

Simplicity and Sustainability

Social Science 220, Section A, TR 1:00pm-2:15pm

DAV 114

Instructor: Professor Russell Arben Fox

Office and Office Hours: Davis 313; TRF 3:00pm-4:30pm and by appointment

Office Phone and E-mail: 295-5827; foxr@friends.edu

The Topic:

This course deals with the related notions of “simplicity” and “sustainability.” These terms will be considered in light of different philosophical, psychological, and environmental perspectives, and those considerations will in turn point towards different economic, sociological, and political evaluations of way we live, work, eat, and engage in our responsibilities as members of communities. Through reading, guest speakers, discussion, and field experiences, students will learn how to examine and assess approaches to social organization which sometimes challenge dominant practices in America today, and discover ways to apply those forms to their own lives. As such, the outcomes of this course are both theoretical and practical. This course will satisfy the Personal and Social Responsibility general education outcome requirement, as well as serve as an elective for the History & Political Science Major.

The University Mission Statement:

The mission of Friends University, a Christian university of Quaker heritage, is to equip students to honor God and serve others by integrating their intellectual, spiritual, and professional lives.

The General Education Outcome Category:

This course satisfies the Personal and Social Responsibility general education outcome requirement, which is defined as follows:

*Students will be able to develop and apply a combination of **knowledge** and **skills** to demonstrate an understanding of **social responsibility** and ethical behaviour. Furthermore, students will be able to **act** on this understanding of social responsibility and ethical behaviour to others in one’s local, national, or global community, and contribute positively via **leadership, collaboration, or other direct action**.*

For this course, this outcome requirement will be broken down as follows:

Knowledge: *Define and analyze a real-world problem from an ethical perspective.* This element of the outcome requirement will be measured through standard examinations (multiple-choice and short answer, based mostly upon the readings from the assigned textbooks) that will assess your mastery of the assigned information about the historical, social, and economic development of America’s consumer culture, the philosophical, technological, and environmental arguments which it gives rise to, and the possible alternatives to it.

Skills: *Situate the problem in the context of other contemporary problems and Present and communicate the problem and ethical perspective.* These elements of the outcome requirement will be measured through multiple short writing collaborative assignments (taken mostly from the assigned readings) that will assess your awareness of various psychological and political aspects—both positive and negative—of the traditional “American way of life.” Doing so will

require you to 1) evaluate and effectively communicate your own assessment of a particular problem or issue, in both its practical and theoretical dimensions, and 2) develop responses to other evaluations of that same problem issue, thus demonstrating the shared social responsibility citizens have towards the issues and problems which confront our society.

Action, Leadership, and Collaboration: *Describe how the project meaningfully serves a community (e.g., local, national, global) within an ethical framework, Explore the project in the context of other efforts to meaningfully serve the community, and Present and communicate the project and ethical framework.* These elements of the outcome requirement will be measured through participatory assignments that will involve: 1) independent student involvement in various “sustainability” activities that will be built into the class schedule; 2) the development of set of goals (in collaboration with the instructor) in conjunction with that activity; and 3) the presentation to the class as a whole about the lessons which, upon reading the chosen material and participating in the assigned activity, could be related to the course as a whole.

The Instructor:

That’s me. My name, office phone number and office e-mail are included at the top of this sheet. Please make use of my office hours if you have a question or concern, or send me an e-mail message.

The Reading:

There are four required books for this course; they are:

Ma’ikwe Ludwig, *Together Resilient* (2017) [TR]

Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (2007) [DE]

Juliet B. Schor, *True Wealth* (2011) [TW]

Barry Schwartz *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less* (2004) [PC]

There will also be numerous readings either handed out or posted on Moodle which will be referred to throughout the course. The Moodle readings should be accessible in class as part of our discussions; you can do this by printing them out, or saving them on electronic devices. Either way, have them available!

The Schedule:

Follow this schedule closely. Every class period has some sort of reading assignment which you should complete before coming to class.

Tuesday, August 22–first day of class; course introduction

Thursday, August 24–Christian, Taoist, Confucian, Wagner readings; simplicity and religion

Tuesday, August 29–Shi, Gregg readings; simplicity and practice

Thursday, August 31–professor attending professional conference; no class

Tuesday, September 5–Roberts, Read, Twitchell readings; the complications of simplicity today

Thursday, September 7–PC, 1-44; navigating the world of choice

Tuesday, September 12–PC, 47-96; deciding and maximizing

Thursday, September 14–PC, 99-146; abundance and opportunity costs

Tuesday, September 19–*PC*, 147-200; adaption and disappointment
Thursday, September 21–*PC*, 221-236, Ben-Porath reading; responding to the burden of choice

Tuesday, September 26–*DE*, 1-45; the downside of growing abundance
Thursday, September 28–*DE*, 46-94; sustainability and the environmental costs of abundance

Tuesday, October 3–*DE*, 95-128; “satisficing” and the civic costs of abundance
Thursday, October 5–*DE*, 129-176; the economics of collective limits

Tuesday, October 10–*DE*, 177-232; the sustainability and virtue of collective limits
(book report selection due)
Thursday, October 12–Fall Break; no class

Tuesday, October 17–local food tour; no class
Thursday, October 19–*TW*, 25-65; consumer choice and ecological consequences

Tuesday, October 24–*TW*, 67-97; economics, technology, and plenitude
Thursday, October 26–*TW*, 99-143; the possibility of plenitude

Tuesday, October 31–*TW*, 145-184; the economics of plenitude
Thursday, November 2–Ocejo reading; plenitude and sustainability in personal practice

Tuesday, November 7–Nick Pohlenz, guest speaker
Thursday, November 9–Rebecca McMahon, guest speaker
(book report rough drafts due)

Tuesday, November 14–*TR*, 1-41; plenitude and sustainability as a community practice
Thursday, November 16–*TR*, 43-63, 109-124; the radicalness of sustainability

Tuesday, November 21–*TR*, 125-153; reforming individuality and community
Thursday, November 23–Thanksgiving Day holiday; no class

Tuesday, November 28–book report presentations
Thursday, November 30–book report presentations

Tuesday, December 5–book report presentations
Thursday, December 7–last day of class; course review
(all book reports and sustainability reports due)

Tuesday, December 12, 1:00pm–final examination

The Grades:

Grading in this course will follow a strict 100-point scale:

91 - 100	= A
81 - 90	= B
71 - 80	= C
60 - 70	= D
59 and below	= let’s not talk about that, shall we?

In calculating the grades, however, I throw in a 10-point margin for error, as the following scale shows:

Book report	15 points
Book presentation	10 points
Midterm exam	25 points
Sustainability activity/outing	15 points (five points for each outing, trip, lecture, or event)
Sustainability report	10 points
Final exam	35 points
Total:	110 points

So, while grades will be distributed according to the 100-point scale listed above, there is actually 110 points possible in this class. Therefore, it is technically possible to, for example, blow off the book report and presentation entirely and still earn a solid B. I wouldn't recommend that though! This margin exists to provide cover for those inevitable bad days and mistakes that plague us all. Don't abuse it.

Your *book report* will be the only significant writing requirement you will have in this class. You will each choose a book that deals, in one way or another, with important themes connected to the notions of or practices regarding simplicity and sustainability (I will present several candidates to the class), read it thoroughly, think about it, then prepare an 8 to 10 page (typed, double-spaced) report that closely exams, (and criticizes if you think necessary) what the book has taught you about these ideas and ways of living. This report will be worth up to 15 points. These need not be research papers, though if you choose to develop your report along those lines it would be accepted (please use footnotes and a works cited page according to Turabian style); however, purely analytical response papers (with page references to the book noted parenthetically) would be acceptable as well. The primary point of the report is to show me that you have read the book in question, thought about it, taken seriously what it has tried to say, and formulated an informed reaction to it. Please be aware that I have read **ALL** the books in question, and thus **will know if you just make something up**. In order to make certain give yourself time to follow through on this assignment, I am requiring **EVERYONE** to 1) inform me of the book they have chosen by **Tuesday, October 10**, and 2) turn in a rough draft (at least 5 pages in length) of your book report on **Thursday, November 9**. The final report will be due a no later than the last day of class on **Thursday, December 7** (though it can be turned in before that if you choose to do so). Anyone who fails to turn in an adequate rough draft (which I will read, comment on, and return to you) will lost **HALF** of the full points which the final report may earn. Please note that **late reports (rough draft or final) are UNACCEPTABLE, the SOLE exception being for hospital stays or other emergencies that you can provide SIGNED DOCUMENTATION for**. Use every writing resource available to you in working on these papers, as **spelling, grammar, format, and structure will all most DEFINITELY count**.

Your *book presentation* will be a short, 10-15-minute lecture on the book you have read that you will prepare to deliver to the class sometime during the final couple of weeks of class. This can be a straightforward presentation, but the more innovative you get (using handouts, demonstrations, video, etc.) the more impressive your presentation will be, and thus possibly the more points you will earn (the presentation will be worth up to 10 points). My main criteria as a listener and grader will be whether you introduce and summarize one or more of the book's observations and arguments well, and whether you are persuasive in making your case for or against or even just in commenting upon those elements of the book which you focus upon. Don't be frightened by this assignment; look upon it as a fun end-of-the-course summing up! (I'll probably provide something to encourage the celebratory atmosphere.)

Your *sustainability activity/outing* and *sustainability report* will involve your involvement in one or more "outings" that will be organized during the semester. Throughout this semester, I will be arranging

outside events, class trips, campus visits, and guest lectures, all involving individuals and organizations which are committed to some version of local, sustainable, simple economics, belief, and living. I will keep you informed of this various events throughout the semester, and at least one will be scheduled actually in place of our regular class. (Note: the guest lectures by Rebecca McMahon and Nick Pohlenz do **NOT** count as a “sustainability activity.”) You **WILL** be expected to attend as many of them as possible, and your presence on such an outing or at such a presentation will qualify you for the points offered. You will **PROVE** your presence at and involvement in these events by either 1) contacting me directly (as I will be organizing many of them personally, I’ll almost always be present!) or 2) by taking a picture of yourself **at the event** and including that photo along with a one-paragraph description of what you saw, heard, and/or did at the event. Any such evidence must be turned in **NO LESS THAN ONE WEEK** after the event; anything later than that will be **UNACCEPTABLE**. You will want to record or take some notes at one of these events, activities, or outings, because you will also be expected to write a report about it. This report will be a medium-length (about 5 pages, typed, double-spaced) summary of and commentary on what you heard, saw, or learned; I definitely do not require or expect this to be a research paper of any sort, though if you feel some additional sources might help you better understand or respond to the information you gained from the trip, speaker, or event, that would be acceptable (again, please use footnotes and a works cited page according to Turabian style). Your report will be due no later than Thursday, December 7, and again, **late reports are UNACCEPTABLE, the SOLE exception being for emergencies that you can provide SIGNED DOCUMENTATION for.**

The *midterm examination* will be a take-home, open-book and open-note exam that will include multiple short essay questions; you will choose and type out 2-3 paragraph answers to five of them; each answer will be worth up to 5 points, for an overall total of 25 points for the exam. The exam will, obviously, only address material that we will have covered in the first half of the course. The *final examination* will be an in-class exam with multiple choice questions (fifteen questions, you choose and answer ten, for a total of 10 possible points), short answer questions (ten questions, you choose and answer five, for a total of 10 possible points) and two essay questions, one that will focus on the material from the second half of the semester (worth up to 5 points), and a longer one that will be comprehensive (worth up to 10 points), making for a total of 35 points possible on the final exam. Remember that **exams CANNOT be made up, the SOLE exception being for hospital stays or other emergencies which you can provide SIGNED DOCUMENTATION for, or scheduling conflicts which you work out with me MORE THAN A WEEK in advance.**

Four Declarations:

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, accommodations may be made for any student who notifies me of their needs. **It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to my attention.** Students who may require special assistance in emergency evacuations should talk to me in order to work out the most appropriate procedures to follow in such an emergency.

I am sympathetic to those who suffer any sort of family emergency and/or tragedy during this semester, and I am frequently open to working out alternative ways of completing assignments when responsibilities prevent you from attending class and so forth. That being said, it must be understood that **life goes on**, and so does this course. Funerals or prolonged hospital stays for loved ones, while clearly and properly demanding of one’s time and energy, are **NOT** an acceptable excuse for ignoring class expectations, policies, or grading; if it appears you must make a choice between family obligations and class assignments, **please inform me as soon as possible**, rather than simply assuming that I will be understanding and let things slide out of sympathy after the fact, because I probably won’t.

For the sake of maintaining class discipline and making certain an environment conducive to hearing and participating in the lectures and discussion exists for all students in the class, **both individually and collectively**, there will be **NO LAPTOPS** allowed in this classroom without **explicit arrangements** being made with me in accordance with university access policies **BEFOREHAND**. Moreover, I reserve the right to either **take away** for the duration of the class cell phones, iPods, or any other kind of electronic communications or text-messaging device, or ask those who have such to leave the classroom. I **REALLY** don't want to have to enforce this, because doing so is a hassle, but I will if I have to, for the sake of those students who are trying to follow along and get something out of class. Let's make it easy: simply turn off your cell phones, or turn them to silent, while in the classroom, and if you have an important call you somehow can't wait a half-hour before returning, just politely excuse yourself.

It should go without saying that **ANY** sort of academic dishonesty is detrimental to both your own education and my ability to fairly and sympathetically administer and grade this class. Hence, **any cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or other general malfeasance that I verify will result in an automatic ZERO ("0") for the assignment or test in question, and potentially the ENTIRE COURSE, depending on the gravity of the offense**. In order to enforce this policy, I reserve the right to take whatever steps I deem appropriate, including banning cell phones and other electronic implements during test-taking, changing the deadlines of assignments (with due notice), and so forth. You're grown-ups by now, so you consider the consequences. If you feel you need more guidance or specifications on this policy, please just check the Friends University **HONOR CODE** online.