

GEOL 1303 – Physical Geology

Fall - 2026

Section: 001

Lecture Times: MWF: 12:00 am-12:50 pm

Room: WSB 101

Instructor: Dr. Tom Shiller

Office: WSB 319

Office Hours: M,W: 1-3:00 pm; or by appointment

e-mail: thomas.shiller@sulross.edu

Materials Required:

Text: Essentials of Geology, 7th edition.

Lab: Laboratory Manual for Physical Geology Laboratory Geology 1103 by Measures and Mattison (provided).

Course Purpose:

Physical geology is defined as a division of geology concerned with Earth materials, changes of the surface and interior of Earth, and the forces that cause those changes. This course serves as a comprehensive overview of these topics of physical geology, as well as an introduction to the science of geology in general.

General Objectives: Each student will develop:

1. Knowledge about the application of the scientific method as a tool for understanding Earth's processes
2. Knowledge about the composition and formation of common rocks and minerals
3. An understanding of the internal and external processes that create Earth's major landforms such as plate tectonics and weathering
4. Ability to identify and interpret structural features in Earth's crust such as faults and folds, and knowledge of the processes responsible for creating such structures.
5. A general knowledge of Earth history and the methods and techniques used to date rocks and geologic events

Student Learning Objectives: Each student will demonstrate the ability to:

1. Identify and interpret common rocks and minerals
2. Explain different weathering processes and the formation of sedimentary rocks
3. Determine the relative ages of rocks and geologic structures using geologic dating principles
4. Identify and evaluate structural features in Earth's crust such as faults and folds
5. Demonstrate the mechanisms and processes that create earthquakes, and how the location and strength of earthquakes are determined
6. Explain and evaluate the relationship between plate tectonics and the formation of mountains, igneous bodies and earthquake zones

Exams:

There will be four total exams covering sections discussed following the previous exam. These exams will comprise primarily short answer and essay questions. You may **not** use your notes for exams. Special arrangements will need to be made for make-up exams. Exams will be curved at the professor's discretion.

Pop Quizzes:

Four unannounced quizzes will be given during the semester at the beginning of class (so don't be late for class!). Student who arrive five minutes or later will not be allowed to take a quiz. These quizzes will cover material from the previous one or two lectures, plus the reading assignment. You may use your own lecture notes that are on paper. (If you take notes on a laptop you can sit in the front of the class where the instructor can see your screen as you use your digital notes.) **No quizzes can be made up.**

Homework:

There will be four take-home assignments given during the semester requiring independent research, critical thinking, and technical writing. Assignments will be given **during class** and will not be available on Blackboard. A due date will be given on the day homework is assigned. Late projects will be accepted at 50% of your earned point value by 5 pm. on the due date (including immediately after class); 25% value by the end of the following day, and 0% after that. Each homework assignment is worth 5% of your total grade. If you are planning on missing class for a Sul Ross sanctioned event or other valid reason, **homework must be turned in early** (prior to the absence).

Group Presentations:

There will be two group research projects during the semester. Each group will give a short presentation on a topic related to physical geology.

EXTRA CREDIT:

Field Trip: There will be a one-day, optional field trip to Big Bend National Park on 11/14. A short assignment will be given, to be turned in after the trip for up to 10 points extra credit to the student's exam average. The date of the trip will be announced later in the semester.

Grading System:**Percentages:**

4 Exams = 60%

4 Pop Quizzes = 5%

4 Homework Assignments = 25%

2 Group Presentations = 10%

Your accumulated grades will be recorded on Blackboard in the Grade Center.

Letter Grading: Final course grade will be based on a percentage of the total points as follows:

90.00-100% = A

80.00-89.90% = B

70.00-79.90% = C

60.00-69.90% = D

Less than 60.00% = F

Attendance and Make-up Policy:

The only acceptable excuses for missing class are those due to illness, approved Sul Ross sanctioned events, and observation of religious holidays. All excused absences **must** be documented on paper. Please inform the professor at least 1 week prior to missing class (e-mail, note on office door, etc...). With an appropriate excuse, you must make up missed quizzes/exams **within 10 days** of the last day of the absence or you have failed to meet your course responsibilities and will receive a zero. Attendance will be recorded at the beginning of class each day. Attendance is expected, but does not count towards the final grade. Students with 2 or less unexcused absences may drop an exam grade. **Arriving 10 minutes or later to class will be considered an unexcused absence.**

University policy dictates that your instructor can drop you with an F from the course after 6 absences from TR/MW classes or after 9 absences from MWF classes.

Student athletes: You are given a full week to return the completed documentation: your progress (attendance and grade) to your coach, so when you present that card to me, I will take it and return it to you the following class period. Alternatively, you can bring it to my listed office hours and I will look up your progress then. I will not complete them at the beginning or end of class. No exceptions.

Classroom Conduct:

The Student handbook states under Student Misconduct, number 21," Such prohibition includes disorderly classroom conduct that obstructs, interferes with, inhibits and/or disrupts teaching and/or classroom activities." Behavior which is included in this category: 1) persistent talking to ones' neighbors during lecture, 2) coming to class late or leaving early, 3) the use of cellular phones. **CELL PHONES MUST BE TURNED OFF IN CLASS.** This includes texting, emailing and social networking. (*If you are a member of an EMS/VFD group or have a child in day care and they must be able to reach you, let me know and we will discuss.*) Offenders of this policy will be asked once to stop. If it occurs a second time, the offender will be instructed to leave the classroom, there will be a meeting with the Dean of Student Life, and 5 points will be taken from their grade. If there are further incidents, UDPS will be called and offenders will be physically ejected from the classroom and will likely be expelled from the University.

CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED:

Any student caught cheating on an exam or quiz will receive an automatic **zero** on that assignment. If a student is caught cheating second time, additional disciplinary actions will be taken. Any student plagiarizing information on an assignment will receive an automatic zero for that assignment. **Use of A.I.:** any work submitted by students for this course generated by generative A.I. will be consider plagiarism/cheating.

ADA Statement

SRSU Accessibility Services. Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. To help protect confidentiality, students seeking accessibility/accommodation(s) services must submit the [Accommodation Request Form](#) located on our [website](#). Students are welcome to call the Office of Accessibility Services at 432-837-8203 or stop by Ferguson Hall Room 112 if they have any additional questions regarding the process. Our mailing address is PO Box C-122; Alpine, TX; 79832.

Lecture Schedule for the Fall 2026 Semester:

Week of...	Lecture Topics	Reading Assignment	Lab
8/24	Science and Geology, Time	Prelude: And Just What is Geology?, 1: The Earth in Context	NO LAB
8/31	Minerals	3: Patterns in Nature: Minerals; Interlude A: Introducing Rocks	Intro Lab
9/7	No Class (9/7) , Igneous Rocks	4: Up from the Inferno: Magma and Igneous Rocks	Minerals
9/14	EXAM 1 , Weathering, Soil & Sediment, Sedimentary Rocks, Field Trip (9/20)	Interlude B: A Surface Veneer: Sediments and Soils;	Igneous Rocks
9/21	Sedimentary Rocks	6: Pages of the Earth's Past: Sedimentary Rocks	Sedimentary Rocks
9/28	Metamorphic Rocks	7: Metamorphism: A Process of Change	Metamorphic Rocks
10/5	EXAM 2 , Earth's Interior, Plate Tectonics	2: The Way the Earth Works: Plate Tectonics	Plate Tectonics
10/12	Mountain Building, Structures	Interlude D: The Earth's Interior Revisited, 9: Craggs, Cracks, and Crumples	LAB PRACTICAL
10/19	Earthquakes	8: A Violent Pulse: Earthquakes	Geologic Structures
10/26	EXAM 3 , Volcanoes	5: The Wrath of Vulcan: Volcanic Eruptions	Geologic Time
11/2	Volcanoes		Topographic Maps

11/9	Geologic Time, Field Trip (11/14)	Interlude E: Memories of Past Life, 10: Deep Time: How Old is Old?	Geologic Maps
11/16	Geologic Time		Ground Water
11/23	Streams, THANKSGIVING (no class 11/25-27)	14: Streams and Floods	No Lab
11/30	Streams & Ground Water, Review	16: A Hidden Reserve: Groundwater	LAB FINAL EXAM
12/7	FINAL EXAM (TBA)		

Geology BS SLO's:

1. The student will be able to apply a diverse body of Geologic information in the area of Earth history.
2. The student will be able to apply a diverse body of Geologic information in the area of mineralogy and petrology.
3. The student will be able to apply a diverse body of Geologic information in the area of structural geology and tectonics.
4. The student will be able to apply a diverse body of Geologic information in the area of stratigraphy.
5. The student will be able to apply a diverse body of Geologic information in the area of field techniques.

Geology BS marketable skills:

- * The student will be able to conduct field work.
- * The student will be able to use field equipment.
- * The student will be able to use lab equipment.
- * The student will be able to use library resources.
- * The student will be able to communicate in written and oral format.

Personal Responsibility. Students will develop principles of personal responsibility for living in a diverse world; to include intercultural competency, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.

Social Responsibility. Students will develop principles of social responsibility for living in a diverse world, to include the ability to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making.