Geology

Department of Geology and Environmental Science

GEOL 102: Environment: Earth. 3 credits.

A study of geological processes causing global change and their impact on human thought. The relationship between some geological processes and life on the Earth is also considered. Not available for major or minor credit in geology. Students may not receive credit for both GEOL 102 and GSCI 102. Prerequisite: GSCI 101.

*GEOL 110. Physical Geology. 3 credits.

A systematic study of earth materials and the internal and external processes that affect earth structure and landforms. Topics include the genesis/properties of rocks and minerals, plate tectonics, and the agents of change that drive surface processes and landform development. The laboratory and lecture portions of GEOL 110 must be taken concurrently. Corequisite: GEOL 110B.

*GEOL 110L. Physical Geology Laboratory. 1 credit.

This laboratory course is designed to complement and supplement the GEOL 110 course. The laboratory and lecture portions must be taken concurrently. Corequisite: GEOL 110.

GEOL 115. Earth Systems and Climate Change. 3 credits.

This course explores cycles, trends and abrupt events in the Earth system. Analyses of the geologic record and global climate models provide perspective for understanding paleoclimate and future climate changes, including global warming. Current hypotheses for causes of climate change are evaluated, including plate tectonics, orbital cyclicity, variations in the sun's strength and human activities. The two reoccurring questions of this class are: What are Earth's climate stories? How do we know?

GEOL 130. Quantitative Geology. 2 credits.

An introduction to quantitative techniques used in descriptive and predictive aspects of the earth and environmental sciences, with emphasis on algorithmic approaches. The focus is on pragmatic application of mathematical methods to geologic problems, considering requirements, uses and limitations. Automatic computation is stressed.

GEOL 167. History and Philosophy of the Geosciences. 3 credits.

As an introductory experience in the Bachelor of Arts in Earth Science, students will be inculcated in the philosophy of geosciences as an interdisciplinary medium for extending classical science viewpoints to complex earth systems. Students will study the geosciences as distinct among sciences, establishing relevance and value of earth science literacy in professional and personal settings.


An investment of a theoretical principle behind evolutionary systems of all types based on mathematical modeling in chaos, complexity theory and artificial life studies with extensive computer experimentation and examples drawn from physical, chemical, biological, economic and social systems. The purpose is to explore what is common and universal to all evolutionary processes.

*GEOL 210. Applied Physical Geology. 3 credits.

A problem-based study of earth materials and the processes that affect earth structure and landforms. Topics include plate tectonics, the genesis/properties of rocks and minerals, and agents of change that drive surface processes and landform development. Quantitative problem-solving skills will be applied to case studies that address 3D visualization and time-based processes, such as earth materials, solid earth and surface processes, natural hazards and engineering applications. Prerequisite: Either PHYS 140 or PHYS 240 or CHEM 131 or by permission of instructor. Corequisite: MATH 205 or MATH 220 or MATH 235 or by permission of instructor.

*GEOL 211. Introduction to Oceanography. 3 credits.

An introduction to the oceanography of coastal environments including barrier islands, estuaries and tidal marshes. The physical, geological and biochemical characteristics of coastal waters will be discussed in the context of the economic and social pressures brought to bear on these areas by an increasing global population. Cannot receive credit for both GEOL 211 and GED 401.

GEOL 220. Genetic Mineralogy (2, 2). 3 credits.

A study of the mineral genesis. Emphasis is directed toward mineralogical environments, mineral associations and the geology/mineralogy of classical localities. An appreciation of mineral value and aesthetics is incorporated throughout the course.

GEOL 230. Evolution of Earth (3, 2). 4 credits.

An introduction to the evidence, methods and assumptions used by scientists to unravel the Earth’s origin and history. Emphasis on rock analysis/interpretation, modern and ancient processes of mountain building, origin and evolution of life and the history of the North American continent. Prerequisite: GEOL 110L or permission of instructor.

GEOL 272. Planetary Geology (2, 2). 3 credits.

A survey of currently developing ideas in planetology including origin of the planets, meteorites and planetary interiors. Also included are geologic processes and land forms on the moon and terrestrial planets, their modification under various planetary environments, and analogies to familiar earth land forms. Includes laboratory. Prerequisite: GEOL 110L.

GEOL 280. Mineralogy (3, 2). 4 credits.

A comprehensive study of minerals, including: crystallography, mineral chemistry, x-ray diffraction, mineral optics with thin section recognition using petrographic microscope, and hand specimen identification of both silicate and non-silicate minerals. Prerequisite: GEOL 110L.

GEOL 289. Optical Mineralogy (3, 2). 3 credits.

A study of the optical properties of minerals and mineral identification with the petrographic microscope. Prerequisite: GEOL 280.

GEOL 291. Writing and Communicating in the Geosciences. 1 credit.

This course prepares students for independent research by providing them with the fundamental skills in literature searches, writing, critical reading and communication in the geosciences. Prerequisite: GEOL 110 or GGEOL 102 or GGEOL 115; must take prior to senior year.

GEOL 300. Introduction to Petrology (3, 3). 4 credits.

Igneous and metamorphic processes explained using crystalization theory, phase diagrams, thermodynamics and geochemistry. Laboratory study of rocks, their chemical and mineralogical signatures, and their geologic origins. Prerequisites: GEOL 280 and CHEM 131, or consent of instructor.

GEOL 301. Earth Sciences for Teachers. 4 credits.

Earth science content is blended with a systems approach to provide pre-service teachers with an understanding of how the Earth works, as well as strategies for teaching it. Major content themes include reconstructing the geologic history of the mid-Atlantic, exploring the interaction of living things and the environment, and predicting how matter and energy circulate in the earth system.

GEOL/GEOG 310 A-D. Environmental Impact. 2-3 credits, repeatable to 6 credits.

Focuses on a selected environmental realm. The course will examine the interface between human activities and environmental systems. It will address the impacts of social, economic and political activities on the environment. A-Atmosphere (air pollution); B-Biosphere (vegetation/wildlife); C-Hydrosphere (water); D-Lithosphere (geologic hazards/land issues).

GEOL 320. Meteorology. 3 credits.

A study of the science of weather including weather forecasting, weather maps and related atmospheric processes. Emphasis is placed on the dynamic aspects of meteorology and the interrelationships of atmospheric phenomena with land masses and the world ocean.


The origin, distribution, and chemical, biological, and physical properties of soil are introduced. Processes responsible for soil properties are emphasized. Field trip highlight the sustainability of soils, their distribution across the Shenandoah Valley and their role in biogeochemical cycles. Prerequisite: GEOL 110 or GEOL 210 or permission of instructor may be granted for students with 4 hours of a lab course.

GEOL/BIO 350. Paleobiology. 3 credits.

The evolution and ecological structure of the biosphere from the origin of life to the present, emphasizing the evolution and paleobiology of animal life as shown by the fossil record. Lectures discuss methods used to interpret the fossil record and cover topics such as phylogeny and systematics, functional morphology, biostatigraphy, paleoecology, evolution, and extinction. Laboratories focus on the major groups of invertebrates that are common in the geologic record. Prerequisite: GEOL 230 or BIO 114 or permission of the instructor.

GEOL/CHM 355. Geochemistry of Natural Waters. 3 credits.

Study of chemical theory and reactions important in natural water systems. The role of atmospheric, geologic and biological inputs in determining the geochemistry of streams, rivers and oceans. Prerequisites: CHEM 131 and CHEM 132 or equivalent.
GEOL 364. Stratigraphy and Basin Analysis (3, 3). 4 credits.
Lecture emphasizes application of sedimentologic and stratigraphic principles to identify and interpret depositional systems and examines how eustasy (sequence theory) and local tectonics influence the distribution of depositional systems under different plate tectonic regimes. Lab emphasizes critical field observation, application of theory to stratigraphic analysis and writing scientific papers. Prerequisite: GEOL 230.

GEOL 365. Structural Geology (3, 2). 4 credits.
Major and minor structures of the Earth's crust. Mechanical principles involved in folding, faulting, jointing and penecontemporaneous structures. The causes and results of mountain building processes. Preparation and interpretation of geologic maps. GEOL 230 is recommended as a prerequisite. Prerequisite: GEOL 110L.

This course addresses the natural relationship between minerals and the rocks they make up. Using the concept of mineralizing environments, illustrated by classic examples, students will investigate minerals through the processes of mineral genesis and associated rock types. This approach provides insight and predictive value for natural conditions in which specific minerals and rocks occur. Not acceptable for B.S. in geology. Prerequisite: GEOL 110L.

GEOL 377. Earth Surface Processes (2, 2). 3 credits.
The interrelationships among climate, landscapes, soils and bedrock geology are examined using the mid-Atlantic region as a conceptual laboratory. Course instruction includes lecture, laboratory and field trip meetings. The processes of rock weathering and erosion and soil formation are reinvestigated. Topographic maps and aerial photography are examined for landforms and landscape evolution. Prerequisite: GEOL 110L, GEOL 210 or GEOG 210, or permission of the instructor.

GEOL 380. Laboratory Techniques in Geology (2, 2). 3 credits.
An elective course for science majors. A study of the basic theories and techniques of laboratory methods and instrumentation. Implementation and application of techniques to geological problems. Prerequisites: GEOL 280 and permission of the instructor.

GEOL/MATS 395. Geologic Perspectives in Materials Science and Engineering. 3 credits.
A one-semester course that emphasizes the commonalities between the geological sciences and materials science. Course includes topics from mineralogy, crystallography, petrology and structural geology which are also important in metallurgy and ceramics. Prerequisites: An introductory course in any physical science or integrated science and technology (GEOL 110, CHEM 131, PHYS 140 or ISAT 141) and at least one additional advanced course in the major.

GEOL/MATS 396. X-ray Characterization of Solid Materials. 3 credits.
Covers fundamental principles and theory behind two powerful, X-ray based, technologies: X-ray Diffraction and Energy Dispersive Analysis of X-rays (EDS). Students will collect and analyze data from a single crystal Gandolfi X-ray camera, automated powder diffraction system (focusing gonimeter), and EDAX system (EDS). Prerequisite: GEOL 280, MATS/ CHEM/PHYS 275 or ISAT 300.

GEOL 398. Topics in Geology. 1-4 credits.
Topics in geology at the advanced level. May be repeated for credit when course content changes. Topics selected may determine prerequisites. Students should consult the instructor prior to enrolling in the course. Prerequisite: Permission of the instructor.

GEOL 399. Field Geology. 6 credits.
Field methods include use of Brunton compass, telescopic alidade and plane table, and compass traversing. A synthesis of geologic concepts and principles leading to the construction and interpretation of geologic and topographic maps. Prerequisites: GEOL 364 and GEOL 365 or permission of the instructor.

GEOL/BIO 400. Geology and Ecology of the Bahamas. 3 credits.
This course explores the geology and ecology of the shallow-water marine environment by examining the preeminent modern example, the Bahamas platform. The Bahamas provide an excellent model for understanding modern and ancient carbonate and reef deposits and a variety of terrestrial/aquatic habitats. Biological processes are responsible for many of the geological features of the Bahamas, so the course considers the biology/ecology of marine organisms in addition to geological topics. Prerequisites: GEOL 110 or GEOL 211 or a 200-level GEOL or BIO course; at least four hours of additional lab science, at least sophomore status, and permission of the instructor.

GEOL 401. Oceanography for Teachers. 3 credits.
A comprehensive study of the world’s oceans and the interrelationships among physical, chemical, biological and geological oceanography for pre- and in-service teachers. Special emphasis on Virginia coastal oceanography, the National Ocean Literacy Principles and the integration of pedagogy applicable to K-12 instruction. Includes a field trip to the Virginia coast. Credit may not be earned in both GEOL 211 and GEOL 401.

GEOL/BIO 405. Vertebrate Paleontology (3, 3). 3 credits.
A study of the origin and evolution of the vertebrates. Emphasis will be on understanding how the processes of earth evolution and biological evolution have interacted through time to produce a coherent picture of vertebrate history. Prerequisite: GEOL 230 or BIO 124 or permission of the instructor.

GEOL 406. Paleoclimatology and Paleoceanography. 3 credits.
In this advanced level course you will investigate the methodologies and data used to reconstruct Earth’s climate history. Emphasis will be placed on the marine sediment and ice core records of the Cenozoic though detailed lecture and lab activities. Case studies include the Paleocene Eocene Thermal Maximum, the glaciation of Antarctica, Milankovitch cyclicity, and Northern Hemisphere glaciation. Prerequisite: GEOL 230 or BIO/GEOL 350 or permission of instructor.

GEOL 410. Engineering Geology (2, 2). 3 credits.
Study of the applications of geology to engineering practice. Topics include soil mechanics, foundations, engineering classification of soils, slope stability and mineral aggregates. Prerequisites: GEOL 110, GEOL 210 or GEOG 210, and either MATH 231 or MATH 225 or equivalent.

A systematic survey of the tectonic evolution of the North American continent and the corresponding evolution of depositional basins and paleoenvironments. Prerequisites: GEOL 364 and GEOL 365 or permission of the instructor.

GEOL 440. Geophysics (3, 2). 3 credits.
A survey of geophysical methods, with joint attention on near-surface and solid earth applications. Topics include seismology, heat flow, gravity, magnetism, electrical methods, ground penetrating radar, and geophysical aspects of plate tectonics. Labs focus on practical experience with data acquisition, reduction, and interpretation and are a combination of field, classroom, and computational activities. Prerequisites: GEOL 110L or PHYS 140-150 or PHYS 240-250 or permission of the instructor.

GEOL 442. Field Geophysics. 3 credits.
This course focuses on collection of geophysical data in the field and interpretation, analysis, and technical reporting afterwards. Case studies discussed include applications to geology, archaeology, and engineering. Students will get hands-on experience with geophysical equipment and an understanding of how and where these tools can be applied. Topics include Ground Penetrating Radar, Electrical Resistivity, Magnetism, Seismic Refraction and Total Station Data. Prerequisite: GEOL 110 or GEOL 210 or ANTH 197 or consent of instructor.

GEOL 444. Topics in Geophysics. 1-4 credits.
An in-depth investigation into selected aspects of geophysics. Topics will be chosen by the instructor and students and may vary from year to year. Some common candidate issues include earthquake seismology, field survey planning and execution, geophysical interpretation theory and the geophysical underpinnings of plate tectonic theory. Prerequisite: Permission of the instructor.

GEOL 450. Geology Seminar. 1 credit.
An in-depth study of a particular problem in geology (e.g., plate tectonics, astrogeology, low-temperature geochemistry, etc.) Scientific literature will be reviewed and discussed. Prerequisite: 20 credits in geology.

GEOL 460. Hydrogeology (2, 2). 3 credits.
Basic concepts of subsurface water as a part of the hydrologic cycle. Topics include storativity and permeability in porous media, principles of flow, computer applications, groundwater exploration, and mapping and environmental aspects of groundwater. Prerequisites: GEOL 110L and two semesters of calculus or permission of the instructor.

GEOL 467. Stratigraphy, Structure and Tectonics (3, 2). 4 credits.
Examination of how stratigraphic, structural, and tectonic principles control the character and distribution of rocks. Study of principles, regional patterns in sedimentary rocks, and stresses that deform rocks are explored in laboratory and field exercises. Topics and techniques are discussed within the framework of the 1.2 billion year geologic history of the Virginia region and its connection with tectonic processes throughout the rest of the world. Not acceptable for the B.S. in geology. Prerequisites: GEOL 110L and GEOL 230.
GER 111. Intensive German I. 6 credits.
The fundamentals of German through intensive listening, speaking, reading and writing. This four-week course is the equivalent of GER 101-102.

GER 212. Intensive German II. 6 credits.
The fundamentals of German through intensive listening, speaking, reading and writing at the intermediate level. This four-week course is the equivalent of GER 211-222. Prerequisite GER 112 or 111 or sufficient score on the Foreign Language Placement Exam.

GER 231. Intermediate German I. 3 credits.
A thorough review of grammar and vocabulary building, conversation, composition and reading. Prerequisite: GER 102 or 111 or sufficient score on the foreign language placement test.

GER 232. Intermediate German II. 3 credits.
A thorough review of GER 231 grammar and vocabulary building. Conversation, composition and reading will be chosen to reach competency at the advanced intermediate level. Prerequisite: GER 231 or sufficient score on the foreign language placement test.

GER 266. Contemporary German Literature in Translation. 3 credits.
German literature from the 1920s to the present. All lectures and readings are in English.

GER 300. Grammar and Communication. 3 credits.
Intensive training in grammatical structures and their application to oral and written communication. Instruction is in German. Fulfills the College of Arts and Letters writing-intensive requirements for the major. Prerequisite: GER 212 or 222 or sufficient score on the Foreign Language Placement Exam.

GER 307. A History of German Civilization. 3 credits.
A study of society, economics, politics and the arts in central Europe from Indo-European beginnings to the present. Emphasis is also placed on outstanding contributions of German-speaking people. Instruction is in German. Prerequisite: GER 300 or equivalent.

GER 308. Contemporary German Civilization. 3 credits.
A study of life, culture, politics and economics in modern Germany. May be repeated for credit. Prerequisite: GER 300 or equivalent.

GER 320. German Oral and Written Communication. 3 credits.
Intensive training in the use of modern, everyday German with emphasis on conversation and composition. Readings in German will provide a context for discussion and writing. Prerequisite: GER 300 or equivalent.

GER 330. Business German. 3 credits.
A study of commercial and trade vocabulary and customs in conjunction with practice in commercial communication, including letter writing, interviews and interpretation. Instruction is in German. Prerequisite: GER 300 or equivalent.

GER 335. Introduction to German Literature. 3 credits.
A survey of German literature from 750 to the present. Textual analysis of sample writings of the most important literary movements. Instruction is in German. Prerequisite: GER 300 or equivalent.

GER 341. German-English Technical/Commercial Translation. 3 credits.
German-English translation applied in several commercial (i.e., marketing, finance) and technical (i.e., electricity and electronics, software, hardware) fields. Focus will be on the acquisition of specialized knowledge (both linguistic and extralinguistic) and the delivery of professional documents in real-market conditions. Fulfills the College of Arts and Letters writing-intensive requirement for the major. Prerequisite: GER 300 or equivalent.

GER 400. Advanced Conversation. 3 credits.
Discussions deal with topics of current interest. Prerequisite: GER 300 or permission of the instructor.

GER 405. The Age of German Classicism. 3 credits.
Reading and interpretation of significant works of Lessing, Schiller and Goethe. Instruction is in German. Prerequisite: GER 300 or permission of the instructor.

GER 415. German Romanticism and Realism. 3 credits.
A study of Romanticism and Realism with emphasis on Romantic poetry and the Realistic novel. Instruction is in German. Prerequisite: GER 300 or permission of the instructor.

GER 426. Modern German Literature. 3 credits.
A study of the works of major German writers of the 20th century. Instruction is in German. Prerequisite: GER 300 or permission of the instructor.

GER/ENG 436. Studies in German Literature. 3 credits.
A study of selected works of German literature. Instruction is in English. May be repeated for credit when course content changes.

GER 446. Special Topics in German Literature. 3 credits.
Study of a particular topic in German literature. It may cover all or specific German literature genre. Course may be repeated. Prerequisite: GER 300.

GER 447. Special Topics in German Civilization and Culture. 3 credits.
Students will study a particular topic in the civilization and/or culture of Germany. Course may be repeated. Prerequisite: GER 300.

GER 448. Topics in German Linguistics. 3 credits.
Students will study a particular topic in German linguistics. Topics could include an introduction to German sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. Course may be repeated. Prerequisite: GER 300.

GER 465. German Cinema. 3 credits.
An analysis of the German cinema from the 1920s through the present. Emphasis will be on the relations between the German film and certain seminal periods in German history. Prerequisite: GER 300 or permission of the instructor.

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