



Press Release

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Geography of Surfing Class Offered This Spring

For probably the first time ever in the United States, college undergraduates will have the opportunity to learn basic principles of the science of geography through the lens of surfing. Professor Stuart Sweeney, faculty member of the University of California Santa Barbara Department of Geography, is offering "The Geography of Surfing" Spring Quarter. It begins March 2004.

An introductory level course, the Geography of Surfing will provide an integrated view of regional, human, and physical geography. Topics will include wave generation and forecasting, the economics of the surf industry, spatial search, strategic behavior under crowding, territorialism, and the generation and diffusion of regional surf cultures. Dr. Sweeney will bring in some guest speakers, too. For instance, Dan Wozniak, President of Dan-O Surf films, a niche-film production and distribution company, is scheduled to come. Dan Wozniak wrote and directed "Siestas & Olas: A Surfing Journey Through Mexico" (1997).

The two required books are not the stereotypical expensive, heavy, dry texts. The first book is Caught Inside: A Surfer's Year on the California Coast, by Daniel Duane. Will Blythe, a reviewer from Esquire magazine, wrote "Wonderful ... [Duane is] an ontologist of dudedom, Henry David Thoreau doing aerials on a fiberglass board." The second text is Surf Forecasting by Nathan Todd Cool. Published by WetSand, the book "explains in easy to understand terms the science behind waves, winds, water temperatures, tidal swings, and more. Learn how to predict when swells will arrive, how big waves will be, and telltale signs of common hazards" (www.wetsand.com).

Dr. Sweeney is a surfer himself. And when he was a student at the University of California San Diego, he spent summers working as an ocean lifeguard for Los Angeles County Beaches. About the course, he says, "I suppose some people will be annoyed by the idea of a class focused on surfing. The sport has strong negative connotations associated with it — laziness, localism, degeneracy, for instance — not all of them undeserving. My motivation for offering the course is to teach some of the ideas central to geography in a context that will connect strongly with the cultural milieu of the students. After all, most of the young people I teach at UCSB grew up in, or near, beach cities of California. I'm hoping that the course connects on a deep level with the students, allowing them to see the world around them through the lens of geography."



Photo to left: Dr. Stuart Sweeney heading out to catch some waves.

Photo to right: Dr. Stuart Sweeney surfing near Point Conception, California.

Photos available upon request, in color or B&W.



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