

Environmental Studies 397C: Consumption and the Environment

Syllabus and Schedule - Summer 2006 Dr. Grace Wang

Welcome to ESTU 397C! For many years, I have wanted to lead a course on consumption-related issues and their connection to the environment. So this is the culmination of many years of thinking and reading. The goal of this course is to lead students in a discussion of consumer choices, particularly in the U.S., and how our choices affect the environment. Some of the things we'll consider in this class are:

1. How the typical American way of life contributes to environmental problems, and measuring environmental impacts of consumption.
2. The difference between *individual* consumptive behavior and larger entities such as corporations and governments.
3. The cultural dimension of consumption – do you really need that iPod?

My expectations for you, the students, are to be active learners and participants. This means keeping up with readings, and writing discussion questions, and most importantly, *think critically* about consumer choices in meaningful ways. This course is graded S/U to relieve you of any grading anxiety. To pass this course, you must be an engaged student, citizen, and consumer. I imagine many of the conversations will take on lives of their own. I am here to *guide* the process.

On nice days, we'll have class outside, so bring sunscreen and a hat. I recommend concurrent enrollment in ESTU 202, but it is not required. Many of the themes will overlap; however, this course will go much more in-depth than 202.

Required Textbooks

- *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic (2nd ed.)*. 2005. John De Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor. **REQUIRED**
- *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism (3rd ed.)*. 2005. Richard H. Robbins. **OPTIONAL**
- *The Consumer's Guide to Effective Environmental Choices: Practical Advice from the Union of Concerned Scientists*. 1999. Michael Brower & Warren Leon. **OPTIONAL**
- Other readings as posted on Blackboard

Schedule (dynamic)

Weekly assignment: prepare a discussion question for each set of readings.

Week	Topic	Assignments
1	Introduction - The Consumer Idea - <i>Affluenza</i> - What does Wal-Mart have to do with anything?	Washed Up Wallet and Grimace Ecological Footprint as our framework: jot down your scores (in both acres and planets)
2	- Are you guilty of being an overconsumer? - <i>Wal-Mart: the high cost of a low price</i>	Provide an example of a personal experience with "conspicuous consumption" Start to read <i>Affluenza</i> – I promise, it's an easy read
3	No class, but I'd like you to think about the "secret lives of stuff"	Readings TBA – check BB Keep a 24-hour log of your consumption: eating, drinking, wearing, driving, washing, living...what are we doing to ourselves?

		Could Wal-Mart actually be good for the environment?
4	Abbreviated make-up session (for those who can make it) 1:00-1:50 Location TBA	
5	Environmental impacts of consumption	Making Better Energy Choices In Defense of Consumerism Buying Nothing Helps No One Earth's impacts from consumerism
6	Personal values, local buying, ethical shopping, and national solutions - "Secret History of the Credit Card"	Ten Principles of Good Consumption
7	Is there hope?	Readings TBA – check BB