutes on either June 19th or 21st. This is a geography class, not a speech class. My intent is that you share what you have learned with your classmates. You will not be graded on how you present . . . only on content.

Graduate Papers
Graduate Papers will be 10-15 pages in length and I will ask you to do a 15 minute presentations to the class (to be scheduled on either June 19th or 21st). I would like a one paragraph proposal of your topic on May 29th – that way I can give you feedback on it before June 1st. The paper is due the last day of class – June 21st. You can either work on an aspect of your thesis or choose a paper topic you are interested in and want to explore. I encourage you to pursue topics related to family history or that require original research.

Accommodations are provided for students with verified disabilities. For more information, contact Dr. Dando or Services for Students with disabilities (SSd) in EAB 117 or 554-2872, TTY 554-3799.
Course Outline

May 15th  Intro to Great Plains
Review syllabus and expectations
Where are the Plains? What are the Plains?

May 17th  Physical Geography of the Plains: Physiography, Climatology, Biogeography
Readings:
Due: journal.

May 22nd  First on the Plains
Earliest Settlement
Later Settlement – who was where?
Evolving Lifestyles
Reading due:
ALSO, read M. Bockenhauer, 1994, “Culture of the Wisconsin Official State Highway Map” Cartographic Perspectives 18: 17-26. This is to prep you for Project #1. You do not need to journal about it. We will be discussing Project #1 in class.
Due: journal.

May 24th  European Exploration and Settlement
Images: Mapping the Plains
Reading due:
-- F. Kaye, “Exploring the Explorers” from Goodlands (2011)
Due: journal. Bring the material you will be analyzing for Project #1 to class. We will be brainstorming.
May 29th  
Expansion of Plains Settlement: Garden in the Grasslands or the Great American Desert?

Images: Railroads as Plains boosters, homesteaders albums  
Readings due:
Due: journal. Project #1 due. Identify research project (#2)

May 31st

June 5th

June 7th

June 12th  
The Dust Bowl: the Set-up – the Event – the Aftermath  
Images: “Plow That Broke the Plains” – video  
Images: Farm Security Administration photography  
Readings due:
Due: journal. Progress report (oral) on your research project.

June 14th  
Late 20th Century Plains – evolving landscapes  
Readings:
Due: journal.
June 19th     Contemporary Plains Issues
Readings due:
Canadian Studies 33, 3: 391-414.
-- H. Barcus and L. Simmons, 2013, “Ethnic Restructuring in Rural America: migration and the
changing faces of rural communities in the Great Plains” Professional Geographer 65, 1: 130-152
(note: LOTS of maps)
-- R. Oglesby et al. 2015. Understanding and Assessing Projected Future Climate Change for
Due: journal.

June 21st     What of the future Plains?
Problems associated with the Plains/ What suggestions have been made to solve “the problem of the
plains”? / But why all the interest in the Plains?
Readings due:
-- D. Flores. 2003. “Loving the Plains, Hating the Plains, Restoring the Plains” in The Future of the
Southern Plains (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 219-244.
-- J. Shortridge. 1997. “Expectations of Others” in Many Wests: Place, Culture, and Regional Identity,
114-135.
century” Heritage of the Great Plains 39, 2: 42-64.
Due: journal research, Project #2 Research Paper