**Course objectives:** This course is designed as an introduction to a number of approaches to the field of consumption (in practical applications, this will often entail spending rather than forms of cultural consumption). There is no canonical approach to consumption within sociology, so we will be drawing from scholars from a range of fields as we begin our approach to the discipline. This includes anthropology, economics, history, and philosophy. The latter portion of the course focuses more heavily on sociological research, however. This will include a range of research that comes from different areas and is sometimes conceptualized as part of different fields.

We will also focus on implications for inequality. Consumption might be interesting as a measure of inequality (rather than income), or as an outcome of inequality.

One of my hopes for this course is for us to think about what an approach to the sociology of consumption would look like. It is clear from economics what the economics of consumption consists of, but it is less clear how we can create a more general sociology of consumption. To that end, I will also plan to cover research on economic sociology more broadly, although there will be no assigned readings on economic sociology.

**Course Requirements:**

**Summary and Presentation:** Students will be responsible for summarizing and presenting course materials. For each class day, one student will write a summary of the overall materials, to be distributed to the class, and will prepare a main presentation and lead a discussion on the materials for that day. In addition, there will be extra reading on some days, and on these days, an additional student will be responsible for a supplemental summary and presentation.

In general, classes will begin with an introduction and overview of the readings for the day, beginning with any supplemental presentations, then followed by the main presentation for the day, with the majority of the remaining time spent in discussion. I will also plan occasional lectures that will give additional context about the readings or the themes in the course.

**The main presentation** should cover the major themes, arguments, and findings of the readings. In addition, the presentation should offer a critical approach to the readings: what are some major strengths or weaknesses of the readings, how do themes from these readings tie in with other weeks or sociology content? The presentation should highlight themes for discussion. Presentations should last between 20 and 30 minutes.

**Supplemental presentations** (of extra readings) should last between 15 and 20 minutes, and should cover the major themes, arguments, and findings of the readings. In addition, these presentations should attempt to situate the readings within the larger context of the course – how
is this book relevant for other materials that we have read? What might it add to an overall understanding of the course materials?

**Main presentations** will count for 20% of the course grade, and the **supplemental presentation** will count for 5% of the course grade.

**In-class Discussion:** Discussion of the readings will be the dominant use of class time and our main way of interacting with the readings. As such, it is extremely important that everyone complete the assigned readings and actively participate in the discussion. Discussion will comprise 40% of the final grade.

**Final Paper:** Students will write a final paper for this class. Students may choose between three options: 1) a research paper, in which they either examine consumption itself, 2) apply concepts from the sociology of consumption to a different research paper on which they are already working, or 3) a theoretical paper that outlines elements of what they see as the crucial components of a sociology of (material) consumption. If students are interested in working with the Consumer Expenditure Survey, I am willing to share my code and recoded data.

Research papers on consumption or other concepts of interest should use qualitative or quantitative methods to examine a question of interest. These papers should be between 15 and 20 pages long, including tables and references. They should set up and answer a research question using some form of analysis.

Theoretical papers can be somewhat shorter, but should still be between 13 and 17 pages long. These papers can vary, but one useful framework might be to think about this in the vein of other “towards a sociology of ____” papers. So this paper could be “toward a sociology a consumption.”

Initial proposals will be due February 20, and a draft will be due March 20.

In sum, the course grade will consist of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main presentations</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplemental presentation</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class discussions</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper proposal</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper draft</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
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**Required books:**


**Units**

**I. Uses of Objects (January 23)**


Early article on consumption as a form of class?

**II. Our Dear Friend Bourdieu and his Pals (January 30)**


**III. Consumer Critiques (February 6)**


IV. *The Long View and Sociology (February 13)*


V. *The Context of Consumption (February 20)*


VI. *The Effect of Inequality on Consumption? (February 27)*


Charles, Maia and Jeffrey D. Lundy. 2013. “The Local Joneses: Household Consumption and Income Inequality in Large Metropolitan Areas.” *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*.

Kornrich, Sabino. “Expenditure Cascades and Spending on Housing.”

VII. *Income Inequality, Consumption Inequality? (March 13)*


VIII. Race and Spending I (March 20)


IX. Race and Spending II (March 27)


X. Spending as Investment (April 3)


XI. Class and Consumption (April 10)


XII. Housework and Consumption (April 17)


XIII. Conclusion (April 24)
Ritzer, George. 2010. Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Continuity and Change in the Cathedrals of Consumption. 3rd edition.


