

RURAL & REGIONAL STUDIES

Office: Science and Technology 105, 537-6117

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Department: Rural and Regional Studies

The Rural and Regional Studies Department is part of Southwest Minnesota State University’s Center for Rural and Regional Studies. The Center fosters interdisciplinary research and teaching among University faculty and programs. The Center supports SMSU’s founding mission to study, represent, and serve southwestern Minnesota. The Center’s geographical scope includes southwestern Minnesota, the tallgrass prairie bioregion, and the central North American grassland biome. Its work encompasses environmental, ecological, demographic, geographic, social, cultural, and historical studies. Topics of special interest include the upper Midwestern agricultural economy, the region’s unique migrant streams, evolving ethnic communities, and the experiences and daily lives of its people.

Minor: Geography (18 credits)

The minor in geography complements existing majors in business administration, environmental science, the social sciences, political science, rural public administration, and the natural sciences, among others. It covers the three main subfields of geography, as well as introducing students to Geographic Information Systems (GIS), a technological skill increasingly in demand in business and academia. The minor requires 12 credits of core geography courses, plus six credits of geography electives.

I. Geography Core Requirements: (12 credits)

RURL 101	Introduction to Geography	3
RURL 121	Introduction to Geographic Information Systems	3
ENVS 120	Regional Geography of the United States and Canada.....	3
RURL 321	GIS Methods and Applications	3

II. Geography Electives: (6 credits)

Select ONE course from each of the following two groups:.....6

Group 1.

RURL 231	Regional Geography of Southwestern Minnesota.....	3
RURL 241	North American Regions	3
RURL 251	Regional Geography of the World.....	3
POL 355	World Political Geography	3

Group 2.

RURL 201	Human Geography	3
RURL 202	Historical Geography	3
RURL 271	Environmental History	3
RURL 331	Geography of Population	3
RURL 351	Cultural Landscapes	3
ANTH 301	Cultural Geography	3

Total Credits: 18

Minor: Rural and Regional Studies (18 credits)

The Rural and Regional Studies Minor consists of a minimum of 12 credits beyond the institutional Rural Studies requirement of three credit hours and the Regional Studies requirement of three credits hours. The student’s minor will be defined in consultation with the student’s advisor, with the approval of the Chair of Rural and Regional Studies. Only one course may be in the candidate’s major area. All courses should be numbered 200 or above. Three of the 12 credit hours may be taken in Directed Studies or Internship. Students shall normally choose from courses designated as Rural Studies (R) or Regional Studies (S); exceptions must be approved by the Chair of Rural and Regional Studies. Modifications of or substitutions in the student’s minor also need the approval of the Chair of Rural and Regional Studies.

RURAL & REGIONAL STUDIES COURSES (RURL)**RURL 101 (LAC, R, S) Introduction to Geography (3 credits)**

This course introduces students to the basic concepts of geography. It covers geographic methods—including cartography and Geographic Information Systems (GIS)—physical geography, and human geography.

RURL 102 Introducing Southwest Minnesota (3 credits)

This course will be offered for 3 credits on a credit or no credit basis. Its goal will be to introduce members of the Southwest community to the region. Its form will be interdisciplinary, involving a wide array of University professors and staff, in addition to community experts and guest speakers. The course will utilize literature created by the University's Center for Rural and Regional Studies and the Society for the Study of Local and Regional History. Two or three field trips will be offered in conjunction with the course. This course will be particularly attractive to members of the community and region.

RURL 103 (R, S) Introduction to Rural and Regional Studies (3 credits)

This course will discuss the concepts of locality and region. It will do this in relation to geographical, social, demographic, and cultural factors. Southwestern Minnesota will be a primary focus in the latter part of the course.

RURL 121 Introduction to Geographic Information Systems (3 credits)

The course introduces students to Geographic Information Systems (GIS) as applied in the business world, in municipal government, and in environmental management. The course covers general GIS topics, provides a hands-on introduction to GIS software, and illustrates practical uses of computer mapping and spatial analysis technology. Instruction will combine lectures and demonstrations with in-class and out-of-class computer lab assignments.

RURL 201 Human Geography (3 credits)

This course addresses the main themes related to the spatial distribution of human populations, including people, migration, adaptation, and material culture. It focuses on human groups and includes discussion of the ways that they evolve through time, move to new places, merge with other groups, and transform their identities.

RURL 202 Historical Geography (3 credits)

Historical geography analyzes the ways that various spatial relationships change through time. It explores the spatial aspects of populations, settlement and migration, economy, transportation, agriculture, and ecosystems in the past.

RURL 231 Regional Geography of Southwestern Minnesota (3 credits)

This course explores the local geography of southwestern Minnesota. Using classroom lectures and discussions, lab work, and field studies, it evaluates local physical structures, cultural diffusion, land use, and landscape change. This course teaches students to “read the landscape,” using the local area as an example.

RURL 241 North American Regions (3 credits)

This course develops the concept of region as a category of analysis, evaluating the role of distinctive environments, cultures, religions, and histories in defining place and human experience. It uses four different

regions in North America to comparatively explore regionalism. The regions studied may change from semester to semester, but southwestern Minnesota and the Upper Midwest will always be one component.

RURL 251 Regional Geography of the World (3 credits)

This is a topical course addressing geographical issues of particular regions of the world. The region of focus will shift from semester to semester, including studies of the South American Pampas, the Sahara, the Yellow River of China, etc. Regions will be evaluated according to aspects of their cultural, historical, and physical geography.

RURL 271 (E) Environmental History (3 credits)

This course explores processes of environmental change, examining them in their proper ecological, geographical, and historical contexts. The course also addresses the multi-faceted relationship between human beings and their surroundings as well as changing definitions of environment and nature.

RURL 321 GIS Methods and Applications (3 credits)

This course is aimed at students with some Geographic Information Systems (GIS) experience. It builds on basic GIS knowledge to explore real-world spatial analysis applications. It develops GIS software skills and addresses high-quality map design. The course combines lectures, demonstrations, and computer lab assignments. A major component of the course is a semester-long spatial analysis project. Prerequisite: RURL 121 or consent of instructor.

RURL 331 Geography of Population (3 credits)

This course introduces students to the study of population. The course covers the concepts, methods, and measures necessary for understanding the characteristics and dynamics of human populations. The course will also address the applications of demographic concepts and methods.

RURL 351 (R, S) Cultural Landscapes (3 credits)

This course focuses on human beings' views of their surroundings. The course explores how humans perceive, imagine, define, and talk about the natural features and artificial creations that comprise landscapes. It also examines the meanings of specific places and settings as reflected in specific ideals, values, rituals, and artifacts.

RURL 494 Directed Studies in Rural and Regional Studies (1-4 credits)

Independent studies of selected Rural and Regional Studies topics not ordinarily covered by established courses. This study can be defined around specialized reading, particular oral and written projects, as well as independent research. Prerequisites: eight credits in Rural and Regional Studies; consent of instructor.

RURL 499 Internship in Rural and Regional Studies (3-9 credits)

The internship involves on-the-job experience. It requires discussion of experience and problems with the internship advisor, as well as significant oral and written reports summarizing the learning involved in the field experience. Prerequisite: consent of instructor.