

GEO 7313 – ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY*, FALL 2008

Instructor: Mark A. Fonstad

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Office Hours: 12:15 PM – 2:00 PM Thursdays or by appointment

Class Time: 9:30 PM – 12:15 PM Thursdays

Classroom: Evans Liberal Arts (ELA) Building, Room 313

Course Line Number: 335107

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, the theories and concepts involved in environmental systems will be examined. Tools and research issues relevant to their analysis will also be explored. Basic principles, as well as specific research questions and techniques, will be proposed to give students a foundation for analysis of current issues involving environmental systems. This seminar will present a broad theoretical foundation for the study of environmental systems, particularly on the dynamics of their spatial and temporal behavior. Components of the course may include (but are not limited to) general systems theory, theories of self-organization, convergence and divergence in system behavior, chaos theory and the environment, causality in and predictability of environmental systems, nonlinear dynamical systems theory (NDS), and models of NDS such as differential equations, cellular automata, and multi-agent systems. Some of specific environmental systems studied will include synoptic meteorology and the limits of prediction, landscape evolution theories, ecosystem stability, self-organization of bedforms, self-regulation of the global climate, patterns and scale in landscape ecology, and the role of humans in system behavior.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Knowledge Outcomes: By the end of this course, you should be able to understand and critique advanced theories of environmental systems dynamics. *Skills Outcomes:* Toward this end, an integral part of this course will be both small lectures/discussions and research project work on an individual systems analysis project.

COURSE MATERIALS

The primary (and required) text for this class is *Environmental Modelling: Finding Simplicity in Complexity* by Wainwright and Mulligan. Readings for this class will also be from several recent physical geography research articles. Most of these articles can be distributed electronically as PDF files, although a few will be distributed as paper copies. There will be no charge for the articles.

EVALUATION AND GRADING POLICIES

I will evaluate your performance and assign grades based on two major areas of work in this course. First, I will assess your ability to communicate advanced material through class participations in weekly research article discussions, and in-class presentation of your modeling research projects. Second, a significant individual written research project is also used to evaluate your final grade. All students are expected to prepare assignments by the scheduled time. Late assignments (presentation or project) will have their grade lowered 10 points per class day late. All assignments must, however, be turned in by the final exam date. I will endeavor to grade projects within a week of their submission.

There is a maximum of 200 points for all of the discussion, presentation, and project activities. The basis for grading will be as follows: 75 points for weekly reading discussions, 25 points for the final project presentation, and 100 points for the final project. The final grades will be determined based on the following rules:

A	≥90% (≥180 points)
B	≥80% and <90% (160 – 179 points)
C	≥70% and <80% (140 – 159 points)
D	≥60% and <70% (120 – 139 points)
F	<60% (< 119 points)

CLASSROOM AND ATTENDANCE POLICIES

Good attendance in the class is key to your success in this course. First, the student discussions in class will require knowledge from previous weeks. Second, the individual research projects will require a deep familiarity with class material.

If you must miss class because of an illness, a personal emergency, or some other extenuating circumstance, please contact me as soon as possible so I can make alternative arrangements for you (this is key). Of course, good attendance means more than just showing up for class. Please read and adhere to the policy on classroom etiquette that appears below. These codes of conduct will allow everyone to participate equally as learners. Thank you for your cooperation.

In the Department of Geography, instructors strive to create an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect in which learning, debate, and intellectual growth can thrive. Creating this atmosphere, however, requires that instructors and students work to achieve a classroom in which learning is not disrupted. At the most basic level, this means that everyone should attend class, be prepared with readings and assignments completed, and that students pay attention. This means no conversations with friends, reading the newspaper, coming late, or leaving early. Such behavior is disruptive to the instructor and to your fellow classmates.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students having special needs/disabilities (as documented by the Office of Disability Services) that will require compensatory arrangements must contact the instructor no later than the fourth class period to discuss specific arrangements and logistics. Students who have not already done so will be required to contact the Office of Disability Services located at LBJ 5-5.1 (512-245-3451). Texas State is dedicated to providing these students with necessary academic adjustments and auxiliary aids to facilitate their participation and performance in the classroom.

TEXAS STATE ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY

Learning and teaching take place best in an atmosphere of intellectual fair-minded openness. All members of the academic community are responsible for supporting freedom and openness through rigorous personal standards of honesty and fairness. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty undermine the very purpose of the university and diminish the value of an education. Specific sanctions for academic dishonesty are outlined in the *Texas State Student Handbook*.

Schedule by

Week

Topics

Aug 28

Introduction to the History and Theories of Systems Analysis

Sep 4

Introduction to Dynamical Systems

Sep 11	Models of Dynamical Systems 1: Differential Equation-based Approaches
Sep 18	Models of Dynamical Systems 2: Cellular and Agent-based Approaches
Sep 25	Introduction to spreadsheet models
Oct 2	Introduction to spreadsheet models
Oct 9	Equilibrium Concepts and an Introduction to Nonlinear Dynamical Systems
Oct 16	Qualitative Analysis of Nonlinear Dynamical Systems
Oct 23	Chaos Theory and Divergent Behavior in Systems
Oct 30	Convergence and Self-Organization
Nov 6	The Concept of Emergence
Nov 13	Simplexity and Scale Hierarchies
Nov 20	Predictability in Environmental Systems
Nov 27	<i>No Class This Week</i>
Dec 4	Project Presentations
Dec 11	Final Projects Due Thursday, Dec 11, 11:00 am

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

The instructor is Mark A. Fonstad, assistant professor of geography. He is a specialist in spatial and hydrological analysis of river systems, theoretical geomorphology, and applied remote sensing. Mark received his Ph.D. in Geography from Arizona State University (2000) where he researched mountain fluvial systems and the prediction of channel change in New Mexico. For the past four years, Mark has directed the field research on channel morphology, watershed hydrology, and the remote sensing of rivers in Yellowstone National Park.



* A member of the Texas State University System