

Dear GLG 121 Student,

Welcome to Our Geology Course Focused on the Principles of an Engaged University.

Thank you for choosing to spend time with us this winter term as we learn about environmental geology and physical science. Miami has made a strong commitment to engaged learning that involves guiding students to develop an internal system to critically evaluate and actively engage in discovering new knowledge. While many of you may be taking this course to fulfill a Miami plan requirement, our hope is that the structure of this course and your innate interest in the environment and natural disasters will lead you to inquiry and discovery. We are working with other faculty, staff, and students to ensure this course gives you the best possible learning experience based on large amounts of research on teaching and neuroscience.

How is this course different?

Fast Pace: Foremost, the pace of this winter term course will be FIVE TIMES faster than during a regular semester, because we are squeezing 15 weeks of work into 3 weeks. Your workload from this class alone will be roughly equivalent to a semester with 15 credit hours. If I were you, I would be hesitant to schedule anything else during winter term unless you are accustomed to taking that course load and a part-time job, athletic obligation, or other significant time commitment during a regular semester.

Mostly Asynchronous: Assignments for this course will be done through a website and we do not have any scheduled face-to-face meetings. If needed, I will be available each day through a WebEx video conferencing software during class time and for my office hours to answer questions and trouble shoot computer issues. However, the coursework is set up such that students can work asynchronously – that is, you do not have to do your work during the regularly scheduled class time (with one key exception: exams). A set of assignments will need to be completed by at midnight of each class day, but you have the flexibility to decide when best to work on the assignments. Be careful: Leaving a bunch of assignments right before the due time will likely result in lower grades.

Synchronous Exams: While most of this class is asynchronous, exams are NOT and must be completed between 10:00 and 11:00 AM on the scheduled class day. To help ensure academic integrity, all students must download the Safe Exam Browser software from our course website and use it to take the exams.

Active E-Learning: This course is designed to have an *active e-learning* approach: you will use the computer to actively perform authentic scientific analysis. You will collect data from internet databases, utilize software to analyze it, and have opportunities to interpret the results. This course also stresses learning from your mistakes, such that each question in your regular assignments will give feedback for wrong answers, allow additional attempts for partial credit, and full re-takes to encourage practicing.

What do I need for this course?

Basic information about environmental geology and geohazards will be provided through reading materials (pdf files and web links) and short lectures (20-30 minute videos/PowerPoints). While it is not required for this course, we find most students prefer a textbook, so we recommend purchasing or borrowing this one: Hyndman, D. and D. Hyndman, *Natural Hazards and Disasters*, Any Edition, Thomson/Brooks Cole. You will have an opportunity to practice your understanding of the new principles through Comprehension Assignments that focus on specific content in the lectures and readings, and Application Assignments that focus on applying those principles in authentic scientific examples. A computer is one of the most valuable tools for a student or scientist to be actively engaged in learning, so we will access internet databases and use programs like *Excel* and *Google Earth* in every Application Assignments. You are welcome to use your own computer or any other computer you have access to, as long as you have software for web browsing, editing spreadsheets, and viewing *Google Earth* files. Finally, we will provide the Safe Exam Browser software for taking secure environment for taking exams. You will be required to install this software on your computer to access the exams as it prevents cheating. I would recommend you download and make sure this works before you leave campus for the winter break. If you are unable to meet any of these technological requirements, please contact us to discuss potential accommodations.

Why is this course different?

This course is specifically designed to give you opportunities to practice learning basic content on your own while also providing guidance on how to actually collect, analyze, and interpret real geoscience data. It is hard to anticipate what kinds of problems you will face in your career, so we want to make sure you have the skills and confidence to use science to help solve whatever you encounter. It would be easier to just lecture in a classroom everyday and have you focus on memorization of content, but there is more and more research to suggest that you wouldn't remember much of that at all after this class is done. In fact, Miami's President Hodge stated the goal of our education is to cultivate a student as a scholar, so that you leave Miami better prepared to identify, manage, and solve life's future challenges.

Are you ready to engage in this course?

We understand that this course is different and may not be what you need right now. If you're not particularly motivated to learn how to do science, or if the time commitment during winter term will be too large, or if a primarily asynchronous online course will drive you crazy, then we suggest dropping this course for something different. No hard feelings, you might find another introductory geoscience course during the Spring semester is a better fit. But honestly, we hope you decide that trying something a bit different will better prepare you for the change and adaptation you will do throughout the rest of your career.

HOW TO GET READY FOR THIS COURSE – Prior to the first day of class (January 2)

1) Login in to Moodle - <http://bit.ly/GLG121Winter2014>

Since assignments for this course are computer intensive, we have tried in the past to utilize Miami's Niihka system, only to have many students lose their work due to glitches in Niihka. We are now using a different system (Moodle) that is more reliable. We will use this Moodle website to access all class resources and assignments, including exams, and it will also record your grades. Please login to this website to learn more about the course – you can even get started on a few assignments to "try before you buy". Your default **username** is your Miami **unique ID**. For example, Mike's email address is brudzimr@MiamiOH.edu so his unique ID is **brudzimr**. Your initial **password** is **Miami-2014** but you will be prompted to change your password after your initial login. If you forget your password, please contact Mike directly.

2) Download the Course Syllabus

Can you find and download the syllabus from the Moodle site? Please take the time to look it learn more about how this course will operate.

3) Take a Course Orientation Survey on Moodle

In order for us to provide helpful resources for you, we have some general questions about your learning style, your comfort with technology, and other course details.

4) Download, Install, and Try the Safe Exam Browser

This is the software we will use for exams. It can be a little tricky, so please read the instructions and try the Practice assignment. If you get stuck, please email Mike. Make sure this is working before you leave campus for winter break.

5) Opportunity for Extra Credit: Take the Geology Concept Pre-Test

In order for us to provide an effective learning environment for you, we want to know what prior geology knowledge you have while starting this course. NOTE: This uses Safe Exam Browser.

Please feel free to email us if you have any questions. Mike (brudzimr@MiamiOH.edu) will be the main contact person for this course, and Agnieszka will be your teaching assistant. We will do our best to respond quickly, but it may take 24 hours to respond to your email.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mike Brudzinski and Ms. Agnieszka Marchlewska