

## **Simplicity and Sustainability**

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

**DAV 111**

**Instructor: Professor Russell Arben Fox**

**Office and Office Hours: Davis 313; MTThF 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, in-class and on-line discussions, 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 also serves as an elective for the History and Politics major.

### **The Covid-19 Note:**

In order to promote the safety of all members of our community during the COVID-19 pandemic, please note the following:

Face masks or other coverings **must be worn by all students in every class**. Exceptions will be made for students with an actual medical excuse not to wear a mask--something that they have provided the professor with evidence of—and students may remove their mask when asking or answer a question or contributing to the class discussion. But in general, there will be **NO EXCEPTION** made for this requirement. It will be enforced by the professor, who will simply **END** class if there is someone who refuses to wear a mask in the classroom, meaning that students will miss out on the assignments which would have been handed out or presented that day, which will have real consequences in terms of points being missed by everyone.

If a student thinks they have COVID-19, the student needs to stay home until they have gone three days with no fever or other symptoms and ten days since symptoms first appeared.

If a student tests positive for COVID-19 but does not have symptoms, the student needs to stay home until 10 days have passed since the positive test.

Students who need to miss face-to-face classes should contact their instructors **immediately** to arrange an online option in order to continue to participate in class.

Please keep in mind that **EVERYTHING** laid out in the syllabus is subject to university-wide changes that may be necessary as we deal with the pandemic. **Please prepare to be adaptable!**

### **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 collaborative writing and presentation assignments 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 or 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) a level of interaction with others through those specific activities, in fulfillment with goals laid out by the professor; and 3) sharing with the class the accomplishment of those goals which, upon participating in the assigned activity, could be related to the course's overall goals.

## **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 three required books for this course; they are:

Charles Marohn, *Strong Towns* (Wiley, 2020) [ST]

Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (2007) [DE]  
Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less* (2004) [PC]

There will also be readings either handed out, placed on reserve at the library, or posted on Moodle, which will be referred to throughout the course. These readings should be accessible in class as part of our discussions; you can do this by printing them out, saving them on electronic devices, or copying them for your own use. Either way, have them available!

### **The Schedule:**

Every class period has a reading assignment which you should complete before coming to class.

Thursday, August 20—first day of class; course introduction

Tuesday, August 24—Christian, Taoist, Confucian readings; simplicity and religion

Thursday, August 26—Shi reading; Quaker simplicity

Tuesday, September 1—PC, 1-44; navigating the world of choice

Thursday, September 3—PC, 47-96; deciding and maximizing

Tuesday, September 8—PC, 99-146; abundance and opportunity costs

Thursday, September 10—PC, 147-200; adaption and disappointment

Tuesday, September 15—PC, 221-236, Ben-Porath reading; responding to the burden of choice

Thursday, September 17—DE, 1-45; the downside of growing abundance  
(simplicity and sustainability team-ups are due)

Tuesday, September 22—DE, 46-94; sustainability and the environmental costs of abundance

Thursday, September 24—DE, 95-128; “satisficing” and the civic costs of abundance

Tuesday, September 29—DE, 129-176; the economics of collective limits

Thursday, October 1—DE, 177-232; the sustainability and virtue of collective limits

Tuesday, October 6—review session

Thursday, October 8—midterm examination

(simplicity and sustainability book report choices are due)

Tuesday, October 13—local sustainability tour(s); no class

Thursday, October 15—Fall Break; no class

Tuesday, October 20—Roberts, Read, Twitchell readings; simplicity and the problem of desire

Thursday, October 22—Keynes, Skidelski readings; sustainability and the problem of growth

Tuesday, October 27—Schumacher, Berry readings; simplicity, sustainability and the problem of scale

Thursday, October 29—ST, 1-35; urban complexity and incrementalism

(simplicity and sustainability book report rough drafts are due)

Tuesday, November 3—ST, 37-80; the costs and consequences of urban growth

Thursday, November 5—ST, 83-123; the possibility of a stable urbanism

Tuesday, November 10–*ST*, 125-169; the possibility of a productive urbanism  
Thursday, November 12–*ST*, 171-218; making intentional urban spaces

Tuesday, November 17–simplicity and sustainability report presentations  
Thursday, November 19–simplicity and sustainability report presentations

Tuesday, November 24–simplicity and sustainability report presentations  
Thursday, November 26–Thanksgiving Day holiday; no class

Tuesday, December 1–professor giving a local presentation; no class  
Thursday, December 3–last day of class; course review  
(all simplicity and sustainability book reports due)

Tuesday, December 8, 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:

Simplicity and sustainability book report	20 points
Simplicity and sustainability presentation	15 points
Midterm exam	25 points
Sustainability outing participation	<b>one letter grade</b>
Sustainability outing discussions	15 points
Final exam	35 points
<b>Total:</b>	<b>110 points</b>

So, while grades will be distributed according to the 100-point scale listed above, there is actually 105 points possible in this class. Therefore, it is technically possible to, for example, blow off the final exam entirely and still, if you've done great on everything else, get a C. I wouldn't recommend that though! This margin exists to provide cover for those inevitable bad days that plague us all. Don't abuse it.

The *simplicity and sustainability book report* will be the only significant writing requirement you will have in this class. You will each either team up or be assigned a partner in the class, and together you will choose a book that deals with important themes connected to the notions of or practices regarding simplicity and sustainability (I will present several candidates to the class). You will read and think about it, then *each of you* will write a 10 page (typed, double-spaced) report that closely examines (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 20 points. These need not be research papers, though if you choose to develop your report along those lines it would be acceptable (please use footnotes and a bibliography page according to Chicago/Turabian style); note that fully engaging with some of the books one might choose

could require additional research in order to respond to them properly. However, in other cases pure 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 you give yourself sufficient time to follow through on this assignment, I am requiring **EVERYONE** to 1) inform me who their partners for this assignment will be by **Thursday, September 17**, 2) inform me of the book they and their partner have chosen by **Thursday, October 8**, and 3) turn in a rough draft (at least 5 pages in length) of your individual book reports on **Thursday, October 29**. The final report will be due no later than the last day of class on **Thursday, December 3** (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 lose **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**. It goes without saying that your and your partner's reports must be **ENTIRELY** your own work; no copying!

The *simplicity and sustainability book presentation* will be a 15 to 20-minute presentation of the book which you and your partner have both read which you will prepare to deliver **together** to the class sometime during the last few weeks of class. This can be a straightforward presentation, but the more innovative you and your partner get (using handouts, demonstrations, video, participation games, etc.) the more impressive your presentation will be, and thus possibly the more points you will earn (the presentation will be worth up to 15 points for **EACH** of you, meaning that both of you need to be involved in the presentation!). My main criteria as a listener and grader will be whether you and your partner **EQUALLY** introduce and summarize one or more of the book's observations and arguments well, and whether you and your partner 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.)

The *sustainability outing* is your **REQUIRED** involvement in at least one of several visits to a local business, organization, or family which pursues sustainability during the week of October 11-17. The details of these visits are still being worked out. While I will work with everyone to make it as easy as possible for all to attend one of these visits, be aware that if all possible avenues are explored and you nonetheless do not participate in **ANY** of them, then your final grade in the class **WILL BE DROPPED BY ONE FULL GRADE**. You will **PROVE** your presence at and involvement in these events by contacting me directly, as I will be attendance at all of them. Note that none of these visits will be the same: some may involve a fee; some may involve fair amount of travel (that I will arrange), some will be mostly outdoor, with others indoors, some will involve leaving the campus during a school day, while the others may be during Fall Break. You **MUST SIGN UP** for these events as they are announced and shared with the class, as **NO MORE THAN 10 STUDENTS** will be allowed to attend any one of the visits. Under **EXCEPTIONAL** circumstances, I will allow a personal outing to substitute for one of the ones I organize, but that requires my **explicit** permission.

The *sustainability outing discussions* will be online class discussions conducted on a Discussion Board that I will erect on the Moodle page for this class **beginning the class period following any of the aforementioned outings**. On that board everyone who participated in the outing will be expected to post a brief report (**at least 1 paragraph in length**), sharing their responses to, thoughts about, or questions

concerning the people or business or place they visited. Such responses will be worth up to 5 points, assuming they show genuine attentiveness to the event which the student participated in. Everyone else is expected to read, respond to, or ask questions about any of these responses as they are posted; every relevant and substantive (**more than one sentence in length**) comment or question made will be worth 1 point, with up to 10 points possible over the course of the semester and the different Discussion Boards I set up. Students who posted reports can comment upon questions asked of their reports, or wait to participate in the discussions on the other Discussion Boards. Each Discussion Board will each be open for only **ONE WEEK** following each particular outing, so pay attention to the Moodle page and announcements in class, so as to not miss your chances to make these points!

The *midterm 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 an essay question, focusing on the material from the first half of the semester (worth up to 5 points), for a total of 25 possible points. The *final examination* will be similar in every way, focusing on the material read during the second half of the semester, though note that the simplicity and sustainability presentations **WILL BE INCLUDED** as possible topics which questions **MAY** be asked about on the final examination. Also, note that the final will include an additional, longer essay question which will be **comprehensive**, and will be worth up to 10 points, making for a total of 35 points possible. 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:**

**Academic Resource Center:** The ARC is an additional resource you are encouraged to use. Peer tutors and professional staff are available for one-on-one help with a variety of topics including written assignments from any course. For more information, e-mail [ARC@friends.edu](mailto:ARC@friends.edu), or call **295-5204**.

**ADA Services:** Friends University does not exclude otherwise qualified persons with disabilities solely by reason of the disability from participating in university programs and activities, nor are persons with disabilities denied the benefits of these programs or subjected to discrimination. If students wish to request accommodations due to a qualifying disability, they should contact the ADA Services Office within the Academic Resource Center at [ADA@friends.edu](mailto:ADA@friends.edu) or **295-5204**.

**Electronics:** I reserve the right, for the sake of maintaining class discipline and making certain an environment conducive to learning, to **BAN** for the duration of the class **any cell phones, laptops, or any other kind of electronic device**. This is for the sake of encouraging you all to get the most out of class. I **REALLY** don't want to have to enforce this, because doing so is embarrassing, but I will if I have to, for the sake of students who are trying to get something out of class.

**Cheating:** 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, or other general malfeasance that I verify will potentially result in an automatic ZERO ("0") for the assignment in question, with greater consequences to follow**. If you need more guidance on this policy, consult the Academic Honor Code Policy on the Friends University website, here: [http://catalog.friends.edu/content.php?catoid=4&navoid=172#acad\\_hono\\_code](http://catalog.friends.edu/content.php?catoid=4&navoid=172#acad_hono_code).