

GEOGRAPHY 200A

CONTEMPORARY GEOGRAPHIC THOUGHT

Nathan F. Sayre

Fall 2016

Thursdays 1:00-4:00, 575 McCone Hall

How best to train graduate students in Geography is a question that seemingly has no clear answer. This may be true in other disciplines as well, but it appears particularly acute in Geography, at least in the United States, where the discipline is semi-invisible both inside and outside the academy. *What is Geography* is a question that “we” encounter all the time (unlike our peers in History, Political Science, Economics, etc.), and what is at stake may be more important than what one considers the answer to be.

If Geography is “the original inter-disciplinary discipline,” as is sometimes said, then the problem is fairly obvious: How to train students whose interests and needs may span the world and touch on almost all of its parts, places and peoples? Does it make sense to train *all* students in *all* the literatures and methods of Geography writ large? What holds this field together, anyway? Where to begin?

This year, we are trying a new approach that is something of an experiment. Previous cohorts of students urged that the course be taught by one faculty member (rather than three); that it make good on the notion that Berkeley Geography integrates or “bridges” human and physical “sides” of the discipline (rather than reinforcing the distinction); that it address “the canon” (for lack of a better term); and that it also address practical issues of professionalization and practice. Meanwhile, some faculty felt that 3 credit hours was insufficient to fulfill these ambitions. Hence the arrangement: require incoming students to take both Nature and Culture (Geography 203) and 200A.

Our goal in this course, then, is to complement 203 while digging more deeply into questions that are more or less unique to your circumstances as incoming Geography students. What is Geography? What is Berkeley’s past and present place in the discipline? What is scholarship as profession and practice? What does a successful academic career require? In the spring semester, Michael Watts will teach 200B, which will specifically focus on proposal development and writing—so we will not emphasize that particular skill in 200A.

Objectives

- To provide a space for intellectual exchange beyond what we achieve with the larger group in 203: where we can dig deeper, ask different questions, and build a sense of community as a cohort, a department and a discipline.

- To cultivate the three practical skills (practices) that make up the bulk of academic work-life: reading, writing, and speaking. My impression is that these skills—especially the last two—are often neglected in graduate training.
- To discuss an array of things that may seem to inhabit a kind of “black box” in academic work-life: publishing, peer review, orals exams, committees, job searches and applications, tenure, etc. Our goal here is both to convey information and to demystify the “inner workings” of this peculiar career path.
- To explore what might be termed the *craft* or *practice* of scholarship, especially geographical scholarship. These are not merely pragmatic issues but also epistemological and political ones: to *practice* geography is to develop ways of seeing, reading and thinking that become, if only by dint of repetition and habit, “second nature.” Such habits (or habitus) necessarily have political dimensions and implications, because *how* one sees and thinks affects *what* one can conceive or deem possible. A critical and reflexive stance is called for as one launches down such a path.
- To examine the relations among theories, questions, methods, and data in both human and physical geography (albeit with greater emphasis on the former).
- To use Berkeley and the Bay Area as case studies that can help us in all of the above.

The Structure of Seminar Meetings

The first 20-30 minutes each week will be devoted to a kind of “post mortem” of the colloquium talk delivered the preceding afternoon. We will discuss not only the content of the talk but also the presentation and delivery, effectiveness of visual aids, the quality of the Q&A, etc. Please make a habit of taking notes at colloquium to bring to our discussion. *I encourage you to take advantage of the opportunity to have lunch with our visiting speakers on Wednesdays, and to read some of their published work on your own.*

The next 60-90 minutes will function like a regular graduate seminar. We will revisit the week’s discussion in 203 if there is interest in doing so, and discuss the readings listed below on their own merits and/or in relation to the 203 readings. (Most weeks, readings have been selected to complement the 203 syllabus, but there are other weeks when they stand alone.) Then we will take a short break.

The final portion of each meeting—approximately 45-80 minutes—will focus on a rotating slate of topics, including the “black box” items listed above. Issues that arise in class, the department (e.g., related to our programmatic review this year), the campus or the broader public realm may command our attention some weeks. I encourage you to bring things to our attention and propose subjects for discussion as the semester progresses.

Finally, we will try to schedule at least a couple of field trips, if logistics permit.

Course Requirements

Seminar participation: The course will only succeed to the extent that everyone participates actively and constructively in discussion. This is not a matter of *how much* you talk, and *what* you say is to some degree less important than *how* you engage the challenge of reading, thinking and exchanging ideas as a group.

Essays: There are **three writing assignments** for the class. Two very short essays (1,000 words or less) are required, the first due on Monday, October 3rd and the second on Monday, November 7th. The topic is entirely of your choosing, but these should be essays in both senses of the word: a short piece of writing on a particular topic (non-fiction, please), and “an attempt or try”—in this case *to write cogently, persuasively and succinctly*. For your final writing assignment, due December 9th, you will be required to revise/rewrite one of the first two essays, based on feedback from me and one of your peers.

Talks: During the final portion of our meetings on November 10th and 17th, every student will deliver a 15-minute talk. Talks may be developed from any of your writing assignments in 203 or 200A this semester, and if you wish they may incorporate materials from outside the classes *provided that you also engage concepts and ideas from the readings*. The outside materials may be scholarly-intellectual, based on your own research, biographical, or some combination thereof. The goal is *to speak cogently, persuasively and succinctly*, no matter what you are saying. Powerpoint-type visual aids will be either disallowed or stringently restricted.

Books and Readings

The following books have been ordered (or will soon be ordered) through the ASUC bookstore:

- Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Chamboredon, and Jean-Claude Passeron. 1991. *The Craft of Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries*
Tim Cresswell. 2013. *Geographic Thought: A Critical Introduction*
Andrew Sayer. 1992. *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach*, 2nd edition
Richard White. 1995. *The Organic Machine: the Remaking of the Columbia River*

All other assigned readings will be posted in pdf to the course website.

How to Reach Me

Email is best: nsayre@berkeley.edu. My office is 599 McCone, phone 510-664-4072. Office hours are Tuesdays 1:00-2:00 and Wednesdays 10:00-11:00 or by appointment.

Schedule

Week 2 (1 September): What is Geography?

Noel Castree. 2005. "The 'Nature' of Geography." Pp. 45-107 in *Nature*

Doreen Massey. 1985. "New Directions in Space." Pp. 9-19 in *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*, edited by Derek Gregory and John Urry

Tim Cresswell. 2013. *Geographic Thought: A Critical Introduction*, pp. 1-34

Post-break topic: Scholarship as a Vocation

Week 3 (8 September): Landscapes and Regions

Carl Sauer. 1925. "The Morphology of Landscape." *University of California Publications in Geography* 2: 19-54

Cresswell. *Geographic Thought*, pp. 58-78

Post-break topic: Scholarly Writing

Week 4 (15 September): Materialism and Modern Geography

David Harvey. 1974. "Population, Resources, and the Ideology of Science." *Economic Geography* 50: 256-277

Karl Marx. 1867. "The Commodity." Pp. 125-177 in *Capital*, vol. 1

Cresswell. *Geographic Thought*, pp. 35-57

Post-break topic: Peer Review

Week 5 (22 September): Marxian Geography

David Harvey. 2006. "Notes towards a theory of uneven geographical development." Pp. 71-116 in *Spaces of Global Capitalism*

Scott Prudham. 2015. "Property and Commodification." Pp. 430-445 in *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*

Cresswell. *Geographic Thought*, pp. 122-146

Post-break topic: Constituting a Committee

Week 6 (29 September): Do Humans "Dominate" Nature?

George Perkins Marsh. 1965 [1864]. *Man and Nature*, pp. 3-52.

Clarence J. Glacken. 1970. "Man Against Nature: An Outmoded Concept." Pp. 127-142 in *The Environmental Crisis*, edited by Harold W. Helfrich, Jr.

Carolyn Merchant. 1998. "The Death of Nature: A Retrospective." *Organization and Environment* 11: 198-206

Post-break topic: The Qualifying Exam

Week 7 (6 October): Bay Area Geography

Matthew Booker. 2013. *Down by the Bay: San Francisco's History between the Tides*

Gray Brechin. 1999. "The University, the Gate, and 'the Gadget'." Pp. 280-330 in
Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin

Post-break topic: Publishing an Article

Week 8 (13 October): Method and Epistemology

Andrew Sayer. 1992. *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach*, 2nd edition, pp.
1-152

Carl Sauer. 1950. "Grassland Climax, Fire, and Man." *Journal of Range Management*
3: 16-21

Post-break topic: Job Searches, Applications and Interviews

Week 9 (20 October): The Craft of Geography

Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Chamboredon, and Jean-Claude Passeron. 1991. *The
Craft of Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries*, Prefaces and pp. 1-77

Post-break topic: The Department Review

Week 10 (27 October): Biophysical Epistemologies

Kristin Shrader-Frechette and Earl D. McCoy. 1994. "Applied Ecology and the Logic
of Case Studies." *Philosophy of Science* 61: 228-249

C. S. Holling and Gary K. Meffe. 1996. "Command and Control and the Pathology of
Natural Resource Management." *Conservation Biology* 10: 328-337

Rebecca Lave et al. 2014. "Intervention: Critical Physical Geography." *The Canadian
Geographer* 58: 1-10

Post-break topic: Tenure and Promotion

Week 11 (3 November): Historical Geography

Richard White. 1995. *The Organic Machine: the Remaking of the Columbia River*

Carl Sauer. 1941. "Foreword to Historical Geography." *Annals of the AAG* 31: 1-24

Post-break topic: Extra-Academic Career Opportunities

Week 12 (10 November): Capital and Agriculture in California

Richard Walker. 2004. "A Landscape of Commodities" and "Capital in the
Countryside." Pp. 48-75 and 256-299 in *The Conquest of Bread: 150 Years of
Agribusiness in California*

Post-break topic: Talks

Week 13 (17 November): Bureaucratic Rationality and Symbolic Power

Max Weber. 1946. "Bureaucracy." Pp. 196-244 in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills

Pierre Bourdieu. 1991. "The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language." Pp. 43-65 in *Language and Symbolic Power*

Post-break topic: Talks

Week 14 (1 December): Fields and Feminist Geographies

Pierre Bourdieu. 1975. "The Specificity of the Scientific Field and the Social Conditions of the Progress of Reason." *Social Science Information* 14: 19-47

Cresswell. *Geographic Thought*, pp. 147-169

Post-Break Topic: Post-mortems of Talks