

**Dr. Psyche Williams-Forson**  
**AMST 450 – Senior Seminar in American Studies**  
**Social and Cultural Issues in Sustainable Consumption**  
**Fall 2010**

T/R 11:00 – 12:15

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Office Hours: Mon & Wed – 2:30 – 4:00 - **NOTE**: Always confirm your appt prior to meeting **and** please allow at least 36-hrs after emailing me to receive a response.

AMST 450 seminar is the capstone course for the major. It serves the needs of American Studies majors who plan to graduate by providing training in researching and integrating extensive primary and secondary texts in order to formulate a senior thesis. Students will pick a problem, collect data to establish the nature of the problem, and analyze the outcome(s) using the theories and methods of American Studies scholarship with emphasis upon cultural analysis and evaluation. Ultimately, students will write a 30-page paper (plus notes) on a topic chosen in collaboration with me. You will come as close as you can to being appropriately proficient for this level of study.

Except for the first couple of weeks, during which we will get an overview of the major issues, class meetings will combine working together in three different ways—meeting as a whole class, individually, and in small research groups. All of these meetings will be factored into your final grade. You will be assigned a research group according to your research topic and/or methodology. As students work on their own essays, they will also serve as peer editors for their classmates offering feedback on each other's work. This is an essential component of this course so feedback is expected to be constructive, civil, and honest.

Your grade for the course is further calculated on the basis of success in the following areas: meeting deadlines (i.e. completing assignments on the specified date), the originality and ingenuity in research, contributing to the learning process by serving as a peer editor, and the quality of the thesis itself. Because of time and assessment constraints, late work will receive a 0, and a missed submission deadline will result in a major loss of points towards your final grade. If you plagiarize, you will fail.

**Course Theme – Sustainable Consumption**

Often times the capstone course has a theme. This year's focus is "Sustainable Consumption." The issue is one of the most theoretically and practically complex questions of our times. Involving far more than simply turning off lights and recycling, the implications are overarching including how and what we produce and consume; how we treat the land, sea, air, and atmosphere; how we approach our health and well-being, and more. The challenge of sustainability is its profoundly crosscutting nature; none of these questions can be addressed without consideration of the others. The first several weeks of the course will be spent taking a brief yet mosaic approach to understanding this salient issue

The prevailing theoretical model of sustainability defines it as the intersection of the social, the environmental, and the economic or the “triple bottom line.” We will consider this but also take up another prevailing point of view, a fourth pillar—cultural vitality. The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001) states “...cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature”; it becomes “one of the roots of development understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence.” Furthermore, mainstream thinking sees environmental studies as the primary discipline for studying sustainability. However, a fourth pillar allows a wider range of disciplines to have a voice including American Studies, which allows for a more interdisciplinary undertaking contributing to a broader understanding of sustainability. Students will be expected to read all texts and be able to contribute to an ongoing discussion of how they understand the notion of "sustainability," and what, in the end, sustainability may mean to their research.

**Sustainable Consumption** - According to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, sustainable consumption means “consuming goods and services without harming the environment or society. Living a sustainable lifestyle is essential to overcoming poverty and conserving and protecting the natural resource base for all forms of life. ESD promotes responsible citizenship and fights against the social and resource impacts of unsustainable lifestyle consumption habits.” We will consider the merits of this definition during the course of the semester. <http://www.unesco.org/en/esd/themes/sustainable-consumption/>

Because most of us engage in some aspect of production and consumption in our daily lives, students in this semester’s course will be asked to include an aspect of sustainable consumption in their overall analysis.

**The Honor Code**

Honor code should be written at the end of all work turned in. This is especially critical given that your work requires original research.

**Special Needs**

If you have special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact me immediately.

Texts:

- Raimes. Keys for Writers. 5th ed.+ (Houghton Mifflin) or any text referencing writing.
- Durning and Ryan, *Stuff: The Secret Life of Everyday Things* (Northwest Environment)
- Parr, *Hijacking Sustainability* (MIT Press)
- All additional readings can be found on ELMS or through RESEARCHPORT

<b>Assignments and Grading</b>	
<b>**All Assignments will be uploaded to ELMS*</b>	
<b>10 pts for each assignment</b>	<b><u>Final Proposal:</u></b> Your proposal will be an explanation of what you will be writing your paper on. It should be two--pages (maximum) and double-spaced.
<b>Total (20)</b>	It must include:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your research question</li> <li>• Your thesis statement</li> <li>• What you will be exploring</li> <li>• Why you have chosen the texts that you have chosen</li> <li>• The possible significance of the paper you will be writing – what are you hoping to learn or convey?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Assignment #3 – Commodifying Experiences:</u></b> Spend an hour at a coffee shop, the mall, or some other center of consumption (your home) and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze the cultural and sociological phenomenon of consumption that you witness.</li> <li>• Write a 2-3 page analysis of what you see and experience, drawing on the readings thus far. If your proposed paper topic will tie into this experience, feel free to make preliminary comments in your analysis.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5 pts for each assignment</b></p> <p><b>Total (15)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><u>Annotated Bibliography:</u></b> Although your bibliography will contain more than ten scholarly sources, you will select ten of your BEST sources (which can and may include references to your theoretical approach) and discuss each one in approximately 6 to 8 sentences (see handout) evaluating the source and its relevance to your essay. DUE w/final proposal</li> <li>• <b><u>Essay Discussion:</u></b> You will lead disc on one of the assigned essays.</li> <li>• <b><u>Final paper presentation:</u></b> You will make a 15-minute presentation of the key findings in your paper. You can use PowerPoint presentations and/or visual aids.</li> </ul>
<p><b>25 pts 5 mtgs @ 5 pts each</b></p> <p><b>Total (25)</b></p>	<p><b><u>Writing Conferences:</u></b> Managing a big paper is a challenge. The weekly writing meeting is a critical part of keeping you on task as you develop and refine your argument. It’s also your best opportunity to hash out ideas, discover the strengths and weaknesses of your writing and make plans for revisions. In short, you will write and revise drafts, [four–five page segments if you prefer] submit them to your group prior to meetings, and show up for conferences. If you don’t show up or you consistently show up without an unchanged draft, this part of your grade will suffer AND you will lose the 5 pts. for “draft segments on time” (see below). And, I can almost guarantee that your final seminar paper grade will suffer too.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend all with work=A;</li> <li>• 1 absence=C; 2 or more absences=F.</li> </ul>
<p><b>40 pts</b></p>	<p><b><u>Final Seminar Paper:</u></b> This is the final, formal 25- to 30-page paper. Your paper must be thesis-driven, well researched, and well documented with scholarly material. It will have MLA parenthetical in-text citations</p>

	and a Works Cited page. Your writing must be clear, compelling, and error free. Leave yourself at least a week to edit and proofread your final draft.
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<b>Schedule – subject to change</b>
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**August**

T-31 Introduction – Identity Topics & Theories

**September****R - 2 Assignment #1 - Prelim Paper Topic Due**

Introduction to Consumption and Society

- Reading due for class: Consumer Culture Theory - <http://www.consumerculturetheory.org/>
- Reading due for class: Belk, “Materialism: Traits Aspects of Living in the Material World.” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12, 3, 265-280.
- Reading due for class: “Consumer Culture and Post-Modernism,” Featherstone (ELMS)

**T - 7 Assignment#2 - Paper Topic, Prelim Thesis, & Draft Proposal DUE**

Reading about “Stuff”

- Reading due for class: Doing Research and Writing a Thesis (ELMS)
- Reading due for class: Glickman, “The Ism that Won the Century” (ELMS)
- Reading due for class: “Prologue” thru “Computer” (*Stuff*)

**R - 9 Assignment#3 – Commodifying Experiences**

Intro to Cultural Criticism

- Due for class: Smith and Murfin, “What is Cultural Criticism?” (ELMS)
- Due for class: “Hamburger” thru “Conclusion” (*Stuff*)

**T - 14 Final thesis DUE on ELMS by 10:00 a.m.**

Interactive class activities - you will need to bring your style manual to class

- Writing a Bibliography and/or Works Cited
- Formatting and Style Guides - MLA/APA/Chicago (ELMS)

**R - 16 Consuming Goods**

- Due for class: Campbell, “Consuming Goods and the Good of Consuming,” (ELMS)
- Due for class: Ilmonen, “The Use of and Commitment to Goods,” JCoCulture, Mar 2004.4

**T - 21 Assignment#4 – Draft Annotated Bibliography of Topic (5 annotations)**

Gender, Race, Class, Body, Sexuality, Age, and Consumption  
(All readings can be found in the *Journal of Consumer Culture*)

- Due for class: Thompson & Holt, “How Do Men Grab the Phallus? Nov 2004.4
- Due for class: Crockett, “Marketing Blackness,” Jul 2008. 8
- Due for class: Cook & Kaiser, “Betwixt and be Tween,” Jul 2004.4

- Due for class: Elizabeth Chin, “The Consumer Diaries,” Nov 2007. 7
- Due for class: Blogspot – “Is Sustainable Fashion an Oxymoron? - <http://www.sustainablefashionshow.com/>

### Thinking about Sustainability

#### R - 23 **Thinking About Issues of Sustainability**

- Due for class: “Defining Sustainability” (ELMS)
- Due for class: “Sustainability,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainability>
- Due for class: “Sus Consumption: Facts and Trends, A Business Perspective” (ELMS)
- Due for Class: #9 – Consumer Education (Read all the sections under “Activities” [http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme\\_b/uncofrm\\_b.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme_b/uncofrm_b.htm)

#### T - 28 **What is Sustainable Consumption?**

- Due for class: Review Activity#6 – “What is Sustainable Consumption?” – Definitions and Concepts  
[http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme\\_b/uncofrm\\_b.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme_b/uncofrm_b.htm)
- Due for class: Sus Consumption: Young Australians as Agents of Change (ELMS)
- Due in class: Parr, *Hijacking Sustainability* – “The Popularization of Sustainability Culture”

#### R - 30 **Sustainable Presentations (See ELMS) for reading links**

[http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme\\_c/uncofrm\\_c.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme_c/uncofrm_c.htm)

- Culture and Religion for a Sustainable Future
- Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainability
- Women and Sustainable Development
- Sustainable Agriculture

### **October**

#### T – 5 **Sustainable Presentation continued**

[http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme\\_c/uncofrm\\_c.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme_c/uncofrm_c.htm)

- Population and Development
- Understanding World Hunger
- Sustainable Tourism
- Sustainable Communities

#### R - 7 **Final Proposal DUE w/ Annotated bibliography (no less than 10 annotations)**

- Due in class: The art of Peer Review
- Due in class: Parr, *Hijacking Sustainability* - “Challenges to Sustainability Culture”

### 15 Min Individual Meetings

- 15 min. Individual Meetings. Preliminary research questions defined by this meeting.
- (See sign-up sheet – 11:00 – 12:15 on Tuesday, 11:00 – 2:00 on Thursday)
- Our meeting needs to take place at the same time each week – Tuesday or Thursday

### **Peer Review/Research group meetings**

- Writing for all conferences is due before you are scheduled to meet with your group and the day you meet with me.
- Your group meeting should take place in lieu of our regular class meeting time.

T - 12 15 min. Individual Meetings. [pp. 1-5] or Research group meetings

R - 14 15 min. Individual Meetings. [pp. 1-5] or Research group meetings

T - 19 15 min. Individual Meetings. [pp. 6-11] or Research group meetings

R - 21 15 min. Individual Meetings. [pp. 6-11] or Research group meetings

T - 26 15 min. Individual Meetings. [pp. 12-17] or Research group meetings

R - 28 15 min. Individual Meetings. [pp. 12-17] or Research group meetings

### **November**

T - 2 15 min. Individual Meetings. [pp. 18-25] or Research group meetings

You have an “almost complete draft” but it’s far from ready. You should be pretty much covering the argument in its entirety but I expect that your final project to look very different from this. Still lots of gaps and problems.

R - 4 15 min. Individual Meetings. [pp. 18-25] or Research group meetings

T - 9 15 min. Individual Meetings. [pp. 26-30] or Research group meetings

Your paper should be nearly complete. We’ll use this meeting to discuss issues remaining with your paper.

R - 11 15 min. Individual Meetings. [pp. 26-30] or Research group meetings

T - 16 Individual Presentation Preparation Meeting

R - 18 Individual Presentation Preparation Meeting

T - 23 Reconvene in Holzapfel 1108

R - 25 [Thanksgiving Holiday]

T - 30 [No class – use this time for prepare your final presentation]

### **December**

R - 2 Oral presentations – 15 minute summary of research results/field questions

T - 7 Oral presentations – 15 minute summary of research results/field questions

R - 9 Oral presentations – 15 minute summary of research results/field questions

Final Paper and Critiques of Oral Presentations - DUE