“Consumer Culture” answers the question, “Why do we have so much stuff?” In this course anthropological theories and concepts are introduced to investigate the close relationships that link people and the made things they live with— their “material culture”— especially relationships that drive consumption beyond basic needs. Categories of material culture given special focus are clothing, household furnishings, and techno-gear. We examine how these goods circulate in our modern society through studies of gifting, shopping, advertising, the “rituals” of product use, heirlooming, and the ecology and politics of recycling and trashing. Specific topics include how things are drawn into our identities, how we extend our bodies and our selves through the things (real and virtual) we manipulate, how we create relationships to other people via things, how things come to have meanings and “social lives,” the sensuality and authenticity of things, and the practices and consequences of object discard and reuse. This course focuses on the “sociality” of goods; not economics or sustainability of consumption.

Student Learning Outcomes:
Identify the major concepts and theorists relevant to material culture studies and apply those concepts to familiar or researched real-world examples. Utilize these concepts and developing skills in fundamental social science methods to observe and analyze cultural patterns in contemporary Euro-American society and individual consumptive practices. Apply them in active learning scenarios and reflective essays and blog posts to demonstrate how ideas about oneself and social others as well as everyday practices are shaped by larger cultural forces, to thereby demonstrate greater self-awareness and senses of personal agency. Recognize anthropological perspectives on the sustainability of current lifestyles and the possibilities of making better informed choices of object acquisition and disposition. Assess in different contexts the three “enduring knowledge statements” for this course: 1) the things we acquire, use, and discard are active social agents; 2) the things we make, make us as social beings; and 3) living with things has social, political, material, and historical consequences.

E-learning - Canvas
This course is managed by Canvas (http://lss.at.ufl.edu). The Files tool has most of the required readings, except for journal articles you can download through the library (see urls). Files are kept in folders by numbered week. The Assignments tool manages short homework assignments. The Discussions tool will be used for each student to maintain a “blog.” Check the Announcements tool regularly to keep up-to-date with course announcements.
Required Textbook and Other Required Readings:

NOTE: We read only some chapters of this book. Save money by renting the book, reading the copy on reserve in Library West, or share the purchase price among a group.

Most required readings are drawn from book chapters and journal articles dealing with material culture and anthropological consumer studies, as well as some blogs, newspaper, and magazine articles.

Important: Readings should be completed before the class period for which they are assigned (this is the “flipped classroom”). We use class meeting times to discuss the readings and apply the concepts they introduce, so you must be prepared to participate. For Thursday’s double period, readings are listed separately for each period, but obviously they must be completed before the first period.

Strategies for Success
Attend class--be on time and be prepared. Many activities begin at the start of class. Take careful notes in class. Keep up with all the readings each week. Create a glossary of the major concepts that are discussed (a list is provided). Ask questions in class or by email if you have any difficulty understanding the material. Meet with the instructor or TA. You are asked to think, be imaginative, look for patterns, apply concepts, and make interpretations—not just memorize material.

Acceptance of Course Requirements
By remaining registered in this class, you agree to accept the course requirements and expectations as stated in this syllabus. These are in addition to other general University requirements and codes of conduct as stated in official documents and listed at the end of this syllabus.

Grade Evaluation and Methods

3 exams 50% of grade
The exams will be administered in class and will consist primarily of multiple-choice questions to assess comprehension of the major concepts and their applications to real life. The first two exams are worth 15% of the grade; the third exam (non-comprehensive) is worth 20%.

12 short written homework assignments 20% of grade
To evaluate how you are applying knowledge and engaging in self-reflection, and to facilitate class discussion exercises, for specific lectures you are asked to write brief essays, most of them as a blog posts, within a limited time frame. Suggested length is 400-500 words; specific instructions are given with each assignment. Each assignment is worth ~1.5% of the grade. The first homework essay is required of everyone as a hard-copy, but for the numbered blog assignments, choose 11 to do out of the 18 total possible. Students who do more than 11 posts may earn extra credit.

participation in in-class activities 20% of grade
Virtually every lecture period will include a class discussion, small group discussion, or a class activity. Everyone is expected to be prepared for and to participate in these activities. They account for approximately 1.4% of the grade for each regular class week.

photo essay project 10% of grade
In week 4 you will be introduced to a research project, to “follow a thing” through its social life, biography, or itinerary. This project will result in a photo essay to be uploaded on Canvas. Detailed instructions will be provided to complete the project. There are specific deadlines for the photo essay topic, a brief description with starter bibliography, and the final paper

Total: 100%
Critical dates for exams or other work

Exam 1: Tuesday, Feb. 10
Exam 2: Tuesday, March 17
Exam 3: Tuesday, April 21
Photo Essay Project: topic deadline: Thursday, Feb. 26
project description (300 words) with starter bibliography (5 entries): Tues. Mar. 24
final photo essay due Friday, April 17

Class Demeanor Expected by the Professor

Students are expected to be in their seats at the start of class. Cell phones should be silenced and out of sight, except when used in class activities. Laptop computers and tablets are allowed ONLY to read any electronic readings, for note-taking, and on certain days to facilitate class activities. Newspapers and other reading materials not relevant to the class should be put away when class begins.

Policy Related to Class Attendance and Missed Exams

Attendance Policy: Although daily attendance per se is not taken, participation in in-class activities is recorded and is worth 15% of the final grade. Furthermore, missing lectures will prove detrimental to your understanding of the course material and ultimately to your final grade. If you must miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain the lecture notes from a classmate.

Make-up Exam Policy: Students may take an exam within one week after the due date with no penalty by asking the professor for permission ahead of time to take a make-up. The make-up exam will be different from the original exam. Please make every effort to take the exam with the class.

Late Homework policy: Because you have a choice of blog posts assignments, there is no allowance for a missed due date. If you miss the due date for a post, choose a later one to take its place.

Late submission of photo essay project: Except for university-allowed excused absences, photo essays should be turned in by the due date. They lose 25% of their value for every day late.

For university policy see https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx.

UF Grading policy and Course Grading Requirements

For information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points see https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx

Every graded activity in this course earns points. Letter grades are based on a total of 300 points; see grading scale below. Important: If a minimum grade of C is required to fulfill certain graduation requirements, C- does not fulfill those requirements. GPA points for each letter grade are provided in the bottom line of the chart.

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The gradebook is “closed” on the date of the university-scheduled final exam for the class (May 1). Any overdue assignments must be received by that date and time.
Tentative Topics, Readings, and Assignments – subject to change!

McCracken = textbook; other readings available directly as pdf files or can be downloaded from library (see urls)

Required readings are to be completed by the class meeting date; note the required pages of a chapter or article.

Reading and Homework assignments are tentative, and any changes will be announced well in advance.

**Week 1**

**Part I: Why Do We Have So Much Stuff?**

**Tues Jan 6**  
*Attitudes towards Modern Consumption*


**Thurs Jan 8-1**  
*Consumption, Capitalism, and Modernity*


**Thurs Jan 8-2**  
*Hyper-Modernity and Hyper-Consumption*


**Week 2**

**Tues Jan 13**  
*The Anthropology of Consumption*


Homework: (required) Essay on a “focal object” (see Woodward reading for Thursday), due Thursday

**Thurs Jan 14-1**  
*Material Culture and Materiality*


**Thurs Jan 14-2**  
*Individual and Society; Singular and Common*

**Week 3**

**Part II: How Does the Stuff I Have Impact Me Personally?**

**Tues Jan 20**  
*My Stuff and Me: Person and Authenticity*


Homework: Blog Post #1: count and rank your possessions in importance, due Thursday before class

Thurs  Jan 22-1  **Who Am I? Who Decides? Ego-and Socio-Centered Self and Persona**


Thurs  Jan 22-2  **The Extended Person and the Megaphone Effect**


Homework: Post# 2: the Extended Person and Cultural Capital, due Tuesday before class

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**Week 4**  
Part III: How Do We Create Social Relationships with Things?

**Tues Jan 27**  **The Gift: Inalienable Possessions**


Homework: Post #3: report on an inalienable gift, due Thursday before class

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**Thurs Jan 29-1**  **Social Lives of Things: Object Biographies**


**Thurs Jan 29-2**  **Object Itineraries: Following Things and Their Traces**


Homework: Post #4: The Gift Revisited, informed comment on prior “gift” posts, due Tuesday before class

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**Week 5**

**Tues Feb 3  **Shopping as Love: Creating a Desiring Subject**


Thurs Feb 5-1  Things Gather: Human-Thing Entanglements


Homework: Post #6: Post on a focal object that has “gathered” other things, due next Thursday

Thurs Feb 5-2  Things are Social Agents, too


Tues Feb 10   EXAM 1

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Week 6  Part IV: How Do Things and People Intersect?

Thurs Feb 12-1  My Body as Me?

Lucas, Gavin (2002) Disposability and Dispossession in the Twentieth Century. *Journal of Material Culture* 7(1):5-22. Read pages 5-12 only on “the moral system of hygiene” and the rise of “disposability” [http://mcu.sagepub.com/content/7/1/5](http://mcu.sagepub.com/content/7/1/5)

Thurs Feb 12-2  The Extended Body-The Extended Self


Homework: Post #7: childhood memory of learning to ride a bike, due Tuesday

Week 7

Tues Feb 17  Ergonomics and Body Techniques


Homework: Post #8: Riding a Bike, Revisited, due Thursday
Thurs Feb 19-1  **Bodily Skill and Praxeology**


Thurs Feb 19-2  **Hexis: The Encultured Body**


focus on the first 2 pages of the online version, or the 4 pages of the pdf provided

Homework: Post #9:  Body Hexis posts (3 options), due Tuesday

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**Week 8**

**Part V: How Can Things Have Meaning?**

Tues Feb 24  **How do Objects Mean?**


Homework: Post #10: the iconicity of cell phone apps; due Thursday  

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**PHOTO ESSAY PROJECT TOPIC DUE**

Thurs Feb 25 - 1  **Meaning Movement (or, How Advertising Works)**

McCracken (textbook) Ch. 5 “Meaning Manufacture and Movement in the World of Goods”

Thurs Feb 25-2  **Buying Authenticity**


Homework: Post #11: “knock-offs” and inauthenticity, due Tuesday (after break)

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**Spring Break**

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**Week 9**

Tues Mar 10  **Making Things - Making Meaning**

Thurs Mar 12 (both hours) **Ensembles: Diderot Unities and Effects**


Read and bring to class: *Diderot Unities Game* (pdf handout on e-learning); laptop computer access needed

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**Tues Mar 17** **Exam II**

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**Week 10 Part VI Creating a Desiring Subject**

Thurs Mar 19-1 **Sensuality and Emotions: the Effects of Things on People**


Homework: Post #12 Post a comment on the Soda Wars, due Tuesday

Thurs Mar 19-2 **The Technology of Enchantment and Enchantment of Technology**


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**Week 11**

**PHOTO ESSAY PROJECT BRIEF DESCRIPTION/BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**

**Tues Mar 24** **Consuming Experience: Tourism as a Rite of Passage**

Assignment: watch youtube videos and be prepared to discuss them; see list of urls posted on e-learning

Homework: Post #13: comment on a remembered consumed experience, due Thursday

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**Thurs Mar 26-1** **Modes of Touristic Experiences**


**Thurs Mar 26-2** **Consuming Authenticity**

http://ac.els-cdn.com/S0160738399000109/1-s2.0-S0160738399000109-main.pdf?_tid=19225310-a7c0-11e3-8107-0000ab0f26&acdnat=1394393104_19a0233fb184eba774f767d8e05f7317

Homework: Post #14: comment on an internet “virtual reality” tourism site, due Tuesday

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**Week 12**

**Part VII: Where Does the Stuff Go?**

**Tues Mar 31**

**Divesting Oneself of Things**

http://www.jstor.org/stable/646815

http://mcu.sagepub.com/content/6/2/213

Homework: Post #15: comment on divesting a specific possession, due Thursday

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**Thurs Apr 2-1**

**Consumer Resistance: Hoarding and Anti-Consumption**


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**Thurs Apr 2-2**

**Trash: Order and Process**

Lucas, Gavin (2002) Disposability and Dispossession in the Twentieth Century. *Journal of Material Culture* 7(1):5-22. Read pages 12 (bottom) to 19. [we read the first part of this article earlier]  
http://mcu.sagepub.com/content/7/1/5

Homework: Post #16: My Trash, due Tuesday

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**Week 13**

**Tues Apr 7**

**Trash or Treasure: Alternative Afterlives of Things**

http://mcu.sagepub.com/content/14/1/29

Homework: Post #17: comment on “afterlives” of trash (2 options), due Thursday

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**Thurs Apr 9-1**

**The Politics of Waste and the Taphonomy of Disaster**

http://www.jstor.org/stable/4496514

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**Thurs Apr 9-2**

**Ruins: Modernity and Decay**


Homework: Post #18: Ruins in modernity (2 options), due Tuesday [this is the last blog assignment]

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**Week 14**

Tues Apr 14 Consumption and Modernity? The Semester in Review

Thurs Apr 16: *Class cancelled* due to professional meeting

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**Photo Essay Due Friday April 17 (uploaded on Canvas)**

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**Week 15**

Tues Apr 21 Exam III in class

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The following information is provided in conformance with University Policy:

1. **Policy related to class attendance, make-up exams, and other work**

Requirements for class attendance, make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies; see [https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx](https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx).

The UF Twelve-Day Rule ([https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx#absences](https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx#absences)) states that students who participate in athletic or scholastic teams are permitted to be absent 12 scholastic (regular class) days per semester without penalty. Students seeking this exemption *must provide documentation* to the instructor. It is the student’s responsibility to maintain satisfactory academic performance and attendance.

2. **Accommodations for students with disabilities**

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Professor when requesting accommodation. Upon receipt of documentation, the Professor will grant the accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow these procedures as early as possible in the semester.

3. **Online course evaluation process**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at [https://evaluations.ufl.edu](https://evaluations.ufl.edu). Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at [https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results](https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results)

4. **Religious Observances**

Students seeking modification of due dates for class participation, assignments, and exams for religious reasons (e.g., holiday observances) should contact the Professor in advance and request this modification; it will then be granted.

5. **Academic Honesty**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code ([http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/)) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs assigned to this class. Instances of dishonesty include conducting unauthorized research on the internet and failing to cite sources of information on any work submitted, as well as unauthorized collaborating with students or others to determine the answers on assignments and exams.
6. Counseling and Emergency Services
– the University Counseling Center, 301 Peabody Hall, 392-1575
  http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx
– Student Health Care Center, 392-1171
– Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601
– Center for Sexual Assault/Abuse Recovery and Education (CARE), Student Health Care Center, 392-1161
– University Police Department 392-1111 (non-emergency); call 9-1-1 for emergencies

7. Electronic Course Reserves
The electronic course reserve service is offered by the George A. Smathers Libraries. Under the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, students with disabilities have the right to equal access, use and benefit of the course materials that have been placed on reserve in the Libraries.

Students who have registered with the University of Florida Disability Resource Center should initiate their request for assistance and accommodation in accessing these materials. The Center will work with the Libraries Course Reserve Unit to provide accessible course materials. All information submitted by the student to the Libraries in fulfilling the request for accommodation will be kept confidential. For more information on services for students with disabilities, contact the UF Disability Resource Center at 352-392-8565 or at accessuf@dso.ufl.edu. For general information on course reserves, please contact the Course Reserves Unit at 352-273-2520, or email at eres@uflib.ufl.edu.

It is best to use the UF VPN client when accessing electronic materials course reserve materials as well as e-books, on-line journals, databases, etc. offered by the library. The VPN client is easily installed and configured, and provides easy access to electronic materials using off-campus computers. For more information on using the VPN client, go to http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/login/vpn.html

8. Software Regulations
All faculty, staff and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate.