

Course Information

Course Number:	GEOG 203
Course Title:	Planet Earth
Section:	599
Time:	online (asynchronous)
Location:	n/a
Credit Hours:	3

Instructor Details

Instructor:	Dr. Julie Loisel
Office:	OMB 803-C
Phone:	979-458-1272 (not recommended)
E-Mail:	planetearth203@gmail.com / julieloisel@tamu.edu
Office Hours:	by appointment

Course Description

The goal of this course is to provide each student with a well-rounded understanding of planet Earth. All of Earth's geosystems, from the solid Earth to the atmosphere, the hydrosphere and the biosphere, are examined through case studies such as hotspot volcanism, hurricane formation, glacial landscape evolution, and carbon-climate feedbacks. Short lectures, interviews, videos, texts, and exercises will also allow you to explore and investigate the complex interactions between these systems as well as how they affect, and are affected by, humans.

An online class allows you to learn *independently*, at your own pace, when you want, and where you want. Still, to achieve your academic goals, it is important to remain engaged with the class. To do so, I recommend **logging on many times per week** to see who has posted in course forums, checking for updates, and keeping informed of upcoming deadlines. Use your virtual classroom visits to **contribute to ongoing discussions** (take advantage of anonymity), check your progress in the course, stay on track, and ask any question you might have. Also, you can work and study with a classmate – take the time to locate someone and **buddy up, either virtually or in real life!** Lastly, **set deadlines for your work** and stick to them. One week of missed work can be difficult to make up. If necessary, schedule a set number of hours per week that you devote to the class.

Online course requirements

You are expected to have basic computer knowledge and the adequate tools at hand **before** the class begins. This includes:

- a computer and a (fast and stable) Internet connection
- access to TAMU's Canvas platform
- access to an email account

- access to the following software: Microsoft Word or Apple Pages, Microsoft Excel (Apple Numbers is not recommended), Microsoft PowerPoint or Apple Keynote, Adobe Reader (to read pdf files), a flash player (to watch videos).

In addition, be sure to be comfortable with the following technological skills **before** the beginning of the course. If you have an issue, please contact me as soon as possible.

-Internet: visit sites and open browser tabs from hyperlinks or URLs, watch streaming videos and download files from the Web

-Canvas: log in, navigate to and within our course, post messages to the course discussion board, upload documents

-Email: send and receive emails with attachments, forward and reply to emails

-Word/Pages, Excel, PowerPoint/Keynote: create and save a document, copy and paste from one source to another.

To avoid the stress of computer and Internet mishaps, be sure to have a backup plan for any type of accident or unavoidable Internet downtime. Save your documents often and backup versions on a **flash drive** or through a cloud-based archive account such as **Dropbox** or **Google Drive**.

Course components

The course is split into **5 themes (a new topic every ~3 weeks)** and each topic is split into **many topics/lectures**. All teaching materials (lectures, videos, texts, and exercises) will be displayed on Canvas.

Every 3rd Friday, an **exam** (each is worth 11% of your final grade = 55% total) will become available on Canvas. You will have 24h to take it (from Friday 12:01am until Friday 11:59pm). These exams are open-book and non-cumulative. If absolutely needed, you could take the exam over the weekend, though prior approval by the instructor is required.

Students seeking an excused absence for an exam must notify me in writing at least three days ahead of time. In cases where advance notification is not feasible, you must provide notification as soon as possible, and by the end of the second working day after the absence at the latest. If the absence is considered excused by the university (<http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07>), you will be able to make up the missed exam. **Computer issues are not a valid excuse for not taking an exam.** At my discretion, the make-up exam might be in a different format than the original exam. **Do not wait until the last minute (i.e., late Friday night) to begin the exam! Technological issues do happen, and I may not be able to help you reboot the exam late at night...**

You will be working on a few homework assignments. These exercises will be made available via TopHat and directly related to topics covered in the lectures, notes, videos, and texts. You will submit all your assignments through **Top Hat** or **Canvas** (unless otherwise specified); refer to the schedule at the end of this syllabus for deadlines. Students who cannot comply with these deadlines must notify me in writing at least three days ahead of time. **Computer issues are not a valid excuse for not turning in an assignment.** Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 10% per business day.

Virtual Field Trips: You will participate in three virtual field trips to be completed via TopHat; each is worth 15% of your final grade. Each field trip should take approximately 10h to complete. You will have about 1 month to complete each one of them.

Course Prerequisites

None.

Special Course Designation

Planet Earth is a **Core Curriculum** course, which means that it provides students with a foundation of knowledge of the **physical and natural world**, and advances intellectual and practical skills that are essential for all learning. The Core Curriculum enhances the individual degree program and university graduation requirements. For more information:

catalog.tamu.edu/undergraduate/general-information/university-core-curriculum/.

Course Learning Outcomes

The core curriculum focuses on the development of six skills that have been shown to be effective in preparing students for the job market and their role in a diverse world and democratic society: (1) Critical Thinking Skills – creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information; (2) Communication Skills – effective development, interpretation, and expression of ideas through written, oral, and visual communication; (3) Empirical and Quantitative Skills – the manipulation and analysis of numerical data or observable facts resulting in informed conclusions; (4) Teamwork – the ability to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal; (5) Personal Responsibility – the ability to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making, and (6) Social Responsibility – intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.

Of these six general goals, this course will emphasize the first four as follows:

Planet Earth learning outcomes pertaining to **Critical Thinking Skills**: (1) apply and understand the fundamental concepts of Earth system science and Geography; (2) explain and rationalize how to find, and assess, scientifically credible information; (3) demonstrate the appropriate use of the scientific method (repeatable observations, testable hypotheses, multiple analytical tools, and data interpretation) to explore, describe, and learn about Earth’s geosystems, (4) interpret the arrangement and evolution of climates, ecosystems, and landforms over Earth’s surface; (5) predict the patterns that emerge from the interplay of multiple Earth system processes, and (6) explain the manner that Earth’s rocks and other materials provide records of our planet’s history, and how the principle of uniformitarianism (“the present is the key to the past”) allows Earth scientists to reconstruct past landscapes and environments. In terms of **Communication Skills**, students will (7) describe geographic patterns through maps and graphs, and (8) communicate about Earth in a meaningful way, both in written (essays and short-answer questions) and oral forms (final video/podcast presentation). Students will develop new **Empirical and Quantitative Skills**

via (9) analyzing several types of geologic, climate, and biogeographic datasets using Excel and other online software. Lastly, **Teamwork** skills will be assessed through some of the Virtual Field Trip activities.

Textbook and/or Resource Materials

Required: We will use the **virtual textbook** “Planet Earth Virtual Field Trips” that is available on Top Hat. The join code is 334473.

Grading Policy

Grading: Exam and course grades are not negotiable. Your grade reflects your performance in this course. The grading scale follows the Texas A&M University grading system:

A = Excellent	90-100%
B = Good	80–89%
C = Satisfactory	70–79%
D = Passing	60–69%
F = Failing	00-59%

Evaluation:

Exams	11% each	55% of total
Homework assignments	15% each	45% of total

Feedback: You can expect feedback and grades on assignments and exams within about one week of the submission deadline of those said assignments and exams. Grades will be uploaded on Canvas and made available to you.

Late Work Policy

Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 10% per business day.

Work submitted by a student as makeup work for an excused absence is not considered late work and is exempted from the late work policy. Late work policies must clearly link to [Student Rule 7](#).

Attendance Policy

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Makeup Work Policy

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the timeframe for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1](#)).

"The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2](#)).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See [Student Rule 24](#).)

Academic Integrity Statement and Policy

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do."

"Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one's work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case" ([Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20](#)).

You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at aggiehonor.tamu.edu.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Resources office on your campus (resources listed below) Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

Disability Resources is located in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit disability.tamu.edu.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

With the exception of some medical and mental health providers, all university employees (including full and part-time faculty, staff, paid graduate assistants, student workers, etc.) are Mandatory Reporters and must report to the Title IX Office if the employee experiences, observes, or becomes aware of an incident that meets the following conditions (see [University Rule 08.01.01.M1](#)):

- The incident is reasonably believed to be discrimination or harassment.
- The incident is alleged to have been committed by or against a person who, at the time of the incident, was (1) a student enrolled at the University or (2) an employee of the University.

Mandatory Reporters must file a report regardless of how the information comes to their attention – including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Although Mandatory Reporters must file a report, in most instances, a person who is subjected to the alleged conduct will be able to control how the report is handled, including whether or not to pursue a formal investigation. The University’s goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and to ensure access to the resources you need.

Students wishing to discuss concerns in a confidential setting are encouraged to make an appointment with [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS).

Students can learn more about filing a report, accessing supportive resources, and navigating the Title IX investigation and resolution process on the University’s [Title IX webpage](#).

Statement on Mental Health and Wellness

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors that influence a student’s academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in healthy self-care by utilizing available resources and services on your campus

Students who need someone to talk to can contact Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) or call the TAMU Helpline (979-845-2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends. 24-hour emergency help is also available through the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org.



THEME 1 –ROCKS (08/30-09/17)	
topic 01	Earth Formation, Geologic Timescale, Stratigraphic Principles
topic 02	Plate tectonics, Seafloor Spreading & Age
topic 03	Volcanoes & Earthquakes, Tsunamis
09/03 LAST DAY FOR ADDING/DROPPING A COURSE (at 5pm)	
FRIDAY 09/17: EXAM 1 (11%)	
THEME 2 – CLIMATE (09/20-10/08)	
topic 04	Earth’s Energy Budget, Natural Climate Cycles
topic 05	Reconstructing Past Environments
topic 06	The Quaternary Period, the Holocene Epoch
topic 07	The Anthropocene
FRIDAY 10/01: VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP #1 (15%)	
FRIDAY 10/08: EXAM 2 (11%)	
THEME 3 – AIR & WATER (10/11-10/29)	
topic 08	Global Atmospheric Circulation
topic 09	Global Ocean Circulation
topic 10	Hurricanes & Monsoons
topic 11	El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO)
FRIDAY 10/22: VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP #2 (15%)	
FRIDAY 10/29: EXAM 3 (11%)	
THEME 4 – LANDSCAPE EVOLUTION (11/01-11/19)	
topic 12	Erosion & Weathering, Mass Movements
topic 13	Glacial & Periglacial Landforms & Processes
topic 14	Fluvial Landforms & Processes
topic 15	Coastal Landforms & Processes
topic 16	Aeolian Landforms & Processes
FRIDAY 11/12: VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP #3 (15%)	
11/19: LAST DAY FOR Q-DROPPING A COURSE (at 5pm)	
FRIDAY 11/19: EXAM 4 (11%)	
THEME 5 – ECOSYSTEMS (11/22-12/08)	
topic 17	System Complexity
topic 18	Soils
topic 19	Forests & Wildfires
topic 20	Lake Eutrophication, Ocean Acidification
FRIDAY 12/10: EXAM 5 (11%)	