Geographical and Sustainability Sciences

Chair
• David A. Bennett

Director, Undergraduate Studies
• Marc A. Linderman

Director, Graduate Studies
• Heather A. Sander

Undergraduate majors: geography (B.A., B.S.); sustainability science (B.S.)
Undergraduate minors: geographic information science; geography
Undergraduate certificate: geographic information science
Graduate degrees: M.A. in geography; Ph.D. in geography
Faculty: https://clas.uiowa.edu/geography/people/faculty
Website: https://clas.uiowa.edu/geography/

The importance of geographical and sustainability sciences is rooted in the complexity of social and environmental problems. We live on a dynamic planet, one that is constantly changing in response to human and natural processes that are highly interconnected. Geographers study the interactions of people and their environment to better understand these intricately related processes. At the University of Iowa, the department teaches and conducts research on human and natural systems and how interactions between these systems shape the world we live in. Cutting edge technologies, such as geographic information systems (GIS), satellite imagery, and Global Positioning System (GPS), are used to help inform decision making at geographic scales and to analyze and visualize geographic processes.

The Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences offers undergraduate programs leading to a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree. Undergraduate students with a major in geography select from three tracks: environmental studies, geographic information science (GISci), and health and society. Each track requires introductory and upper-level geography and sustainability courses, as well as course work from other departments. The department also offers the new B.S. with a major in sustainability science. In addition, the department offers a minor in geography and a minor and certificate in geographic information science. It administers the interdisciplinary environmental policy and planning major and collaborates with other departments to offer the undergraduate Certificates in Social Science Analytics and Sustainability (see below). The department also participates in the University’s internship program for students; see Career Center Programs (University College) in the Catalog.

Geography and sustainability courses provide a background for many related professions including law, health care, planning (urban, regional, environmental, or transportation), conservation, sustainability, environmental or transportation engineering, and international business, and are commonly required for students preparing to teach at elementary and secondary levels.

Geographical and sustainability science students acquire valuable skills in computer-based geographic information systems (GIS) software used to investigate and solve many environmental and social problems. Opportunities for graduates with GIS training are growing rapidly in both private and governmental organizations. To gain related knowledge, get hands-on experience, and conduct independent research, students have access to the department’s state-of-the-art Geographical Information Systems Instructional Lab (GISIL). For more information, see Facilities [p. 2] in this section of the Catalog.

The Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences offers Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees. Graduate programs focus on studies that extend understanding of the environmental consequences of human decisions at local, regional, and global scales; processes that lead to geographic patterns in health and disease; technologies that help capture, represent, visualize, and analyze geographic patterns and processes; and processes that produce ecosystem services and sustainable futures. Within this broad domain, the department has strengths in environmental justice, environmental modeling, urban ecology, GIScience and GIS, land use/land cover change, and health geography. The mission of the graduate program is to empower graduates with the ability to conduct significant research. In addition to offering graduate degree programs, the department administers the geoinformatics subprogram of the graduate informatics certificate; see the Certificate in Informatics (Graduate College) in the Catalog.

GE CLAS Core Courses

The Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences offers a number of courses that students in other majors may use to satisfy requirements of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences GE CLAS Core. Look for courses with the prefix GEOG under “Natural Sciences,” “Social Sciences,” and “International and Global Issues” in the GE CLAS Core section of the Catalog. Nonmajors also may choose geographical and sustainability sciences courses as electives.

Related Certificates
Social Science Analytics

The Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences collaborates with the Departments of Political Science, Sociology and Criminology, and Statistics and Actuarial Science (College of Liberal Arts and Sciences) to offer the undergraduate program in social science analytics. The Department of Political Science administers the certificate; see the Certificate in Social Science Analytics in the Catalog.

Sustainability

The Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences collaborates with the Departments of Biology, Earth and Environmental Science (College of Liberal Arts and Sciences), Civil and Environmental Engineering (College of Engineering), and Urban and Regional Planning (Graduate College) as well as the Tippie College of Business to offer the undergraduate program in sustainability. The certificate is administered by University College; see the Certificate in Sustainability in the Catalog.
Mathematical and Computational Sciences, the Center for working groups through the University’s Program in Applied Faculty and graduate students participate in multidisciplinary spectrometers, light sensors, and data loggers. stations, GPS, ground-based 3-D LiDAR, anemometers, equipment, including soil probes, portable meteorological soil, and water quality. The laboratory has a variety of field department has a laboratory for the analysis of vegetation, To aid studies of water resources and physical geography, the University Consortium on Geographic Geographical and Sustainability Sciences. The University also with a high-performance network link to the Department of Information Technology Services research support group. The University of Iowa is a charter member of Internet2, access to additional resources managed by the University's massive storage or high-performance computing have an array of software development tools. Projects requiring state-of-the-art machines (Windows and Linux platforms), geoprocessing and statistical software, and an array of software development tools. All lab computers are regularly updated to ensure that they are capable of running the latest software at peak performance. The Geographical Information Systems Instructional Lab (GISIL) is the department’s center for GIS teaching as well as a place where students conduct geographic and GIS-related projects. It is equipped with 27 networked student workstations, instructional support technology (e.g., CRT projection), and a suite of peripherals, including a LiDAR 3-D scanner, high-end global positioning system (GPS) units, and a large-format printer. The environmental modeling and GIS research laboratories contain state-of-the-art machines (Windows and Linux platforms), geoprocessing and statistical software, and an array of software development tools. Projects requiring massive storage or high-performance computing have access to additional resources managed by the University’s Information Technology Services research support group. The University of Iowa is a charter member of Internet2, with a high-performance network link to the Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences. The University also is a member of the University Consortium on Geographic Information Science. To aid studies of water resources and physical geography, the department has a laboratory for the analysis of vegetation, soil, and water quality. The laboratory has a variety of field equipment, including soil probes, portable meteorological stations, GPS, ground-based 3-D LiDAR, anemometers, spectrometers, light sensors, and data loggers. Faculty and graduate students participate in multidisciplinary working groups through the University's Program in Applied Mathematical and Computational Sciences, the Center for Global and Regional Environmental Research, the Center for Health Effects of Environmental Contamination, International Programs, the Institute for Rural and Environmental Health, the Iowa Quaternary Studies Group, and the Public Policy Center. Participation in multidisciplinary working groups is available through interdisciplinary research grants with investigators from other University of Iowa academic units, for example, the College of Engineering, the Carver College of Medicine, and the College of Public Health. Geographic researchers also have access to other University of Iowa resources, such as the University’s Main Library, whose collections include more than 115,500 maps; 3,600 atlases and reference works; and around 100,000 aerial photographs, primarily of Iowa.

Programs

Undergraduate Programs of Study

Majors

- Major in Geography (Bachelor of Arts)
- Major in Geography (Bachelor of Science)
- Major in Sustainability Science (Bachelor of Science)

Minors

- Minor in Geographic Information Science
- Minor in Geography

Certificate

- Certificate in Geographic Information Science

Graduate Programs of Study

Majors

- Master of Arts in Geography
- Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

Facilities

The department houses three geographic information computational laboratories. They support a variety of geographic information system (GIS) software packages, including the latest software from Esri (ArcGIS) and Erdas Imagine as well as a suite of other commercial and open-source software. All lab computers are regularly updated to ensure that they are capable of running the latest software at peak performance.

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Courses

- Geography Courses [p. 2]
- Sustainability Science Course [p. 7]
GEOG:1060 Geography of Asia: From Japan to Pakistan 3 s.h.
Varied cultures and environments of Asia; different geographic regions and processes in Asian development. GE: International and Global Issues.

GEOG:1065 Introduction to Spatial Analysis: Patterns and Processes 3 s.h.
Fundamental concepts and applications of spatial analysis; how clusters of crime in a community are identified; how patterns of disease are described within a community.

GEOG:1070 Contemporary Environmental Issues 3 s.h.
Global environmental challenges; ecological, economical, cultural, and geographical causes and effects; underlying science and potential solutions to global issues of sustainability. GE: International and Global Issues; Social Sciences.

GEOG:1090 Globalization and Geographic Diversity 3 s.h.
World regions including their physical environment, culture, economy, politics, and relationships with other regions; students learn about conflicts within and between regions. GE: International and Global Issues; Social Sciences.

GEOG:1115 The History and Science of Oil 3 s.h.
Historical perspective on business, science, geology, technology, politics, environment, and culture of the global oil industry; the rise of oil as the most influential international business of the last 150 years, the material foundation of economies, a major force in world politics, a shaper of daily life, and a guide to understanding Earth's deep history.
Offered fall semesters. GE: Historical Perspectives. Same as EES:1115, ENVS:1115, HIST:1115.

GEOG:2010 Interdisciplinary Environmental Seminar 1 s.h.

GEOG:2013 Introduction to Sustainability arr.
Introduction to sustainability knowledge, skills, and habits as a means to shape one's vision of a sustainable citizen; emphasis on basic skills of literacy, applied math, and finding information; traditional sustainability knowledge areas related to society, economy, and environment; intersecting themes (e.g., informed consumerism, eco-economics, and livable environments). Same as BUS:2013, URP:2013.

GEOG:2110 Seven Billion and Counting: Introduction to Population Dynamics 3 s.h.
How dramatic changes to the size of population has changed fundamental characteristics of populations and processes, such as food and water scarcity, climate change and biodiversity, rise of megacities, health and disease, migration, social networks, economics, environment, and household structure. GE: Social Sciences. Same as GHS:2110.

GEOG:2130 World Cities 3 s.h.
Important urban centers, past and present, with focus on why cities exist and how they are organized; examination of different historical eras, including ancient, medieval, and modern; analysis of urban physical structures.

GEOG:2310 Introduction to Climatology 3 s.h.
Introduction to atmospheric processes that determine weather and climate; flow of energy through the atmosphere, distribution and movement of moisture and air, and atmospheric disturbances such as cyclones, hurricanes and tornadoes, and climate change. Recommendations: GEOG:1020 or similar earth systems science course. Same as EES:2310.

GEOG:2374 Biogeography 3 s.h.
Introduction to processes that lead to the patterns of plant and animal distributions we see across the globe; processes of focus include plate tectonics, climate, and human-ecological interactions; species management and conservation in relationship to climate and change in human patterns of environment. Prerequisites: BIOL:1141 or BIOL:1370 or BIOL:1261 or GEOG:1020 or BIOL:1412. Same as BIOL:2374.

GEOG:2410 Environment and Development 3 s.h.
Investigation of questions that surround human-environment interactions; case studies highlight approaches (e.g., political economy, gender, sustainability) to addressing and understanding human relationship to environmental change.

GEOG:2910 The Global Economy 3 s.h.
Examination of contemporary economic geography; types of national economies, uneven development, role of government in shaping economy, multinational corporations; foundation for understanding national economies and economic statistics; contemporary issues including economic globalization, commodification of nature, de-industrialization. GE: International and Global Issues; Social Sciences.

GEOG:2930 Water Resources 3 s.h.
Introduction to science and policy issues affecting water resources management in the U.S.; how the intersection of people, climate, technology, and geography affects the quality, availability, and demand for freshwater resources.

GEOG:2950 Environmental Conservation 3 s.h.
Scientific foundations of biological conservation; strategies used to better connect conservation practice with needs of a growing human population. Prerequisites: EES:1080 or GEOG:1020 or GEOG:1070.

GEOG:2990 Readings for Undergraduates arr.
Supervised readings in geography.

GEOG:3001 Special Topics arr.
Contemporary fields of inquiry, such as biophysical systems, GIS, locational analysis, water resources, economic geography, demographic analysis, environment, urbanization, transportation, and regional development.

GEOG:3003 Interdisciplinary Environmental Seminar 1 s.h.
Role of sciences in environmental issues and problems; progression from observation to evaluation to design of better questions and experiments. Requirements: third- or fourth-year standing. Same as EES:3010, ENVS:3010.

GEOG:3010 Geographic Information Systems and Science 3 s.h.
Solid foundation and introduction to GIS and digital mapping; what GIS is and how GIS can contribute to research, careers, and everyday life; fundamentals that underlie GIS, including methods for GIS data collection and georeferencing, spatial modeling, spatial data analysis, and visualization; GIS trends including mobile GIS and the Web. Same as IGPI:3010.
GEOG:3020 Earth Surface Processes  3 s.h.
Basic geomorphic and environmental processes that shape
the earth's surface; emphasis on erosion, transport, deposition
by land mass movement (creep, landslides, earth flow),
fluid agents (wind, water, ice); methods used to study these
processes. Recommendations: EES:1050 or EES:1080 or
ENVS:1080 or GEOG:1020 or EES:1085 or ENVs:1085. Same
as EES:3020, ENVs:3020.

GEOG:3050 Introduction to Geospatial
Programming  3 s.h.
Introduction to geospatial programming with Python;
programming basics, data structures, and algorithms; spatial
data models and structures; vector-based and raster-based
grocessing; automating GIS tasks and models; spatial
libraries (e.g., ArcPy, GeoPandas, GDAL, PySAL). Prerequisites:
GEOG:1050.

GEOG:3070 Hungry Planet: Global Geographies of
Food  3 s.h.
Societal and environmental implications of past, current,
and future global food supply examined from a geographical
perspective; focus on questions of who eats what, where,
and why; transformative history of agriculture, modern
agribusiness and alternative food supplies, geopolitical
implications of food production, food scarcity and rising
food costs, urban versus rural agriculture, the obesity
epidemic versus malnutrition, and the future of food. Same as
GHS:3070.

GEOG:3110 Geography of Health  3 s.h.
 Provision of health care in selected countries, with particular
reference to the Third World; focus on problems of
geographical, economic, cultural accessibility to health
services; disease ecology, prospective payment systems,
privatization, medical pluralism. Same as GHS:3111.

GEOG:3210 Health, Work, and the Environment  3 s.h.
Survey of environmental and occupational health hazards and
the associated health risks of exposure; how public health
protects society from these hazards; how public health policy
can be influenced by science. Same as CHP:3400.

GEOG:3300 Envisioning Future Worlds: Sustainable
Development and Its Alternatives  3 s.h.
Sociocultural, geopolitical, and environmental implications
of sustainable development and its alternatives investigated
from a geographic perspective; geopolitical history of
sustainable development; measures of sustainability in
development; major critiques of sustainable development;
alternative visions of development from different geographical
contexts including ecofeminism, Buen Vivir, food sovereignty,
degrowth, commoning, and the People's Health Movement.

GEOG:3310 Landscape Ecology  3 s.h.
Landscapes as complex systems that arise from interactions
among physical environments and species, including humans;
exploration of how these interactions shape landscape
ecosystems and influence landscape change through lecture,
computer and field labs, and research discussion; key topics
include causes and consequences of landscape pattern,
techniques used to quantify and model landscape pattern,
the role of humans in determining landscape structure and
function, and conservation and management of species and
landscapes. Prerequisites: GEOG:2374 or BIOL:2673
or BIOL:2673. Requirements: ecology course numbered
1000-4999.

GEOG:3320 Wetlands: Function, Geography, and
Management  3 s.h.
Hydrological, geomorphological, and ecological processes
and their interaction in wetlands; geographic differences in
wetlands based on climate and hydrology; wetlands, lakes,
and rivers; role of wetlands in drainage basin hydrology
and flooding; values and valuation of wetlands; wetland law
and wetland delineation; wetlands and water resources.
Prerequisites: GEOG:2310 or GEOG:2374. Same as EES:3260.

GEOG:3331 Human Dimensions of Climate  3 s.h.
How climate shapes human societies; focus on how climate
and climate variability affects food production, water use,
energy use, and human disease systems (e.g., influenza,
malaria, air pollution, diarrheal disease); climate change
impacts (e.g., sea level rise, droughts, wildfires, famine);
societal impact, adaptation and vulnerability, mitigation
strategies; policy.

GEOG:3340 Ecosystem Services: Human Dependence
on Natural Systems  3 s.h.
Ecosystem services—valuable goods and services produced
by ecosystems (e.g., flood control, food production, water
purification)—from an interdisciplinary perspective centering
on modern techniques used to measure, map, and model
ecosystem services; methods used to incorporate ecosystem
services into decision and policy making; how human
activities alter these services. Prerequisites: GEOG:1050
and (GEOG:2374 or GEOG:3310 or EES:1080 or BIOL:2673
or BIOL:1370 or GEOG:1070 or EES:1080 or BIOL:2673 or
GEOG:1020).

GEOG:3350 Urban Ecology  3 s.h.
Urban ecology as an interdisciplinary field that investigates
relationships between natural and the systems in urban
environments; students explore urban ecosystems through
lecture, discussion of current research, and field-based
research projects; and identify how cities can become more
sustainable systems. Prerequisites: BIOL:2673 or BIOL:2673
or GEOG:3340 or Introductory course in ecology, and junior standing.

GEOG:3360 Soil Genesis and Geomorphology  3 s.h.
Introduction to soil genesis, soil geomorphology, and
classification including the basics of soil profile description
and soil-landscape, soil-vegetation, and soil-climate
relationships; emphasis on study of soils as the interface
between living and non-living Earth systems and the role of
soils in sustaining ecosystems and human societies; short field
excursions and a weekend field trip. Requirements: college
earth science and chemistry. Same as EES:3360.

GEOG:3400 Iowa Environmental Policy in Practice  3 s.h.
How Iowa government addresses environmental policy
development and implementation; policy process and current
environmental issues; students attend meetings with Iowa
State legislators and relevant agency personnel in Des
Moines, Iowa, to observe how policies move into practice in
agency offices. Prerequisites: GEOG:1070 or POLI:3111 or
GEOG:3780 or ANTH:3102. Requirements: junior or higher
standing.
The image contains a list of course descriptions, each starting with a course code and title, followed by a credit hour (s.h.) or other details as necessary. The courses cover a wide range of topics including sustainable building, environmental economics, remote sensing, GIS, transportation, and environmental policy. The credits range from 3 to 4 s.h., indicating the depth and breadth of the courses offered in Geographical and Sustainability Sciences.
GEOG:4520 GIS for Environmental Studies: Applications 3 s.h.
Project-driven course to advance student knowledge of geographic information systems (GIS); application of GIS to environmental change analysis, environmental assessment, hazard/risk analysis, and environmental decision making. Prerequisites: GEOG:3520. Same as IGPI:4520.

GEOG:4570 Spatial Analysis and Location Models 3 s.h.
Application of location models within GIS environments to support decision making; small area demographic forecasting, location-allocation models, regionalization problems, shortest path models, other spatial analysis methods used to support spatial decisions. Prerequisites: GEOG:1050.

GEOG:4580 Introduction to Geographic Databases 3 s.h.
Introduction to basic building blocks of spatial database design, spatial data models, structures, relationships, queries (SQL), indexing, and geoprocessing; design and construction of various types of spatial databases, including relational and big data approaches such as ArcGIS geodatabase, PostGIS/PostgreSQL, and MongoDB. Prerequisites: GEOG:1050. Same as IGPI:4581.

GEOG:4650 Simulation in Environmental Geography 3 s.h.
Exploration of how computer simulations are used in environmental studies, with focus on landscape ecology; students learn the basics of performing simulations and the principles and applications of simulation through readings and labs. Requirements: advanced courses in environmental geography or environmental science and senior standing.

GEOG:4750 Environmental Impact Analysis 3 s.h.
In-depth exposure to the history and evolution of the U.S. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process; discussion of major court cases; ecological, economic, and political aspects of current environmental controversies; exposure to real-world scenarios that are crucial to understanding the EIA process in action; field trips to six or seven environmental control facilities in Iowa City and neighboring areas. Prerequisites: GEOG:1070. Same as URP:4750.

GEOG:4770 Environmental Justice 3 s.h.
Introduction to the field of environmental justice; understanding and addressing the processes that lead poor and marginalized communities to face a disproportionate degree of environmental risks and hazards. Same as GHS:4770.

GEOG:4990 Senior Thesis 3 s.h.
Original research. Requirements: senior standing.

GEOG:4995 Honors Thesis arr.
Original research. Requirements: honors standing.

GEOG:5001 Readings arr.
Supervised readings by graduate students in topics of their choice.

GEOG:5010 Fundamentals of Geography 3 s.h.
Geography as an academic discipline; history, advances, epistemology, common themes.

GEOG:5050 Research and Writing in Geography 3 s.h.
Identification of research areas; research questions and hypotheses; responsible conduct of research; methodological decisions; research proposal and paper writing.

GEOG:5070 Special Topics arr.
Contemporary fields of inquiry, such as biophysical systems, GIS, locational analysis, water resources, economic geography, demographic analysis, environment, urbanization, transportation, and regional development.

GEOG:5300 Envisioning Future Worlds: Sustainable Development and Its Alternatives 3 s.h.
Sociocultural, geopolitical, and environmental implications of sustainable development and its alternatives investigated from a geographic perspective; geopolitical history of sustainable development; measures of sustainability in development; major critiques of sustainable development; alternative visions of development from different geographical contexts including ecofeminism, Buen Vivir, food sovereignty, degrowth, commoning, and the People’s Health Movement.

GEOG:5800 Environmental Economics and Policy 3 s.h.
Reasons why markets fail in environmental realm (e.g., externalities, common pool resources, club goods, public goods); ecosystem services and techniques used for their valuation; revealed and stated preferences; cost-benefit analysis and role in policy-making process; tools to address environmental market failures, particularly command and control, taxes and subsidies, and mitigation markets; focus on air pollution, climate change, and water-related policies. Same as URP:5800.

GEOG:6100 Seminar in Health and Environment 3 s.h.
Research on health and environment.

GEOG:6264 Planning Sustainable Transportation 2-4 s.h.
Theories and methods of exerting public control over passenger and freight transportation; social and environmental regulation; effects of changing finance, regulation, and pricing policies, including privatization, tolls, impact fees. Same as URP:6265.

GEOG:6300 Seminar in Environment, Conservation, and Land Use 1-3 s.h.
Research on land use, water resources, conservation.

GEOG:6500 Seminar in Spatial Analysis and Modeling 1-3 s.h.
Research themes in spatial analysis, GIScience, simulation, remote sensing. Same as IGPI:6501.

GEOG:6635 Crossing Borders Seminar 2-3 s.h.

GEOG:7000 Geography Colloquium 1 s.h.

GEOG:7150 Research in Health and Environment 1-3 s.h.
Directed research in health and environment.

GEOG:7350 Research in Environment, Conservation, and Land Use 1-3 s.h.
Directed research in land use, water resources, conservation.

GEOG:7550 Research in Spatial Analysis and Modeling 1-3 s.h.
Directed research in spatial analysis, GIScience, simulation.

GEOG:7750 Research in Environmental Policy 1-3 s.h.
Directed research in environmental justice and policy.

GEOG:7999 Thesis arr.
Sustainability Science Course

SUST:2013 Introduction to Sustainability  arr.
Introduction to sustainability knowledge, skills, and habits as a means to shape one's vision of a sustainable citizen; emphasis on basic skills of literacy, applied math, and finding information; traditional sustainability knowledge areas related to society, economy, and environment; intersecting themes (e.g., informed consumerism, eco-economics, and livable environments). Same as BUS:2013, GEOG:2013, URP:2013.

SUST:4200 Sustainability as a System Science  3 s.h.
Investigation of social, environmental, and economic sustainability in systems across the planet with a focus on food, energy, and water nexus; geographical and temporal trade-offs, unintended consequences, impacts quantification, role of public and private sectors, conceptual modeling of key system drivers and their interactions, nested systems, and system relations. Same as GEOG:4200.