

# ***Media, Society, and Political Identity***

*~ Consumer Society, Economy and Environment ~*

Political Science & Communication 306 ~ Spring 2015

Professor Lance Bennett [lbennett@u.washington.edu](mailto:lbennett@u.washington.edu)

Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:00 - 3:20 Gowen 115

## **Statement of Purpose**

*This course explores the broad outlines of society, politics, and identity with a focus on the media as agencies for representing our desires and our identities. Branding and image making become the methods for delivering both politics and products tailored to the emotions of individuals. We leave dense personal data trails in the online world and become part of the process of marketing and branding to our selves and to our friends.*

*Meanwhile, we live with the larger political imperative of economic growth achieved through producing and consuming huge volumes of new stuff. The bi-partisan goal of growing the economy has run into global economic and environmental problems. The US is still struggling to restart an economy burdened with under-employment, growing inequality, heavy personal credit loads, and carbon energy dependency. The European Union has its own version of the debt and growth crises, challenging the future of the EU itself. Chinese growth has slowed and the environmental quality for hundreds of millions of citizens has deteriorated to the point of becoming dangerous to their health. However, cleaning up the environment and finding better ways to run the economy are often dismissed as costly threats to economic growth. Few politicians seem able to embrace or promote new ideas about what to do. We will explore the reasons for these political problems and look at alternatives.*

*As young citizens enter societies that no longer seem to work for majorities of people, growing numbers have less faith in parties and government to secure the future. Americans are waking up to soaring costs of education and threats to the American Dream. How did all this happen? Why is it so hard to deal with? What happened to the capacity of government to deal with big problems? Where do we go from here? This course aims to help you think about these questions.*

**★ To help connect these themes to our everyday lives, this class comes with a soundtrack.** This playlist has been created by classes from past years, and will be expanded by you. Please email me songs that you feel fit the topics we are discussing and

I will add them to the playlist and play them in class. You can also play them when studying or just feel like some great music. Here is the playlist:

<http://grooveshark.com/#!/playlist/Bennett+s+Ps+and+Com+306+Playlist+1/69459302>

★★ **Important Class Policy: We Are Device Free!**



What do you mean, device free? What I mean is: No phones, tablets, laptops or Internet connectable devices. (The instructor is exempted from this policy so you and he may share relatively uninterrupted attention to the same questions and ideas). The Canvas site has a number of interesting readings about why devices in classrooms are a bad idea, including one article titled: *To Remember A Lecture Better, Take Notes by Hand*, along with several other interesting reads. See the 7 short files in the canvas site that come before the weeks 1 & 2 readings for more on this.

**Here's how it works:**

**Use of personal media devices (laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc.) is not permitted in class.\* That's because research has consistently shown that:**

- Devices distract students from learning. The temptation to do other things is simply too great.
- Taking notes on a laptop or other device does not help students understand the material. Taking notes by hand helps learning more than typing.
- Device use distracts others. Merely sitting behind a laptop user can lower grades.

**\* You are welcome to use devices during breaks when you are outside the classroom.**

**\* If you have a DRS authorization we will work out an exception.**

### **USE PEN AND NOTEBOOK TO TAKE NOTES BY HAND**

**Enforcement:** I hope we need no enforcement policy because we think about this together as a small experiment in learning. Only if you insist, will we develop an enforcement policy.

For now, if you can't live without a device for 80 minutes you may have to consider buying a phone shaped plastic hand pacifier, available online after class:

# **2,000 People Paid Real Cash For An iPhone-Shaped Piece Of Plastic**

*You too can own the NoPhone!*



## Course Requirements

You will be graded on your analytical understanding of concepts from lectures, readings, discussions, guest speakers and short films. The more ideas from all of these sources that you bring into your work and participation, the better you will do. The graded assignments are these:

✪ **Discussion section participation and assignments: 20%** Your TA will grade you on your *regular participation* in discussion section and on special assignments, projects or quizzes that your TA deems appropriate for covering the material.

✪ **Weekly reading/lecture questions announced in lectures – to be handed in the following quiz section: 20%.** Paying attention in lecture is a rewarding experience. At least once a week, there will be a short answer question displayed on a lecture slide that you can write down and hand the answer in at the following quiz section. These will cover big ideas from readings, lecture or both. Since illness or general life complication may keep you from attending every lecture, the TAs will drop the two lowest scores from your grade for this part of the course. These are straightforward short answer questions that will give your grade a boost just by attending and reading.

Sample Week 1 question:

Juliet Schor (reading week 1 # 1) gives 3 reasons why we consume so much. What are they? (one sentence description for each) Which one most directly affects the problems addressed in the second reading for this week? (one sentence) Can you imagine a good way to deal with this problem of over consumption either through government or business policies? (two or three sentences)

1. **Tests: 60%** There are 2 tests (30% each) -- one in-class exam during week 5 on Tuesday April 28 and the second is a take-home exam on the last day of class (and due the Monday of finals week). The first test will have 3-4 concept definition questions and 2-3 short essays covering core material from the class to help integrate your ideas and thinking. The take-home will be a project-based assignment (4 page essay) covering both class materials and some research by you.

### Important Guidelines:

**Missed assignments:** *There will be no make-ups or late assignments without a doctor's excuse or prior approval from your TA. Any make-ups granted will involve different questions. Please discuss all class absences and missed assignments with your TA.*

**Course honesty policy:** The assignments in this course change each year. Any effort to borrow from work done in earlier classes will be painfully evident to us. Also remember

that text stripped from online sources can be tracked as easily as it was found. Plagiarism or cheating on tests will be punished to the full extent of the law, beginning with a grade of 0.0 for the assignment. This is a very enjoyable class to teach. Please make it an enjoyable experience for you, too. Other policies regarding rights and responsibilities can be found here: <http://depts.washington.edu/grading/conduct/>

**There is a canvas site for the course** that contains an extra copy of the syllabus in the files section. The files for the first two weeks of readings are also posted there. IN addition there are files explaining why we are device free. We may post other files there from time to time, including other readings and selected lectures.

### **TAs and Sections**

1. John-Paul Anderson	<a href="mailto:jpha@uw.edu">jpha@uw.edu</a> AM 11.30-12.20 / AN 12.30-1.20
2. Christopher Colligan	<a href="mailto:cpcoll93@uw.edu">cpcoll93@uw.edu</a> AE 9.30-10.20 / AF 10.30-11.20
3. Kiana Juarez	<a href="mailto:krjuarez@uw.edu">krjuarez@uw.edu</a> AB 8.30-9.20 / AD 9.30-10.20
4. Caterina Rost	<a href="mailto:crost@uw.edu">crost@uw.edu</a> AJ 11.30-12.20 / AL 12.30-1.20
5. Eric Schwab	<a href="mailto:erics1@uw.edu">erics1@uw.edu</a> AI 11.30-12.20 / AK 12.30- 1.20
6. Rafeel Wasif	<a href="mailto:rafeel@uw.edu">rafeel@uw.edu</a> AG 10.30-11.20 / AH 11.30-12.20
7. Bryan Wilcox	<a href="mailto:bmwilcox@uw.edu">bmwilcox@uw.edu</a> AA 8.30-9.20 / AC 9.30-10.20

**NOTE: all section changes and adds must go through the TAs first.**

### **Texts**

All Required and available at University Book Store (in the order we will read them):

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 Title: Pr! - A Social History Of Spin  
 Author: Stuart Ewen  
 Publisher: Basic Books 1996  
 ISBN: 978-0465061792  
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Title: Enough Is Enough  
Author: Rob Dietz and Dan O'Neill  
Publisher: Berrett-Koehler 2013  
ISBN: 978-1 60994-805-4

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Title: Republic Lost: How Money Corrupts Congress  
Author: Lawrence Lessig  
Publisher: Twelve/Hachette 2011  
ISBN: 978-0446-57643-7

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Title: What's the Economy For, Anyway?  
Author: John De Graaf and David Batker  
Publisher: Bloomsbury 2011  
ISBN: 13-798-1-60819-5107

Note: Additional short readings will be assigned with some units of the course. These will be distributed electronically ahead of time.

**BE SURE TO CHECK YOUR UW EMAIL REGULARLY. IF YOU HAVE YOUR UW EMAIL FORWARDED TO ANOTHER ACCOUNT CHECK YOUR JUNK MAIL FILTER TO MAKE SURE THAT CLASS MAILINGS ARE NOT BEING SIDETRACKED.**

### **Course Outline**

Week 1: **Social change and the consumer society**

March 31 & April 2

Consumerism has become the dominant value system on the planet, providing people with everyday meanings and sense of success and personal identity. For those who can consume, life seems good as long as stress and debt can be managed. Those who can't consume are left out. The hidden part of this consumer bargain is that the environment on which people depend for food, water, air and other resources is the biggest loser.

**Due to TA conference commitments: No sections first week!!**

Reading: (you will be given a reading question in class on Thursday to hand in at sections next Wednesday)

For Thursday:

Juliet Schor “Why Do We Consume So Much?” (Canvas File labeled “wk1-reading 1-Schor-WhyDoWeConsumeSoMuch?”)

Joel Achenbach, “Scientists: Human Activity Has Pushed Earth Beyond Four of Nine Planetary Boundaries” (Canvas File labeled: wk1-reading 2-Scientists/ Human activity has pushed Earth beyond four of nine ‘planetary boundaries’”)

## Week 2. **Branding , personal identity and loss of privacy**

April 7 & 9

How branding works, and how it affects public life. Are brand images and lifestyle networks the new bases of social order? In the past, mass media advertising sold us most of our products. Now we also market and brand our selves and our friends as personal data are gathered and fed back to us in our online lives. The hidden price people pay for their consumer lifestyles is the collection of vast and detailed personal data on such things as sexual preference, dating histories, vacations, friends, product purchases and aspirations, geo-location, web surfing habits, and what we share with whom via social networks. Is this a kind of stalking? How to think about it?

### Readings for Tuesday:

“From Gen X to Z: Teens and The New Cool” *PBS*  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/media/generation-like/alissa-quart-from-gen-x-to-z-teens-and-the-new-cool/> (Canvas File labeled: wk2-reading1-Alissa Quart- From Gen X to Z- Teens and the New Cool | Generation Like | FRONTLINE | PBS.pdf)

“The Future of Digital Marketing Is You” *PBS*  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/media/generation-like/the-future-of-digital-marketing-is-you/> (Canvas File labeled: wk2-reading2-The Future of Digital Marketing Is You | Generation Like | FRONTLINE | PBS.pdf)

“How Your Data Are Being Deeply Mined” Alice Marwick, *New York Review of Books* (Cavas File labeled: wk2-reading3-How Your Data Are Being Deeply Mined by Alice E. Marwick | The New York Review of Books.pdf)

Wall Street Journal, “They Know What You’re Shopping For” (Canvas File labeled: wk2-reading 4-They Know What You're Shopping For - WSJ.pdf)

Readings for Thursday:

Natasha Singer, "You For Sale: Mapping, and Sharing the Consumer Genome" (Canvas File labeled: wk2-reading 5-Singer-MappingSharingConsumerGenome NYTimes.com.pdf)

Amatai Etzioni, "The Privacy Merchants: What Is to Be Done?" (Canvas File labeled: wk2-reading6-Etzioni\_ThePrivacyMerchants.pdf)

Week 3: **The manufacture of meaning: Public relations and social values**

April 14 & 16

The origins and evolution of public relations. How do people relate to the world beyond immediate personal experience? How are realistic social and political impressions constructed through communication campaigns? How are consumer goods, politician and ideas marketed to us?

Reading: Ewen, *PR!*

by discussion section April 15: chapters 1-2

by discussion section April 17: chapters 3-6

Week 4: **Public relations, news management and public opinion**

April 21 & 23

Changing definitions of democracy. How communication technologies have changed society and politics. Examples of strategic communication campaigns in politics and the business world. The importance of news for authenticating PR.

Reading: Ewen, *PR!*

by discussion section April 22: chapters 7-10

by discussion section April 24: chapter 16 & Coda

Weeks 5: April 28 & 30

**EXAM: Tuesday April 28. Bring large green book to class. Do not write anything in it beforehand.**



**Special Class Holiday: No Sections Wednesday April 29!!**

**New section: How much consuming is enough – and how long can we go?**

Reading: *Enough Is Enough*

by Friday May 1: Preface, chapters 1-4

**Week 6: Dealing with debt, inequality, and how we measure progress**

May 5 & 7

Reading: *Enough Is Enough*

by Wednesday May 6 sections: chapters 5-11

by Friday May 8 sections: finish book

**Week 7: Why Government Can't Handle these Economic and Environmental Problems**

May 12 & 14

Understanding corruption in government as a system problem and not a “bad politician” problem. Does money in politics corrupts the system? Thinking about solutions beyond those commonly offered by Republicans and Democrats.

Reading: Lawrence Lessig, *Republic, Lost*.

by Wednesday May 13 sections: Preface, introduction, chapters 1-8

by Friday May 15 sections: chapters 9-14

**Week 8: How Americans understand the problems of government failure. Exploring possible reforms to overcome government dysfunction.**

May 19 & 21

Reading: Lessig,

by Wednesday May 20 sections: chapters 15-20

by Friday May 22: chapter 21 & conclusion

Week 9: **What would another economy look like?**

May 26 & 28

What is the right balance of values for a good society? What is the economy for? We explore corporations, global economy, media, and visions of happiness that money cannot buy.

Reading: De Graaf and Bakker, What's the Economy For, Anyway?

by Wednesday May 27 sections: Introduction, Chapters 1-5

by Friday May 29 sections: WTEF, chapters 6-8

Week 10: **What to Do?**

June 2 & 4

How we got here and where can we go?

Reading: WTEF?

by Wednesday June 3 sections: chapters 9-12

by Friday June 5 sections: chapter 13

**TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT HANDED OUT AT FINAL LECTURE. DUE Monday June 8 or per arrangement with your TA.**

Class Grade Scale

Score out of 100 / Score on 4.0 scale

96-100	4.0
95	3.9
93-94	3.8
92	3.7
90-91	3.6
89	3.5
87-88	3.4
86	3.3
84-85	3.2
83	3.1
81-82	3.0
80	2.9
78-79	2.8

77	2.7
75-76	2.6
74	2.5
72-73	2.4
71	2.3
69-70	2.2
68	2.1
66-67	2.0
65	1.9
63-64	1.8
62	1.7
60-61	1.6
59	1.5
57-58	1.4
56	1.3
54-55	1.2
53	1.1
51-52	1.0
50	0.9
48-49	0.8
47	0.7

If you receive below 47% for any assignments and tests, your raw percent score will be added to your total grade and weighted toward your final grade. The registrar will not give course credit for final grades below .7

The TAs and I value your participation and engagement with the ideas, and we hope to learn from your observations and questions. Let's have a great quarter! ~ *Lance Bennett*