Settlement Geography: The American West

Settlement Geography: The American West is a graduate seminar that explores the historical and contemporary geography of an important, diverse American region. Using an assortment of weekly readings in cultural and historical geography as well as history, the seminar will explore the character and changing human geography of the American West. The class will assess this regional entity through the readings and discussions and individual student research projects will enable class participants to develop their own topics of interest for more detailed research.

The central topics under discussion will be:

"What are the key cultural, environmental, economic, and political impulses that have shaped the settlement geography of the American West?"

“How do historians and historical geographers frame questions about the West?”

As historical and cultural geographers, we can define "settlement geography" as including:

1. the distinctive spatial patterns of areal organization and settlement associated with occupancy of the West
2. the evolution, appearance, representations (maps, images, etc) and meanings of the region's distinctive cultural landscapes
3. the ongoing dynamic interrelationships between people and the environment in the West
4. the creation of distinctive communities and place identities and their associated institutions in western settings.

Text and Readings: REQUIRED: Wyckoff, HOW TO READ THE AMERICAN WEST: A FIELD GUIDE (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014) offers some general regional examples of many of the landscape features and settlement patterns we explore in the course. All students should also purchase Robin Grossinger’s NAPA VALLEY HISTORICAL ECOLOGY ATLAS (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), Carl Abbott’s HOW CITIES WON THE WEST: FOUR CENTURIES OF URBAN CHANGE IN WESTERN NORTH AMERICA (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), and Lincoln Bramwell’s WILDERBURBS:
COMMUNITIES ON NATURE’S EDGE (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014). In addition, I will place collections of readings on electronic reserve (e-reserve) in the Library. Other articles in journals can be accessed electronically (online e-journal) at the Library. You may read or copy the readings as you wish. Additionally, some assigned individual readings will be passed out in class (prof) or put on D2L (as indicated in syllabus).

Course Grade: Grades will be assigned through weekly class participation (25%), short weekly presentations (25%), and student research projects (20% oral presentation, 30% written paper).

Weekly Activities: Each week the class will share responsibility for several group readings. For each reading, I will call on one of you to summarize its contents/themes and its relation to the evening's topic and then open the discussion to the rest of the class. Be prepared to lead these opening discussions for each assigned group reading!

In addition, I will assign individual readings to be reported on by seminar participants. Plan on a 10-minute summation and assessment/review of your assigned reading, no more, no less! These will also be open for more general discussion/questions by the group once you have completed your initial report.

The final three weeks of the semester will be reserved for your own oral research reports, based on a research project pertinent to the course and your own interests. Plan on a 20 minute presentation (Powerpoint, overheads, etc. are great) with an additional 10 minutes reserved for questions from the group.

Your written research papers are due December 9 (Friday) and should be 15-18 pages long plus illustrations. Reference style is up to you BUT be consistent, follow one of the standard methods (the ANNALS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN GEOGRAPHERS and the CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE are good guides), and use a style so that the reader can easily find the source.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: GPHY 503

As a graduate seminar, GPHY 503 has several specific learning outcomes:

1. Describing the separate but interrelated intellectual traditions of historical/cultural geography, western American history, and environmental history in understanding the evolution of the American West.
2. Integrating our knowledge of Native Americans in the American West with broader themes in the settlement geography of the region. Including both historical and contemporary examples.
3. Examining a wide variety of recent literature and research on the West that generally falls into a focus on 1) mining, 2) ranching/farming, 3) tourism, 4) public lands, 5) cultural diversity, and 6) urban topics. Emphasis given to how these activities are manifest on the cultural landscape and how they shape human-environment interaction in the region. Including both historical and contemporary examples.
4. Develop a student awareness of and participation in a seminar-style class based on discussion
and extensive weekly presentations.
5. Foster an understanding of taking an independent research project from an initial idea/proposal through the mechanics of primary data research, writing, and oral presentation.

**Course Schedule and Reading List**

**August 30**
- Introduction to the American West
- Course Overview and Class Expectations
- Themes in Settlement/Historical Geography
- Defining and Experiencing the West

**September 6**
- Defining the West: Geographical Perspectives
  - The “West”: a new way of organizing space
  - Cultural landscapes and settlement patterns
  - Regional place identities
  - Themes in historical geography

**Group Readings:**


2. William Wyckoff, *How to Read the American West*, pp. 3-87. (text)


**Individual Readings:**


September 13  Defining the West: Historical Perspectives
Themes of Western Unity
Research Trends in the Field
The "New Western History"
“Environmental History” in the West

Group Readings:


Individual Readings:


4. Derek Everett, Creating the American West: Boundaries and Borderlands (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014) (prof)

September 20  Native American Perspectives
Demographic and Ecological Impacts
European Conflicts
Themes of Contact and Conquest
Group Readings:


Individual Readings:


**September 27**

The Mining West  
Spatial Systems  
Landscape Impacts  
Boom-Bust Economies  
Social Geographies

Group Readings:

1. Wyckoff, *How to Read*, 124-59 (text)


Individual Readings:


October 4

Signatures of Ranching and Farming in the West
Local patterns of settlement in ranching zones
Spatial networks and commercial markets
Ranching Ecology-impacts on the land
Consequences of Aridity
Agricultural Settlement Patterns/Communities

Group Readings:


2. Wyckoff, How to Read, 88-123 (text)


Individual Readings:


October 11
Public Signatures in the West
Evolving Historical Perceptions
National Parkscapes
Evolution of Wilderness
Public vs. Private Control

BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS RESEARCH TOPICS!

Group Readings:


3. Wyckoff, How to Read, 238-83 (text)


Individual Readings:

1. Linda McClelland, Building the National Parks (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1998). (prof)


October 18  Signatures of Ethnicity and Gender
Gendered perceptions/impacts in the West
Traditional ethnic islands and provinces
Modern ethnicity in the West

Group Readings:

1. Wyckoff, How to Read, 160-67; 174-203 (text)


Individual Readings:


October 25

Tourism Signatures in the West
Leisure landscapes in the West
The impact of the automobile in the West
Tourism, place identity, and images of the West

Group Readings:

1. William Wyckoff, How to Read, 336-389 (text)


Individual Readings:

1. Dydia Delyser, Ramona Memories: Tourism and the Shaping of Southern California (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). (prof)

2. Bonnie Christensen, Red Lodge and the Mythic West: Coal Miners to Cowboys (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002) (prof)


November 1

The Urban West
Evolving Urban Landscapes and Communities
Twentieth Century Modifications

Group Readings:

1. Wyckoff, How to Read, 284-335 (text)

Individual Readings:


**November 8**  
**ELECTION DAY HOLIDAY: NO CLASS!**

**November 15**  
The Modern Rural West  
Twentieth Century Evolution  
Major Regional Issues/Tensions  
Rural and Urban Contrasts  
Images of the Modern West  
New Approaches and Themes

Group Readings:

1. Lincoln Bramwell, *Wilderburbs* (text)

2. Donald Worster, “The American West in an Age of Vulnerability,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 45 (Spring 2014): 5-16. (online e-journal)

Individual Readings:


November 22

THANKSGIVING POTLUCK! (bring a dish, goodies)

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS!!

November 29

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS!!

December 6

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS!!

DECEMBER 9 (FRIDAY) at 5:00 PM: Seminar Research Papers are due!!