

2011/2012 academic year, Term 1

**University of British Columbia  
Faculty of Arts  
Department of Geography**

**Course: GEOG 453, Political Geography**

Class meets: **Mon. 1-4pm, Room Geog. 130**

**Instructor:** Dr. Merje Kuus  
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Office hours: Tue: 3-4pm

**Brief course description:** This seminar course focuses on the spatiality of politics: how a set of taken-for-granted assumptions about places underpin political practice and, conversely, how political processes shape these assumptions. We will first explore how the mainstream ideas about North and South, East and West, developed and developing places, came into being historically. We will then turn to the ways in which geographical claims and assumptions underpin our understanding of specific issues in world affairs. These issues include security and border management, poverty, migration, environmental degradation, and national belonging, to name just some of them. This is a seminar course and it therefore revolves around class discussions of assigned readings. I hope that the discussions will help us all to think through how political processes connect us to distant places.

**Required reading:**

Course reader, available at UBC bookstore.

**Grading:**

Final term paper: 30%  
One-page outline and a bibliography for the term paper: 8%  
Class presentation of the term paper: 10%  
Short written assignments on readings (details below): 35%  
Attendance and participation: 17%

**Term paper** will be a 10-page **plus** references (approximately 2,800-3,000 words of text, plus references) research paper that discusses how the printed media uses claims and assumptions about geography to explain international political issues. You will select a topic that interests you, read current media coverage on this topic, and write an essay on the geographical assumptions that underpin the media coverage. The possible topics include global warming, the AIDS epidemic, global trade in diamonds or illegal drugs, economic assistance to less developed countries, and many others. I will circulate a long list of topics to make sure that everyone selects a different topic, but you can modify your

topic in consultation with me. *The list of possible topics along with various writing tips will be distributed in class on September 24.* The paper is due in the departmental office (Room 217) by 3pm on Wednesday, December 7.

A one-page single-spaced outline of the research paper, plus a one-page bibliography, is due in class on October 24.

The last two weeks of the class will include presentations of the research papers. Each student will make a 5-7 minute presentation of his/her research paper, followed by a brief class discussion.

**Class participation:** Your participation grade is based on attendance and general participation.

**Assignments on readings:** Two thoughtful questions, comments, or criticisms on each set of weekly readings assigned for the classes on Sept 20-Nov. 22 (inclusive; total 9 assignments, two questions/comments per assignment). If three readings are assigned for the week, you still need to do only two comments/questions. Those **should not be long:** just one paragraph per comment/question. They will prepare you for class discussion. Each assignment must be handed in at the beginning of the class period. The assignments may be handwritten. **If you miss the class, I will not accept the assignment for that week.**

**Class schedule** (tentative, subject to minor changes):

<b>Date</b>	<b>Class topic</b>	<b>Reading</b>
Sept. 12	Key terms.	No reading
Sept. 19	Language and war	Cohn, 1987 (1) Gusterson, 2004 (2)
Sept.26	Geopolitics: a view from nowhere?	Agnew, 1998 (3); O'Tuathail and Agnew, 1992 (4)
Oct. 3	Geographical analogies in world politics	Agnew, 2009b (5); Barnett, 2003 (6) Roberts, Secor and Sparke, 2003 (7)
Oct. 10	<b>Thanksgiving. No class.</b>	No reading
Oct. 17	The modern nation-state	Agnew, 2009a (8); Dittmer, 2007 (9)
Oct. 24	Nationalism <b>One-page outline of the research paper due in class</b>	Billig, 1995 (10); Žižek, 2000 (11); Kofman, 2005 (12)
Oct. 31	Inscription of categories	Campbell, 1999 (13); Law and Mol, 2008 (14)
Nov. 7	Citizenship	Sparke, 2006 (15); Secor, 2004 (16)
Nov. 14	Security	Kaplan, 1994 (17); Dalby, 1996 (18) Sidaway, 2010 (19)
Nov. 21	Dissent <b>Class presentations</b>	Megoran 2005 (20); Mitchell, 2005, (21) (Changes possible)
Nov. 28	<b>Class presentations</b>	No reading

**Academic honesty, policy regarding submitted exams and assignments:** see the UBC Calendar. Do not submit a paper originally written for another course as the term paper for this class. Such practices constitute plagiarism.

**Late assignments:** There are penalties for lateness. With respect to the final paper, eight percent of the assignment grade will be subtracted for every 24 hours (including weekends and holidays) that the paper is late. This means that if you turn in the final paper three days late without a valid excuse, you will lose twenty-four percent of the final paper grade. For the responses and the outline, I will not accept them at all if they are not submitted in class. Penalties will only be waived with the submission of an original note from a physician or from Arts Advising in the event of an emotional trauma. In the latter case, please go to Arts Advising prior to asking for late assignments to be accepted without penalty. **Computer crashes and deadlines for other classes are not acceptable reasons for lateness.**