

**COURSE TITLE:** TOO MUCH STUFF

**NO. OF CREDITS:** 5 QUARTER CREDITS  
[semester equivalent = 3.33 credits]

**WA CLOCK HRS:** 50  
**OREGON PDUs:** 50  
**PENNSYLVANIA ACT 48:** 50

**INSTRUCTOR:** Eva Varga  
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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Happiness is a crucial ingredient of human well-being and health, and the pursuit of which was identified as an “inalienable right” in the US Declaration of Independence. In America, as in other developed nations, many seek material things to bring happiness. Yet, a wide variety of environmental, health and social justice indicators suggest people in developed nations are consuming too much. Consumerism is the idea that increasing consumption of goods and services purchased in the market is always a desirable goal.

This course provides upper elementary and secondary grade teachers with a menu of assignment options to heighten awareness about the consequences of our actions as consumers and citizens. All course participants will explore personal values as they read *The Story of Stuff* by Annie Leonard, preview the companion website, and dive into different components of consumerism. Those taking the course for credit will develop a unit study for their classroom and dive deeper into the impact of capitalism on our environment with the text, *This Changes Everything*, by Naomi Klein.

This course is appropriate for grades 4-12.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** Upon completion of this course, participants will have:

- Have a complete understanding of what aspects of the consumer product cycle are harmful to personal, social, or environmental health.
- Have an inventory of print and Internet resources that provide evidence of the consequences of over-consumption and promote socially and environmentally responsible living.
- Have reflected on their consumer & life values and practice how to bring them forward in their teaching.
- Have designed and implemented some action project for/with students that minimizes the impact of consuming.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Completion of all specified assignments is required for issuance of hours or credit. The Heritage Institute does not award partial credit.

The use of artificial intelligence is not permitted. Assignment responses found to be generated by AI will not be accepted.

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**HOURS EARNED:**

Completing the basic assignments (Section A. Information Acquisition) for this course automatically earns participants their choice of CEUs (Continuing Education Units), Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, or Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours. The Heritage Institute offers CEUs and is an approved provider of Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, and Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours.

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**UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT INFORMATION**

**REQUIREMENTS FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT**

Continuing Education Quarter credits are awarded by Antioch University Seattle (AUS). AUS requires 75% or better for credit at the 400 level and 85% or better to issue credit at the 500 level. These criteria refer both to the amount and quality of work submitted.

1. Completion of Information Acquisition assignments 30%
  2. Completion of Learning Application assignments 40%
  3. Completion of Integration Paper assignment 30%
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### **CREDIT/NO CREDIT (No Letter Grades or Numeric Equivalents on Transcripts)**

Antioch University Seattle (AUS) Continuing Education Quarter credit is offered on a Credit/No Credit basis; neither letter grades nor numeric equivalents are on a transcript. 400 level credit is equal to a "C" or better, 500 level credit is equal to a "B" or better. This information is on the back of the transcript.

AUS Continuing Education quarter credits may or may not be accepted into degree programs. Prior to registering, determine with your district personnel, department head, or state education office the acceptability of these credits for your purpose.

### **ADDITIONAL COURSE INFORMATION**

#### **REQUIRED TEXT**

*The Story of Stuff: The Impact of Overconsumption on the Planet, Our Communities, and Our Health-And How We Can Make It Better* by Annie Leonard

Additional text required for 400/500 Credit Option:

*This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* by Naomi Klein

None. All reading is online.

#### **MATERIALS FEE**

None

### **ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR HOURS OR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT**

#### **A. INFORMATION ACQUISITION**

Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. Feel free to read and respond to others' comments.

Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

#### **Assignment #1: Introduce Yourself**

Read the article, Why Do We Buy What We Buy? By Emily Stewart (<https://www.vox.com/the-goods/22547185/consumerism-competition-history-interview>) and write a one-page response in which you introduce yourself, providing background on your role as a consumer, your professional situation, and what you hope to gain from this course. Feel free to respond to other postings from educators also taking this course.

#### **Assignment #2: Materialism in Times of Covid**

Read the article, Materialism in Times of Covid: An Opportunity for a Paradigm Shift by Arianna Steigman ([https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.associationforcoaching.com/resource/resmgr/Materialism\\_in\\_times\\_of\\_Covi.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.associationforcoaching.com/resource/resmgr/Materialism_in_times_of_Covi.pdf)), people's relationship with 'stuff' and sustainability and answer the following questions:

1. What is your opinion on how Americans today became so attached to material possessions? How do previous generations compare?
2. Describe the times in your life when you've had much less (or more) than you do now. Reflect on the differences in your quality of life. Does happiness after a certain point of material well-being increase less (or not at all) with each increment of having more?
3. Describe other personal reflections you had while reading this article.

**Note:** All group participants must read the above article.

#### **Assignment #3: Water Pollution: Everything You Need to Know**

Read the article, Water Pollution: Everything You Need to Know by Melissa Denchak (<https://www.nrdc.org/stories/water-pollution-everything-you-need-know>)

) to explore how our rivers, reservoirs, lakes, and seas are drowning in chemicals, waste, plastic, and other pollutants and what we can do to help. Create a one-pager (<https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/one-pagers/>) to summarize the key points of this article.

**Note:** All group participants must read the above article.

#### **Assignment #4: The Waste We Generate**

The amount of waste we generate and how we deal with it speaks volumes about our consumption, prosperity, and social inequality levels. Watch the DW documentary, *The Rich, the Poor, and the Trash*.

[https://www.youtube.com/embed/G\\_e7eFSkEjw](https://www.youtube.com/embed/G_e7eFSkEjw)

Read the article, *What a Waste: An Updated Look into the Future of Solid Waste Management* by Ede Ijjasz-Vasquez.

(<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2018/09/20/what-a-waste-an-updated-look-into-the-future-of-solid-waste-management>).

Then, write a 2-3 page paper, juxtapose the article with the documentary.

- What new insights did you gain from the documentary and the article?
- How is waste managed in your local area?
- How much waste does your household generate on an average week? What steps can you take to reduce this amount?

Note: All group participants must watch the video above and read the *Future of Solid Waste Management* article.

#### **Assignment #5: The Impact of Overconsumption**

Have you ever wondered what happens to all that trash on your street on garbage day? Where does it go? Annie Leonard strove to answer that question and shares her insights in her book, *The Story of Stuff: The Impact of Overconsumption on the Planet, Our Communities, and Our Health-And How We Can Make It Better*.

Leonard invites us to consider the impact of toxic chemicals and ingredients in the stuff we buy. How do those toxins affect the miners/extractors of raw materials, production workers, and purchasers, and how do they affect the people who live in areas where our discarded stuff with its toxins (if any) are dumped?

After reading the book, write a reflective summary (2-3 pages) of what you found most compelling and reflect on how you might bring this into your teaching.

#### **Assignment #6: The Consumption Crazy Culture**

Upon publication, Leonard's work launched a conversation about our consumption-crazy culture. In 2007, Free Range Studios produced a short film with the same title. This light-hearted and informative video essay highlights the destructive life-cycle of our production system and presents many strategies that are working toward creating a better world.

Since then, *The Story of Stuff Project*, a global, online community, has produced dozens more animated shorts and documentaries that chart a path to a more just and sustainable future.

View the original video, *The Story of Stuff* (<https://www.storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>) below,

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/9GorqroiqgM>

and at least two additional videos available on the project website (<https://www.storyofstuff.org/movies/>).

Reflect on the videos and [create a Flipgrid video](https://flip.com/546c8f7b) (<https://flip.com/546c8f7b>) response to the following prompts:

1. What did Annie Leonard say in the original film that produced an "Ah-ha" moment for you?
2. What additional films did you choose and why?
3. Share a few takeaways you gleaned from each of the films.

**Note:** All group participants must view the above videos and two additional videos.

#### **Assignment #7: Possible Actions**

Now it's time to look at possible actions you and your school or students can engage in. Continue to explore the other resources available on *The Story of Stuff Project* website including Learning Tools (<https://www.storyofstuff.org/learn/>) and Grassroots Grants (<https://www.storyofstuff.org/grassroots-grants/>).

Seek out additional websites and multimedia. Create an annotated bibliography of at least ten (10) websites, films, print materials, or

other resources which relate to your teaching situation. Consider using Padlet, Pinterest, Wakelet, or an alternative online tool to organize and share your collection.

**Note:** All group participants must read Learning Tools and Grassroot Grants articles.

### **Assignment #8: Time for Reform**

Rachel Carson first brought the negative impacts on the environment to the public's attention in the 1960s. In 1991, Jane Goodall found Roots & Shoots (<https://rootsandshoots.org/>), a global grassroots organization whose mission is to empower young people to affect positive changes in their communities. Now, Greta Thunberg, a young Swedish activist, has been fighting climate change with such urgency that she has set a new precedent for how we as humans need to act to save the planet that we call home. The planet is breaking and cracking under the weight of our hunger for more. To reform the world, we must first reform ourselves.

Do you know another organization dedicated to helping youth people become more conscientious consumers and citizens? Review the links on their websites and learn more about each organization. Then write a one-page summary outlining the goals and objectives of the organization of your choice. Finally, take action yourself by choosing one (1) of the following options:

1. Select at least one action (refer back to assignment #6 for more ideas) to take either in your personal or professional life (or both). Create and follow an action plan for a week and report on your progress in the online response box.
2. Draft a written proposal or slides presentation for a Roots & Shoots (or related club) at your school and create a poster to recruit students.
3. Organize a small group (family, friends, and/or students) to collaboratively take action and make a difference locally. The action can be a single-day event such as a beach clean-up, a donation to the local humane society, or an invasive weed pull.

## **ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT**

### **B. LEARNING APPLICATION**

In this section, you will apply your learning to your professional situation. This course assumes that most participants are classroom teachers who have access to students. If you do not have a classroom available to you, please contact the instructor for course modifications. Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. ?Feel free to read and respond to others' comments. Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

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### **Assignment #9: This Changes Everything**

Purchase and read the text, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*, by Naomi Klein. Write a 3-page reflection of what you found most compelling about each of the text's three parts. Consider the following questions in your response:

- Is climate change a social justice issue?
- Is capitalism responsible for rising inequality and/or climate change?
- Can capitalism and environmentalism coexist?

### **Assignment #10: Create a Unit Plan for Your Classroom**

Develop a unit study you can implement with your students from all the online research, website reviews, and texts. Using either the Heritage Institute lesson template or one from your district, write 5-6 lesson plans that integrate what you've learned in this course with your teaching situation. This should cover a minimum of two weeks of instructional time. As you formulate your teaching unit, identify the standards you intend to meet with your unit.

Within your unit plan, include at least ONE (1) of the following:

1. Have students create video segments that could be compiled together in a class video to teach others. You may consider publishing these on FlipGrid or YouTube. Students can work as a whole class, in small groups, or individually.
2. Engage students in a community-based service-learning project whereby students take action to initiate change in their local community. This could be done as a whole class, in small groups, or individually.

### Assignment #11: (500 Level ONLY)

Complete **two (2)** of the following options:

1. If you are taking this course during the school year, implement your unit study with students in your classroom. Submit a 2-3 page description of what worked well and could be improved. Be sure to discuss each of the lessons included in your plan. If you made changes along the way, explain your reasoning and how your change improved the plan. Include samples of exemplary student work (via video, photos, scans of essays, etc.) and include any rubric used for assessment purposes.

**AND/OR**

2. Prepare a presentation to be made to colleagues at a local, state, or regional conference that focuses on the topics discussed in this course. Share your ideas and engage your colleagues in collaboration to involve students. Upload your presentation outline, and any handouts developed.

**AND/OR**

3. View the documentary film Maxed Out: Hard Times, Easy Credit and the Era of Predatory Lenders (2006), which investigates Americans' personal and national debt. Write a summary of the film, how you might use it in your teaching, and make a list of key questions to ask students. The film is available on YouTube, Amazon, and other online streaming platforms.

**AND/OR**

4. Develop another assignment of your own choosing, provided you have the instructor's prior approval.

### C. INTEGRATION PAPER

Assignment #12: (Required for 400 and 500 Level)

#### SELF REFLECTION & INTEGRATION PAPER

**(Please do not write this paper until you've completed all of your other assignments)**

Write a 400-500 word Integration Paper answering these 5 questions:

1. What did you learn vs. what you expected to learn from this course?
2. What aspects of the course were most helpful and why?
3. What further knowledge and skills in this general area do you feel you need?
4. How, when and where will you use what you have learned?
5. How and with what other school or community members might you share what you learned?

#### INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS ON YOUR WORK:

Instructors will comment on each assignment. If you do not hear from the instructor within a few days of posting your assignment, please get in touch with them immediately.

#### QUALIFICATIONS FOR TEACHING THIS COURSE:

**Eva Varga**, was born and raised in Oregon and has been associated with K-12 education since 1990, most recently in her role as an English Language Development specialist. Previously, she taught fifth grade in a self-contained classroom and served as an elementary science specialist. She has received numerous awards and grant honors and was selected as an Oregon state finalist for the *Presidential Award of Excellence for Math and Science Teaching* in 2002. She homeschooled her children through elementary and secondary grade levels whereupon she published curriculum, coordinated numerous science co-ops, and taught online English and science courses. She has also served as a Solar System Ambassador for NASA and was selected as an Earthwatch Teacher Fellow in Ecuador. With a special interest in hands-on, service learning experiences, Eva has been an avid volunteer at local museums and nature centers. As an undergraduate, she pursued a dual degree in General Science and International Studies during which time she spent a summer teaching abroad in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico. Thereafter, she began graduate work at Oregon State University in Elementary Education, earning a Master of Arts in Teaching degree and most recently an ESOL certification.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### TOO MUCH STUFF

##### Required Text:

Leonard, Annie. 2017. *The Story of Stuff: The Impact of Overconsumption on the Planet, Our Communities, and Our Health-And How We Can Make It Better*. Free Press, Inc. 368 pages.

*The Story of Stuff* expands on the celebrated documentary exploring the threat of overconsumption on the environment, economy, and our health. Leonard examines the "stuff" we use everyday, offering a galvanizing critique and steps for a changed planet.

##### Additional text required for 400/500 Credit Option:

Klein, Naomi. 2014. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*. Simon & Schuster, Inc. 576 pages.

A brilliant explanation of why the climate crisis challenges us to abandon our time's core "free market" ideology, restructure the global economy, and remake our political systems. Klein argues that the changes to our relationship with nature and one another that are required to respond to the climate crisis humanely should not be viewed grimly, but rather as a catalyst to transform broken economic and cultural priorities and to heal long-festered historical wounds.

**Optional Reading or Viewing:**

Durning, Alan; Ryan, John. 1997. *Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things* (new Report , No 4). Seattle. NW Environment Watch. Documenting a day in the life of the average North American consumer, *Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things* deconstructs the American Dream by unraveling the hidden costs behind the objects around us. From our morning cup of Columbian coffee to our South Korean-made sneakers, the book traces the environmental impact of the consumer decisions most of us make without thinking.

Dungan, Nathan; Walsh, David. 2003. *Prodigal Sons and Material Girls: How Not to be Your Child's ATM*. Wiley & Sons. Financial advisor Dungan has written an informative guide to dealing with possession-crazed kids. Sure, young people are wooed by advertisers, but they can still be "savvy consumers who make decisions based on their values." Part one of Dungan's book paints a scary picture of the current state of affairs (e.g., the fastest-growing segment of those filing for bankruptcy are people under 25), while part two explains what to do about it, including having financial discussions with kids, learning to say "no" and teaching them how to save.

Dominguez, Joe; Robin, Vicki. 1999. *Your Money or Your Life: Transforming Your Relationships With Money and Achieving Financial Independence*. Penguin Books. New York. Based on their West Coast self-help seminars, Dominguez and Robin map a route to financial security through a relaxed, prudent and environmentally-friendly way of life. Systemically analyzing one's overspending and calculating the "life-energy" cost (time, expenses, stress) of a competitive career, the authors maintain, can lead to reduced occupational expectations and to surprisingly large economies effected by pre-pricing food, clothing, transportation, loan rates, health care and so on.

Elgin, Duane. 1993. *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life that is Outwardly Simple and Inwardly Rich*. William Morrow & Co. New York.

This is the original classic text on the importance of choosing simpler, more meaningful life.

Klein, Naomi. 2022. *How to Change Everything: The Young Human's Guide to Protecting the Planet and Each Other*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, Simon & Schuster. New York.

In collaboration with Rebecca Steffof, Naomi Klein's first book written specifically for young readers, adapts over twenty years of reporting and research on climate change and the movements that are trying to stop it.

*Maxed Out*, a documentary film investigating both the personal and the national debt owed by Americans, this thought-provoking documentary explores the staggering financial burden we live with every day and exposes how the contemporary financial industry is set up in ways that can harm unwitting customers. With both sobering facts and black humor, *Maxed Out* unveils the consequences of our debt addiction, including its contribution to the vanishing of the American middle class.

Simple Living Network provides a wealth of resources on how to simplify your life and make it more meaningful.

<http://www.simpleliving.net/main/>

New American Dream is an organization dedicated to promoting conscious living and responsible consumption.

<http://www.newdream.org/>