

Interdisciplinary Team-Taught First Year Seminar Information Sheet

Cell Phones, Coffee, and Clothing: Critiquing Consumption

Course Description

Life, as we know it, is dependent on the everyday consumption of goods and services; however, our consumptive practices can also have negative social and environmental consequences. This first-year seminar focuses on environmental and social sustainability. We combine sociological and geological perspectives to provide a unique viewpoint on the cause and effects of our consumer society. Sociology allows us to examine the changing meaning, practices, and social implications of consumption, while geology provides scientific insight into the physical processes and environmental implications of consumption.

Course Objectives

As a First-Year Seminar, this course serves the dual purpose of (i) introducing students to academic disciplines (geology and sociology) within the context of the liberal arts and (ii) introducing students to the academic life of Cornell College. Students will be expected to master the academic vocabulary as well as the concepts and processes that drive geological and social processes; however the goals of the course are broader than this content alone.

By the end of the course:

- Students will be able to think intentionally about their academic choices, including their course of study, their attitude toward learning, and the tools and skills they wish to develop to improve their learning.
- Students will be aware of the resources available to them that will help them construct a successful future at Cornell.
- Students will be able to make connections between apparently different areas of study.
- Students will be able to reasonably interpret the geological and sociological processes around them using careful observation and experimentation.
- Students will be able to demonstrate the relevance of geology and sociology in their everyday lives, as seen through the lens of human consumption.
- Student will develop critical thinking, oral communication, and writing skills that demonstrate an ability to understand and analyze social and geological issues, as well as an ability to apply these skills to their lives and the world around them.

This course supports the Educational Priorities and Outcomes of Cornell College with emphasis on knowledge, inquiry, reasoning, communication, and intercultural literacy.

Student Assessment

Students complete several different types of assignment in this course, including analytic reflections, write-to-learn assignments, laboratory exercises, mapping exercises, and analytical papers.

Grading: 15% Participation (including analytic reflections and WTL assignments); 10% Lab Assignments; 75% Consumer Object Project (10% Infographic Presentation; 25% Natural Resource Map; 30% Interview Analysis; 10% Final Presentation).

Participation

Students are evaluated based on the quality of their presence in the classroom. “Quality” here is defined as informed and respectful participation in class.

Analytic Reflections

Students are responsible for developing a discussion question and 1-paragraph response (200-400 words). This reflection should incorporate the range of course material assigned for that day, present the large-scale issues raised, and illustrate how this material is relevant to the overarching prompt posted in the course schedule. Reflections are credit/no credit. In

reviewing these reflections, we look for evidence that students have done the reading carefully and have put some thought into their reflections.

Write-to-Learn Assignments

Write-to-learn assignments (like freewrites) are short assignments in which students use writing to explore their knowledge of a topic, thus helping them to organize their thoughts on the topic and assess their understanding of the topic. Write-to-learn assignments are credit/no credit.

Laboratory Exercises

Lab assignments are designed to provide hands-on experience to help students better understand the course material.

Consumer Object “Life-cycle” Project

This project entails a series of mapping and writing assignments and a public group presentation examining a consumer object. Students complete and revise several assignments that link course concepts and sociological/geological processes to the life-cycle of this consumer object. Students also write a final assessment of their individual and group work.

Quantitative Infographic Assignment

Students gather, interpret, and present quantitative data (as an infographic) about their chosen consumer object.

Natural Resource Assignment

Students research, in depth, one of the natural geological resources that are used in production of their consumer object. They develop a concept map and write a 1000-word analysis of the specifics of this resource (including geologic origin, location, mining processes and consequences, and production processes and consequences), connecting these specifics to a particular concern in the geosphere, biosphere, or sociosphere, and devising a realistic and relevant solution.

Qualitative Interview Assignment

Based on qualitative interview data collected by the members of each object group, students will individually develop a 1500-word analysis focused on the social meanings, experiences, and/or implications of consumption related to this object.

Course Schedule

Introduction to Course (1 hour)

In-Class Activities:

- Introduce course
- Review syllabus and schedule
- Free-write (define wilderness, conservation, environment)

Topic 1: Studying Consumption (3 hours)

Reflection Prompt: How do Brower and Park’s different understandings of the purpose of wilderness inform their worldviews? How might you draw from each argument and integrate different insights in developing your own perspective?

Course Reading:

- McPhee, John. 1971. *Encounters with the archdruid. Part 1: A mountain*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

In-Class Activities:

- Class discussion
- Watch Film: Films for the Humanities & Sciences. 2010. *Connecting People: the Human Cost of Mobile Phones*. New York, N.Y.: Films Media Group.

- Freewrite (knowledge about climate change)
- 6 Americas climate change quiz (<http://uw.kqed.org/climatesurvey/index-kqed.php>)

Topic 2: Climate Change (2 hours)

Reflection Prompt: What do you see as the biggest challenge to educating others on the science of climate change and what information would you provide to address this challenge?

Course Reading:

- EPA website on the Science of Climate Change (<https://www.epa.gov/climate-change-science>)
Overview and Causes of Climate Change pages, 3 of the Indicators of Climate Change
- Sutter, Woodward County, Oklahoma: Why Do So Many Here Doubt Climate Change?
(<http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/03/opinions/sutter-climate-skeptics-woodward-oklahoma/index.html>)
- Cox and Jones, Believers, Sympathizers, and Skeptics: Why Americans are Conflicted about Climate Change, Environmental Policy, and Science, sections II and III
(<http://www.prr.org/research/believers-sympathizers-skeptics-americans-conflicted-climate-change-environmental-policy-science/>)

In-Class Activities:

- Mini-lecture on science of climate change
- Class discussion

Topic 3: Natural Hazards, Social Vulnerability, and Environmental Justice (2 hours)

(Included 2.5 hours of additional workshop sessions on data visualization and infographics lead by the Quantitative Reasoning Consultant and the Instructional Technology Librarian)

Reflection Prompt: How do climate change, patterns of exposure and vulnerability, and social inequalities intersect to increase the prevalence and impact of natural hazards?

Course Reading:

- Kovach, There's No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster
(<http://timkovach.com/wp/2013/11/13/theres-no-such-thing-as-a-natural-disaster/>)
- Harlan, et. al., Climate Justice and Inequality, pp. 127-129, 132-142
(Chapter 5 in Dunlap, Riley E., and Robert J. Brulle. 2015. *Climate change and society: sociological perspectives.*)
- Oxfam, Exposed: Social Vulnerability and Climate Change in the US Southeast
(<https://www.oxfamamerica.org/publications/exposed-social-vulnerability-and-climate-change-in-the-us-southeast/>)

In-Class Activities:

- Class discussion
- Hazards and vulnerabilities lab (based on http://serc.carleton.edu/integrate/teaching_Reading_s/map_hazards/index.html)

Topic 4: Resource Usage: Water and Watershed (2.5 hours)

Reflection Prompt: How does water become such a contested resource? How do the natural, social, and political processes intersect to create (and possibly address) water crises?

Course Readings:

- Choy & McGhee, Groundwater: Ignore It and It Might go Away
(<http://waterinthewest.stanford.edu/groundwater/overview/index.html>)
- Moran, Choy & Sanchez, The Hidden Costs of Groundwater
(<http://waterinthewest.stanford.edu/groundwater/overdraft/index.html>)

- The Salt, NPR, Beyond Almonds: A Rogue's Gallery of Guzzlers in California's Drought (<http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/04/12/398757250/beyond-almonds-a-rogues-gallery-of-guzzlers-in-californias-drought>)
- Fresh Air, NPR Drought in California Creates Water Wars Between Farmers, Developers, and Residents (<http://www.npr.org/2015/04/30/403283276/drought-in-calif-creates-water-wars-between-farmers-developers-residents>)
- New York Times, Farmers Try Political Force to Open California's Taps (http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/31/us/farmers-try-political-force-to-twist-open-californias-taps.html?action=click&contentCollection=U.S.&module=RelatedCoverage®ion=EndOfArticle&pgtype=article&_r=0)

In-Class Activities:

- Mini-lecture including water cycle, surface water & watershed, and ground water
- Class discussion
- Google earth lab (based on <http://serc.carleton.edu/eslabs/drought/2b.html>)

Topic 5: Socio-Cultural Aspects and Patterns of Consumption (2 hours)

(Included 2.5 hours of additional workshop sessions on the construction of infographics lead by the Quantitative Reasoning Consultant, the Instructional Technology Librarian, and the Writing Consultant)

Reflection Prompt: Given the negative environmental and social impacts of consumption, how do scholars explain our increasing levels of consumption? What factors are most influential in explaining your own consumption patterns?

Course Reading:

- Ehrhardt-Martinez et. al., Consumption and Climate Change (Chapter 4 in Dunlap, Riley E., and Robert J. Brulle. 2015. *Climate change and society: sociological perspectives.*)
- NPR, What America Buys (<http://www.npr.org/sections/money/2012/04/05/149997097/what-americans-buy>)
- Thompson, How the Rich and Poor Spend Money Today—and 30 Years Ago (<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/04/how-the-rich-and-poor-spend-money-today-and-30-years-ago/360103/>)
- Thompson, Rich People are Great at Spending Money to Make Their Kids Rich Too (<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/04/being-rich-means-having-money-to-spend-on-being-richer/389871/>)

In-Class Activities:

- Mini-lecture of social theories of consumption
- Class discussion

Infographic Presentations (2.5 hours)

Topic 6: Where Do Resources Come From/How are Resources Extracted (4 hours)

(2 hours of additional workshop sessions on concept mapping lead by the Science Librarian and the Instructional Technology Librarian. Based on soda can concept map:

http://serc.carleton.edu/integrate/teaching_materials/mineral_resources/unit3.html)

Reflection Prompt: What do we consider to be natural resources and which resources are considered renewable? How do processes of resource formation, extraction, and usage patterns impact the sustainability of these resources?

Course Reading:

- The Guardian, The Six Natural Resources Most Drained by our 7 Billion People (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/blog/2011/oct/31/six-natural-resources-population>)

- National Geographic, The Hidden Water We Use (<http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/freshwater/embedded-water/>)
- Nuwer, What is the World's Scarcest Material? (<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20140314-the-worlds-scarcest-material>)
- Cho, Phosphorus: Essential to Life--Are We Running Out? (<http://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2013/04/01/phosphorus-essential-to-life-are-we-running-out/>)
- US Energy Information Administration, Section on "What is Energy," "Nonrenewable Energy," and Renewable Energy" (from http://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/index.cfm?page=about_home)
- Rio Tinto Kennecott Virtual Tour (<http://www.kennecott.com/virtual-tour>) or From Ore to More: The Story of Copper (<http://www.kennecott.com/about-us>)

In-Class Activities:

- Mini-lecture on mining processes, environmental consequences of mining, and natural resource sustainability
- Guest lecture on energy by Professor of Physics
- Class discussion
- Muffin mining lab (based on http://serc.carleton.edu/integrate/teaching_materials/mineral_resources/activity3-1.html)

Topic 7: Tragedy of the Commons and Resource Management (2 hours)

Reflection Prompt: How do governmental policies and the practices of private companies regarding resource management (i.e., extraction, remediation, manufacturing) impact the sustainability of natural resources and the resulting environmental and social impacts of consumption?

Course Reading:

- Diamond, Jared M. 2005. *Collapse: how societies choose to fail or succeed*. New York: Viking. pp.441-468.
- Goleman, Daniel. 2009. *Ecological intelligence: how knowing the hidden impacts of what we buy can change everything*. New York: Broadway Books, Chapter 2 (pp. 14-22) and Chapter 5.

In-Class Activities:

- Guest lecture by Professor of Economics
- Class discussion

Topic 8: Consumer Experiences and Identities (3 hours)

Reflection Prompt: Explain identity-based consumer behavior. How do consumption patterns reflect individual's identities and how are commodities used to construct and express identity? In what ways are your identities and consumption intertwined?

Course Reading:

- Jennifer Smith Maguire, and Dan Hu. 2013. "Not a simple coffee shop: local, global and glocal dimensions of the consumption of Starbucks in China". *Social Identities*. 19 (5): 670-684.
- Avery, Jill. 2012. "Defending the markers of masculinity: Consumer resistance to brand gender-bending". *International Journal of Research in Marketing*. 29 (4): 322-336.
- Reed, Americus, Mark Forehand, Stefano Puntoni, and Luk Warlop. 2012. *Identity-based consumer behavior*. Leuven: Kath. Univ. Leuven, Fac. of Business and Economics. <https://lirias.kuleuven.be/handle/123456789/357429>. (skip section 3)

In-Class Activities:

- Class discussion
- Consumer identity lab

Field Trip 1: Alliant Energy Field Trip (2.5 hours plus travel time)

Reflection Prompt: To what extent, and in what ways, is the course material helpful in understanding the policies and practice at Alliant Energy? For example, how does Alliant address issues such as natural hazards planning, changes in public demand and perception, resource management, and environmental and social sustainability? What surprised you most about your visit?

Topic 9: Planned Obsolescence (2 hours)

Reflection Prompt: Assess your own environmental footprint. To what extent, and in what ways, is the course material helpful in understanding your own consumption practice? What surprised you most about your environmental footprint?

Course Reading:

- Kolber, Elizabeth. 2011. "Enter The Anthropocene—Age of Man". *National Geographic*. 219 (3): 62-85.
- 114 years young: Lightbulbs before planned obsolescence (<http://socimages.tumblr.com/post/131525984095/114-years-young-light-bulbs-before-planned>)
- Environmental Footprint Quiz (<http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/calculators/>)

In-Class Activities:

- Watch film (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01zxmrw>)
- Class discussion

Field Trip 2: Landfill Field Trip (1 hour plus travel time)

Reflection Prompt: To what extent, and in what ways, is the course material helpful in understanding the policies and practices at the Linn County Landfill? For example, how does the landfill address issues such as natural hazards planning, changes in public demand and perception, resource management, and environmental and social sustainability? What surprised you most about the landfill visit?

Topic 10: Marketing, Branding, and Design: Consumer Ideologies, Implications, and Resistance (2 hours)

Reflection Prompt: What is the purpose of segmented marketing, branding, and design? How do people respond to this and what are the larger social implications?

Course Reading:

- Lezotte, Chris. 2012. "The Evolution of the 'Chick Car' Or: What Came First, the Chick or the Car?" *Journal of Popular Culture*. 45 (3).
- Why Marketers Fear the Female Geek (<http://women2.com/stories/2014/01/08/marketers-fear-female-geek>)
- NPR, When Women Stopped Coding (<http://www.npr.org/sections/money/2014/10/21/357629765/when-women-stopped-coding>)

In-Class Activities:

- Mini-lecture on practices and implication of gendered marketing
- Class discussion

Topic 11: Environmental Racism: Inequities in Access, Risk, and Response (3 hours)

Reflection Prompt: How does differential access, risk, and governmental policies/responses intersect in both reflecting and perpetuating social inequalities?

Course Reading:

- Covert, Bryce, and Mike Konczal.. 2016. "Environmental Racism". *Nation*. 302 (10).
- Ryder, The Flint Water Crisis and Beyond
(<https://hazards.colorado.edu/article/the-flint-water-crisis-and-beyond-looking-through-the-lens-of-environmental-justice>)
- Carasik, US Environmental Injustice Goes Well Beyond Flint
(<http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2016/2/us-environmental-injustice-goes-well-beyond-flint.html>)
- Coates, The Case for Reparations, read sections 1 and 2.
(<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>)

In-Class Activities:

- Presentation of environmental disaster case studies
- Mini-lecture on history and implications of racial segregation
- Watch film (selection from Pounder, C. C. H., et. al.. 2003. *Race: the power of an illusion*. San Francisco, Calif: California Newsreel.)
- Class discussion

Topic 12: Citizen-Consumers and Alternative Consumption (2 hours)

Reflection Prompt: How does the concept of the citizen-consumer complicate our critique of consumption? How might alternative forms of consumption serve to both promote and undermine environmental/social sustainability and justice?

Course Reading:

- Johnston, Josée. 2008. "The citizen-consumer hybrid: ideological tensions and the case of Whole Foods Market". *Theory and Society : Renewal and Critique in Social Theory*. 37 (3): 230-232 & 236-263.
- Szasz, Is Green Consumption Part of the Solution? (in Dryzek, John S., Richard B. Norgaard, and David Schlosberg. 2011. *Oxford handbook of climate change and society*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press)

In-Class Activities:

- Class discussion
- Reviewed GoodGuide (<http://www.goodguide.com/>) and other product rating guides

Field Trip 3: CSA Field Trip (2 hours plus travel)

Reflection Prompt: To what extent, and in what ways, is the course material helpful in understanding Abbe Hills CSA? For example, who participates and why; how does Abbe Hills address issues such as resource management and environmental and social sustainability; is this a successful form of alternative consumption? What surprised you most about your visit?

Final Project Class Sessions

Poster Presentation and Planning Workshop (1 hour as full class, plus 1 hour group meetings with Instructional Technology Librarian)

Final Project Presentations (2 hour poster session over lunch period in student commons)

Additional FYS Based Class Sessions (interspersed throughout course)

FYS Topic 1: Learning to Learn (1.5 hours)

Meeting with Academic Support Coordinator

Course Reading:

- Werth and Perkins, Learning to Learn (<https://www.macalester.edu/academics/geology/wirth/learning.pdf>)

In-Class Activities:

- Freewrite (on reading, on learning style, on changes to make in learning)
- Watch video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN34FNbOKXc>)
- Class discussion

FYS Topic 2: Academic Honesty/Integrity and Information Literacy (2 hours)

(Workshop with Science Librarian and Social Science Librarian)

Course Reading:

- Gabriel, Plagiarism Lines Blur for Students in Digital Age (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/02/education/02cheat.html>)
- Tollefson, Heatwaves Blamed on Global Warming: Unusually High Frequency Points to Human Influence (<http://www.nature.com/news/heatwaves-blamed-on-global-warming-1.11130>)
- Hansen, James, et. al. 2012, Perception of climate change, *PNAS.*, 109: 14726–14727.

In-Class Activities:

- Class discussion

FYS Topic 3: Academic Writing and Revising (2.5 hours)

Course Reading:

- Dartmouth Writing Program, Developing Your Thesis (<http://writing-speech.dartmouth.edu/learning/materials/materials-first-year-writers/developing-your-thesis>)
- Dartmouth Writing Program, Writing: Considering Structure & Organization (<http://writing-speech.dartmouth.edu/learning/materials-first-year-writers/considering-structure-and-organization>)
- Dartmouth Writing Program, Revision: Cultivating a Critical Eye (<https://writing-speech.dartmouth.edu/learning/materials/materials-first-year-writers/revision-cultivating-critical-eye>)

In-Class Activities:

- Workshop with Writing Consultant
- Individual 20 minute meeting toward end of the course with one of the instructors or the writing consultant to discuss paper revisions