

Department of Anthropology
ANTH 2274A-650: The Anthropology of Shopping
COURSE OUTLINE
Fall 2023



Aerial view of floating market, Vietnam

Version date: August 31, 2023

Instructor and course information:

Instructor: Dr. Lindsay Bell

Email: Lindsay.bell@uwo.ca

Credit Value: 0.5

Antirequisites: None

Prerequisites: None

Use of OWL:

The course will be delivered via Western's online learning platform, OWL. Students will be expected to have a working proficiency of OWL's main tools (tests and quizzes, assignments, gradebook, forums). Videos will be uploaded via YouTube so that you can watch at a speed that suits you and opt to use closed captioning if needed/ preferred.

Course Description:

This course serves as an introduction to how anthropologists study everyday life to reveal the meanings and consequences of what often seem like mundane, routine actions. Shopping is a ubiquitous activity that we may take for granted as "normal". Indeed, our daily lives involve the purchase and consumption of "lots of stuff." More than simply being about individual materialism, this course explores how shopping is a cultural practice. We will learn how to closely observe shopping environments to discover what people's procurement practices reveal about their social relationships and identities. We will explore the diversity of ways in which people shop as well as what they shop for. We will think about local and global consumer culture with an eye towards a better understanding of both human creativity and social inequality.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Conduct close observation of consumer behaviour and environments using anthropological tools;
- Analyze specific types of shopping as meaningful acts of producing self and society;
- Link conditions of commodity production to practices of consumption and vice versa;
- Reflect on their shopping habits using anthropological concepts such as value, reciprocity, exchange and identity;
- Describe and debate changes to global consumer culture in the last century.

Course Materials:

All course readings and materials will be accessed via OWL.

Evaluation:

Weekly Consumer Diary Entry	30%+20%
Comprehension Questions	20%
Final take home exam	30%

Weekly Consumer Diary Entry

Each week's lesson will have a culminating question, prompt or activity that will require you to write a 350-500 word response. These "consumer diary" entries will usually ask you to connect the week's material to your own life or observations. You may be asked to keep track of your shopping habits and practices or interview someone else on theirs. The emphasis in these is on applying the week's ideas, and not so much spelling/grammar etc. The word "diary" should free you up to write in your own voice.

Three of these responses will be worth 10% each. Two of the three will be selected at random by me and the third will be one you feel is particularly strong. Six responses will be worth 2 points and graded on a simple scale of 2 (exceptional) 1.5 (satisfactory) 1 (needs improvement) or 0 (incomplete). In any given week you can't be sure if your post will be worth 10% or 2 points. This is to ensure consistent work across the course.

You have two opportunities to SKIP a response. Simply type SKIP in the subject header of your post for that week and you will not lose points. You may not skip two posts before week 4. If you do not use your "skip" weeks, we will drop your lowest two grades (out of 2%). There will not be a prompt in week 1.

There will be more guidance on expectations for these assignments on OWL.

Late Policy for Weekly Responses:

As you have two opportunities in a term to SKIP a week's response, no late weekly responses will be accepted. Deadlines for weekly content are firm. Unfinished work on the due dates will receive a 0.

Comprehension Questions 20%

Each week's lessons will have 3-5 questions embedded in the content to help reward you for completing a section and to check your understanding.

Take-Home Final Exam – 30%

Students will have three days during the final exam period to complete the final exam. The exam will consist of several short answer questions and an essay question given in the final week of the course. The essay will ask you to go out in the world and shop like an anthropologist. There will be some choice around the type of shopping you do (groceries, shoes, electronics). You will be asked to observe the space and practices of shoppers closely. You will write up your data and then analyze it in relation to course readings. Answers will be in the range of 800-1200 words. The release and due dates are to be determined. You will submit using the Turnitin feature on the OWL Assignments page. The final exam cannot be submitted late unless accommodation is granted.

Course Pacing

The course is delivered online asynchronously, meaning there is no weekly meeting time. That said, the course is not entirely self-paced. New content will be posted weekly. I recommend you move through the week's content within seven days. You may not see new content until you complete the previous week (response and comprehension questions). This is to assist with pacing and to ensure you don't get too far behind. That said, I know students choose online courses to add some flexibility to their lives. Weekly content deadlines will be three times in the term. So, if some weeks take less or more time, you will be able to get it all done.

Weeks 1-4 Due by Tuesday October 10th, 8:00 am

Weeks 5- 8 Due by Tuesday November 14th, 8:00 am

Weeks 9-12 Due by Friday December 8th, 8:00am

Weekly Discussion Board

For those who like to write to process information, or for those who may have questions, there will be a weekly discussion board under the forums tab. I make this optional as in my experience students don't enjoy forced participation in discussion boards, yet some of you may need engagement to get more out of the course.

Topics by Week:

- Week 1 Shopping. But Make It Anthropological.
- Week 2 How Stuff Means: What Roles Do Objects Play In Our Lives?
- Week 3 Taste: More Than Individual Preference?
- Week 4 Mommy bloggers and Manscapers: Buying and Becoming Gendered.
- Week 5 Black Barbies and "Ethnic" Groceries: Selling race and social difference.

- 6 Main Street, Malls And Big Box Stores: Why Where We Shop Matters.
- 7 The Work of Selling: The Rise and Fall of Retailing.
- 8 Purchasing Values: Fair trade, Organic and The Ethics of Objects
- 9 Patriot Shoppers: The Rise of Consumer Nationalism
- 10 Gifts, Debts and the Ties that Bind.
- 11 Culture in the Amazon: How is online shopping is shaping who we are?
- 12 Thrift, Trash or Keep? What happens to all our stuff?

Academic Statements and Policies:

Academic Rights and Responsibilities

All students should familiarize themselves with Western's current [Academic Policies in the Academic Calendar](#) which include, but is not limited to, academic consideration for medical illness, accommodation for religious holidays, academic appeals, academic accommodation for students with disabilities, as well as scholastic discipline.

Course Specific Conditions Required to Pass this Course:

In order to pass this course students must submit and pass the final take-home exam.

Academic Consideration for Student Absences

No accommodations will be granted retroactively more than 10 days after an assignment's due date or a missed quiz or test. Please see your academic counsellor immediately if you will be seeking accommodations based on medical or compassionate grounds.

For students who have missed, or will miss, any course work, whether it be for medical related or non-medical related, please read the details and instructions on "[What is Academic Consideration](#)".

Academic Integrity - Statement on Plagiarism:

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing. It is also a scholastic offence to submit the same work for credit in more than one course. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence.

Accessible Education

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. Please see [Accessible Education](#) for information.

End