

223.28 • Consumer Culture and Voluntary Simplicity (3 hrs.)

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Providence College

Fall Session, 2009

Mondays 2:00 & Thursdays 8:30

Classroom 2

SYLLABUS

A. Catalogue Description of the Course

This course first examines various aspects of the current cultural ethos of “conspicuous consumption.” It then examines the theory and practice of voluntary simplicity as a search for alternative values and “living well”. Attention will be given to particular ways of fostering emotional-spiritual well-being, vibrant community, sustainable environment, and social justice.

B. Purpose of the Course

Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. identify and summarize salient aspects of consumer culture and conspicuous consumption
 2. recognize the historicity of simplicity as a philosophical and lived choice
 3. articulate the multiple motivating factors which contribute to individual and collective simplicity choices
 4. describe the relative merit and viability of simplicity life-style choices, and its relationship to social justice
 5. understand the various spiritual perspectives which inform and are formed by belief in simplicity as a lived commitment
 6. recognize the potential for alternatives to consumer culture offered by voluntary simplicity
 7. make informed decisions about their own potential simplicity life-style choices
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Note re. Syllabus:

It is the student’s responsibility to retain their course syllabi for use as support for possible future applications to other educational institutions for transfer of credit.

C. Texts

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Burch, Mark A. 2000. *Stepping Lightly: Simplicity for People and the Planet*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.

Elgin, Duane. 1993. *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life That is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich*. (Revised Edition) New York, N.Y.: William Morrow and Company.

D. Course Requirements

1. Annotated Articles and Summary Paragraphs (17 x 2%) 34%
Due Date: At the end of each class

For each assigned reading the student is required to

- i) provide an annotated copy of the reading for use in class discussion
Annotate – “to make or furnish critical or explanatory notes or comments”
Merriam-webster
- ii) write a concise summary of the reading
Length Guidelines: 1 - 5 pages 50 words
6 - 10 pages 100 words
11 - 20 pages 150 words
21 - 30 pages 200 words
31 or more pages 250 words
(single spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt. Font)
- iii) **answer the question, “What practical/applied response could I meaningfully “do”, in light of this information?”**
- iv) participate fully in class discussion
- v) submit both the annotated copy and summary/response to the instructor at the end of class

Note: With the exception of the course texts (Burch and Elgin) all assigned readings are available as PDF documents on your student Blackbaud class portal under “Shared Documents”.

2. Discussion Leadership 11% **Due Date: Date of assigned discussion**

Each student will be asked to select a class period during the semester in which you will lead your classmates in a discussion of the assigned topic and readings. The entire class period will be given to your leadership. This includes the following:

- 1) You should come prepared with a 2 page typed outline and summary of the reading, including discussion questions to be used to generate class discussion.
- 2) Bringing additional resources on the topic to the class is recommended.
- 3) After introducing the topic to the class, your role is to draw out and guide discussion, ending the period with an oral summary that pulls together both what you have written prior to the class period as well as what your classmates have said during the period. The format of the discussion should be divided into ‘around the table’ discussion, and free-ranging discussion.

Sign-up for discussion leadership will be determined in the first class.

3. Adbuster Spoofad Analysis 5%

Due Date: Oct. 5th

Choose one of the spoofads from the Adbusters website (<https://www.adbusters.org/gallery/spoofads>) and write a 1½ - 2 page analysis of it. Your analysis should

- i) provide any relevant background information about the product, ad, or ad campaign that provides insight to your analysis
- ii) explore and explain the satire being employed
- iii) your assessment of its relative effectiveness
- iv) include a hard copy of the ad when submitting the assignment
(double spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt. Font)

4. Book Review 10%

Due Date: Nov. 5th

Write an informal, personal assessment of Duane Elgin’s classic of the simplicity movement, *Voluntary Simplicity; Toward A Way Of Life that is Outwardly Simple and Inwardly Rich* (4-5 pages, double-spaced, 12 point font). Your reaction should **not** outline the contents of the book, but rather should discuss what you found most interesting or provocative and what thoughts of your own it stimulated. What do you think of his ideas? What effects do they have on your thinking? Your response should demonstrate your ability to interact critically with the material, identifying its strengths and weaknesses while bringing fresh observations or applications to it.

5. Research Paper and Presentation (20% + 10%) 30%

Research Paper 20%

Due Date: Nov. 23rd

Write a research paper (8-10 pages, double-spaced, 12 point font) on any course-related topic of your choice, using a formal style of writing (i.e. 3rd person, etc.)

and a social scientific style of documentation (see Section G of this syllabus, “The Bare Basics of ASA Documentation”). As a general guideline, you should have approximately the same number of references as there are pages to your paper, and no more than half of the references may be from internet sources other than on-line academic journals, government agencies, or credible public organizations. Your paper should demonstrate that you have done independent research and reading beyond the assigned readings, that you have thought carefully and/or reorganized your topic in an original manner, and that you can express yourself in writing clearly and effectively. It will be graded on the quality of its content, rhetoric, and technical competence.

Class Presentation 10%

Due Date: Nov. 30th, Dec. 3rd (in alphabetical order)

Present a 7 - 8 minute report of your research to the class. This should include:

- i) a full power point presentation
- ii) a set of presentation notes to be handed in to the instructor right after your presentation. DO NOT read your paper to the class.

NOTE: DO NOT go over your 8 minute limit. Marks will be deducted for going over the time limit.

6. Final Exam 10%

The final exam will be a combination of short answer and essay questions.

E. Grading Summary

1. Grade Components

| | |
|--|-----|
| 1. Annotated articles, summary paragraph, and class participation (17 x 2%) | 34% |
| 2. Class Discussion Leadership | 11% |
| 3. Adbuster Spoofad Analysis | 5% |
| 4. Book Review of Elgin | 10% |
| 5. Research Paper and Class Presentation (20% + 10%) | 30% |
| 6. Final Exam | 10% |

Note: The last date for **Voluntary Withdrawal** from this course is Friday, **Nov. 13**

2. Grading Scale

Final course letter grades and their Grade Point equivalents will be calculated using the following scale:

| <i>Percent</i> | <i>G.P.</i> | <i>Quality</i> | <i>Percent</i> | <i>G.P.</i> | <i>Quality</i> |
|----------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|
| 91 – 99 = A+ | 4.0 | Exceptional | 67 – 69 = C+ | 2.5 | Satisfactory |
| 85 – 90 = A | | Excellent | 63 – 66 = C | 2.0 | Adequate |
| 80 – 84 = A- | | | 60 – 62 = C- | | |
| 77 – 79 = B+ | 3.5 | Superior | 57 – 59 = D+ | 1.0 | Marginal |
| 73 – 76 = B | 3.0 | Good | 53 – 56 = D | | Poor |
| 70 – 72 = B- | | | 50 – 52 = D- | | |
| | | | < 50 = F | 0.0 | Failure |

F. Course Policies

In addition to the policies outlined in the *Student Handbook*, the complete academic policies, procedures, and regulations of Providence College can be found online (http://prov.ca/college/ac_pol-proc-reg.aspx), or in the Library, Admissions Office, or Dean's Office.

1. Plagiarism

Students are expected to demonstrate academic integrity in all its various forms, and will be held accountable for doing so by the policy on Academic Conduct in the Student Handbook (<http://prov.ca/studentLife/handbook.aspx>). One particularly problematic breach of academic integrity is plagiarism, which is stealing from the ideas and writings of another person and passing them off as one's own. For an elaboration of the nature, types, and prevention of plagiarism, see the Providence College document entitled "Academic Dishonesty: The Problem of Plagiarism in Academic Writing," in the Providence College Academic Formation Guide available in the Providence Bookstore, or in the Providence College "Academic Policies, Procedures, and Regulations" (http://prov.ca/college/ac_pol-proc-reg.aspx). Plagiarism will result in either failure of the assignment, or failure of the course. In short, don't.

2. Late Assignments

Late assignments will not be accepted after their due date, and will receive a grade of zero for that component of the course. The instructor will *not* receive requests for extensions. If you feel an extension is warranted, attach a cover letter

to your assignment when you hand it in, explaining why it is late, and a decision will be made by the instructor when your paper is graded. A waiving of the zero grade will be granted only in the cases of personal or medical emergencies as detailed in the cover letter. Computer problems, conflicts with co-curricular activities, competition for library resources, and/or long weekends before or after due dates do not constitute such emergencies. Failure to plan ahead, or to maintain a margin of time for unforeseen events prior to the due date, does not warrant an extension either.

G. The Bare Basics of American Sociological Association (ASA) Documentation

For the complete ASA Quick Style Guide for students writing sociology papers, see <http://www.asanet.org/page.wv?name=Quick+Style+Guide§ion=Sociology+Depts>

1. In-text Citations

a) For ideas or information contained in a sentence:

Basic Format:

This is what you should do at the end of the sentence (Author Year-of-Publication).

Example:

This is what you should do at the end of the sentence (Smith 2008).

Basic Format:

According to Author (Year-of-Publication), this is what you should do in the middle of a sentence.

Example:

According to Smith (2008), this is what you should do in the middle of a sentence.

b) For direct quotations contained in a sentence:

Basic Format:

This is what you should do for a quotation “at the end of the sentence” (Author Year:page#).

Example:

This is what you should do for a quotation “at the end of the sentence” (Smith 2008:35).

Basic Format:

For a quotation “in the middle of a sentence” (Author Year:page#), this is what you should do.

Example:

For a quotation “in the middle of a sentence” (Smith 2008:35), this is what

you should do.

2. Notes

ASA format does **not** use footnotes at the bottom of the page where a reference occurs. Endnotes numbered consecutively at the end of the whole document are permissible for material that explains or amplifies the main text.

3. References

Full bibliographic information for all citations in the text must appear at the end of the essay in alphabetical order under the centered title of “References” as follows:

a) Books:

Basic Format:

Last Name, First Name and Second Initial. Year. *Title Italicized and in Title Case*. City: Publisher.

Example:

Smith, John Q. 2008. *How to Document a Paper: The ASA Style*. Toronto: Academic Publishers.

b) Edited books, and editions other than the first:

Basic Format:

Last Name, First Name and Second Initial., Editor. Year. *Title Italicized and in Title Case*. Edition. City: Publisher.

Example:

Smith, John Q., ed. 2008. *How to Document a Paper: The ASA Style*. 5th ed. Toronto: Academic Publishers.

c) Journal articles:

Basic Format:

Last Name, First Name and Second Initial. Year. “Title of the Article in Title Case and Quotations.” *Title of the Journal in Title Case and Italicized* Volume Number:Pages.

Example:

Smith, John Q. 2008. “How to Document in ASA Format.” *Journal of Documentation Styles* 27:44-51.

d) Articles from edited collected works:

Basic Format:

Last Name, First Name and Second Initial. Year. “Title of the Article in Title Case and Quotations.” Pages xx-yy in *Title of the Book in Title Case and Italicized* (edition), edited by First and Last Name.

City: Publisher.

Example:

Smith, John Q. 2008. "How to Document in ASA Format." Pp. 65-76 in *A Comparison of Documentation Styles* 3rd ed., edited by Jane X. Doe. New York: Scholar's Press.

e) Internet sites:

Basic Format:

Last Name, First Name and Second Initial. Publication or update date.
"Title in Title Case and Quotations," Access date. Internet address.

Example:

Smith, John Q. 2008. "A Quick Style Guide for Students Writing Sociology Papers." Washington, DC: American Sociological Association, Retrieved July 1, 2008.
<http://www.asanet.org/page.wv?name=Quick+Style+Guide§ion=Sociology+Depts>

H. Class Schedule

The readings appearing below each class topic are to be read in conjunction with that class, and assignments submitted on the due dates listed.

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Topic and Readings</u> |
|-------------|---|
| Sept. 10 | Orientation to the Course |
| Sept. 14 | Lecture: Consumer Culture and Voluntary Simplicity – an Overview Rowe, Stan. 2006. "A Cautionary Fable" Pp. 24 – 27 in <i>Earth alive; Essays on Ecology</i> . Edmonton: Newest Press. (class handout) |

PART I: CONSUMER CULTURE

| | |
|----------|---|
| Sept. 17 | The Psychology of Consumption (40 pgs) Berger, Arthur Asa. 2005. Chapter 3 "The Act of Consumption." Pp. 45-68 in <i>Shop 'til you Drop; consumer behavior and American culture</i> . Toronto: Rowman Y Littlefield Publishers, Inc. |
|----------|---|

Berry, Wendell. 1993. "The Joys of Sales of Resistance" Pp. xi – xxii in *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Sept. 21 Children/Youth and Consumption (38 pgs.)

Linn, Susan. 2004. Chp. 1 "Notes from the Underground" Pp. 11 – 30 and Chp. 5 "Students for Sale" Pp. 75 – 93 in *Consuming Kids; The Hostile Takeover of Childhood*. New York: The New Press.

Sept. 24 Religion and Consumption (47 pgs.)

Miller, Vincent J. 2005. "Introduction" Pp. 1 – 13 in *Consuming Religion; Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture*. New York: Continuum.

Clapp, Rodney. 1997. "The Theology of Consumption and the Consumption of Theology" Pp. 169 – 204 in *The consuming Passion; Christianity and the Consumer culture*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press.

Sept. 28 Anti-Consumption For Sale (32 pgs.)

Heath, Joseph and Andrew Potter. 2005. "Introduction" Pp. 1 – 9 and Chp 1 "The Birth of Counterculture" Pp. 13 – 35 in *The Rebel Sell; Why the Culture can't be Jammed*. Toronto: Harper Perennial.

McCracken, Brett. 2009. "Introducing the Poorgeoisie." In *Conversant Life*. July 23, 2009.

Oct. 1 Video: Culture Jam; Hijacking Commercial Culture

PART II: VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY

Oct. 5 What is Voluntary Simplicity? (38 pgs)

Burch, Mark. 2000. Pp. 1 – 38 in *Stepping Lightly: Simplicity for People and the Planet*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.

Adbuster Spooftad Due

Oct. 8 What is Voluntary Simplicity? (cont.) (30 pgs)

Deirdre, Shaw and Terry Newholm. "Voluntary simplicity and the ethics of consumption" in *Psychology & Marketing*. Feb. 2002: vol 19.

Zavestoski, Stephen. "The social-psychological bases of anticonsumption attitudes" in *Psychology & Marketing*. Feb. 2002: vol 19.

Oct. 12 Thanksgiving (classes cancelled)

Oct. 15 History of Simplicity (35 pgs)

Shi, David. 2008. "Transcendent Simplicity" Pp. 123-138 in *Voluntary Simplicity; The Poetic Alternative to Consumer Culture*. Simplicity Poets Collective.

Whitmire, Catherine. 2001. Chp. 1 "Keeping to Plainness" Pp. 20 - 27 in *Plain Living: A Quaker Path to Simplicity*. Notre Dame: Sorin Books.

Wikipedia. "Testimony of Simplicity"

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Testimony_of_Simplicity

Sager, Gene C. 2003. "Asian Simplicity Pp. 16 – 20 in *Natural Life Magazine*. March/April 2003.

Bender, Harold S., Nanne van der Zijpp and Cornelius Krahn. 2009. "Simplicity (1958)." In *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*.

Elgin, Duane. 1993. Pp. 46 – 53 in *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life that is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich*. (Revised Edition) New York: William Morrow and Company.

Oct. 19 Food Democracy (39 pgs.)

Jung, L. Shannon. 2004. "Global Food Disorder" Pp. 75 – 92 in *Food for Life; the spirituality and ethics of eating*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Kroeker, Stephanie, Marie Raynard and Alexandra Smith. 2008. "Meaty Issues:

What's at Steak? Presentation at *Creation Care* Conference, Providence College, May 2008.

Berry, Wendell. 1999. "The Pleasures of Eating" Pp. 145 – 152 in *WHAT ARE People FOR?*. New York: North Point Press.

Oct. 22 Lecture Series (classes cancelled)

Oct. 26 Earth Care (31 pgs.)

Burch, Mark. 2000. "Simplicity and the Environment" Pp. 77 – 89 in *Stepping Lightly: Simplicity for People and the Planet*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.

Berry, Wendell. 1993. "Conservation and Local Economy" Pp. 3 – 18 in *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Whitmire, Catherine. 2001. "Listening to the Earth" Pp. 171 - 174 in *Plain Living: A Quaker Path to Simplicity*. Notre Dame: Sorin Books.

Oct. 29 Earth Care (cont.) (34 pgs.)

Bouma-Prediger, Steven. 2001. "Where are we?" Pp. 19-24, 36-38, "Is Christianity to Blame?" Pp. 67 - 86, and "Wherein Lies Hope?" Pp. 181 – 187 in *For the Beauty of the Earth; a Christian vision for creation care*.

Nov. 2 The Slow Movement (41 pgs.)

Burch, Mark. 2000. "Simplicity, Time, and Money" Pp. 125 – 136 in *Stepping Lightly: Simplicity for People and the Planet*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.

Honore, Carl. 2004. "Do Everything Faster" Pp. 19 – 36 in *In Praise of Slow; How a Worldwide movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed*. Canada: Vintage Canada.

Andrews, Cecile. 2006. "Toward a Philosophy of Slow" Pp. 1 – 12 in *Slow is Beautiful; New Visions of Community, Leisure and Joie de vivre*. Gabriola

Island: New Society Publishers.

Nov. 5 Re-valuing Community (45 pgs.)

Andrews, Cecile. 2006. "Slow Together: Exuberant Community" Pp. 163 – 195 in *Slow is Beautiful; New Visions of Community, Leisure, and Joie de vivre*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.

Burch, Mark. 2000. "Simplicity, Family, and Community" Pp. 63 – 76 in *Stepping Lightly: Simplicity for People and the Planet*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.

Book Review Due

**Nov. 9 Guest Presenter Lindsay Harris:
 Wendell Berry and the new agrarianism**

Nov. 12 Simplicity and Spirituality (32 pgs.)

Burch, Mark. 2000. "Simplicity and Spirituality" Pp. 91 - 99 and "Cultivating Mindfulness" Pp. 103 - 110 in *Stepping Lightly: Simplicity for People and the Planet*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.

Foster, Richard J. 1977. "The Complexity of Simplicity" Pp. 3 – 14 in *Freedom of Simplicity*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers.

Nov. 19 Faculty Forum (classes cancelled)

**Nov. 23 Guest Presenter Dennis Hiebert:
 Sociology, Christianity, and Social Justice**

Research Paper Due

Nov. 26 Christianity, Simplicity, and Social Justice (33 pgs.)

Foster, Richard J. 1977. "The Biblical Roots: The New Covenant" Pp. 33 – 51 in *Freedom of Simplicity*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers.

Burch, Mark. 2000. "Simplicity and Equity" Pp. 171 - 178 and "Writing

a New Story” Pp. 181 - 184 in *Stepping Lightly: Simplicity for People and the Planet*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.

Nov. 30 **Student Presentations**

Dec. 3 **Student Presentations**

Dec. 7 **Guest Presenter Mark Burch: *The Journey of Simplicity***

Dec. 10 **Gathering Together**

Each student is asked to provide a ‘snack’ for the class that in some way acknowledges the concerns of food democracy. We will eat and discuss together.

Dec. 14 **Exam** (Monday, 2:00 – 4:00)