

Bachelor of Circumpolar Studies (BCS) 100: Introduction to the Circumpolar World

Course Outline

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Circumpolar World introduces students to the landscape, peoples and issues of the circumpolar region. Beginning with an examination of the geography, biological and physical systems of the Subarctic and Arctic, it then turns to the aboriginal and contemporary peoples of the region. The history of the Circumpolar World is treated in a broad fashion, to provide a grounding in the events and developments that have created the region's contemporary qualities. The second part of the course surveys some of the particular issues facing the region, including climate change, economic, political and social development. This course ultimately is intended to stimulate interest in the circumpolar world.

COURSE OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of The Circumpolar World, students will have:

- ◆ Acquired a basic knowledge of the region's geography, peoples, and their systems of knowledge;
- ◆ Developed an introductory understanding of physical and biological features and processes in the North;
- ◆ Acquired an understanding of the diversity of northern cultures, social structures and political systems;
- ◆ Gained insight into the complexity and inter-relatedness of human activity and the northern environment;
- ◆ Examined some of the critical issues facing the region such as sustainability, subsistence living, community wellbeing, and self-government; and
- ◆ Learnt about the mandate and programs of the University of the Arctic.

COURSE FORMAT

This course has been designed for web-based delivery. It consists of at least twelve modules, each comprised of a "lecture" or module text, required and suggested readings, and study questions. Students will discuss the module text in online fora. Alternatively, the course may be offered consisting of in-class lectures and discussions of readings.

ASSESSMENT

The model of student activities and assessment for the distance-delivered version is the following:

- ◆ Two short graded module assignments (2 x 10%);
- ◆ An 8-10-page paper on a major northern theme (30%);
- ◆ Participation (20%)
- ◆ Comprehensive final exam (30%)

COURSE SYLLABUS

Section One: Introduction to the Circumpolar World

Module 1: Introduction

This first lecture introduces students to BCS 100: Introduction to the Circumpolar World and to the interdisciplinary study of this fascinating part of the world, of the people who live here, and of the challenges they face.

Module 2: Geography and Physical Features and Processes of the Circumpolar World

Many of the physical features and processes found in the Circumpolar World are unique to this part of the earth. The major factors involved in the physical features and processes of the North are

- ◆ the climate, including very low winter temperatures, relatively high summer temperatures, and the subsequent freeze-thaw cycle;
- ◆ the long-term glaciation cycle and the current position in that cycle; and
- ◆ the presence or absence of water and the dynamics and influence of water, both as liquid and ice, on the northern landscape.

This module will give students a brief introduction to the physical features and processes of the Arctic region and will make them aware of the significant factors that influence those features and processes.

Module 3: Biological Features and Processes of the Circumpolar World

The flora and fauna of the northern regions are unique in the world. It would be safe to say that the major factors involved in the evolution of the biology of the circumpolar ecosystem are:

- ◆ The climate, including cold temperatures and low precipitation;
- ◆ Lack of energy in the form of sunlight through much of the year;
- ◆ A rich marine environment along an extended coastline;
- ◆ Constant and ongoing changes in the northern environment; and
- ◆ The relatively short time that flora and fauna have had to adapt and develop, due to the recent emergence of much of the Circumpolar North from the last Ice Age.

This module will give students a brief introduction to the biological features and processes of the Arctic region and will make them aware of the significant factors that affect the flora and fauna of the North.

Module 4: The Peoples and Cultures of the Circumpolar World

This module introduces students to the variety of peoples and cultures of the Circumpolar World. Aboriginal peoples and their lifeways are a major focus. However, the module does not overlook the substantial numbers on non-aboriginal peoples who currently live in many parts of the Circumpolar World.

Module 5: The History of the Circumpolar World

The arrangement of the peoples, communities and boundaries of the North Circumpolar Region that we are familiar with today is the result of many thousands of years of events, weather, and climate, the personal decisions of individuals and the policies of governments. As a result, the history, the story, of the Circumpolar world is complex and, in many times and places, more connected to world issues than you might imagine. Even though the Circumpolar world is more usually thought of as a series of separate but adjacent Norths, linked mainly to their southern centres, the truth is that there are many broad historical other similarities across the entire area.

This module presents a brief overview of the vast landscape of Circumpolar history to enable students to commence their study of contemporary issues from a common historical perspective.

Section Two: Contemporary Issues

Module 6: Environment and Global Climate Change

This module gives a general overview of environmental issues that affect the Arctic, including climate change. The module is based mainly on the circumpolar priorities described in the Arctic Council's Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) and Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) working groups, and in the Arctic Sections of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports supported by work presented in the scientific literature of the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) GEO reports.

Module 7: Economic Activity in the Circumpolar World

This module introduces the students to current changes in the economies of northern regions and the impacts of globalization. It discusses both traditional and new models of development, as well as changes to centre-periphery relations, fiscal transfers, transportation, infrastructure, information technology, and resource markets.

Module 8: The Spiritual and the Aesthetic in the Circumpolar World

The aim of this module is to provide an overview of aesthetic and spiritual traditions among northern, native peoples. First, it will look at the word and how storytelling functions to perpetuate myths. Then, it considers spiritual practices of animism and shamanism. Lastly, it looks in detail at a number of aesthetic practices, including totemic animals and handcrafts.

Module 9: The Well-being of Northern Peoples and Communities

This module will give students an introduction to the theoretical aspects of well-being studies and will make them aware of the current problems of well-being facing residents of different parts of the north. The emphasis is on the community level to show the value of the community perspective in well-being studies. In this module, students will learn how the well-being of northern communities is established and maintained, and how well-being may be improved under difficult conditions of rapid social change.

Module 10: Traditional and Western Knowledge Systems in the Circumpolar World

This module introduces students to the varieties of forms of knowledge found in the Circumpolar North. Much research on the Circumpolar North is derived from “Western” intellectual approaches (including empiricism, positivism) and methods (for example the Scientific Method). Traditional knowledge of northern aboriginal peoples is a fundamental component of contemporary understanding of the Circumpolar World, its past, present and future. In many disciplines, the study of traditional knowledge systems raises questions of orality and literacy.

Module 11: Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination

This module introduces students to the context of the emergence of indigenous rights and self-determination movements, as well as the different models and options that indigenous rights and self-determination have taken. First, the module outlines key features of historical aboriginal-state relations. Following the historical outline, the module discusses the reasons for the emergence of indigenous rights movements. Then, students are introduced to the concept of ethno-political rights. Finally, students explore different models from around the circumpolar north, starting with Alaska and coming full circle to Russia. It will become apparent that, although indigenous peoples may share a lot in common, there exists great variety in the models of self-determination.

Module 12: Autonomy and Emerging Political Structures in the Circumpolar World

This module introduces students to the concept of devolution and how it applies to the Circumpolar World. First, the module discusses the concept of devolution as a peaceful transference of power.

The second section provides students with a framework with which to study the process of devolution by suggesting three areas of political development to consider. The third section explores diverse ways that devolution has been manifested in the North, developing an understanding of why some northern regions have followed a path of independence while others remain part of a larger state.

Module 13: International Cooperation in the Circumpolar World

This module introduces you to recent developments relating to international

cooperation in the Circumpolar World. It describes the barriers to cooperation in the past and explains the recent proliferation of cooperative arrangements. The module compares and contrasts the Arctic with other regions in terms of major features of the landscape of international cooperation and identifies a number of key issues relating to the future course of international cooperation in the Circumpolar World.

Module 14: Conclusion: The New North

This module presents students with a map task that asks them to identify a community that lies 180° opposite their home community at the same latitude. Drawing on the information presented in the course, students are asked to infer as much as they can about that community. They should then use whatever sources available to them to test their inference.

The module also provides an opportunity for students to summarize their experience in the course, and, where the format requires it, prepare for the final examination.