

**University of British Columbia - Soci 342-003 - Consumers and
Consumption
Fall 2014 - Course Outline
<https://sites.google.com/site/soci342/>**

Instructor

Dr. Evan Keith Preston [kpreston@mail.ubc.ca]

Classes

Monday, Wednesday and Friday - 12:00-13:00. Room - BUCH B313

Office Time

By appointment

Overview and Learning Outcomes

While consumption is part of the human condition it is often claimed that, because the nature and significance of consumption in contemporary advanced capitalist societies is so different from consumption of the past or in other societies, we now live in a *consumer society*. In such a society we are encouraged to consume and to consider ourselves and others to be *consumers*. This course introduces and assesses a number of concepts that have been used in sociology to make sense of the causes, characteristics and consequences of being consumers and engaging in consumption. We will also consider the impact such concepts have had on the study of society and on the possibilities for changing society. Issues such as production, commodification, alienation, ideology, desire, identity... will be examined in connection with consumption. An acquaintance with concepts that encourage us to think critically about the social world will potentially also encourage us to change it for the better.

Learning Objectives

After completing this course students will be able to: outline the characteristics of contemporary consumption; outline the traditional sociological critiques of consumption; outline the major cultural analyses of consumption; explain the relationship between individual agency and consumption; explain the relationship between structural context and consumption; explain the relationship between identity and consumption; assess arguments about the future of consumers and consumption.

Course Organization

The course will be based on a close reading of the required text and organized as a mix of individual directed study, lectures, and in-class individual and group activities. Through individual directed study students will read required and recommended course material. Lectures will provide disciplinary and social context for this material and introduce concepts and examples relevant to, but not included in, the material. Ongoing in-class individual and group activities such as quizzes, discussions, informal presentations, video viewing, problem solving... will reinforce and assess understanding of both reading and lecture material.

Required and Recommended Reading

The required reading for the course is from: Dunn, Robert G. *Identifying Consumption: Subjects and Objects in Consumer Society*. Philadelphia PA: Temple University Press. [**This text is available as a download from Project Muse via the library**] Throughout the course the instructor will recommend reading material available in the library.

Grading

The grade for the course will be determined by performance on: **2 in-class tests; a library research essay; and a final exam.**

Test 1 is worth 20% of the course grade. Test 2 is worth 20% of the course grade. The essay is worth 30% of the course grade. The exam is worth 30% of the course grade.

Test 1 - This will be held in the last class of week 4. It will consist of objective [multiple-choice and true/false] questions based on reading and class [lecture, video, class discussion...] material from weeks 1-4. **Test 2** - This will be held in the last class of week 8. It will consist of objective [multiple-choice and true/false] questions based on reading and class [lecture, video, class discussion...] material from weeks 5-8. **Exam** - This will be held in the formal exam period. It will consist of 5 short-answer questions - 3 of which must be answered using no more than 250 words per answer - based on reading and class [lecture, video, class discussion...] material from weeks 9-13. **Essay** - Essay topics will be made available after week 4 and a 750 word essay referencing the course text and 3 contemporary [>2010] academic journal articles can be submitted at any time before the end of week 12.

Grades

An 'A' grade [80%-84% = A-, 85%-89% = A, 90%-100% = A+] will be

awarded for exceptional performance.

A 'B' grade [68%-71% = B-, 72%-75% = B, 76%-79% = B+] will be awarded for competent performance.

A 'C' grade [55%-59% = C-, 60%-63% = C, 64%-67% = C+] will be awarded for adequate performance.

A 'D' grade [50%-54%] will be awarded for just-adequate performance.

An 'F' grade [0%-49%] will be awarded for an inadequate performance.

Academic Integrity - please be familiar with University policies on this.

Marking Criteria for Responses to Short-answer Questions

Appearance - name and student number; legibility; organization; consistent formatting; double-spacing; numbered pages; word count; clean paper. *Breadth* - inclusion of context [academic] and key points. *Clarity* - correct disciplinary terminology used; meaning of sentences clear; correct grammar, spelling and punctuation; logical arrangement of points.

Marking Criteria for Responses to Essay Questions

Appearance - name and student number; legibility; organization; consistent formatting; double-spacing; numbered pages; word count; clean paper. *Breadth* - inclusion of context [academic and social], key, example and critical points. *Clarity* - correct disciplinary terminology used; meaning of sentences clear; correct grammar, spelling and punctuation; logical arrangement of points. *Documentation* - correct Social Science Style [as used in the *Canadian Review of Sociology*] use and acknowledgement of paraphrases, quotes, citations and references.

Topics

Week 1 & 2 - Introduction: the main issues. Defining consumption. Consumption studies. Consumerism. Modern and postmodern critiques of consumption. Consumption and subjectivity. A synthesis of critical and cultural theory. *Reading - text chapter 1 and class notes.*

Weeks 3 & 4 - Critiques of consumption. Alienation and commodity fetishism. Reification. Domination. Emulation and status seeking. Hedonism. Social control. Narcissism. *Reading - text chapter 2 and class notes.*

Weeks 5 & 6 - Linguistic, cultural and performative turns in sociology. Semiotics and consumption. Anthropological functionalism. Consumption

and class. Cultural studies. The significance of symbols. Performance and consumption. *Reading - text chapter 3 and class notes.*

Weeks 7 & 8 - The importance of economic context. Status and consumption. Lifestyle and consumption. Style and fashion. Identity and postmodern consumer capitalism. *Reading - text chapter 4 and class notes.*

Weeks 9 & 10 - The issue of identity. Modern and postmodern conceptions of identity. Social constructionism and identity. Rethinking identity and consumption. *Reading - text chapter 5 and class notes.*

Weeks 11 & 12 - Consumers and consumption. Avoiding reductionism and determinism. Connecting the project of the self to the rise of consumer culture. Commodities or objects. Aesthetics. *Reading - text conclusion and class notes.*

Week 13 - The consequences of consumption. Commodification. Environmental security. *Reading - text conclusion and class notes.*
