

NO LIMITS?
Tutorial - Fall 2009

Meeting
T, Th 8:00-9:50
JRC 202

Instructor
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Office Hours: M/W 11-12, Tu/Th 10-12 (though may be out of office during Convo). Basically, I am happy to have you stop by at any time; however, sometimes during non-office hours, I might be occupied and unable to meet. I will be happy, though, to schedule appointments during non-office hours.

Official Course Description

The catch-phrase ‘No Limits’ apparently struck quite a chord when market-tested on teenagers across the country, and why shouldn’t it? It is an idea that is deeply rooted in the American ethos. We can do anything. We can have it all. This message is highlighted in the stories that we tell ourselves about ourselves and is also incessantly fed to us through the commercial media. But there may be a downside to this deep-set, feel-good ideology. Americans without limits are consuming a disproportionate share of the world’s non-renewable resources and producing a disproportionate share of the world’s green-house gasses and other waste. *Can we keep this ‘no limits’ ideology, which helps drive our society’s ingenuity, from fueling our mass consumption habits as well? Should we want to?* This tutorial will explore the ideological foundations of US consumerism and the costs and benefits of such consumption to the planet. These questions are intricately tied to two pressing global issues. On one hand, the world looks to US consumption to climb out of the global recession. On the other, global warming has increasingly raised questions concerning the levels and kinds of consumption that are wise.

Course Plan and Objectives

As I expect you have been informed, the tutorial is not really about the theme of the course. Exploration of a particular theme is only a means to meet the broader objectives, which I discuss below. Thus, there is no expectation that you become well versed in any particular topic. Your tutorial could be on global warming just as well as it could be on marble tournaments or Elvis. This leaves a lot of flexibility in designing the course content, and faculty tend to take on subjects that interest them and which they think will be of interest to some set of students. It also leaves a lot of flexibility concerning what readings are assigned on any given topic.

In our case, there is no pre-defined reading list. Instead, we are starting only with a question and a hypothesis. The question is highlighted in the first paragraph of the course description above. It is one that I have thought about in some detail since the college’s adoption of the ‘No Limits’ slogan. My hypothesis is as follows:

society's ubiquitous celebration of *No Limits*, even in the positive senses of boundless creativity and opportunity, reinforces our heedless consumption of natural resources and production of waste, which has negative repercussions for the natural environment, about which we should be quite concerned.

I am willing to accept that I may be wrong. There are those who argue that consumption is not a problem and that there are not really natural limits, or that we can resolve any problems that are created. It is also possible that, even if we decide that consumption is a problem, the roots of it have absolutely nothing to do with our sense of unbounded ingenuity, opportunity, creativity, etc. Perhaps we can consume less or differently and still see ourselves as having no limits in other respects. The goal of the course is to explore this question. We will break the question apart and decide what we need to investigate, and then we will find appropriate resources, read, and discuss them. Some of us may come to a conclusion concerning the question. Some of us may find ourselves seriously more confused than when we started. In any case, I hope and expect that we will have some good discussion and lively debate along the way.

In the process of exploring the hypothesis, we will pursue the two main objectives to the course. First, our exploration will be interdisciplinary, allowing us to appreciate the value of different kinds of knowledge and learning. I expect that we will read academic literature from the natural sciences, economics, and anthropology, among disciplines. We are also likely to consider the influences of various media like films and fine art. The primary goal of tutorial is to help you develop skills that will form the backbone of your liberal education. The principal among these is writing. Other important skills that we will work on over the semester include: research, reading, analysis, engaging in discussion, and public speaking and presentations. The attached evaluation sheet provides a sense of some of the skills we will work to further develop.

Participation and Attendance

Everyone is expected to come to class prepared to participate everyday and to actively engage one another in discussion. Proper participation requires a careful and thoughtful reading of the required texts. Each discussion period, we want to truly engage the writer and the text. *What is the author's argument? What evidence is used to support the argument? Is the argument sound and compelling? What are its strengths and weaknesses? What is the logic of the organization? How does the argument fit into a broader debate?* In class discussions, we must be respectful of one another, but this does not mean that we need to come to agreement on issues. Reasoned debate/argument is one of the principal means of learning as well as understanding our own basic values and biases. It is perfectly acceptable to challenge one-another's ideas, as long as it is done in a respectful way. We must all also learn to appreciate such challenges not as personal attacks but rather as collaborative efforts to further knowledge and personal growth.

Attendance is required. Each unexcused absence will result in the loss of one grade (e.g. from a B+ to a B). Excused absences include illness (with a note from the health center or student affairs), family emergencies (with a note from student affairs), or by prior agreement of the instructor (an e-mail or note from me). You should arrive on time for class. Tardiness is disrespectful to other members of the class. Each two late arrivals will count as one absence in

affecting your grade. Anyone who does not by habit wake up sufficiently before 8:00 am should purchase or borrow a functioning alarm clock.

Assignments and Grading

While we do not have a predefined set of readings, we do have a set of assignments with generally fixed due dates that we will tailor to the readings (or other material) that we are exploring at the time.

1. **Academic Honesty Exercise.** This is not graded, but is required for the completion of the course.
2. **Four short graded essays. 50% of final grade.** Each will be worth 12.5% of the final grade. You will have the opportunity to all four papers. The final grade for a rewritten paper will be assessed as 50% first draft & 50% revised draft.
3. **Class Participation. 25% of final grade.** This includes participation in class discussions, peer reviews of papers, and honest efforts on non-graded assignments. See above comments on participation.
4. **Reading Journal. 10% of final grade.** The journal will include for each reading a brief summary of the article, useful information, points of agreement/disagreement, and value towards answering our question. This is akin to an annotated bibliography, which is a common means to prepare for a major research paper or independent study. A journal entry must be prepared for every class in which there is not an essay due.
5. **Leading Discussion. 7.5% of grade.** Each student will have responsibility for leading class discussion twice. The first round will not be graded.
6. **Class Presentations: 7.5% of the grade.** Each student will present two of their papers. The first round will not be graded.

**Course Outline
(What we AUCTUALLY did)**

Day	Assignments & Class Activities. (Assignments are in bold)
Aug 27	Discussion of tutorial. Break down of question. Meta-discussion on discussions
Sept 1	Meet in Computer Lab of Library Basement. Class on library resources. Preliminary Essay Due: 400 words. Do you think that the hypothesis is right? Explain.
Sept 3	Find & read article, write journal entry: 1 article of 10+ pages (or enough short articles to reach 10+ pages). Is there a 'ubiquitous' celebration of no limits – ingenuity and creativity? Discussion of essays and readings. Brainstorm on topic. Discussion of Academic Honesty.
Sept 8	Read, write journal entry: Chapter 5, "Historical Roots of Consumer Culture" and Ch 8, "An Evaluation of Advertising". From Schudson, Michael 1984 Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society. View Film Affluenza.
Sept 10	Prepare paraphrase and block quote for academic honesty exercise Discussion of Schudson and Affluenza.
Sept 15	Essay 1 Due. 400-600 words. Please respond to the following question: According to the film <i>Affluenza</i> , why are Americans such voracious consumers? Bring example of ingenuity/creativity aspect of no-limits. Discussion of articles.

Sept 17	<p>Anonymous peer review comments due</p> <p>Read & prepared journal entry: Human Mind as a Barrier to Wiser Environmental Agreements." On P-Web.</p> <p>Meta-discussion on leading a group discussion</p> <p>Honesty exercises.</p>
Sept 22	<p>Group led discussions. Prepare journal entries.</p> <p>Read: The Paradox of Ecological Economics and Sustainable Development.</p> <p>View: The Story of Stuff. Journal Entries</p>
Sept 24	<p>Group led discussions. Prepare journal entries.</p> <p>Read: Into the Fourth Kingdom: Representations of Plastic Materials, 1920-1950.</p> <p>Read: Reconversion: The Emergence of the Consumers' Republic. Journal Entries</p>
Sept 29	<p>Read and prepare journal entry: The Global 2000 Report to the President. Preface and pages 6-42. Discussion of reading.</p>
Oct 1	<p>Read and prepare journal entry: Resourceful Earth - Response to the Global 2000 Report. Discussion of reading.</p>
Oct 6	<p>Prepare Individual Presentations Each individual should prepare a presentation assessing one of the projections made by 'Global 2000' and "The Resourceful Earth." Selections will be made in class. You should aim for 5 minutes for your presentation. It should definitely be more than 4 but less than 6 minutes. You should answer the following questions related to the topic you choose:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the projections provided by Global 2000? 2. What are the projections (or comments on G2000 projections) made by Simon and Kahn. 3. What were the actual relevant indicators in the year 2000? 4. (If you have time) How do you explain this? (Why were the projections right or wrong? What accounts for the accuracy or inaccuracy?)
Oct 8	<p>Reassessing the Thesis – What have we done, where should we go?</p>
Oct 13	<p>Read and prepare journal entry: choose any THREE inaugural addresses since 1900 (these are quite brief) from the site (http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/inaugurals.php). Come prepared to talk about the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you see any evidence for a celebration of No Limits? Please mark the passages. 2. What views, if any, are expressed concerning the "American Dream," consumption, the environment, technological innovation, human ingenuity? (Not necessarily in relation to one another, but just in general.) 3. To the extent that any of this is discussed, do you get a sense of change in tone or focus over time? Journal Entry
Oct 15	<p>Inaugural Addresses continued.</p> <p>Essay 2 Due: Compare and contrast Myers' and Simon's arguments "Population Growth Is Not Bad for Humanity" and "The Population Factor." Maximum of 600 words. Class discussion on papers.</p>
Oct 27	<p>Metadiscussion on critical reading.</p> <p>Information Literacy Scavenger Hunt</p>
Oct 29	<p>Information Literacy Scavenger Hunt continued.</p> <p>Read and prepare journal entry:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Virtual consumption article on P-Web. 2. The Consumer Society - State of the World 2004. This includes the forward and first chapter.

Nov 3	Discussion of virtual world and state of world articles. Academic Honesty Exercise: 1. Redo the paraphrase and block quotation. 2. Complete the SNIPPETS and USING AN IDEA FROM ANOTHER SOURCE assignment from the academic honesty, using virtual consumption article.
Nov 5	No Class – Advising meetings. Work on Group discussion.
Nov 10	Group Led Discussions and Journal Entries. Read: Our Carbon Copies Read: Interactions of Consumption and Metropolitan Growth
Nov 12	Group Led Discussions and Journal Entries Read: Alternative Hedonism, Cultural Theory and the Role of Aesthetic Revisioning
Nov 17	NO CLASS Paper 3 Due 11/18 by noon. For this essay, I would like for you to examine how the article that you read for your group discussion relates to the course hypothesis. Do the central arguments of the author support or reject the hypothesis? You do not need to focus on every aspect of hypothesis, but rather that part or those parts most related to the central arguments from your reading. Format: No more than 600 words, not including the bibliography.
Nov 19	Work on research question for final paper in class.
Nov 24	Meet in Library – Work on research papers.
Nov 26 – Consume Like You’re Starving!	
Dec 1	In class work on research projects. Be prepared to present your topic to another student.
Dec 3	DUE: Rewrites of the first two papers and your completed reading journal.
Dec 8	Individual In-Class Presentations 1. Kathy 2. Diana 3. Robert 4. Sara 5. Sammy 6. Noah Paper 4 Due – 5 pm. Each of you should write a research paper that examines a specific question that relates to the course materials. We will work together to develop the question. It is NOT necessary to relate the question to the course thesis in the paper itself.
Dec 10th	Individual In-Class Presentations 7. Jason 8. Cyril 9. Tim 10. David 11. Drew
Dec 16	Rewrites due for papers 3 & 4