Consumer Culture:
Buy Stuff and Save the World?
WRTG 3020
Spring 2005

Instructor: Lonni Pearce, PhD
Office: Envd 1B50 A
Section: 058, 062
Office Hours: T/TH 11-12:30 (or by appt)
Time: Tues/Thurs, 3:30 / 5:00
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(this is the most reliable way to reach me!)

Required Texts/Materials
• Reading assignments on e-reserve in the library or on the Internet
• Loose-leaf notebook paper for in-class writing
• Copies of your work when needed for class discussion
• Grammar handbook

Course Description
We’re told that we live in a “consumer culture,” but what is meant by this phrase and how did this culture of consumption emerge? What role does rhetoric—a term that we’ll define early on in the semester—play in shaping both our collective culture and our identities as individual “consumers”? Finally, how does the current trend toward “socially responsible” consumption reveal the politics of money? Can we—as the company Working Assets advertises—talk on the phone and save the world at the same time? During the semester, we will work together to examine these questions through reading and responding to various written, audio and visual texts.

Although the subject matter of the course is consumer culture, the primary work of the course is writing—writing in response to texts, class discussion, and your own observations and research. You will write three major essays during the semester: historical analysis, rhetorical analysis, and cultural critique. We will address how to approach each of these essays, as well as general concerns with academic writing, as part of our class discussion.

Academic writing generally serves two purposes: writing to teach and writing to learn. That is, in your essays I will expect you to demonstrate what you know by:
• making clear arguments
• supporting your arguments with concrete examples and illustrations
• organizing your ideas into a cohesive structure
• effectively using the tools of writing—style and tone, grammar, spelling, and punctuation—to present your ideas
but I will also expect you to use the writing in this course to explore new ideas by:
• considering the opinions of people who think differently than you do (this includes both the authors of assigned texts and other people in the class)
• examining and questioning your current assumptions.

I have two goals for the course:
• rather than finding definitive answers for our questions about consumer culture, that we engage in the subject matter and find that it is complicated, contradictory, and ripe for further exploration
• that we better understand and practice academic writing in order to recognize its power, limitations, and consequences.
Attendance
You may be dropped from the course if you miss more than three classes. This may seem harsh, but the reasoning is simple—if you are absent more than three times, you have missed a significant amount of the course material and it will be difficult for you to achieve the goals of this course. Of course, there are always exceptions. If you have a valid reason for being absent for more than three class periods, contact me and we can discuss the situation. If you are absent, contact a classmate for the information and assignments you missed.

Conferences
During the course of the semester, I will schedule conferences (either individually or in groups) to discuss your writing. Conferences are regarded as a class period. If you don’t show up for your scheduled time, it will be counted as an absence. If you are unable to attend and you know beforehand, please contact me to reschedule.

Writing Center
If you want additional help with your writing, the Writing Center is a great place to go to talk about ideas, improve your thesis or essay organization, or just generally work on your writing skills. Check the Writing Center link on the PWR website for hours of operation and locations: www.colorado.edu/pwr.

Grading
To complete this course successfully, you must attend class and scheduled conferences, complete assignments on time, and participate in class activities and discussions. For major essay assignments, you must turn in all drafts before I will grade the final version of your essay. If you have a question about your grade, please ask me about it. An important thing to remember is that even if you feel you have done poorly on an assignment, turn it in anyway! If you turn the assignment in, you will at least receive some points that count toward your final grade. Otherwise, you will not receive any points for the assignment.

Note: A word to the wise—keep copies of all of your assignments! Although I don’t often lose things, it can happen. If you have a copy, we’ll both be happier in the rare event that I misplace your paper.

The grades for the course will be determined according to the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-class essay required, ungraded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 1: Historical Analysis</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 2: Rhetorical Analysis</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique presentation</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 3: Cultural Critique</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Portfolio (in-class last day)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture Comment (presentation and essay)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation (discussion, attendance)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal writing (in-class and other assigned writing)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A = 900-1000 points; B = 800-899 points; C = 700-799; D = 600-699

Essay Format
Informal in-class writing and homework assignments: These assignments can be typed or hand-written—the one requirement is that they are legible. These assignments will not be graded on grammar, spelling, or punctuation. (But here’s a hint: I will be less distracted and better able to focus on your insightful comments and ideas when I’m not distracted by major grammatical and spelling errors.)

Essays 1, 2, & 3: All versions of your papers that are turned in should be typed and double-spaced.
Late Papers
Late papers are, well, late. Unless you have spoken with me beforehand to arrange for an extension, I will subtract 10 points from the assignment grade for each class day the paper is late. I will not grant extensions just for any old reason, but if you absolutely cannot meet the deadline because of something unavoidable, contact me as soon as possible so we can discuss the situation. Computer problems are not an acceptable excuse for a late paper—with the variety of resources on campus, you should have ample opportunity to complete your paper on time.

Plagiarism
Only you can prevent plagiarism! Seriously, this is an important issue. Please read carefully the Honor Code (available at: www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/) to familiarize yourself with the University’s policy on using other people’s work. Plagiarism will not be tolerated; the paper will receive an automatic F and your case will be reported, consistent with the procedures of the Student Honor Code. If you have any questions on whether you are in danger of plagiarizing, ask me.

Disabilities
If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities (303-492-8671, Willard 322, www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices).

Daily Schedule
Note: This schedule is subject to change. Any major change in deadlines will be distributed in writing or on our class listserv.

WEEK 1
Tues, Jan 11:

- Intro to the course and consumer culture theme

Thurs, Jan 13:

DUE: read the syllabus, email me with your responses to the About You questions, read Snare, Charles E. “Implications of Considering Students as Consumers.” College Teaching, v. 45 n. 4 (1997): 122. (available at: http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/pwr/themes/dancing.htm, scroll down to find the link to the article); bring a copy of the article to class

- discuss syllabus and course policies
- discuss Snare reading

WEEK 2
Tues, Jan 18:

DUE: read “Rhetorical Criticism” (S. Foss) and “Defining Rhetorical Situations” (on e-reserve); write a one to two-page response to the following questions: What is Foss’s definition of rhetoric? What might be some useful ways to connect these two readings with our discussion of consumer culture? How and where do you see rhetoric at work in consumer culture? Bring a copy of the articles to class

- discuss “Rhetorical Criticism” and “Defining Rhetorical Situations” readings
- define rhetoric and rhetorical analysis
Thurs, Jan 20: DUE: read T.J. Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization" (on e-reserve); response journal #1: two-column (text, response) and come prepared with three discussion questions; bring article to class

- brief lecture on the roots of consumer culture
- discuss Lears reading and journals
- discuss Historical Analysis and Culture Comment assignments

WEEK 3
Tues, Jan 25: DUE: read Stuart Ewen, Captains of Consciousness, pgs 1-41 (on e-reserve); response journal #2: two-column (text, response) and select/define three key terms; bring article to class and response journals 1 and 2

- discuss Ewen reading
- workshop ideas for Historical Analysis essay

Thurs, Jan 27: DUE: paragraph proposal for historical analysis essay (topic and research question)

- Library seminar (class will meet in the instruction lab on the first floor next to the reference department, E160)

WEEK 4
Tues, Feb 1: DUE: Bring all sources/notes you have for your Historical Analysis essay

- Invention/drafting exercises

Thurs, Feb 3:

- Discuss primary source texts
- Sign up for conferences
- CULTURE COMMENT#1

WEEK 5
Tues, Feb 8: DUE: version 1 of Historical Analysis essay due for peer review (bring 4 copies of your essay)

- Peer review workshop

Thurs, Feb 10: DUE: draft of historical analysis essay to me (include peer review sheets, drafts)

- CULTURE COMMENT#2

WEEK 6
Tues, Feb 15:

- Conferences (bring 3 questions to discuss)
Thurs, Feb 17:

- Conferences (bring 3 questions to discuss)

WEEK 7

Tues, Feb 22:

DUE: Bring your draft of your historical analysis essay to class

- discuss revision, editing/prooreading strategies

Thurs, Feb 24:

DUE: final version of Historical Analysis essay (see checklist on assignment sheet)

- intro to “politicized consumption”
- CULTURE COMMENT #3

A Little Bit About You…

Occasionally I need to contact you outside of class, so please fill out the following information and email your responses to me before the second class meeting. Your answers to these questions will also help me gauge where we are starting as a group—thanks!

Name:
Phone:
Email:

Tell me a little about your previous experiences in writing—is it only a school thing, or do you do any writing on your own?

What are your favorite/least favorite things about writing?

What do you expect out of this class?

What’s your major? What are some ways that the ability to write well might help you in your chosen field?