

PO 300

The Politics of Consumption

Boston University
MWF 4:40-5:30PM, Location: CAS B06A

Spring 2018

Contact Information

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Course description

This course examines the social, political, and economic determinants and consequences of our own behavior as consumers of goods and services. Among other topics, we consider the relationship between consumption and social status, political participation, transnational regulation, ethics, and business strategy. The course brings together research from a variety of disciplines including political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, and business management. By the end of the course, students will better understand the role they play as consumers in the political economy of the United States as well as in the wider global political economy.

Course requirements

This course will be run as a seminar. Students are expected to do all the readings and arrive at class prepared to discuss them. There will be two take home essays (1500 words for undergraduates, 2000 for graduate students, each worth 20 percent of the grade) and a final paper (worth 40 percent). Students will also be expected to make one oral presentation based on course readings, plus attend class regularly and participate in discussions (worth 20 percent of the grade). The paper (4000 words for undergraduates, 5000 words for graduate students) will be a research paper focused on an important issue with regard to consumption. Students will exchange and critique a one-page research

proposal with a partner. In the final week of the course, students will present preliminary findings from their research. Late papers without acceptable excuse or prior notification will be docked 3 percentage points per day. Students are also asked to keep a private journal to track their own personal consumption for at least the first two weeks of the course.

Important deadlines:

- Keep a private journal of your own personal consumption: *Fri. 1/19* through *Fri. 2/2*
- Essay #1: *Fri. 2/23*
- Exchange research proposal with review partner: *Fri. 3/16*
- Provide feedback on your partner's research proposal: *Fri. 3/23*
- Essay #2: *Fri. 4/6*
- Present preliminary research findings: *Fri. 4/27, Mon. 4/30, or Wed. 5/2*
- Research paper: *Mon. 5/7*

The College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) Dean's Office has requested that you be informed of the following: The last day you may drop the course without a 'W' grade is February 22. The last day you may drop the course with a 'W' grade is March 30.

You are responsible for knowing the provisions of the CAS Academic Conduct Code (copies are available in CAS 105). Cases of suspected academic misconduct will be referred to the Dean's Office. See: <http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>

Boston University is committed to providing equal access to our coursework and programs to all students, including those with disabilities. In order to be sure that accommodations can be made in time for all exams and assignments, please plan to turn in your accommodations letter as soon as possible after the first class, but no later than (ten days) from the first exam/assignment. After you turn in your letter, please meet with me to discuss the plan for accommodations so we can be sure that they are adequate and you are supported in your learning. If you have further questions or need additional support, please contact the Office of Disability Services (access@bu.edu), the Political Science advisor or the Pardee School Advisor.

Please regularly check the course web page for updates via <https://learn.bu.edu/>.

Required texts

Bartley, Tim, Sebastian Koos, Hiram Samel, Gustavo Setrini, and Nik Summers. 2015. *Looking Behind the Label: Global Industries and the Conscientious Consumer*. Bloomington, IN:

Indiana University Press.

Bazerman, Max H., and Ann E. Tenbrunsel. 2011. *Blind Spots: Why We Fail to Do What's Right and What to Do about It*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Currid-Halkett, Elizabeth. 2017. *The Sum of Small Things: A Theory of the Aspirational Class*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Dauvergne, Peter, and Jane Lister. 2013. *Eco-Business: A Big-Brand Takeover of Sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Gray, Margaret. 2014. *Labor and the Locavore: The Making of a Comprehensive Food Ethic*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Miller, Daniel. 2012. *Consumption and Its Consequences*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Stolle, Dietlind, and Michele Micheletti. 2013. *Political Consumerism: Global Responsibility in Action*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Note: All other readings are available on our course website.

Course schedule

1 Introduction—What is consumption?

Fri. 1/19

No readings assigned for this class.

Mon. 1/22 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Miller, *Consumption and Its Consequences*, Chapter 1: “What’s Wrong with Consumption?” and Chapter 2: “A Consumer Society.”

Additional reading (required for graduate students):

- Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador, 2000), Introduction: “A Web of Brands” and Chapter 1: “New Branded World.”

Wed. 1/24 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Miller, *Consumption and Its Consequences*, Chapter 3: “Why We Shop” and Chapter 4: “Why Denim?”

Fri. 1/26 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Miller, *Consumption and Its Consequences*, Chapter 5: “It’s the Stupid Economy” and Chapter 6: “How Not to Save a Planet.”

Additional reading (required for graduate students):

- Michael E. Porter and Mark R. Kramer, "Creating Shared Value: How to Reinvent Capitalism—and Unleash a Wave of Innovation and Growth," *Harvard Business Review* (2011) January-February, 2-17.

2 Consumption and the economy

Mon. 1/29 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Jean Tirole, *Economics for the Common Good* (Princeton University Press, 2017), Introduction: "Whatever Happened to the Common Good?" and Chapter 2: "The Moral Limits of the Market."

Additional reading (required for graduate students):

- Suzanne Berger, *How We Compete: What Companies Around the World Are Doing To Make It in Today's Global Economy* (Doubleday, 2006), Chapter 1: "Who's Afraid of Globalization?"

Wed. 1/31 — Discussion leader: Catie

Required reading:

- Jean Tirole, *Economics for the Common Good* (Princeton University Press, 2017), Chapter 6: "Toward a Modern State."

Additional reading (required for graduate students):

- Fred Block, "The Roles of the State in the Economy" in *The Handbook of Economic Sociology* (Princeton University Press, 1994).
- Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (University of Chicago Press, 1962), Chapter 2: "The Role of Government in a Free Society."

Fri. 2/2 — Discussion leader: Rickie

Required reading:

- Jean Tirole, *Economics for the Common Good* (Princeton University Press, 2017), Chapter 7: "The Governance and Social Responsibility of Business."

Additional reading (required for graduate students):

- Graeme Auld, Steven Bernstein, and Benjamin Cashore, "The New Corporate Social Responsibility," *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* (2008) Vol. 33, No. 1, 413-435.
- Dirk Matten and Jeremy Moon, "'Implicit' and 'Explicit' CSR: A Conceptual Framework for a Comparative Understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility," *Academy of Management Review* (2008) Vol. 33, No. 2, 404-424.

3 Consumption and social status

Mon. 2/5 — Discussion leader: Leo

Required reading:

- Currid-Halkett, *The Sum of Small Things*, Chapter 1: "The Twenty-first-Century 'Leisure' Class."

Additional reading (required for graduate students):

- Andrew Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast: Capitalist Crisis and the Politics of Recession* (Palgrave. 2009), Introduction: "The Road to Excess."

Wed. 2/7 — Discussion leader: Justin

Required reading:

- Currid-Halkett, *The Sum of Small Things*, Chapter 2: "Conspicuous Consumption in the Twenty-first Century."

Fri. 2/9 — Discussion leader: Laura

Required reading:

- Currid-Halkett, *The Sum of Small Things*, Chapter 3: "Ballet Slippers and Yale Tuition: Inconspicuous Consumption and the New Elites."

Mon. 2/12 — Discussion leader: Rachel

Required reading:

- Currid-Halkett, *The Sum of Small Things*, Chapter 4: "Motherhood as Conspicuous Leisure in the Twenty-first Century."

Wed. 2/14 — Discussion leader: Andrew

Required reading:

- Currid-Halkett, *The Sum of Small Things*, Chapter 5: "Conspicuous Production."

Fri. 2/16 — Discussion leader: Aram

Required reading:

- Currid-Halkett, *The Sum of Small Things*, Chapter 6: "Landscapes of Consumption" and Chapter 7: "'To Get Rich Is Glorious'?: The State of Consumption and Class in America."

4 Consumption and political participation

Tue. 2/20 — Discussion leader: Jessica

Required reading:

- Stolle and Micheletti, *Political Consumerism*, Chapter 1: "Reconfiguring Political Responsibility."

Additional reading (required for graduate students):

- Clive Barnett, Paul Cloke, Nick Clarke, and Alice Malpass, *Globalizing Responsibility: The Political Rationalities of Ethical Consumption* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), Chapter 1: "Politicizing Consumption in an Unequal World."

Wed. 2/21 — Discussion leader: James

Required reading:

- Stolle and Micheletti, *Political Consumerism*, Chapter 2: "Reconfiguring Political Participation."

Additional reading (required for graduate students):

- Dara O'Rourke and Nikas Lollo, "Transforming Consumption: From Decoupling, to Behavior Change, to System Changes for Sustainable Consumption," *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* (2015), Vol. 40, 233-259.

Fri. 2/23 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Stolle and Micheletti, *Political Consumerism*, Chapter 3: "Who Are Political Consumers?" and Chapter 4: "Mapping Political Consumerism in Western Democracies."

Additional reading (required for graduate students):

- Luc Fransen and Brian Burgoon, "Support for Ethical Consumerism and Welfare States in the Global Economy: Complements or Substitutes?" *Global Policy* (2017), Vol. 8, No. 3, 42-55.

Essay #1 due in class (submit via email).

Mon. 2/26 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Stolle and Micheletti, *Political Consumerism*, Chapter 5: "The Organizational Setting for Political Consumerism" and Chapter 6: "Discursive Political Consumerism."

Wed. 2/28 — Discussion leader: Charles

Required reading:

- Stolle and Micheletti, *Political Consumerism*, Chapter 7: "Does Political Consumerism Matter? Effectiveness and Limits of Political Consumer Action Repertoires."

Fri. 3/2 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Stolle and Micheletti, *Political Consumerism*, Chapter 8: "Political Consumerism's Scope and Challenges."

Spring Break

5 Local consumption

Mon. 3/12 — Discussion leader: Emma

Required reading:

- Gray, *Labor and the Locavore*, Introduction: "Is Local Food an Ethical Alternative?" and Chapter 1: "Agrarianism and Hudson Valley Agriculture."

Wed. 3/14 — Discussion leader: Roxanne

Required reading:

- Gray, *Labor and the Locavore*, Chapter 2: "The Workers: Labor Conditions, Paternalism, and Immigrant Stories" and Chapter 3: "The Farmers: Challenges of the Small Business."

Fri. 3/16 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Gray, *Labor and the Locavore*, Chapter 4: “Sustainable Jobs? Ethnic Succession and the New Latinos” and Chapter 5: “Toward a Comprehensive Food Ethic.”

Exchange research proposal with review partner.

6 Consumption and transnational regulation

Mon. 3/19 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Bartley et al., *Looking Behind the Label*, Introduction: “Rules, Responsibilities, and Rights in the Global Economy.”

Wed. 3/21 — Discussion leader: Henry

Required reading:

- Bartley et al., *Looking Behind the Label*, Chapter 1: “The Making of Conscientious Consumers” and Chapter 2: “The Dilemmas of Conscientious Consumerism.”

Fri. 3/23 — Discussion leader: Sabrina

Required reading:

- Bartley et al., *Looking Behind the Label*, Chapters 3: “Wood and Paper Products: Search for Sustainability.”

Provide feedback on your partner’s research proposal.

Mon. 3/26 — Discussion leader: Leah

Required reading:

- Bartley et al., *Looking Behind the Label*, Chapter 4: “Food: Global Agriculture and Local Institutions” and Chapter 5: “Apparel and Footwear: Standards for Sweatshops.”

Wed. 3/28 — Discussion leader: Ian

Required reading:

- Bartley et al., *Looking Behind the Label*, Chapter 6: “Electronics: The Hidden Costs of Computing.”

Fri. 3/30 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Bartley et al., *Looking Behind the Label*, Conclusion: “Beyond Conscientious Consumerism.”

7 Consumption and ethics

Mon. 4/2 — Discussion leader: Andrada

Required reading:

- Bazerman and Tenbrunsel, *Blind Spots*, Chapter 1: “The Gap between Intended and Actual Ethical Behavior” and Chapter 2: “Why Traditional Approaches to Ethics Won’t Save You.”

Wed. 4/4 — Discussion leader: Luna

Required reading:

- Bazerman and Tenbrunsel, *Blind Spots*, Chapter 3: “When We Act against Our Own Ethical Values.”

Fri. 4/6 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Bazerman and Tenbrunsel, *Blind Spots*, Chapter 4: “Why You Aren’t as Ethical as You Think You Are.”

Essay #2 due in class (submit via email).

Mon. 4/9 — Discussion leader: Pedro

Required reading:

- Bazerman and Tenbrunsel, *Blind Spots*, Chapter 5: “When We Ignore Unethical Behavior” and Chapter 6: “Placing False Hope in the ‘Ethical Organization’.”

Wed. 4/11 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Bazerman and Tenbrunsel, *Blind Spots*, Chapter 7: “Why We Fail to Fix Our Corrupted Institutions.”

Additional reading (required for graduate students):

- Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics and Markets: The World’s Political Economic Systems* (Basic Books, 1977), Chapter 13: “The Privileged Position of Business.”
- Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, *The Uneven Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2012), Chapter 11: “Who Sings in the Heavenly Chorus? The Shape of the Organized Interest System.”

Fri. 4/13 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Bazerman and Tenbrunsel, *Blind Spots*, Chapter 8: “Narrowing the Gap: Interventions for Improving Ethical Behavior.”

8 Ethical consumption and its critics

Wed. 4/18 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Dauvergne and Lister, *Eco-Business*, Chapter 1: “The Politics of ‘Big-Brand Sustainability’.”

Additional reading (required for graduate students):

- Robert B. Reich, "The Case Against Corporate Social Responsibility," Goldman School Working Paper Series (University of California Berkeley, 2008).

Fri. 4/20 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Dauvergne and Lister, *Eco-Business*, Chapter 2: "The Eco-Business Setting."

Mon. 4/23 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Dauvergne and Lister, *Eco-Business*, Chapter 3: "The Eco-Business Market Advantage" and Chapter 4: "Eco-Business Tools of Supply-Chain Power."

Wed. 4/25 — Discussion leader: None

Required reading:

- Dauvergne and Lister, *Eco-Business*, Chapter 5: "The Supply-Chain Eco-Business of Brand Growth" and Chapter 6: "Eco-Business Governance."

9 Presentations

Fri. 4/27

No readings assigned for this class.

Mon. 4/30

No readings assigned for this class.

Wed. 5/2

No readings assigned for this class.

Research paper due by the end of Mon. 5/7 (submit via email).