

ES 1-- “Environment and the Consumer Society”

Syllabus, Spring 2003

Instructors:

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Course Description:

Is there such a thing as sustainable consumption, or will life on Earth become increasingly unbalanced? Will our grandchildren accuse us of “devouring” their future? This multidisciplinary course investigates these issues, both locally and globally, from the perspectives of anthropology, history, communication, and politics. Topics include cultural causes and responses to past environmental disasters; biological and cultural limits to growth; overfishing the commons; resources and land use issues; communication in a consumer culture; and politics and governmental regulations.

Readings:

There will be one book and a series of short article-length readings assigned during the semester. Available for purchase in the Bookstore:

Alan Durning, *How Much Is Enough? The Consumer Society and the Future of the Earth*
(Washington, D.C.: Worldwatch Institute, Norton, 1992)

Additional articles are available on electronic reserve under ES 1 Blackboard site.

Course Components and Total Grade Makeup:

1 st Hour Exam	15%
2 nd Hour Exam	15%
“Stuff Project”	15%
Written Campus Trans. Project	20%
Oral Campus Trans. Project	5%
Class Participation	15%
<u>Final Essay</u>	<u>15%</u>
Total	100%

Class Sessions:

This class will meet Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 11:10-12:00. These sessions will be both lectures and class discussions. **Your participation in class discussion will be an important part of this course and your grade.** You will need to be prepared by doing the assigned readings and attending class. **More than three absences, whether excused or unexcused, will lower your final grade one letter.** Since late arrivals disrupt discussions, two late arrivals will count as an absence. Leaving and returning to the classroom during discussions also is disruptive and, if you do so, it will count as a late arrival. **So come to class prepared to stay the full time and come on time.**

Course Projects:

It is a given fact that human beings must consume natural resources to survive. Everyone needs a modicum of food, clothing, and shelter, as well as some level of those sorts of personal possessions by which we identify ourselves and that contribute to “quality of life” and the positive make-up of differing cultures around the world. At the same time, there is no denying that such human consumption has very real implications for the natural environment, with some cultures contributing more than others to the overall ecological impact.

In addition to the discussion of selected readings, in this course we will pursue two projects—one at a personal, or individual student, level and the other at a broader community, or campus, level—in an attempt to understand some of our consumption patterns and their implications for the environment.

The Stuff Project

At the individual level, each student will conduct a series of activities aimed at assessing his or her consumption patterns and values, and by extension, those of other individual Lehigh students. Collectively we should be able to determine some interesting consumption patterns. **Turn in your papers in two ways:** 1) post them on the class Blackboard site (instructions to come about this) the night before the class they are due and 2) bring a paper copy of them to class on the day they are due.

The “Stuff Project” will be broken down as follows:

Part A:

Make an inventory of the “stuff” in the room in which you live at Lehigh.

Now answer the following questions about your inventory:

- 1) How much of this “stuff” was there before you arrived, and what did you bring?
- 2) What is the estimated value of your inventory?
- 3) What does the stuff you currently live with say about the way you live your life?
- 4) Suppose all your inanimate possessions were about to be destroyed by a natural disaster—fire, flood, earthquake—and you could only save three (3) things. What would you save and why?

Part B:

Section 1:

Make a list of the five (5) most recent (separate transactions) consumer purchases you have made. Indicate for each transaction what you bought, where and when you bought it, and most important why you made the purchase.

Section 2:

Collect the same data as in Section 1 for two (2) other Lehigh students.

Write a paragraph that assesses and analyzes your and your peers’ consumption patterns as revealed by these sets of purchases.

Part C:

Choose one of these purchased items and analyze it in writing in response to the following questions:

1. Who makes the product (be sure to name it) and where?
2. What resources were used to create the product?
3. Are the resources renewable or nonrenewable?
4. Is it likely that the workers who produce the product also own the product?
5. Who buys the product, and what do the buyers have to be willing to do in order to buy it (work more, save less, buy on credit)?
6. If appropriate, is the product easy or difficult to repair?
7. What happens to the product at the end of its life?
8. What is the environmental impact of the product?

Each part of the “stuff Project” is worth 5% of your final grade for a total of 15%. The due dates are indicated on the class assignment schedule.

The Campus Transportation Assessment Project

The campus transportation assessment project will be conducted in teams of 4-5 students, and each team will be assigned a portion of the overall project. Part of the task will be to determine how best to define the project and to organize the research design. You will be given a chance to express your preference in tasks, but to ensure a reasonable balance of student backgrounds and majors, and a mix of different years (Freshmen to Seniors), the instructors will make the final task assignments. We will do our best to give you one of your top choices.

The goal is to learn something about how the Lehigh campus functions in terms of transportation usage patterns—conceived in the broadest sense—and what the “ecological footprint” of such usage patterns is. The class as a whole, and each team as a distinct unit, will work together to determine the appropriate questions to be asked, the best methodology to acquire all relevant data, and how to present the group’s findings to the class as a whole. It is expected that the main findings from each team will be compiled in such a way that they may be made available through the course web page as well as in a class presentation.

There will be several distinct steps and assignments with specific due dates as part of the total Campus Traffic Assessment project:

Feb. 14—Initial discussion of Transportation Assessment Project—goals, research design, teams.

Feb. 28—Discussion and finalization of research team assignments.

Mar. 19-21—Meet with Prof. Friedman and Michelle Baer **outside of class** to discuss preliminary progress being made on the project.

Apr. 4—Progress Reports. Each team will make a 5-minute presentation to the class on its project plan. At a minimum, each project plan should include a statement of things the team is doing to complete its assessment and how the work is being divided among the team members. This report should include a list of people being contacted by team members, where the team is going to access appropriate information, similar activities on other campuses, if any, and any problems the team is encountering. Other class members should be prepared to offer constructive feedback for each presentation. **Each team will receive a grade for this plan, which will be typed out and handed in.**

Apr. 18—Team meeting

Apr. 21-25—Project teams will each make 15-minute oral presentations of their findings to the rest of the class, which will offer any constructive evaluative comments they might have. The team may determine the precise format of the presentation.

Apr. 28—Final Written Transportation Assessment Reports are due. **The final written report should be posted on the course Blackboard site as well as turned in to Prof. Friedman in both a printed and disk version.**

Each team will receive two grades—one for its oral presentation (5%) and one for the final overall report (20%). Individual students may, if they so desire, add a personal addendum to the team’s submission indicating their role in the project and how they might do things differently if they had the opportunity.

There will be peer evaluation of individual effort within each project by the students on each team. Although all members of a given team will receive approximately the same grade, these peer evaluations will be considered by the instructors in assigning variations for each student’s grade for this component of the course.

The Final Essay:

The final essay provides each student a reflective opportunity to draw upon the material from the course to assess his or her personal consumption patterns; those of the Lehigh community; and those of American society more broadly, especially in the context of the “ecological footprint” that these patterns entail. **Each student should be preparing throughout the semester to write a 6-8-page essay that will discuss information from each of the five modules in the course.** It also should discuss and analyze the following sorts of issues:

1. What are your personal consumption patterns, and importantly what are the ecological implications of those patterns?
2. What is the ecological footprint of the Lehigh community’s consumption patterns, at least in terms of transportation? (Here it is necessary to draw on material from team reports in addition to the one from your own team.)
3. How do these personal and community patterns relate more broadly to those of American society?
4. What sorts of solutions or recommendations for change can you propose, both personally and collectively, for what **you** see as the consumption-environment issues before you as an individual, for the Lehigh community, and more broadly, for American society as a whole.

Note that not every student will start with the same consumption patterns, or assessments of the issues/problems that society faces, so it is assumed that there is no one, clear-cut correct answer or approach for this essay. **However, and this is important, each student must make direct reference to the readings and material findings of the course in responding to the theme of the essay. All such references should be completely cited if from readings, or as class discussion, or as material from the transportation report of a particular team.**

The final essay will be worth 15% of each student’s final grade and will be due by 4 p.m. on May 5.

PLEASE NOTE:

ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE COMPLETED AND TURNED IN TO PASS THE COURSE.

Schedule of Class Meetings, Topics, and Readings

Week 1

Introductions

Monday, Jan. 13

Course introduction

Wed. Jan. 15

A World of Consumers

Read:

William Greider, "One World of Consumers,"

Durning, Foreword and Ch. 1, "The Conundrum of Consumption"

Fri. Jan 17

Affluenza video and discussion

Week 2

Patterns of Consumption

Mon. Jan. 20

Ecological Systems/Limits to Growth

Read:

Executive Summary, *Beyond the Limits*

Due: "Stuff Project" Part A

Wed. Jan. 22

Personal Consumption

Read:

Durning, Ch. 2, "The Consumer Society"

Don DeLillo, "The Day of the Station Wagons," from *White Noise*.

Fri. Jan. 24

Personal Consumption, continued

Read:

Durning, Ch. 3, "The Dubious Rewards of Consumption"

Excerpt from *Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things*

(http://www.northwestwatch.org/pubs/stuff_excerpt.html)

Due: "Stuff Project" Part B

Part I: Culture and Environment—Prof. David Small (dbs6@lehigh.edu)

Week 3

Culture and Environment

Mon. Jan. 27

How Do We View Environment and Culture?

Read:

Emilio F. Moran, *Human Adaptability: An Introduction to Ecological Anthropology* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview), ch's. 1 & 3.

Wed. Jan 29

How Do We View Consumption?

Read:

Orvar Lofgren, "Consuming Interests," ch. 2 in Jonathan Friedman, ed., *Consumption and Identity* (Harwood Academic).

Fri. Jan. 31

Discussion of Stuff Project

Read:

Durning, Ch. 5, "Food and Drink"

Due: "Stuff Project" Part C

Week 4

- Mon. Feb. 3 Are There Strategies in Our Consumption?
Read:
D. Miller, "Structures and Strategies: An Aspect of the Relationship between Social Hierarchy and Cultural Change," ch. 9 in Ian Hodder, ed., *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press).
- Wed. Feb. 5 Aspects of Perception and Failure
Read:
Thomas H. McGovern, "Management for Extinction in Norse Greenland," ch. 6 in Carole L. Crumley, ed. *Historical Ecology*.
- Fri. Feb. 7 Overview discussion of section and relationship to overall course themes

Part II: Tragedy of the Commons---Prof. John Gatewood (jbg1@lehigh.edu)

Week 5

- Mon. Feb. 10 What is a "Tragedy of the Commons" and what can be done about it?
Read:
Garrett Hardin, (1968) "The Tragedy of the Commons." *Science* 162: 1243-48
- Wed. Feb. 12 Refinements to Hardin's model arising from ethnographic studies of fisheries
Read:
Ottar Brox (1990) "The Common Property Theory: Epistemological Status and Analytical Utility." *Human Organization* 49: 227-35.
- Fri. Feb. 14 Preliminary Discussion of Team Transportation Projects

Week 6

- Mon. Feb. 17 Fishery Case Studies
Read:
E. N. Anderson, Jr. (1987) "A Malaysian Tragedy of the Commons." In B.J. McCay and J. Acheson, eds. *The Question of the Commons*. Pp. 327-43. Tuscon: Univ. of Arizona Press.
- James M. Acheson (1987) "The Lobster Fiefs Revisited: Economic and Ecological Effects of Territoriality in the Maine Lobster Fishery." In McCay and Acheson, eds. *The Question of the Commons*. Pp. 37-65.
- Wed. Feb. 19 What can managers do to "solve" the tragedy of the commons in fisheries?
Read:
John B. Gatewood (1993) "Ecology, Efficiency, Equity, and Competitiveness." In Steven L. Goldman, ed. *Competitiveness and American Society*. Pp. 123-55.
- Fri. Feb. 21 Overview discussion of section and relationship to overall course themes

Week 7

- Mon. Feb. 24 Review for first exam. **Come prepared with two questions to turn in that you think should be asked in the exam.**
- Wed. Feb. 26 **First Exam**
- Fri. Feb. 28 Discussion of Campus Transportation Assessment Project—finalization of teams
Read:
Durning, Ch. 6, “Clean Motion”

Part III: American Environmental History Overview---Prof. Stephen Cutcliffe (shc0@lehigh.edu)

Week 8

- Mon. Mar. 3 “Yield vs. Loot”—Native Americans encounter Europeans
Read:
William Cronon, “That Wilderness Should Turn a Mart,” pp. 159-70 in *Changes in the Land*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1983
Excerpts from: William Bradford, John Winthrop, and Thomas Morton
- Wed. Mar. 5 Appreciation, Preservation, and Conservation
Read:
Excerpts from H. D. Thoreau, “Walking,” 1851 and George Catlin, “On Indians, Nature, and Civilization,” 1844
John Muir, “A Voice for Wilderness,” 1901, 1912
Gifford Pinchot, “Ends and Means,” 1910, 1947
- Fri. Mar. 7 The Emergence of Scientific Ecology and Aldo Leopold’s “Land Ethic”
Read:
Leopold, “An Ethic for Man-land Relations,” 1949
Donald Worster, “Organic, Economic, and Chaotic Ecology” excerpts in Carolyn Merchant, *Major Problems in American Environmental History* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 465-79.

MWF—Mar. 10-14

No Class, Spring Break

Week 9

- Mon. Mar. 17 The Modern Environmental Movement: Rachel Carson, Deep Ecologists, and Grass Roots Greens; and overview discussion of history section-- Prof. Cutcliffe
Read:
Carson, excerpt from *Silent Spring*, 1962
George Sessions and Aarne Ness, “Principles of Deep Ecology”
Brian Tokar, “Changing to Green,” *The Green Reader: Essays Toward a Sustainable Society* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991), 187-91.

Part IV: The Environment, Consumer Culture and Communication—Prof. Sharon Friedman (smf6@lehigh.edu)

Wed. Mar. 19 Where Do Environmental Messages Come From:
Environmental Organizations and the Mass Media
Read:
Selections from Craig L. LaMay and Everette E. Dennis, eds., *Media and the Environment* (Covelo, Calif.: Island Press, 1991):
 Robert Gottlieb, “An Odd Assortment of Allies: American
Environmentalism in the 1990s,” pp. 43-54.
 Everette E. Dennis, “In Context: Environmentalism in the System of
News,” pp. 55-64.
 Sharon M. Friedman, “Two Decades of the Environmental Beat,” pp.
17-28.

Fri. Mar. 21 Television: Image and Effect
Read:
“Television and the Environment: An Introduction,” pp. 1-24 in Mike Budd,
Steve Craig, and Clay Steinman, *Consuming Environments: Television and
Commercial Culture* New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1999).
Mini assignment:
Watch TV environment show and respond to questionnaire.

Week 10

Mon. Mar. 24 Consumption and the Environment
Read:
Durning, Ch. 9, “The Cultivation of Needs”
Mini assignment:
Advertisement analysis

Wed. Mar. 26 The Problems with Advertising
Read:
“The Numerical Lies of Advertising,” pp. 70-97 in Cynthia Crossen, *Tainted
Truth* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

Fri. Mar. 28 Overview discussion of section and relationship to overall course
themes.

Week 11

Part V: The Politics of Sustainability—Prof. Al Wurth (ahw1@lehigh.edu)

Mon. Mar. 31 Sustainable Development: The Environment and the Economy
Read:
Herman Daly, “The Economics of the Steady State” and “Sustainable Growth:
An Impossibility Theorem”—Excerpts available at:
<http://dieoff.org/page37.html>
Durning, Ch.4, “The Environmental Costs of Consumption”

Wed. Apr. 2	American Politics and Sustainability Read: Selected chapters from CEQ Reports; Brian Tokar, <i>Earth for Sale</i> , excerpts.
Fri. Apr. 4	Transportation Assessment Projects—Preliminary Progress Reports
Week 12	
Mon. Apr. 7	Pollution: Regulation and Prevention Read: Barry Commoner, <i>Making Peace with the Planet</i> , excerpts. Brian Tokar, “The Limits of Regulation,” <i>Earth for Sale</i> .
Wed. Apr. 9	Natural Capitalism? Sustainability and Markets Read: Durning, Ch. 8, “The Myth of Consume or Decline” Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and L. Hunter Lovins, <i>Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution</i> , Introduction, and Chapters 1 and 3. Available at: http://www.naturalcapitalism.org http://www.naturalcapitalism.org/images/other/Ncchapter1.pdf http://www.naturalcapitalism.org/images/other/Ncchapter3.pdf
Fri. Apr. 11	Overview discussion of section and relationship to overall course themes
Week 13	
Mon. Apr. 14	Second Exam
Wed. Apr. 16	Where do we go from Here? Prof. Friedman Green Consumerism Read: Durning, Ch. 10, “A Culture of Permanence”
Fri. Apr. 18	Team meetings to work on project presentations
Week 14	
Mon. Apr. 21- Fri. Apr 25.	Team Project Oral Presentations
Mon. Apr. 28	Final Written Transportation Assessment Reports Due— Prof. Friedman’s Office, 209 Coppee Hall
Mon. May 5	Final Essay Due—Prof. Friedman’s Office