



Course Syllabus: Historical Geology - Online

McCoy College of Science, Mathematics, and Engineering

GEOS 1234 Section x20

Spring 2025

Contact Information

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Course Description

This course is a lecture-based overview of the Earth's history, from the formation and evolution of the Earth to the present. Focus is placed on integrating geological and biological concepts through Earth history, including plate tectonics, mountain building, and major evolutionary events. Connections between modern and historical events will also be discussed.

This course also includes a lab component. Projects will range from mineral, rock, and fossil identification to using and understanding different types of maps.

Course Overview

This course will be presented in a fully online format. Lectures, labs, and other assignments will be posted in D2L. Lectures include voice-over video files and PowerPoint Slides. Three roughly 50-minute lectures will be posted in D2L each week for you to watch. Lab exercises may include slideshows, videos, and/or prerequisite readings depending on the needs of the individual lab. All exams and quizzes are administered online through D2L. Most assignments and exams have a one-week window to complete, see the course schedule at the end of the syllabus for further information. If you have any questions about the course schedule, please contact the instructor by email or during office hours.

This course is asynchronous. You may work ahead of the course schedule whenever possible, although most assignments and lectures are posted weekly.

Textbook & Instructional Materials (not required)

No textbooks will be required for this course. Some required supplemental readings will be provided in D2L as PDFs.

Grading

The formal grade for this course is determined by your completion and performance on lecture exams, lab activities, lab quizzes, and major projects. Assignments are graded on a point-based system, with 60 points being equivalent to one letter grade (or 10 percent out of 100 will be dropped in this course. All assignments will be graded after their due date (so even if you finish early, it will not be graded sooner).

Table 1: Points allocated to each assignment type. Details about each assignment type will be described below.

Assignments	Points
Lecture Exams (4/5)	200
Lab Activities (11/12)	220
Lab Quizzes (3)	60
Documentary Projects (2)	60
Research Projects (2)	60
Total Points	600

Table 2: Total points for final grade.

Grade	Points
A	540 and above
B	480 to 539
C	420 to 479
D	360 to 419
F	Less than 360

Lecture Exams

There will be five noncumulative lecture exams throughout the semester. The lowest grade of the five exams will be dropped. Each exam will be worth 50 points each, totaling 200 points of your total course grade. These exams will be a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and fill-in-the-blank questions. Tests will have an hour-long time limit, and the number of questions will be based on perceived difficulty and length (short answers typically require a longer time than multiple choice). You may not take the exam with multiple people or share answers. All exams will be online through D2L. Exams will be open for one week. Lecture exams are due by 11:59 pm on the dates indicated on the last page of this syllabus.

Lab Activities

The historical geology course includes a lab component. A new lab will be opened each week during the semester starting the second week. Lab activity materials

will be posted in D2L. Lab activities are due by 11:59 pm on the dates indicated on the last page of this syllabus.

Labs are submitted through a quiz on D2L or a D2L Dropbox, depending on the specific activity. The quizzes are not timed, but they are due by 11:59 pm on their scheduled due date. Lab activities are completed based on the speed you work at. Because in-person labs are scheduled to take two hours to complete, plus possible homework, do not be surprised if your labs also take two or more hours to complete.

Lab activities are worth 20 points each. Twelve labs will be given, but the lowest lab grade will be dropped.

Lab Quizzes

Three lab quizzes will be given to test your understanding of the lab activities. The first lab quiz will cover physical rock and mineral specimens (labs 1 through 5). The second lab quiz will cover fossil specimens (labs 6 through 8). The final lab quiz will cover geologic mapping and histories (labs 9 through 12).

The quizzes will include a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and fill-in-the-blank. Each quiz is worth 20 points. Lab quizzes will be timed based on the number and difficulty of the questions. Lab quizzes will be open for one week. You may not take the quiz with multiple people or share answers.

Documentary Projects

There are many sources of scientific information available beyond the classroom. With the large number of streaming services and online video platforms available, these projects are designed to broaden students' perspectives on the history of the earth. You will choose which documentaries you wish to watch, but they must have scientific merit, and be related to a geologic topic discussed in this course.

This should be at no extra cost to you. You will watch two earth history-focused documentaries and write summaries describing what you have learned. Both documentaries must be longer than 40 minutes in length. Each summary should be submitted as a Word document and written with Times New Roman, 12-point font, and double-spaced. Further details will be provided in D2L. Each summary will be worth 30 points for a total of 60 points of your total grade (10 percent).

Research Projects

There will be two research projects done over the course of the semester. The first is to describe two rocks. Because this course is fully online, there are no physical specimens for the students to touch and observe. To give you a more hands-on experience, you will classify two different rocks or minerals that you

find based on the information you have learned in this class – specifically the lab portion. These can be rocks you own or found somewhere outside. You will prepare a PowerPoint slideshow, where you will describe the specimens and show pictures you take of the specimens. The rock must be naturally occurring. It cannot be concrete, asphalt, linoleum, or any other man-made material. This project is expected to be completed after lab 8.

The second research project will be to describe a geologic time period. Time periods will be assigned to each individual student. ***You do not get to choose your topic.** You will prepare a PowerPoint slideshow describing the time period. This project is expected to be completed by May 10, but you are encouraged to work on it throughout the semester.

The research projects are worth 30 points each, for a total of 60 points (10 percent of your total grade).

Extra Credit

Extra credit assignments will be given to the entire class, not individual students. Extra credit assignments may be given as the semester progresses at the discretion of the instructor. If the extra credit assignment is not completed by the due date, no extra credit will be given.

There is one planned extra credit activity called “Introduce Yourself Extra Credit.” You will see details in D2L.

Late Work

Missed labs and exams may be made up with paper-documented excuses.

Late work will be accepted for any lab activity or project, but each assignment will drop a letter grade for each day past the due date. Typically, exams and quizzes cannot be made up without a paper-documented excuse.

Make Up Work/Tests

Labs, quizzes, and exams can be made-up with a legal, paper-documented excuse. Whenever possible, make-up work should be arranged before the deadline. When given make-up work, the instructor will give you a new deadline based on what was missed. ***No make-up work (lecture or lab) will be given beyond 10 days past the original deadline.**

Because the documentary and research projects will be open for most of the semester, no make-up work will be given.

Important Dates

Last day for term schedule changes: January 24 at 5:00 pm

Deadline to file for graduation: February 17

Last Day to drop with a grade of “W:” April 30 at 4:00 pm

Refer to: [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#)

Instructor Class Policies

Because this class is asynchronous, you are not expected to watch lectures or participate at a designated time during the week. However, all assignments, quizzes, and exams are expected to be completed by their deadlines. You are expected to finish the required readings and lectures before you complete these assignments, so plan accordingly.

If you believe there is an error in either your final grade or an individual assignment grade, please reach out. I do not mind recalculating grades or confirming that an assignment is graded correctly. The only way to bump your grade is through extra credit given to the whole class.

I understand that life is chaotic. If there are any issues, make sure to reach out to me. Exceptions to late work and make-up work are done on a case-by-case basis, and assignments may be difficult. I encourage you to ask questions if you are confused or need help. Remember, the more you communicate with me, the easier I can work with and help you.

Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work, not the individual to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the Office of Student Conduct. [Office of Student Conduct](#)

The use of any artificial intelligence (AI) in completing course assignments is NOT allowed. AI in this sense is any technology that summarizes, writes, or answers questions on its own. Recent court rulings have allowed lawsuits to go forward against Chat GPT and other AI operators because it directly plagiarizes the use of others. College is about you learning to write, you developing your voice, and you learning how to process, summarize, and properly cite information. Any use of AI is considered a violation of this academic honesty policy.

If a student is caught cheating, colluding, plagiarizing, or using artificial intelligence on an assignment the grade for that assignment will be a zero. Multiple violations could result in a failure of the course.

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Each student is expected to be familiar with this program as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU Homepage. If you

experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program or contact your instructor.

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all meetings of the classes in which they are enrolled. Although in general students are graded on intellectual effort and performance rather than attendance, absences may lower the student's grade where class attendance and class participation are deemed essential by the faculty member. In those classes where attendance is considered as part of the grade, the instructor should so inform students of the specifics in writing at the beginning of the semester in a syllabus or separate attendance policy statement. An instructor who has an attendance policy must keep records on a daily basis. The instructor must give the student a verbal or written warning prior to being dropped from the class. Instructor's records will stand as evidence of absences. A student with excessive absences may be dropped from a course by the instructor. Any individual faculty member or college has the authority to establish an attendance policy, providing the policy is in accordance with the General University Policies.

Online Computer Requirements

Taking an online class requires you to have access to a computer (with Internet access) to complete and upload your assignments. It is your responsibility to have (or have access to) a working computer in this class. ***Assignments and tests are due by the due date, and personal computer technical difficulties will not be considered reason for the instructor to allow students extra time to submit assignments, tests, or discussion postings.*** Computers are available on campus in various areas of the buildings as well as the Academic Success Center. **Your computer being down is not an excuse for missing a deadline!!** There are many places to access your class! Our online classes can be accessed from any computer in the world which is connected to the internet. Contact your instructor immediately upon having computer trouble. If you have technical difficulties in the course, there is also a student helpdesk available to you. The college cannot work directly on student computers due to both liability and resource limitations however they are able to help you get connected to our online services. For help, log into [D2L](#).

Student Handbook

Refer to: https://msutexas.edu/student-life/_assets/files/handbook.pdf

Moffett Library

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support student's studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Get started on this [Moffett Library webpage](#) to explore these resources and learn how to best utilize the library.

Change of Schedule

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first 12 class days of a regular semester or the first four class days of a summer semester is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

Refund and Repayment Policy

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Midwestern State University (MSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees and room/board charges that were paid to MSU for the semester. HOWEVER, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. As described below, two formulas (federal and state) exist in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

Services for Students With Disabilities

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Clark Student Center, Room 168, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

College Policies

Campus Carry Rules/Policies

Refer to: [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#)

Smoking/Tobacco Policy

College policy strictly prohibits the use of tobacco products in any building owned or operated by WATC. Adult students may smoke only in the outside designated smoking areas at each location.

Alcohol and Drug Policy

To comply with the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibit the unlawful possession, use, or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state,

and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

Campus Carry

Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. The new Constitutional Carry law does not change this process. Concealed carry still requires a License-to-carry permit, and openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit [Campus Carry](#).

Active Shooter

The safety and security of our campus is the responsibility of everyone in our community. Each of us has an obligation to be prepared to appropriately respond to threats to our campus, such as an active aggressor. Please review the information provided by the MSU Police Department regarding the options and strategies we can all use to stay safe during difficult situations. For more information, visit [MSUReady – Active Shooter](#). Students are encouraged to watch the video entitled “*Run. Hide. Fight.*” which may be electronically accessed via the University police department’s webpage: [“Run. Hide. Fight.”](#)

Grade Appeal Process

Grade appeals should first be discussed with your instructor following appropriate procedure. Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [Undergraduate Catalog](#).

Notice

Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor.

Course Schedule:

Course schedule details are given on the next three pages. The first table lists lecture topics and lab topics introduced each week. The second table lists due dates for lab assignments, quizzes, projects, and exams.

Notice

Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor. Any changes will be communicated to the class through D2L. Please make sure to pay attention to course news. You can also allow email notifications through D2L, so you stay up to date to any changes.

Lecture Course Schedule

Week	Lecture Topics	Lab Topics
Week 1 1/21 to 1/24	Course Intro Beginning of Module 1: Basics of Science Historical Geology	No lab
Week 2 1/27 to 1/31	Deep Time Principles of Stratigraphy Relative Age Dating	Lab 1. Mineral Identification
Week 3 2/3 to 2/7	Foundations of Absolute Age Dating Absolute Age Dating	Lab 2. Igneous Rocks
Week 4 2/10 to 2/14	Beginning of Module 2: Continental Drift Seafloor Spreading Plate Tectonics	Lab 3. Clastic Sedimentary Rocks
Week 5 2/17 to 2/21	Plate Boundaries Hot Spots Selection Processes	Lab 4. Other Sedimentary Rocks
Week 6 2/24 to 2/28	Variation and Speciation Concepts in Evolution	Lab 5. Metamorphic Rocks
Week 7 3/3 to 3/7	Beginning of Module 3: Origins of Everything Birth of the Earth A New Moon	Lab 6. Primitive Life Forms
Week 8 3/10 to 3/14	No class – Spring Break	No lab
Week 9 3/17 to 3/21	Building the Crust Earth's Water and Atmosphere Inorganic Origins of Life	Lab 7. Common Invertebrates
Week 10 3/24 to 3/28	Oxygenation and Oxidation Supercontinents and Glaciation A Complicating Life	Lab 8. Other Fossil Life

Lecture Course Schedule (Continued)

Week	Lecture Topics	Lab Topics
Week 11 3/31 to 4/4	Beginning of Module 4: Introduction to the Paleozoic Mobile Belts and Orogenic Events Cratonic Flooding Sequences	Lab 9. Topographic Maps
Week 12 4/7 to 4/11	The Appalachian Orogeny Assembling Pangaea Of Pangaeian Origin	Lab 10. Measured Sections
Week 13 4/14 to 4/18	Paleozoic Invertebrates Paleozoic Plants and Vertebrates	Lab 11. Correlations
Week 14 4/21 to 4/25	Paleozoic Mass Extinctions Beginning of Module 5: Becoming Modern Earth	Lab 12. Geologic Histories
Week 15 4/28 to 5/2	The Cordilleran Orogeny The Evolving Continent Part I The Evolving Continent Part II	N/A
Week 16 5/5 to 5/9	Mesozoic Life and Death Cenozoic Life and Death On the Horizon and Beyond	N/A
Week 17 5/12 to 5/16	Finals Week (Final Exam due by Wednesday, 5/14 at 11:59 pm)	N/A

Course Due Dates in Chronological Order

The following table lists the due dates of each assignment in the course. All assignments will be due at 11:59 pm on their listed deadline. Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor.

Due Date	Assignment
Wednesday, Feb 5	Lab 1. Mineral Identification
Wednesday, Feb 12	Lab 2. Igneous Rocks
Friday, Feb 14	Exam 1
Wednesday, Feb 19	Lab 3. Clastic Sedimentary Rocks
Saturday, Feb 22	Documentary Project I
Wednesday, Feb 26	Lab 4. Other Sedimentary Rocks
Wednesday, March 5	Lab 5. Metamorphic Rocks
Friday, March 7	Exam 2
Wednesday, March 19	Lab 6. Single-Celled and Colonial Life
Wednesday, March 26	Lab 7. Common Invertebrates
Friday, March 28	Lab Quiz 1
Wednesday, April 2	Lab 8. Other Fossil Life
Friday, April 4	Exam 3
Saturday, April 5	Research Project – Find a Rock
Wednesday, April 9	Lab 9. Topographic Maps
Wednesday, April 16	Lab 10. Measured Sections
Friday, April 18	Lab Quiz 2
Wednesday, April 23	Lab 11. Correlation
Saturday, April 26	Documentary Project 2
Wednesday, April 30	Lab 12. Geologic Histories
Friday, May 2	Exam 4
Friday, May 9	Lab Quiz 3
Saturday, May 10	Research Project – Geologic Time Period
Wednesday, May 14	Final Exam