

**GEOGRAPHY 302: GEOGRAPHY OF ALASKA**  
**Summer 2021   June 28-August 6   MTWR 12:00-1:50 PM   Zoom Video Conference**

**Instructor:** Benjamin Christian

**Office:** Remote (Available by video conference)

**Office Hours:** By appointment (please email instructor to arrange meetings)

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**Course Description:** Welcome to Geography 302: Geography of Alaska. This course is an in-depth exploration of Alaska's physical and human geography. We'll take a region-by-region approach to the study of Alaska's topography, climates, biomes, geographic hazards, human settlements, cultures, and societies, amongst a host of other topics. Our goal will be to understand how these factors combine and interact to form the underpinnings of life in contemporary Alaska. We'll be giving two topics special attention throughout the semester. The first of these is climate change. Alaska's environments are being profoundly altered by our warming climate, posing countless challenges--and some opportunities--to Alaska's human and biotic communities. We'll address the processes driving climate change in Alaska; the social, cultural, economic, and political problems that result from such change; and the ways Alaskan communities are adapting and building resilience. The second topic that will guide our discussions this semester is environmental conflict. Alaska's history is dominated by episodic disputes over land ownership, resource use, and environmental values. We'll use a case-studies approach to analyze and discuss a host of these conflicts, and try to distill from them some general themes, patterns, and principles that we can apply to ongoing and future conflicts over Alaska's land and resources.

**Course Objectives:** By the end of the semester, my hope is that you will:

- be able to recognize the broad patterns of Alaska's physical and human geography.
- understand the specific processes behind those patterns.
- know the location and understand the significance of Alaska's most important places.
- understand how Alaska's people use, interact with, and fight over Alaska's resources and environments.
- understand Alaska's most pressing geographic problems, especially climate change.

**Required Course Materials:** There are two required texts for this course:

- Marino, Elizabeth. *Fierce Climate, Sacred Ground: An Ethnography of Climate Change in Shishmaref, Alaska*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2015
- Ross, Ken. *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000.

Our other readings will be posted as PDFs to whatever course management system we end up using. I would also highly recommend picking up a good map and/or atlas of Alaska. UAF's Map Office in the IARC building has lots of good options, ranging from large wall maps to small folding maps and everything in between. A DeLorme *Atlas and Gazetteer of Alaska* or something like it will undoubtedly be helpful, too.

### **Additional Course Materials:**

**Google Earth Pro:** We will be using Google Earth Pro throughout the semester to explore and analyze places, regions, and geospatial data. You should download Google Earth Pro (<https://www.google.com/earth/desktop/>) to the computer you use to complete your coursework as soon as possible and begin to familiarize yourself with its features and capabilities.

**Google Drive:** I will post your course documents, lecture slides, supplemental readings, assignment descriptions, KML files, and other course materials to a shared Google Drive folder. You will also turn in reading summaries, in-class activities, and other assignments in on Google Drive.

### **Assignments & Grading:**

**Reading Summaries:** You'll be asked to write short summaries of assigned readings before most class periods. The reading summaries should be about 500 words, or one single-spaced page. Reading summaries are great tools to help you gather your thoughts on the readings, distill their main points, and generate questions and ideas for our group discussions. You'll need to complete 15 out of 18 reading summaries to get full credit for this assignment. In other words, you can miss three reading summaries over the course of the semester without accruing a penalty. **Reading summaries will account for 30% of your final grade.**

**In-Class Activities and Discussions:** We'll be doing a host of activities and engaging in seminar-style discussions during our class sessions. You should come to each class prepared to thoughtfully and respectfully discuss our case study topics, and complete any associated in-class activities. **Discussions and activities will account for 20% of your final grade.**

**StoryMaps Project:** Depending upon the size and dynamics of the class, you'll either work alone or in small groups to make a presentation about a specific place in Alaska using ArcGIS StoryMaps. I'll provide a detailed assignment description, a StoryMaps tutorial, and some useful examples to help get you started. **The StoryMaps project is worth 30% of your final grade.**

**Final Exam:** There will be a comprehensive final exam comprised of short answer, short essay, long essay, and map labeling/identification questions. You'll be provided with a detailed study guide well in advance of the exam. **The exam is worth 20% of your final grade.**

Assignment	Max Points	Percentage of Final Grade
Reading Summaries	150	30%
Activities and Discussions	100	20%
StoryMaps Project	150	30%
Final Exam	100	20%

**500 points total**

### **Grading Scale**

A+ = 98% - 100%	A = 93% - 97%	A- = 90% - 92%	
B+ = 88% - 89%	B = 83% - 87%	B- = 80% - 82%	
C+ = 78% - 79%	C = 73% - 77%	C- = 70% - 72%	
D+ = 68% - 69%	D = 63% - 67%	D- = 60% - 62%	F = <60%

**Extra Credit:** You will have the option of writing a 3-5 page review of a documentary that we watch in class or that you view on your own time (I will provide a list of acceptable documentaries and essay prompts for each). The film review extra credit is worth a maximum of 25 points, or a 5% boost in your final grade. Note that extra credit will not be available to those who have not done all of the other required assignments, or to those who have a failing grade when all other points are tabulated.

**Attendance Policy:** Class sessions will be a mixture of lecture, discussion, and small group activities. Sadly, there is no single comprehensive textbook covering Alaska's nuts-and-bolts geography, and most of the articles that might in aggregate fill that role are written for a more specialized audience. Thus, a lot of the material you'll encounter this semester will be delivered exclusively via lecture. It's imperative that you make every effort to make it to those lectures. On the other hand, it's summer in Alaska, and I certainly understand that many of you will have responsibilities and activities that will prevent you from being in class on occasion. I will do my very best to accommodate those absences as long as you communicate with me about them and are proactive about making up missed work.

**Late Assignments & Make-Up Exams:** Late assignments and make-up exams will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. My general policy will be to deduct 25% per late day on the reading summaries, but I will be flexible should the situation warrant. If you are going to be late submitting the exam or final project, you must contact the instructor prior to the due date to arrange an extension. Please discuss missed assignments with the instructor as soon as possible.

**Academic Misconduct Policy:** Copying, plagiarism, and/or other academic misconduct at any time during the semester will not be tolerated. Students caught in any of these activities will be removed from the course, will receive an F, and will likely face additional punishment from the University, up to and including expulsion. The University's policy on academic misconduct can be found in the UAF catalog under "Students' Rights and Responsibilities" and at [www.uaf.edu/catalog/current/academics/regs3.html](http://www.uaf.edu/catalog/current/academics/regs3.html).

**Students with Disabilities:** UAF is obligated to provide accommodation only to the known limitations of an otherwise qualified student who has a disability. Please identify yourself to UAF Disability Services by applying for accommodations. To be considered for UAF Disability Services accommodations, individuals must be **enrolled for at least one credit** as a UAF student. For more information contact Disability Services at [uaf-disabilityservices@alaska.edu](mailto:uaf-disabilityservices@alaska.edu), 474-5655 or by TTY at 474-1827.

### **Title IX**

The University of Alaska Board of Regents have clearly stated in BOR policy that discrimination, harassment and violence will not be tolerated on any campus of the University of Alaska. If you believe you are experiencing discrimination or any form of harassment, including sexual harassment/misconduct/assault, you are encouraged to report that behavior. If you disclose sexual

harassment or sexual violence to faculty members or university employees, they must notify the UAF Title IX coordinator about the basic facts of the incident. Your choices for disclosure include:

1. You may confidentially disclose and access confidential counseling by contacting the UAF Health and Counseling Center at 474-7043.
2. You can get support and file a Title IX report by contacting the UAF Title IX coordinator at 474-7599.
3. You may file a criminal complaint by contacting the UAF Police Department at 474-7721.

**Zoom Video Conference Code:** This class will be delivered via Zoom video conference unless otherwise noted. You will be required to tune in at the assigned meeting time each class period. You do not need any special hardware or software to join the video conference. Simply use the link provided by the instructor to open the video conference window. Contact UAF OIT at (907) 450-8300 or 1-800-478-8226 if you need technical support.

**Geography of Alaska**  
**Schedule (Subject to Capricious and Frequent Change)**

**Week 1: June 28-July 1**

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**Lesson 1**

**Date:** Monday, June 28

**Topic:** Introduction to the Course

**Reading Assignment:**

- Syllabus
- Schedule
- Assignment Descriptions

**Assignments Due:** None

**Lesson 2**

**Date:** Tuesday, June 29

**Topic:** Alaska in the American Imagination

**Reading Assignment:**

- Kollin, Susan. "Inventing the Last Frontier." Introduction to *Nature's State: Imagining Alaska as the Last Frontier* (pp. 1-22). PDF in Google Drive.

**Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #1

**Lesson 3**

**Date:** Wednesday, June 30

**Topic:** Alaska: The Physical Setting

**Reading Assignment:**

- Haycox, Stephen. Introduction to *Alaska: An American Colony* (pp. 1-20). PDF in Google Drive.

**Assignments Due:**

- Map Quiz #1

**Lesson 4**

**Date:** Thursday, July 1

**Topic:** Alaska's Human Geography: An Overview

**Reading Assignment:**

- Haycox, Stephen. Introduction to *Alaska: An American Colony* (pp. 20-33). PDF in Google Drive.
- Haycox, Stephen. Prologue to *Alaska: An American Colony*. PDF in Google Drive.

**Assignments Due:**

- Map Quiz #2

## Week 2: July 5-July 8

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### **JULY 5-6: FOURTH OF JULY HOLIDAY. NO CLASS**

#### **Lesson 5**

**Date:** Wednesday, July 7

**Topic:** Climate Change in Alaska

**Reading Assignment:**

- Marino, Elizabeth. *Fierce Climate, Sacred Ground: An Ethnography of Climate Change in Shishmaref, Alaska*. (pp. 1-100)

**Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #2

#### **Lesson 6**

**Date:** Thursday, July 8

**Topic:** Land Use and Resource Conflicts in Alaska: An Introductory Overview

**Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Prologue to *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. (pp. xv-xviii).

**Assignments Due:**

- StoryMaps Topic Proposal

## Week 3: July 12-July 15

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#### **Lesson 7**

**Date:** Monday, July 12

**Topics:**

- Arctic Alaska, Physical Geography I
- Case Study: Polar Bears and Arctic Alaska

**Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 1 in *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. "Polar Bear's Passage." (pp. 5-15)
- Goode, Erica. "Polar Bears' Path to Decline Runs Through Alaskan Village." *The New York Times* (December 18, 2016). PDF in Google Drive.

**Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #3

## **Lesson 8**

**Date:** Tuesday, July 13

### **Topics:**

- Arctic Alaska, Physical Geography II
- Case Study: Bowhead Whales

### **Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 2 in *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. "Bowhead Whales and Eskimos." (pp. 16-25).
- Rozell, Ned. "Despite changing and uncertain habitat, Alaska's bowhead whales appear to be on the rebound." *Anchorage Daily News* (January 30, 2021). PDF in Google Drive.

### **Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #4

## **Lesson 9**

**Date:** Wednesday, July 14

### **Topics:**

- Arctic Alaska, Human Geography I
- Case Study: Project Chariot

### **Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 7 in *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. "Ancient Village, Modern Bomb: Project Chariot." (pp. 96-109).
- Hughes, Zachariah. "As Project Chariot Clean-Up Ends, Legacy Lingers for Point Hope." *Alaska Public Media* (August 8, 2014). PDF in Google Drive.

### **Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #5

## **Lesson 10**

**Date:** Thursday, July 15

### **Topics:**

- Arctic Alaska, Human Geography II
- Case Study: The ANWR Saga

### **Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 8 in *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. "Arctic Wilderness: A Question of Values." (pp. 269-290)
- Hanlon, Tegan and Nat Herz. "Major Oil Companies Take a Pass on Controversial Lease Sale in Arctic Refuge." *NPR* (January 6, 2021). PDF in Google Drive.

### **Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #6

## **Week 4: July 19-July 22**

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### **Lesson 11**

**Date:** Monday, July 19

**Topics:**

- Western Alaska, Physical Geography I
- Case Study: Migratory Waterfowl

**Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 3 in Environmental Conflict in Alaska. "Yukon-Kuskokwim Geese." (pp. 26-40).
- Friedman, Lisa. "In Alaska, a Deal Is Made for a Controversial Road Inside a Refuge." *The New York Times* (January 7, 2018). PDF in Google Drive.

**Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #7

### **Lesson 12**

**Date:** Tuesday, July 20

**Topics:**

- Western Alaska, Physical Geography II
- Case Study: Amchitka and the US Military in Alaska

**Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 8 in Environmental Conflict in Alaska. "Return to Amchitka." (pp. 110-120).
- Hughes, Zachariah. "As the Navy Eyes A Thawing Arctic, A Remote Island Town Sees an Opportunity." *KPBS* (November 15, 2019). PDF in Google Drive.

**Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #8

### **Lesson 13**

**Date:** Wednesday, July 21

**Topics:**

- Western Alaska, Human Geography I
- Case Study: Alaska Native Land Claims and Corporations

**Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 13 in Environmental Conflict in Alaska. "Land Deal of the Century." (pp. 192-205)
- Ruskin, Liz. "Tribes win decision to exclude Alaska Native corporations from \$8B coronavirus fund." *Alaska Public Media* (September 25, 2020). PDF in Google Drive.

**Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #9



## **Lesson 14**

**Date:** Thursday, July 22

**Topics:**

- Western Alaska, Human Geography II
- Case Study: Subsistence and the Pebble Mine

**Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 6 in *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. "Subsistence." (pp. 78-95)
- Fountain, Henry. "Alaska's Controversial Pebble Mine Fails to Win Critical Permit, Likely Killing It." *The New York Times* (November 25, 2020). PDF in Google Drive.

**Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #10

### **Week 5: July 26-July 29**

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## **Lesson 15**

**Date:** Monday, July 26

**Topics:**

- Southcentral and Southeast Alaska, Physical Geography I
- Case Study: Chilkat Eagles, Salmon, and Climate Change

**Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 4 in *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. "Chilkat Eagles." (pp. 41-48)
- Stremple, Claire. "Not even the eagles came to the canceled Alaska Bald Eagle Festival." *KTOO* (November 30, 2020). PDF in Google Drive.

**Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #11

## **Lesson 16**

**Date:** Tuesday, July 27

**Topics:**

- Southcentral and Southeast Alaska, Physical Geography II
- Case Study: The Tongass National Forest

**Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 15 in *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. "Trouble in the Tongass." (pp. 229-268)
- Brooks, James. "New 'Roadless Rule' lawsuit seeks to restore environmental protections for Tongass National Forest." *Anchorage Daily News* (December 23, 2020). PDF in Google Drive.

**Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #12

## **Lesson 17**

**Date:** Wednesday, July 28

**Topics:**

- Southcentral and Southeast Alaska, Human Geography I
- Case Study: The Susitna-Watana Dam Proposal(s)

**Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 10 in *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. "Susitna: An Exercise in Power Politics." (pp. 135-144)
- Brehmer, Elwood. "Alaska lawmakers take another look at the Susitna-Watana hydro project." *Anchorage Daily News* (February 20, 2020). PDF in Google Drive.

**Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #13

## **Lesson 18**

**Date:** Thursday, July 29

**Topic:**

- Southcentral and Southeast Alaska, Human Geography II
- Case Study: The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill and its Aftermath

**Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 12 in *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. "Oil on the Oceans." (pp. 163-191).
- Bohrer, Becky. "Alaska is considering whether to change oil spill plan requirements." *Anchorage Daily News* (October 16, 2019). PDF in Google Drive.

**Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #14

## **Week 6: August 2-August 6**

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## **Lesson 19**

**Date:** Monday, August 2

**Topic:**

- Interior Alaska, Physical Geography I
- Case Study: Wolf Control and the Denali Wolf Buffer

**Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 5 in *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. "Wolf Control." (pp. 49-77)
- Hollander, Zaz. "State rejects request for emergency wolf buffer next to Denali National Park." *Anchorage Daily News* (August 14, 2019). PDF in Google Drive.

**Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #15
- StoryMap Projects

## **Lesson 20**

**Date:** Tuesday, August 3

### **Topics:**

- Interior Alaska, Physical Geography II
- Case Study: Rampart Dam and Other Hydroelectric Schemes

### **Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 9 in *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. "Rampart: Developer's Dream, Nature Lover's Nightmare." (pp. 121-134).
- Mooney, Chris. "Alaska's quest to power remote villages -- and how it could spread clean energy worldwide." *The Washington Post* (August 14, 2015). PDF in Google Drive.

### **Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #16

## **Lesson 21**

**Date:** Wednesday, August 4

### **Topic:**

- Interior Alaska, Human Geography I
- Case Study: Pipeline Politics, Old and New

### **Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 11 in *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. "An Oil Pipeline Changes Everything." (pp. 145-162)
- DeMarben, Alex. "Gov. Dunleavy pitches a new plan for a long-sought Alaska gas pipeline." *Anchorage Daily News* (February 4, 2021). PDF in Google Drive.

### **Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #17

## **Lesson 22**

**Date:** Thursday, August 5

### **Topics:**

- Interior Alaska, Human Geography II
- Case Study: Federal Land Ownership and the Ambler Road

### **Reading Assignment:**

- Ross, Ken. Chapter 14 in *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*. "Managing Federal Lands." (pp. 206-228)
- Early, Wesley. "Federal and state officials sign right-of-way permit for controversial Ambler Road." *Alaska Public Media* (January 8, 2021). PDF in Google Drive.

### **Assignments Due:**

- Reading Summary #18

**FINAL EXAM:** Friday, August 6

