[OVERVIEW]

Why do we buy what we do? And what do our purchases say about us? Consumption encompasses more than an autonomous, isolated act of swiping a credit card to make a purchase. Rather, it is a central part of life that shapes identity, social status and social relations and impacts how social categories such as gender, class, race and sexuality are experienced. While consumption is the practical acquisition of goods and services, it also serves as a marker for one’s social standing. Likewise, social position can dictate consumption habits. And together, consumption and social position shape what we call “lifestyle.” As economists argue, consumer behavior is supposedly based on the agentic actor, free in both will and economic spirit. For the consumers of a democratic capitalist state, however, the power bestowed upon a “sovereign consumer” is inflated, obscuring the level of social control, creating an illusion of consumer choice as democracy. In this course, we will examine how consumption, lifestyle and taste come together to operate as a site of class difference and social reproduction.

[REQUIREMENTS]

CLASS PARTICIPATION + ATTENDANCE (15%)

Your active and engaged participation in class sessions is essential. All students are expected to be active, attentive, and respectful members of the class and to participate in class discussions and activities. This means coming to class prepared, having done all the reading, and ready to discuss and apply the materials. Attendance is mandatory, and I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. (NOTE: If you arrive more than 15 minutes late to class, you will be marked absent for that class.) You are allowed TWO unexcused absences, after which I will lower your participation grade by 3% per unexcused absence. I will excuse an absence if it has been discussed with me in advance. (NOTE: This does not mean emailing me right before class to inform me you will not be coming to class.) Whenever you miss a class, and for whatever reason, it is YOUR responsibility to catch up on the material that we covered.
ASSIGNMENTS (30%)
There will be three short writing assignments (750-1,000 words) over the course of the semester. Each is worth 10% of your grade.

- Assignment 1 — due Friday, October 6
- Assignment 2 — due Friday, November 10
- Assignment 3 — due Friday, December 1

EXAMS (55%)
Both the midterm and the final will be take-home essay exams. You will receive the questions a week before they are due.

- Mid-term exam (20%) — due Sunday, October 22
- Final exam (35%) — due Friday, December 22 (by end of exam period)

Paper Formatting: All written work should be single spaced, in 12pt. Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins. Please include a word count as well.

Paper Submitting: All papers must be submitted electronically on Moodle as a Word doc (no PDFs).

Late Papers: Unless previous accommodations have been made, late papers will be lowered by 3% for each day late.

REQUIRED TEXTS
All readings will be available as PDFs on Moodle.

ACCOMMODATION
Haverford College is committed to supporting the learning process for all students. Please contact me as soon as possible if you are having difficulties in the course. There are also many resources on campus including the Office of Academic Resources (https://www.haverford.edu/oar/) and the Office of Access and Disabilities Services (https://www.haverford.edu/ads/). If you think you may need accommodations because of a disability, please contact Sherrie Borowsky, Coordinator of Accommodations, Office of Access and Disability Services at hc-ads@haverford.edu. If you have already been approved to receive academic accommodations and would like to request accommodations in this course because of a disability, please meet with me privately at the beginning of the semester (within the first two weeks if possible) with your verification letter.

[COURSE SCHEDULE]

PART I: INTRODUCTION

WEEK ONE: Introduction

Wednesday, September 6 — Course Introduction

- No readings
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK TWO: Why Sociology? Why Consumption?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monday, September 11 — Thinking Sociologically</strong></td>
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| **Wednesday, September 13 — Introduction to Consumer Society** |

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<tr>
<th><strong>WEEK THREE: Historicizing Consumption</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Monday, September 18 — Capitalism and The Consumer Revolution</strong></td>
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| **Wednesday, September 20 — The Cultural Production of Economic Value** |

| **PART II: SOCIAL THEORY AND CONSUMPTION** |

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<th><strong>WEEK FOUR: Capitalist Modernity and the Culture of Commodities</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Monday, September 25 — Production and Consumption under Capitalism / Labor as Commodity</strong></td>
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| **Wednesday, September 27 — Consumers, Markets, and Ideology** |

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>WEEK FIVE: The Means of Consumption</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Monday, October 2 — Shift in the Means of Consumption</strong></td>
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</table>
Wednesday, October 4 — Shift in the Means of Consumption

*** Friday, October 6 — Assignment #1 DUE ***

WEEK SIX: Consumer Needs

Monday, October 9 — The Uses of Goods

Wednesday, October 11 — Manufacturing Needs

WEEK SEVEN (October 16 & 18) — NO CLASS! (Fall Break)

*** Sunday, October 22 — Midterm Exam DUE ***

PART III: CONSUMPTION AND CLASS

WEEK EIGHT: Economic Class, Social Status, and Stratification

Monday, October 23 — The Leisure Class

Wednesday, October 25 — Consumption as Status Display

WEEK NINE: Taste as a Critical Concept

Monday, October 30 — Distinction, Cultural Capital, and Habitus
Wednesday, November 1 — Cultural Capital in Action


WEEK TEN: Taste and Cultural Boundaries

Monday, November 6 — Taste and Cultural Boundaries


Wednesday, November 8 — Distinction through Cultural Consumption


*** Friday, November 10 — Assignment #2 DUE ***

WEEK ELEVEN: Reproducing Difference / Today’s Leisure Class

Monday, November 13 — Levels of Taste


Wednesday, November 15 — Inconspicuous Consumption and the New Elites


PART III: CONSUMPTION AND IDENTITY

WEEK TWELVE: Gender, Race, and Consumption

Monday, November 20 — Making Female Consumers

Wednesday, November 22 — Identity in Advertising

*** Friday, December 1 — Assignment #3 DUE ***

### WEEK THIRTEEN: Lifestyle, Authenticity, and Gentrification

Monday, December 4 — Consuming the City

Wednesday, December 6 — Destination Culture and the Crisis of Authenticity

### WEEK FOURTEEN: Consuming Emotions / Services

Monday, November 27 — Emotion as Commodity

Wednesday, November 29 — Emotion as Commodity

### WEEK FIFTEEN: Course Conclusions / Consumption Today…

Monday, December 11 — Waste vs. Sustainable Consumption?
- TBD

Wednesday, December 13 — Consumer Empowerment
- TBD

*** Friday, December 22 — Final Exam DUE ***